

THE CAMBRIDGE HISTORY OF
POSTCOLONIAL LITERATURE

*
VOLUME II

Postcolonial studies is attentive to cultural differences, marginalization and exclusion. Such studies pay equal attention to the lives and conditions of various racial minorities in the West, as well as to regional, indigenous forms of representation around the world as being distinct from a dominant Western tradition. With the consolidation of the field in the past forty years, the need to establish the terms by which we might understand the sources of postcolonial literary history is more urgent now than ever before. *The Cambridge History of Postcolonial Literature* is the first major collaborative overview of the field. A mix of geographic and thematic chapters allows for different viewpoints on postcolonial literary history. Chapters cover the most important national traditions, as well as more comparative geographical and thematic frameworks. This major reference work will set the future agenda for the field, whilst also synthesizing its development for scholars and students.

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CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town,
Singapore, São Paulo, Delhi, Tokyo, Mexico City
Cambridge University Press
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 8RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: <http://www.cambridge.org/9780521517492>

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First published 2011

Printed in the United Kingdom at the University Press, Cambridge

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

ISBN 978-1-107-00703-1 Hardback
only available as a two-volume set:
ISBN 978-0-521-51749-2 two-volume set

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Contents

Contents of Volume 1

Notes on contributors page xi

Acknowledgments xxii

Chronology xxiii

1 · Introduction: postcolonial literature in a changing historical frame 1

ATO QUAYSON

2 · Postcolonial fictions of slavery 30

GLENDA R. CARPIO

3 · Postcolonialism and travel writing 58

GARETH GRIFFITHS

4 · Missionary writing and postcolonialism 81

ELISABETH MUDIMBE-BOYI

5 · Postcolonial auto/biography 107

PHILIP HOLDEN

6 · Orality and the genres of African postcolonial writing 137

UZOMA ESONWANNE

7 · Canadian literatures and the postcolonial 171

WINFRIED SIEMERLING

8 · Postcolonialism and Caribbean literature 215

ELAINE SAVORY

Contents

9 · Postcolonialism and Arab literature	250
MUHSIN AL-MUSAWI	
10 · Postcolonialism and postcolonial writing in Latin America	288
(a) Postcolonialism and Latin American writing, 1492–1850	288
FRANCISCO A. ORTEGA	
(b) Postcolonial writing in Latin America, 1850–2000	309
MARCOS P. NATALI	
11 · Postcolonial writing in South Africa	329
CHRISTOPHER WARNES	
12 · Postcolonial literature in Southeast Asia	352
RAJEEV S. PATKE	
13 · Postcolonial South Asian poetry	385
G. J. V. PRASAD	
14 · Postcolonial writing in India	412
ANANYA JAHANARA KABIR	
15 · Postcolonial writing in Australia and New Zealand	446
JULIAN MURPHET	
16 · Indigenous writing in Canada, Australia and New Zealand	484
(a) Indigenous peoples' writing in Canada	484
DANIEL HEATH JUSTICE	
(b) Indigenous writing in Australia and New Zealand	511
ANNE BREWSTER	
17 · Postcolonial writing in Ireland	539
JOE CLEARY	
18 · Postcolonial writing in Britain	571
JOHN MCLEOD	

Contents

19 · Postcolonial writing in France 604

DOMINIC THOMAS

20 · Postcolonial writing in Germany 620

SARA LENNOX

Contents of Volume II

21 · The language question in India and Africa 649

(a) The language question in India 649

DEBJANI GANGULY

(b) The language question in Africa 681

BHEKIZIZWE PETERSON

22 · English and the development of postcolonial literature 703

GABRIELLA MAZZON

23 · Religion and postcolonial writing 739

JAMIE S. SCOTT

24 · Postcolonial responses to the Western canon 771

ANKHI MUKHERJEE

25 · Island writing, Creole cultures 802

ELIZABETH DELOUGHREY

26 · Magical realism 833

MARIANO SISKIND

27 · Palimpsest and hybridity in postcolonial writing 869

LENE M. JOHANNESSEN

28 · The narrative forms of postcolonial fiction 903

MONIKA FLUDERNIK

29 · Poetry and postcolonialism 938

JAHAN RAMAZANI

30 · Primitivism and postcolonial literature 982

VICTOR LI

Contents

31 · Popular culture and postcolonial literary production in Africa and India	1006
(a) Popular writing in Africa	
STEPHANIE NEWELL	
(b) Popular writing in India	
ABHIJIT GUPTA	
32 · Film and postcolonial writing	1039
LINDIWE DOVEY	
33 · Fanon, Memmi, Glissant and postcolonial writing	1068
ANJALI PRABHU	
34 · Negritude and postcolonial literature	1100
H. ADLAI MURDOCH	
35 · Publishing, prizes and postcolonial literary production	1127
SANDRA PONZANESI	
36 · Key journals and organizations	1155
IRA RAJA AND DEEPIKA BAHRI	
<i>Bibliography</i>	
<i>Index</i>	

The language question in India and Africa

21(a) The language question in India

DEBJANI GANGULY

In February 2008, India's largest metropolis, Mumbai, witnessed a sordid spectacle of linguistic and regional chauvinism. The discredited *Shiv Sainik*,¹ Raj Thackeray, attacked India's top Bollywood star, Amitabh Bachchan, for showing more allegiance to his Hindi roots in Uttar Pradesh (UP) than to his Marathi-speaking Mumbai home, the capital of the state of Maharashtra and the city that gave Bachchan his stardom.² The cause of this outburst was Bachchan's decision to fund a college for rural women in his Hindi-speaking home state, UP. Thackeray and his rabid band of 'Marathi' loyalists saw this as an act of betrayal. Their logic was simple and deadly. Bachchan's first loyalty should lie with Maharashtra and its largely Marathi-speaking ilk. They should be the recipients of his largesse. While Amitabh Bachchan refused to respond to the provocation, his wife Jaya protested against this intimidation and even taunted Thackeray at a film premiere by deliberately making a case for why she would speak in 'Hindi'.³ Thackeray went on the offensive, demanding an apology from Jaya Bachchan, and even threatening to block all film releases that featured Bachchan, his wife and their son. Despite the avowed cosmopolitanism of Mumbai – the famed city of culturally diverse migrants – linguistic chauvinism, it appears, is rife. For long-term residents of Mumbai this episode will perforce trigger memories of other instances of linguistic intimidation that has dogged the metropolis since the very beginning of the formation of linguistically determined states in post-independence India. Previous victims have been Gujarati- and Tamil-speaking dwellers of Mumbai.

If the episode above is an instance of India's clashing language worlds originating in the rationalizing procedures of the modern state,⁴ the other unsettling episode I am about to narrate is an instance of clashing literary worlds

originating in the subcontinent's colonial history. In the introduction to his edited collection, *The Vintage Book of Indian Writing*, published in 1997, the fiftieth year of Indian independence, Salman Rushdie claimed the following:

Prose writing – both fiction and non-fiction – created in this period [that is, 1947–97] by Indian writers working in English is proving to be a more interesting body of work than most of what has been produced in the sixteen ‘official languages’ of India, the so-called ‘vernacular’ languages during the same time.⁵

As if that were not provocation enough in a plurilingual literary ethos battling the hegemony of English, Rushdie went on to assert that, “‘Indo-Anglian’ literature represents perhaps the most valuable contribution India has yet made to the world of books.”⁶ Finally, he contended, ‘Parochialism is perhaps the main vice of the vernacular literatures.’⁷ In one rhetorical sweep, India’s best-known literary celebrity in this era of global English had rubbished centuries of India’s fabled linguistic and literary plenitude, and tainted its contemporary indigenous literary productions as inward looking. Predictably, there was outrage among the Indian literati⁸ and Rushdie appeared to enjoy the storm, even claiming that what he said may have been ‘improper’, but it was not ‘wrong’.⁹

Notwithstanding his absurd dismissal of the subcontinent’s non-English literary oeuvre, at least two points extrapolated from his extraordinary pugnacity are worth reckoning with. One is the emergence, not seen since Sanskrit, of a critical mass of writing in an auratic/elitist tongue, English, in late modern India, phenomenally enriching, again not unlike the European ‘discovery’ of Sanskrit in the eighteenth century, the nation’s literary capital in the world republic of letters. The second is the anxiety of a postcolonial stance keen to balance global connectivity with nationalism, localism and nativism. I see the first as urging a foray into India’s linguistic and literary historiography to productively situate the claims of Indian English literary production. The second, I contend, urges an analysis of the contestatory dynamics of linguistic world-making in post-independent India of which the Bachchan–Thackeray fracas is just one illustration, a dynamics in which the modern state is a key player. This chapter seeks to undertake both these tasks, but not before I first give a thumbnail sketch of India’s complex language weave beginning with antiquity.

India’s language weave

Sanskrit and Tamil, with some Prakrit and Pali, were the primary languages of the subcontinent for over 2,000 years till the end of the first millennium. The second millennium witnessed not only the evolution of many vernacular

languages such as Kannada, Marathi and Bengali, but also the domination of Persian with the consolidation of Islamic rule and confirmation of its official status subsequently under the Mughals in the sixteenth century. The linguistic make-up of South Asia was enriched further with the arrival in the same century of European traders, the French, the Portuguese, the Dutch and, eventually, the English. While the impact of the European languages was felt most in the coastal trading zones of the west and the south, English, the language of India's governing class since the late eighteenth century, became firmly entrenched in the subcontinent's linguistic and literary firmament. Its strong and continuing presence, as we shall go on to see, has since become the critical focal point of linguistic, literary and cultural debates in India.

Currently, the nation state of India is home to four language families: the Indo-Aryan, the Dravidian, the Austro-Asiatic and the Tibeto-Burman, of which the first two represent over 95 per cent of languages spoken in the subcontinent. The eighteen Scheduled languages recognized by the Constitution of India come from these groups. The ninety-six other non-Scheduled languages are spoken predominantly by the subcontinent's tribal population and by people from the seven states of the Northeast. These belong overwhelmingly to the Austro-Asiatic and Tibeto-Burman families. These numbers – eighteen and ninety-six – by no means account for the total number of languages spoken in India. As studies of India's evolving language spheres have shown, the changing criteria for language identification in successive censuses have successively whittled down the numbers. Thus, if the 1961 Census lists 1,652 tongues, the 1981 Census shows only 106.¹⁰ The 1971 Census Commissioner was advised to drop all languages with less than 10,000 speakers.¹¹ As for the 1981 Census, the criterion was no longer the mother tongue but the main language spoken in the household. Further, many languages were grouped under a dominant language of the region, so that, for instance, Bhojpuri, Mewari, Avadhi and Chhattisgarhi lost their independent status and were grouped under Hindi. The irony here is that, as we shall see later, Hindi itself evolved as a standard language towards the end of the nineteenth century from some of these 'variations' or 'dialects' as they are called now.¹²

Linguists have long recognized that spatial reorganization and territorial realignments play an important role in the evolution of language spheres. Thus, the Partition of the subcontinent witnessed the splintering of language communities. Suddenly after 1947, Punjabi, Sindhi, Urdu and Bengali became languages of two nations and have over the years developed multiple social, cultural and literary trajectories. As for post-Partition India, all the eighteen officially recognized languages have identities as 'regional' languages territorially demarcated by

their concentrated use in specific regions of the country. The years from 1953 to 1971 witnessed the creation of linguistically organized provinces from princely and British-governed territories and presidencies. Today, Marathi is the language of the western state of Maharashtra, Punjabi is predominantly spoken in the northern state of Punjab, Telugu is the language of southern Indian state of Andhra Pradesh, and Bengali of West Bengal, in India's east.

In practice, English and Hindi are the two recognized 'national' languages for their avowed pan-Indian reach,¹³ their capacity to mediate the 'mutual incomprehensibilities'¹⁴ of India's multiple other tongues. Hindi is the hegemonic tongue north of the Vindhyas, the mountain range dividing peninsular India from its upper half. Its cultural currency as the lingua franca of the entertainment industry has only solidified in the last two decades with India's satellite revolution, despite its seventy-year reign as the language of India's popular film industry now called 'Bollywood'. The current 'national' status of English is very firm and derives mainly from its recognition as India's language for the purpose of political deliberations in Parliament, for professional and employment purposes, and for the nation's international dealings. However, the 'national' status of both Hindi and English has not been achieved without considerable debate, deliberation and, in some cases, outright opposition.

Where the impact of English in the context of India's multilingual literary production is concerned, it is but one recent development in the long history of the evolution of Indian literatures. Two other transregional languages, Sanskrit and Persian, preceded English in their broad, cosmopolitan mediation of indigenous language spheres across two millennia. For a while indeed, in the eighteenth century, all three circulated as languages of power in varying degrees. Sanskrit's influence was palpable mostly in intellectual, high cultural and literary spheres; Persian dominated political discourse as also literary production in the early decades of the century, while English gained influence in the sphere of trade, albeit in its ability to transact effectively with the vernacular languages zones through mediators. While there is no doubt that British colonial practices in the nineteenth century, especially in the domain of education and culture, led to a reconfiguration of linguistic and literary hierarchies, the reception of English in India was mediated at every stage by extant literary traditions in different parts of India. Literary scholars of premodern India have traced continuous trajectories of literary production, criticism and scholarship in more than twenty languages right until the arrival of Europeans on the subcontinent.¹⁵ From the beginning of European contact, these literary traditions played a significant role in determining the subcontinent's terms of engagement with literatures from Europe. Since the nineteenth century, the

various vernacular or regional literatures were in turn influenced by the introduction of English education. Scholarship is divided on whether to see this latter influence as a rupture in the development of India's 3,000-year-long literary history, or whether to read the influence of English as but another significant strand in a continuous trajectory.¹⁶

Whatever the validity of these divided perceptions, it is clear that a post-colonial literary history of India cannot be reduced to a narrative of the dominance of English over atrophying local literary traditions. No doubt, anglicization has led to an attenuation of philological and historical expertise in the various language traditions, as Sheldon Pollock has argued.¹⁷ But literatures in the Indian languages continue to generate rich forms of comparative scholarship even if, inevitably, this scholarship now displays signs of 400 years of confluence with European traditions. Further, in terms of reading publics in India, there are substantially more readers in Marathi, Hindi, Urdu and Punjabi, than in English. Bengali, Urdu and Tamil have transnational reading and reception spheres across Bangladesh, Pakistan and Sri Lanka respectively. The dominance of English is evident primarily in India's global literary mediations, especially with the West. In the national context, however, it is more fruitful, to see works in English and their relationship to Indian-language literatures not so much in terms of a polarization of 'global' and 'parochial', as Rushdie does in the anthology referred to earlier, but in terms of their location along multiple sites of literary production, circulation and reception within a polyglot culture characterized by urbanization, translation and bilingualism. As Vinay Dharwadkar notes, 'The indigenous languages are among the social, political and aesthetic elements that have penetrated the English language in its alien environment on the subcontinent, and like other precolonial and noncolonial presences, they have leaked continuously into this literature through the aperture that opened inside it two hundred years ago.'¹⁸

India's non-English literary flows have emerged in the form of three streams – national, regional and sublinguistic. The 'national' encompasses not only Hindi literature, but also works in other languages that have an interregional or national impact and are available in translations across many languages including English. Examples of such works include U. Ananthamurthy's Kannada novel *Samskara* and works of the Bengali writer Mahasweta Devi. The 'regional' stream is constituted of literatures in the eighteen state-recognized languages and primarily consists of works that rarely have an audience beyond their linguistic regions. Thus, while they may have large reading publics in terms of absolute numbers, their literary capital is very limited. The 'sublinguistic' stream consists of literatures emerging from the

tribal and dalit (ex-untouchable caste) communities across the country, often in dialects and the demotic distinct from those officially recognized ‘scheduled’ languages. These writings have in recent years become part of a subaltern literary internationalism that includes minority literatures and literatures of the First Peoples from Australia, Canada and the US. Each of these streams has generated a substantial body of literary criticism.

The scenario above of India’s linguistic and literary complexity and its long historical trajectory, beginning in 1500 BC and leading up to its current post-colonial phase, warrants analysis on a historical scale that is beyond the scope of this chapter, and also that of the current volume. What I plan to do in addressing the two tasks I set for myself at the start of this chapter – sign-posting key stages in a historiography of the subcontinent’s language and literary traditions, and analysing the impact of modern state-making on conflicting language worlds – is pick up the story of India’s language question from the eighteenth century onwards with the consolidation of East India Company rule and the inevitable intensification of contact with and transmission of English in its wake. I then take the reader through key nineteenth-century developments in colonial education and language policy, Orientalist scholarship, social reform movements, printing technologies, missionary activities and the establishment of academies and institutions, all of which played a key role in reconfiguring the subcontinent’s language and literary worlds. The final section will highlight factors that affect India’s post-independence language question. These include conflicting nationalist visions, constitutional debates on the creation of linguistic provinces, education policies, competing claims of English and Hindi, and agitation for regional linguistic rights.

While, in the tradition of canonical postcolonial scholarship, I look at India’s past through its colonial optic, my analysis will seek to be guided by insights from literary scholarship on India’s ‘precolonial’ worlds that bring home the import of critical attentiveness to the deep history of the subcontinent’s myriad languages. Only then can one truly begin to mine the depths of their postcolonial manifestations and avert the danger of freezing them in the time-zone of Westernization and late modernity, wherein they appear trapped in an inevitable narrative of ‘erosion’ and ‘victim-hood’ *apropos* the global dominance of English.

Linguistic contact zones in the eighteenth century: Sanskrit, Persian, English

The mid eighteenth century is historically recognized as the beginning of British colonial rule in India with the victory of the East India Company, led

by Robert Clive, over the Nawab of Bengal at the Battle of Plassey in 1757. This could lead one to conclude that the English language too consolidated its hold on India around the same time. After all, the political victory of the East India Company was preceded by at least one and a half centuries of subcontinental contact through trade and the requisite interlingual skills it warranted.

Scholarship on eighteenth-century language and literary spheres, however, presents a far more complicated picture. It is true, as we shall see below, that English did make its presence felt from the late seventeenth century, but it was far from dominant all through the next century. In fact, eighteenth-century India constituted a unique zone of amalgamation, coexistence and only occasional conflict between three transregional linguistic spheres that have marked the coordinates of India's literary history since antiquity: Sanskritic, Perso-Arabic and anglophone. Sanskrit, Persian and English, each manifested its cultural and political influence over this century in varying degrees, generating in the process radical changes in the linguistic and literary trajectories of the vernaculars, and creating composite, multilingual and intercultural domains that would come to fruition in the early years of the nineteenth century and then morph into more anglo-determined forms of acculturation.

The arrival of the British East India Company on India's shores for the first time in 1608 is historically marked as the arrival of the English language in India's coastal zones. But recent scholarship has retrieved evidence of the use of English on the subcontinent at least two decades prior to the formation of the East India Company.¹⁹ The story revolves around the escape of a Roman Catholic priest, Father Thomas Stephens, from Elizabethan England. He initially sought refuge in Rome in 1578 and then persuaded his superiors to send him to the south-central coast in western India to join a group of Jesuits. He arrived in India in 1579 and settled down in Salsette and then Goa, where he went by the name of Father Estavam. The first public records of his English-language usage appear in a Portuguese trial of four English merchant-adventurers in 1583, where Father Stephens/Estavam was called upon to act as translator and intermediary.²⁰ The four were subsequently released by the Portuguese. While there are no records of three among them, the fourth merchant, Ralph Fitch, also the only one to find his way back to England in 1591, eventually compiled an account of his travels in India and the East. It can well be called a proto-travelogue, the first of its kind on India by an English-language speaker. It was published in 1599 in Richard Hakluyt's *Principal Navigations Voyages, Traffiques and Discoveries of the English Nation*.²¹

Father Stephens and Ralph Fitch were 'prototypical representatives of two entire classes of historical agents – the missionary and the merchant – that were

to dominate the history of British evangelism, trade, conquest, and colonization over the next four and a half centuries'.²² A sizeable number of Englishmen settled in India after 1660 when Charles II conferred on the merchants of the East India Company the power to 'be a state unto themselves, and [act] accordingly whenever east of [the Cape] of Good Hope'.²³

The gradual control of trade by the British East India Company through the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, with the seal of approval from a successive line of Mughal emperors beginning with Jehangir, saw the establishment of distinctly English zones of cultural contact in the Malabar and Coromandel coastal regions and, to some extent, in the presidency towns of Bombay, Madras and Calcutta. The zones of contact included those generated by employment, marriage and kinship bonds, religious conversion, and finally, friendship and social relation.²⁴ The English language was still far from ascendant in its influence across the rest of the subcontinent. Its use was primarily manifested in genres such as personal letters, epistolary travelogues and more formally structured travel writing, all emanating from merchants, officials and adventurers who came to India's shores in the wake of the East India Company. Persian and Sanskrit continued to inform the sociopolitical and cultural domains.

The year 1757 transformed the destiny of English in India. The date, as we saw, marks the Company's first significant step towards political consolidation of power, with Clive's victory over the Nawab of Bengal in the Battle of Plassey. For the next sixty years, English steadily moved from the peripheries of the coastal trading communities to zones of power and social influence. With the beginnings of the Company's governance of Bengal, English confronted the dominance of Persian which was the principal language of political and economic administration. At this stage, however, the Englishmen were in no hurry to impose English as any kind of *lingua franca*. The language continued to coexist with Persian in the administrative and market spheres, with most Company officials gradually acquiring proficiency in Persian. Not until England's official promulgation in 1835 with the 'Minute' of Macaulay, as we shall see later, did English begin to dislodge Persian from its everyday use in state and trade matters.

All through the eighteenth and early decades of the nineteenth century, Persian and Arabic were the vehicles of knowledge-making and culture. Arabic, as the language of the Qur'an, and Persian, as the language fostered by the Mughal rulers for all modes of literary and cultural expression, were the undisputed languages of power and sociocultural influence. All who had educational aspirations and wished to be part of the Mughal administrative cadres

had to master both, irrespective of religion and caste. Further, Persian was the primary conduit to literary and cultural refinement. Almost all Mughal emperors since Akbar actively patronized Persian literary figures and were themselves immersed in the poetic sophistication of its literary works. As Muzaffar Alam notes:

To take an interest in Persian arts and letters was considered a mark of refinement and sophistication. No monarch, however brilliant his record of military achievement, could aspire to fame in the world of culture at home and abroad without generous patronage to Persian poets and scholars.²⁵

The secular tradition of Persian poetry, especially its reach far into pre-Islamic Persia, and its ability to be a vehicle for a liberal, tolerant accommodation of diverse cultural influences, especially resonated with the Mughal administration's own attempts to mediate India's cultural diversity. Scholars have noted how significant Persian was, right from the twelfth to the eighteenth century, in enabling the development of literary cultures in the vernacular languages.²⁶ The Islamic rulers from other regions in India, and especially from India's south, despite their commitment to upholding the dominance of Persian and Arabic, encouraged the growth of languages such as Kannada, Marathi, Telugu and Dakkani. Each of these showed evidence of Persian influence.

Persian vocabulary, grammar, literary themes and genres also found their way into Punjabi, Kashmiri, Sindhi and eventually Urdu. Translation between Persian and these languages was widespread as were adaptations of classics. Some of the well-known instances are Hakim Khan's translation of the *Janam Sakhi* from Punjabi, Nawab Wali Leghari's masnavi, *Hir-wa-Ranjha* and Ibrati's *Aijaz-ul Mohabbat*, a Persian adaptation of the Nala-Damayanti love legend from the *Mahabharata*.²⁷ In fact, a very distinctive form of Indo-Persian literary repertoire, as distinct from Iranian Persian, developed over a period of five centuries due to these exchanges. By the end of the eighteenth century Persian was by far the language most frequently used in all spheres of knowledge production, history, geography, astronomy, philosophy, theology and lexicography.²⁸ The College of Fort William, set up by the British in 1800 to inculcate a systematic study among the Company's officers of India's various languages and literary traditions, employed the largest number of teachers in Persian.²⁹

The eighteenth century witnessed the continuing influence of yet another transregional linguistic and literary force, the Sanskrit. The onset of Islamic rule in the second millennium, and, subsequently, that of the British East India Company, did not erode the literary and cultural power of this magisterial tongue. Persian was no match for it. Never the language of the common people

in the 2,500 years of its living history, Sanskrit was unsurpassed in its embodiment of ancient India's refined aesthetic sensibilities, its literary and cultural wonders, and its sacral aura. Most Indian vernacular literary traditions emerged under its shadow; the Islamic rulers encouraged translations into Persian of its many literary, philological, theological and epistemological treasures; and successive waves of Europeans could only marvel at its rich and complex history and expressly set about mining its cultural riches. With the consolidation of British rule, India's first Governor General, Warren Hastings, officially recognized Sanskrit's superior cultural status and commissioned authoritative English translations of its key works. Thus, 1776 saw the English rendering of Hindu laws by N. B. Halhed under the title *The Code of Gentoo Laws*, and Charles Wilkins's translation of the *Bhagvad Gita* appeared in 1785. No doubt, Hastings was impelled by motives of governance, for he wished to maintain his autonomy from British Parliament by undertaking to introduce separate civil laws based on religious practices by Hindus and Muslims.³⁰ Translations from both Sanskrit and Persian texts were imperative to this goal. Nevertheless, his patronage of key Sanskrit translations was significant enough to initiate a critical mass of philological scholarship in the field.

Sir William Jones's historic speech at the Asiatic Society in Bengal in 1786, extolling Sanskrit's grandeur, was another landmark event in the modern history of the language. 'The Sanskrit language', Jones enthused, 'is of wonderful structure, more perfect than the Greek, more copious than the Latin, and more exquisitely refined than either.'³¹ His English translation of Kalidas's *Shakuntala* in 1789 and Georg Foster's into German in 1791 heralded the era of German Romanticism's 'discovery' of Sanskrit as the *Ursprache*, the master language and origin of all Indo-European languages.³² Among the best-known responses are those of Goethe and Herder to *Shakuntala*. Herder called it 'a real blossom of the Orient, and the first, most beautiful of its kind! . . . Something like that, of course, appears once every two thousand years.' Goethe responded with a quatrain:

Shall I embrace the blossoms of Spring, the fruits of the autumn
All that enchants and all that charms, all that nurtures and fills,
Shall I embrace in a name all heaven and the whole of the earth
Call I Sakontala, thee – all is comprised in one name.³³

From this enthusiasm for Sanskrit on the part of Western scholarship emerged disciplines such as comparative philology and Indology, the progenitors of contemporary linguistics and lexicography. While, in most accounts of the rise

of nineteenth-century philology and linguistic theory, Sanskrit is seen as providing at best no more than a brilliant ‘case’ study and a privileged site of ‘raw’ data, and at worst an antiquarian system of no relevance to nineteenth-century knowledge-making.³⁴ Revathy Krishnaswamy, in a recent essay on the emergence of linguistic theory in Europe,³⁵ argues that Sanskrit, in fact, also provided the ‘metalinguistic, theoretical and ideological apparatus’ for such theory,³⁶ and was not merely a ‘museum of ancient practices’. Building her argument on five separate sites of analysis – poetics, epistemology, ethnology, linguistics and the figure of the linguist – she traces the impact of the ancient science of grammar, *Vyakarana*, on key theoretical formulations of the European linguists, an impact that was gradually disavowed from the second half of the nineteenth century by philologists intent on Europeanizing the corpus of linguistic science. Krishnaswamy’s contention is that nineteenth-century Europe’s exclusive claim to linguistic ‘theory’ ‘rests on a simultaneous appropriation and denial of colonized linguistic knowledge that constituted Sanskrit as a privileged yet safe object of antiquarian interest’.³⁷ This shift to ‘Europe’ as the privileged site of modern knowledge-making in the nineteenth century also had the impact of further relegating Sanskrit to esoteric peripheries within the subcontinent while English gained dominance.

All through the eighteenth century, however, Sanskrit scholarship was particularly nurtured by the various Hindu rulers and the aristocracy in Benaras, Mithila, Kashmir, Travancore and Tanjore. While the use of Sanskrit was restricted to exclusive enclaves of learning and scholarship, its wider impact was felt through the evolution of the vernacular language and literary traditions, many of which drew from poetic forms and themes of Sanskrit epics and the *puranas*. Ethical and theological life worlds depicted in the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* were the main sources of inspiration for writers in India’s many languages. The *Attakathas*, which constituted the key texts for Kathakali plays in Malayalam, were Sanskritic in formal and thematic orientation. They were particularly nurtured during the reign of Maharaja Kartika Tirunal of Travancore (1758–98). Other poetic and performative genres in Malayalam, such as *tullals*, *campu* and *duta kavya*, were all inspired by Sanskrit aesthetic forms. Telugu literature witnessed the continuous flourishing of yet another Sanskritic verse form, the *sataka* (literally a ‘century’ of verse). This form first appeared in the particular linguistic region we currently identify as Andhra Pradesh in the thirteenth century with the *Sarvesvara Sataka* by Yathavakkala Annamayya. The year 1800 saw the publication of yet another famous work in the *sataka* form, V. Venkata Kavi’s *Madana Gopala Satakam*. In the north, the Gujarati, Rajasthani and Maithili literatures evolved under the

shadow of Sanskritic religious poetics. As for Hindi literature during the eighteenth century, or *riti* as the particular period was called then, its essence was constituted of an elaborate, stylized and embellished tradition of poetics inspired primarily by Sanskrit.³⁸

The eighteenth century, thus, witnessed the evolution of India's vernacular languages and literatures under the influence both Sanskrit and Persian, two of the largest extant pan-Indian and transregional language worlds to straddle the century. Towards the second half of the century, as we have seen, English continued to make inroads but was far from consolidating itself as the subcontinent's dominant tongue. The section that follows marks the rise of English and the modernization of India's vernacular languages under its shadow. In the process it also signals the gradual dwindling of composite linguistic and cultural worlds that the eighteenth century generated at the intersection of three world languages.

The long nineteenth century: English and the evolution of modern Indian languages and literatures

If all through the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the subcontinental cultural scene was a mosaic of tongues at the confluence of three large linguistic worlds, two of long standing (Sanskrit and Persian) and one emergent (English), the nineteenth century witnessed the gradual consolidation of English and a dramatic shift under its influence in the developmental trajectory of modern Indian languages and literatures as we know them today. By the mid nineteenth century, through various acts of Parliament, English had also dislodged Persian as the language of governance and political economy.

Each of these might suggest a process of comprehensive colonial takeover and erasure of existing indigenous language traditions. What we have instead is a history of protracted debate, negotiation and compromise on the terms of their transformation under yet another transregional cosmopolis, this time that of English. There is enough documentation to suggest that even the most imperial-minded of colonial actors, including the much maligned Macaulay, did not envisage English replacing mass education in the vernaculars.³⁹ They were invested in the development of the vernacular languages, but on less antiquated foundations than Sanskrit and Persian. English, they hoped, would provide that 'modernizing' boost. They only envisioned the anglicization of the native bureaucratic training regime. The idea was that this 'creamy layer' of English-educated Indian civil servants would not only assist in day-to-day

administration, but also gradually acculturate the masses in English liberal and Enlightenment values through their own languages which would eventually breathe the air of modernity. As for the champions of India's classical heritage, they had supporters from among indigenous and British intellectuals alike, and of the latter, some unlikely personages such as John Stuart Mill. Zastoupil and Moir note in their Preface to *The Great Indian Education Debate* that scholars have overlooked two critical sources on Mill's advocacy of Sanskrit and Arabic and his opposition to Macaulay's rabid imperialist stance: an obscure nineteenth-century journal and a handwritten manuscript in the India Office Records and the British Library's Oriental and India Office Collections. In his later dispatches, of course, J. S. Mill, supported the 'filtration theory' of education where English would reach only a small proportion of the population, and this 'elite' class would disseminate Western knowledge to the vernacular masses.⁴⁰

What is intriguing about the celebrated debate on Indian education between the Orientalists and the Anglicists from the 1780s to the 1820s was that it was *not* a simple polarization between the antinomian forces of indigenization and Westernization. Both groups, in fact, saw the introduction of English education in India as inevitable; and ironically many indigenous conservatives themselves petitioned for the establishment of institutions founded on English-language education.⁴¹ The fundamental differences lay in the way they each envisaged the nature of cultural amalgamation wrought by the forces of anglicization, and in the philosophical worldviews they brought to bear on their arguments. To put it briefly, the education debate symbolized a conflict between *civilizational* and *utilitarian* points of view. To the Orientalists, India's classical and Perso-Arabic heritage was rich and capacious enough to accommodate, transfigure and even rejuvenate European knowledge forms. They favoured a form of English education that could be grafted on and enhance the already existing civilizational depth of India represented by its classical Sanskrit heritage and a courtly Persian culture. They, thus, opposed an attitude that saw the introduction of English as a 'progressive' world language that would ease out the supposedly moribund linguistic and cultural influences of India's premodernity. This latter was the worldview of the Anglicists constituted mainly of Whigs, the evangelicals and the Utilitarians, who saw no practical value in India's classically inspired pedagogy and culture and firmly believed in the ultimate efficacy of a modernized governance of India through a westernized education system. The Anglicists were of the firm view that not only would English education enable the British to gain greater administrative ascendancy over the Mughals,⁴² and enable a better reception of the missionary

activities, but that it would rejuvenate the Indian vernaculars through a process of transmission and osmosis. One strategic manifestation of this ideology, also referred to as ‘Downward Filtration’, is to be found in the report of the General Committee of Public Instruction of the Bengal Presidency in 1835:

[English education] is the first stage in the process by which India is to be enlightened. The natives must learn before they teach. The best educated among them must be placed in possession of our knowledge before they transfer it into their own language.⁴³

The political coordinates of this story, especially in light of the eventual prevalence of the Anglicist position in the education debate,⁴⁴ are well known. Here I enumerate only five of the most significant. These include:

Charles Grant’s 1792 tract on India. The publication of evangelist Charles Grant’s 1792 tract on India, called *Observations on the State of Society Among the Asiatic Subjects of Great Britain, Particularly with Respect to Moral, and on the Means of Improving it*, first signalled the compulsion felt by East India Company officials to rethink education policy in India. Grant eventually became a member of the Court of Directors of the East India Company and, from 1806 onwards, its chairman four times.

1813 East India Company charter. The 1813 renewal of the Company charter by the British Parliament for the first time officially recorded the need to make education of Indian natives an obligation of the British government. The cabinet resolution stated that educational ‘measures ought to be introduced as may tend to the introduction among them [natives] of useful knowledge, and of religious and moral improvement’.⁴⁵ The renewal also made legal the entry of Christian missionaries into the subcontinent.

1833 renewal of Company charter. A further renewal of the East India Company charter in 1833 expressed concerns about the rising administrative costs of governing India, and for the first time included a provision linking English education with recruitment of natives into civil service. The Select Committee of the Parliament reviewing the working of the Company specifically suggested that ‘the most powerful stimulus would be to make a certain degree of proficiency in English a condition of qualification for Civil Employment’.⁴⁶

1835 Macaulay ‘Minute on Indian Education’. The acceptance on 7 March 1835, by Governor General William Bentinck, of the ‘Minute on Indian Education’ by T. B. Macaulay, President of the Committee on Public Instruction, recommending the formal introduction of English education, was the single decisive

moment in turning the tide against the Orientalists' civilization vision of an India accommodative of both classical and modern knowledge forms. No doubt, as Zastoupil and Moir have argued, the Orientalists still managed to get some of their recommendations adopted in policies that were developed since the formal ratification of the 'Minute'.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, since the Macaulay moment, the eighteenth-century idea of India at the confluence of three weighty, world-making linguistic horizons vanished forever, and the subcontinent was comprehensively on a trajectory of modernization of its language and literary cultures under the tutelage of English. Macaulay's 'Minute' rhetorically marked this momentous shift in three strategic moves, each drawing on *utilitarian*, *culturalist* and *governmental* arguments respectively.⁴⁸ The last can be seen in his reference to the 'limited means' at the disposal of the colonial government and the need to use it judiciously to promote only teaching in English and that too exclusively to a select group of willing learners who would then go on to 'form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions we govern: a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals and in intellect'. This class would help 'refine the vernacular dialects of this country, to enrich them with terms of science borrowed from western nomenclature'. Towards the end here we see the emergence of his culturalist rhetoric which is elaborated at some length in an early section of the 'Minute'. Just as Britain and Russia were culturally ennobled by the exposure to texts of classical antiquity from Greece and Rome, the moment was ripe for India to experience its own renaissance with the glories of English Literature, for this latter was undoubtedly the repository of mankind's best talents in that moment of human history. Or as he put it, 'The literature of England is now more valuable than the literature of classical antiquity.' As for Sanskrit and Persian, Macaulay's dismissal of their riches is now legendary in its imperial snootiness, not to mention blatantly disingenuous:

I am quite ready to take the Oriental learning at the valuation of the Orientalists themselves. I have never found one among them who could deny that a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia. The intrinsic superiority of the Western literature is, indeed, fully admitted by those members of the Committee who support the Oriental plan of education.⁴⁹

Finally, in extolling the merits of a westernized education for Britain's colonial subjects, Macaulay invoked the classic utilitarian principle of value, 'the greatest good of the greatest number'. England, he averred, was at the pinnacle of Western civilization. Most Indians, in his view, quite naturally craved Western

education through the medium of English. Would the Committee of Public Instruction be blind to this overarching need to bring a less tutored part of the British Empire into the realm of Enlightenment? And if it chose not to open its eyes, it had

no right to the respectable name of a Board of Public Instruction. We are a Board for wasting public money, for printing books which are of less value than the paper on which they are printed was while it was blank; for giving artificial encouragement to absurd history, absurd metaphysics, absurd physics, absurd theology; for raising up a breed of scholars who find their scholarship an encumbrance and a blemish.⁵⁰

Wood's Educational Despatch of 1854. If the 'Minute' of Macaulay provided the requisite ideological ballast for an education revolution in colonial India, the 'Despatch' of Sir Charles Wood nineteen years later provided its architecture. Touted as the 'Magna Carta of English Education in India', Wood's 'Despatch' was the first major policy document to lay out a comprehensive plan for primary and secondary education in India.⁵¹ Arguing that it was the 'sacred' duty of the government to promote education at all levels in both English and the vernacular languages, Wood put forward seven key initiatives: (1) establishment of a Department of Education; (2) foundation of universities in the three presidency towns of Bengal, Bombay and Madras; (3) establishment of teacher-training institutions; (4) support and maintenance of existing government colleges and high schools and establishment of new ones; (5) establishment of new middle schools; (6) greater support for vernacular schools at the level of elementary education; and (7) introduction of a system of grants-in-aid to support a rising number of privately managed educational institutions.⁵²

The fallout of these political and policy developments and their intersection at various stages with existing missionary, educational and social reform movements, were far reaching. They generated an array of overlapping sites of reconfiguration of India's language and literary worlds throughout the nineteenth century. I wish to consider these in two phases which I call, for the sake of convenience, the 'pre-Macaulay phase' from 1800 to 1835; and the 'post-Macaulay phase' from 1835 to 1900. The sites of analysis under the pre-Macaulay phase include the establishment of the College of Fort William in Calcutta, the proliferation of printing presses, the evolution of vernacular-language public spheres through prose journalism, and missionary endeavours to promote translations. In the post-Macaulay phase I consider briefly the following: the rise of Indian English, the imperial reorientation of the power and efficacy of vernacular tongues, the emergence of Hindi and Urdu as

transregional vernaculars, and the role of language in nation-making with the germination of a nationalist consciousness in the last years of the nineteenth century.

The pre-Macaulay phase, 1800–1835. The importance of the year 1800 can scarcely be underestimated in any history of India's language worlds. The fact that it was the birth year of Thomas Babington Macaulay is only a part of its significance. Of greater import is the establishment of the College of Fort William in Calcutta and the Serampore Mission Press which for the first time had the wherewithal to print works in the Indian languages. All colonial agents, irrespective of whether they were East India Company officials, missionaries or imperial policy makers, realized the value of not just mastering Sanskrit and Persian but also the vernacular languages of the everyday worlds in different regions. Their respective goals of trade, governance, civilizational change and spiritual transformation could not be achieved without access to means of communication. Hence at the very turn of the century was established the Fort William College in Calcutta to train young British civil servants in Indian languages and culture. It went on to become a major site of scholarship in the Indian languages and produced textbooks, compendiums, lexicons, grammars and translations.

These scholarly publications were themselves enabled by developments in print technology which first came to the subcontinent with the Portuguese in the mid sixteenth century. Subsequently, the French and the Danish missionaries established printing presses in the southern regions of Pondicherry, Tranquebar and Madras. The year 1793 saw the publication of the first English work in any Indian language, a Tamil translation of John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. But it was the setting up of the Serampore Mission Press in 1800 by three Christian missionaries of the Baptist Mission, Joshua Marshman, William Ward and William Carey, that is widely recognized by cultural historians as a landmark event in the history of India's print culture and its impact on the modernization of India's languages and literatures. Within a decade the press grew into the greatest type foundry in Asia for it had the wherewithal to make elegant types and founts in almost all Eastern languages of the world. Not only did it print translations of the Bible into different Indian languages and textbooks prepared by the teachers of the College of Fort William, but it also published literary journals, newspapers and edited classics. Its extensive printing programme included almost all languages of India, and by one estimate, between 1800 and 1832, it had published over 200,000 books in forty-five languages.⁵³ The spread of print technology spearheaded by the Serampore Mission Press was responsible for

the decline of centuries-old oral and scribal traditions. Along with innovations in the educational system and changes in the writer–reader relationship, it transformed the domain of literary production and scholarship. This period witnessed the emergence of a critical mass of prose genres that revolutionized Indian languages. Three types of printed publication were particularly influential: (i) pedagogical material; (ii) translations of the Bible and tracts on socioreligious debates; (iii) newspapers and periodicals. The last two especially merit attention.

Among the clauses that make up the ‘Serampore Form of Agreement’ between Serampore Press and the Baptist Mission is one that is explicit about its goal to translate the Bible into vernacular tongues:

It becomes us . . . to labour with all our might in forwarding translations of the sacred Scriptures in the languages of Hindoostan. The help which God has afforded us already in this work is a loud call to us to ‘go forward’. So far, therefore, as God has qualified us to learn those languages which are necessary, we consider it our bounden duty to apply with unwearied assiduity in acquiring them. We consider the publication of the Divine Word throughout India as an object which we ought never to give up till accomplished, looking to the Fountain of all knowledge and strength to qualify us for this great work, and to carry us through it to the praise of His Holy Name.⁵⁴

There are many scholarly accounts of the impact of this missionary commitment to take the Bible to the masses in their many tongues.⁵⁵ One fascinating account that focuses on the ramifications of this phenomenon specifically from the point of view of India’s acquisition of English is Srinivas Aravamudan’s *Guru English: South Asian Religion in a Cosmopolitan Language*.⁵⁶ Aravamudan places Bible translations at the intersection of theosophical, Orientalist and religious revivalist discourses in the nineteenth century to account for the emergence of a transidiomatic register of English he calls ‘Guru English’, a distinctly South Asian form of English ingeniously coding the subcontinent’s multiple spiritual worlds.

Translations of the Bible into the vernaculars along with the printing and publication of newspapers and periodicals in Indian languages between 1800 and 1835 were critical developments in the history of Indian prose. As Sisir Kumar Das notes, one of the earliest signs of the influence of English on Indian-language prose was seen in the newspapers. He also notes the experiments of journalists with vocabulary and syntax:

There was a sudden influx of loan words, direct from Sanskrit and Persian, borrowings from English, and neologisms. This helped the growth of technical

words as well, thus complementing the efforts of text book writers who were in need of new terminologies. The journalistic prose also made many innovations in syntax [such as] the increasing frequency of reported speech, a feature borrowed from English and now naturalized in written styles.⁵⁷

However, unlike the history of the impact of print technology on the standardization of languages in Europe, many of the vernacular languages had already achieved levels of standardization in orthography and grammar much before the advent of print.⁵⁸ In the Indian case, the impact of English, coupled with translations from European texts and the spread of print, led to a reorientation of the vernaculars away from the elaborate and ornamental style and syntactical arrangements of Sanskrit and Persian towards a more robust, matter-of-fact, unembellished form better suited for wider dissemination to multiple reception spheres with varying degrees of literacy. This was most evident in the newspaper prose.

Journals and periodicals offered more substantive support for writers, allowing for greater freedom to innovate and experiment with style and genres. It is no coincidence that multilingual cities such as Bombay, Calcutta and Madras, best equipped with the requisite infrastructure, human resources and a critical mass of reading publics, took the lead in print journalism. Not only was *Uddanta Martanda* the first ever Hindi newspaper, published in Calcutta, but Urdu and Persian journals also flourished there. Bombay was the centre of Marathi and Gujarati journalism, while Madras was a similar centre for Tamil and Telugu. It is also interesting to note that some of the earliest makers of Indian prose, Ram Mohan Roy, Isvarchandra Vidyasagar, Bal Gangadhar Shashtri Jambhekar, Anandaram Dhekiyal Phukan, Raja Shivaprasad, Nabin Chandra Ray and Chinnaya Suri, were not literary figures but scholars, educationists and social reformers. Opinion columns by these public intellectuals and social activists, featuring live issues of the day from diverse ideological perspectives, created new reading publics, and eventually constituted the crucible for a nascent nationalist consciousness that would blaze forth in the last decades of the century. This corpus of prose combined with access to translations from European classics paved the way for the evolution of the novel form and the biography, the two creative genres that dominated literary output in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The post-Macaulay phase, 1835–1900. With the official endorsement of the Macaulay ‘Minute’, the Indian language scene would be irrevocably transformed as the outlines of a vision of India’s national language and literary framework under the command of English began to take shape. In 1838, Charles Trevelyan, in his tract, *On the Education of the People in India*, proclaimed:

The vernacular dialects of India will... be united among themselves. The diversity among languages is one of the greatest obstacles to improvement in India. But when English shall everywhere be established as the language of education, when the vernacular literature shall everywhere be formed from materials drawn from this source, and according to models furnished by this prototype, a strong tendency to assimilation will be created... Saturated from the same source, recast in the same mould, with a common science, a common standard of taste, a common nomenclature, the national languages as well as the national character will be consolidated.⁵⁹

As scholars have noted, efforts towards achieving these objectives involved not just top-down policing from the precincts of colonial government, but also actively soliciting the co-operation of some of the earliest Indian converts to the merits of Western education.⁶⁰ They took many forms, three of which bear particular mention: (i) increased state support for translations of not only English and European literary and historical classics into the vernaculars, but also of Indian classical and Persian texts into English; (ii) encouragement through prizes and commendations of creative efforts by writers in the various Indian languages, which led to the publication of some of the earliest novels and biographical works; and (iii) finally, though controversially, the creation of a canon of 'good' Indian literature through an elevation of India's classical heritage and a marginalization of more popular genres considered morally unsuitable for a people already sunk into a state of intellectual and moral somnolence.⁶¹

The fallout of these developments has been long lasting and oriented the subcontinent for the first time to the idea of a few nation-making languages of cultural and moral worth that would operate in tandem with their regional manifestations. This was a radical topographical shift in political consciousness, a territorially circumscribed federalism of modern language-making, distinctly different not only from the production of new vernacular spaces in the second millennium,⁶² but also from the civilizational worldview of the Orientalists at the end of the eighteenth century invested in an idea of India as a site of cross-fertilization of transcontinental languages and cultures. The emergence of Indian English, of Hindi and Urdu as transregional tongues demarcating a widening rift between Hindus and Muslims, and an imperial realignment of other vernacular tongues, are all phenomena that can be attributed to this momentous shift. The British were keen to minimize the diversity of regional languages for matters of administrative convenience, and accordingly granted official recognition to only a handful most exposed to the influence of English. Bengal was the first seat of colonial governance and

experienced the earliest impact of British education policies. Bangla, thus, trumped other languages of eastern India, and as early as 1836, replaced Assamese and Oriya in the law courts and schools of Assam and Orissa. Urdu replaced Punjabi in northern India, and languages such as Konkani on India's west coast, already threatened by Portuguese influx before the arrival of the British, now faced further marginalization under the impact of Marathi, yet another tongue of import to British governance. Each hierarchical realignment was accompanied by written protests now languishing in dusty archives, signalling, nevertheless, the linguistic ferment of rivalry and accommodation that continues to characterize the language question in India today.

In this context, the colonial intervention in the historical dispute between the legacies of Hindi and Urdu merits a brief account. The scholarship on this is vast⁶³ and here I only recapitulate some of the key debates. As things stand, two facts are self-evident. One, Hindi, along with English, is India's *rashtrabhasha*, its officially acknowledged national language, and two, the symbiotic relationship it has historically had with Urdu could not withstand the politico-religious rift that led to the Partition of India and the elevation of Urdu to Pakistan's national tongue. Historians are in broad agreement that it was not until the mid nineteenth century that Hindi and Urdu consolidated themselves as two separate languages with distinct scripts, and it was not until the end of the nineteenth century that the cultural association of Hindi with Hinduism and Urdu with Islam began to solidify in the Indian imaginary. Hindi and Urdu had their origins in a composite literary continuum in northern India since at least the fourteenth century and were designated respectively by Braj and Avadhi literary traditions in Hindu majority regions and by a chronology of terms such as 'Hindvi', 'Hindi', 'Dihlavi', 'Gujri', 'Dakani' and 'Rekhtah' to designate a successive evolution of a northern lingua franca with a predominantly Persian/Islamic influence. Sometime in the early years of the eighteenth century these various strands coalesced to form a language identical in structure but only marginally different in sound and morphology, and which could be written in either the Persian script or the *nagari* script influenced by Sanskrit. Hindus and Muslims alike were at home in this composite linguistic domain, and its literary manifestations emerged from the pens of writers whose religious identity scarcely had any bearing on their choice of scripts. When the British first confronted this linguistically hybrid phenomenon, their taxonomic mindset could describe it only in terms of a disaggregation of its Hindu/Sanskritist and Muslim/Persian strands. The first evidence of this is seen in the efforts of scribes and translators at the College of Fort William working under colonial authorities. Hard put to create prose texts in 'Hindi' as ordered by their

masters due to the absence of the genre in Braj and Avadhi, they used texts from the 'Hindvi' continuum, excised Arabic and Persian words from them and replaced them with Sanskritized terms. A similar excision of Sanskrit terms occurred in the production of 'Urdu' prose. Within a decade, from within the precincts of Fort William, was generated an entire corpus of prose in two distinct north Indian languages, Hindi and Urdu. Tara Chand, one of the historians invited in 1939 to give a talk at an All India Radio forum on 'What is Hindustani?' lamented:

Within the space of less than ten years, two new languages . . . were decked out and presented [before the public] at the behest of the foreigner . . . Both were look-alikes in form and structure, but their faces were turned away from each other . . . and from that day to this we are wandering directionless, on two paths.⁶⁴

A further impetus to create a separate Urdu base, distinct from Hindi, was provided by the colonial government in 1837 when it adopted Urdu over Persian as the official language of law and governance in the Northwestern Provinces. This caused not a little disgruntlement among advocates of Hindi, and was, in fact, the catalyst for the evolution of a robust Hindi culture of prose writing and political intervention from the 1860s to the 1890s that not only saw Hindi reinstalled as the language of administration in the north by 1900, but also its emergence as the language of anti-colonial nationalism.⁶⁵ The same period also saw the gradual standardization of the Hindi language. Further ballast to its efflorescence was provided by the Hindu social reform movements, and especially the Arya Samaj. This resurgence of Hindi, by then already associated with a Hindu majority in the eyes of both Muslims and the British, was viewed with enormous disquiet by pockets of Muslim-dominated India, which saw the phenomenon signalling the rise of a new Hindu ruling class from among the native elites and the final nail in the coffin of the millennium-long Islamic cultural influence on the subcontinent. The story of Hindi and Urdu has since been indelibly written into the fractious communal terrain of the Indian subcontinent which is wracked by tremors to this day.

How did the English language navigate these cultural rifts and realignments through the nineteenth century? Did it succeed in realizing the vision of Macaulay, Trevelyan and Wood to function as a nationally unifying cultural and intellectual force that would modernize the subcontinent? Scholars are divided on the nature and degree of its impact on indigenous literary and knowledge traditions. Urdu scholars have noted the relative irrelevance of English's cultural influence on Ghalib (1797–1869), the renowned Persian

and Urdu poet, who, until the 1857 ‘Mutiny’, wrote within the long medieval tradition of Persian literature, renowned as much for its secularism as its romance with the aristocracy. Gauri Viswanathan, in a chapter tellingly entitled ‘The failure of English’, argues that the goals of introducing English education backfired. Though it did produce a bureaucratic and professional class to help the administration, its overwhelming effect, much to the dismay of colonial rulers, was the creation of a class increasingly conscious and critical of British oppression.⁶⁶ Further, the impact of English along with the advent of print technology, the creation of new reading publics, and the receding of traditional forms of patronage, affected each linguistic region differently, so that it is difficult to make a case for the emergence of a unifying national literary culture under British education and language policies.

Nevertheless, few would dispute the role of English as the harbinger of Western education and modern literary world-making, at least in the British presidencies of Bombay, Calcutta and Madras. Almost all major nineteenth-century writers from these regions – Bankim Chatterjee, Marthanda Verma, Goverdhanram Tripathi and O Chandu Menon – were proficient in their mother tongue, in English, in a classical language, either Sanskrit or Tamil, and to some extent in Persian. Their exposure to and adaptation of Western literary genres were characterized by a creative tension between the forces of old and new.⁶⁷ The novel, poetry and drama all displayed signs of influence and experimentation with European and English classics. But they were by no means overdetermined by the colonial exposure.⁶⁸ As for Indian writers in English, far from being openly complicit in the programme of colonial education, most displayed a distinct ambivalence and even hostility towards it, and as Das notes, Kylas Chunder Dutt’s ‘A Journal of Forty-Eight Hours of the Year 1945’, a story of imaginary armed uprisings against the British published as early as 1835, was the ‘first ever glowing expression of patriotism as well as hatred for the British rule . . . in the English language’.⁶⁹ The literature of the mid nineteenth century was also a product of the newly created ‘middle class’ – the legions of clerks, accountants, revenue officers, journalists, teachers, magistrates – who were the first to partake of English education.⁷⁰ From among this class also emerged the mid-century social reform movements – themselves highly fraught between advocating ‘liberal’ values and reviving selected traditions – that had such a bearing on the emergence of social realism in fiction. Perhaps, the most significant import of English towards the end of the nineteenth century – an English by then fairly interpellated into other literary traditions – was the provision of a register for the Indian intelligentsia to articulate a nascent nationalist vision that mediated India’s linguistic

heterogeneity and its need for a united front against colonial incursion. The novel played an exemplary role in this regard, ‘providing a vehicle for the emergence of political aspirations, imaginative adventure, historical reconstruction as well as a desire to document contemporary life’.⁷¹ We have already noted the emergence of Hindi, as an anti-colonial tongue in the upper half of the subcontinent. The final section of this chapter unravels the impact of these contending nation-making tongues on the multiple linguistic worlds of post-colonial India.

Nation and postcoloniality: 1900–present

The period of high nationalism from 1920 to 1945 witnessed several interventions in India’s language question by political figures such as Mahatma Gandhi, while the period after independence, from 1947 to 1960 – the Nehruvian era – witnessed socialist and Hindu revivalist arguments against the imposition of English. Rammanohar Lohia, a prominent socialist, was a key figure in these debates. From 1908 to 1938 Gandhi wrote extensively on the issue of English education. Mostly, they were expressions of disquiet at the extent of its impact on the Indian psyche. In 1908 he categorically declared: ‘The foundation that Macaulay laid of education has enslaved us.’ ‘Is it not a painful thing’, he goes on to ask, ‘that, if I want to go to a court of justice, I must employ the English language . . . that, when I become a Barrister, I may not speak my mother tongue? Is this not absolutely absurd?’⁷² English, as he saw it, not only distanced him from his immediate filial and fraternal context, but also created an impassable barrier between ‘the educated classes’ and the ‘uneducated masses’. Lohia’s condemnation was more brutal. The English language, he thundered, ‘helps cut the tongue and deaden the ear of ninety percent of the people’.⁷³

A foreign language, when it becomes the instrument of government and scholarship and public life generally, is an unmitigated curse . . . The chasms that separate man from man on account of birth, riches, caste and education become terrifying and wholly unbridgeable on account of the public use of a foreign language. Some kind of a secret learning or secret magic comes to prevail . . . which is utterly incomprehensible to the people, as though they were listening to some charms and invocations of superstitious lore.⁷⁴

The irony here of the auratic power of English, the harbinger of rationalist modernity, inverted to an inscrutable, irrational force when viewed by the masses, is hard to miss. Uncannily, Gandhi too deploys the term ‘superstition’ in his scepticism towards the rational claims of English education. ‘Of all the

superstitions that affect India', he caustically suggests, 'none is so great as that a knowledge of the English language is necessary for imbibing the ideas of liberty, and developing accuracy of thought.'⁷⁵

Both Gandhi and Lohia resisted the Nehruvian vision of an India in which English education was seen in a continuum with the imperatives of a secularizing modernity, economic modernization and an internationalization of outlook. Gandhi opposed its insensitivity to the plural domain of linguistic subalternity, while Lohia was set against its elitist class bias. As a national tongue and the language of mass education along with the vernaculars, Hindi was their preference. As Gandhi wrote:

The first and the greatest social service we can render is to revert to our vernaculars, to restore Hindi to its natural place as the National Language and begin carrying on all our provincial proceedings in our respective vernaculars and national proceedings in Hindi.⁷⁶

Around the time of independence, the Congress Party was divided equally on the issue, as is apparent from the remarks of B. R. Ambedkar, the chief architect of the Constitution of India. Commenting on the Congress Party deliberations around the constitutional promulgation of 'Hindi' as India's national language, he notes:

It may now not be a breach of a secret if I reveal to the public what happened in the Congress Party meeting when the Draft Constitution of India was being considered, on the issue of adopting Hindi as the national language. There was no article which proved more controversial than Article 115 which deals with the question. No article produced more opposition. No article, more heat. After a prolonged discussion when the question was put, the vote was 78 against 78. The tie could not be resolved. After a long time when the question was put to the Party meeting the result was 77 against 78 for Hindi. Hindi won its place as a national language by one vote.⁷⁷

Alongside Hindi, the Constitution also advocated the use of English for fifteen years after independence after which it hoped that Hindi would be more widely accepted as the language of public administration, education and political economy.

The conflicting visions of linguistic nation-making outlined in the discussion so far are a reflection not only of the polarizing claims of English and Hindi, but of a complex set of debates beginning in the 1930s about the balance between the imperatives of national unity and the powerful regional aspirations symbolically represented by the vernacular languages. The creation of linguistic states in the post-independence period was the result of protracted

deliberations extending over nearly a decade from 1935 with the promulgation of the Government of India Act which granted the provinces greater autonomy. Immediately after independence, however, Nehru resisted the carving up of India on the basis of language. In a statement to the Constituent Assembly on 27 November 1947, he insisted that ‘the security and stability of the country’ was more important than the ‘redistribution of provinces on a linguistic basis’.⁷⁸ No doubt, the Partition of India, an open wound in the flesh of the newly created nation, figured prominently in his anxiety about separatism. But he soon had to come to terms with the imperatives of federated nation-making and confront regional aspirations.⁷⁹ The Jaipur Congress of 1948 appointed a Linguistic Provinces Committee to study India’s linguistic topography and recommend the creation of states on that basis. The Committee, consisting of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, Jawaharlal Nehru and Pattabhi Sitaramayya, produced a report which became the basis for a linguistic reorganization of provinces from 1953 to 1971. Andhra Pradesh, a predominantly Telugu-speaking region, was the first to be carved out of the Madras Presidency. In 1956, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh and Tamil Nadu were formed and Himachal Pradesh, West Bengal, Assam and Bihar saw a realignment of their borders. Maharashtra and Gujarat, dominated by speakers of Marathi and Gujarati respectively, were carved out of the Bombay Presidency in 1960. The culmination of this process in 1971 with the promulgation of the Northeastern States Reorganization Act, created the states of Meghalaya, Mizoram, Tripura, Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh.⁸⁰ As a means of balancing regional linguistic demands with national ones, all Education Acts in India since 1956 have recommended a three-language formula (TLF) for primary and secondary schooling. For the Hindi-speaking states of north and central India, this entails the study of English, Hindi and a modern Indian language preferably from the south. Students from the non-Hindi-speaking states have to study Hindi, English and the language of their region.⁸¹

Towards the end of the fifteen-year time frame for the constitutionally permitted use of English, many parts of India, and especially its non-Hindi-speaking regions, erupted in agitations against what they saw as the inevitable elevation of Hindi as India’s sole national language. The most violent of these occurred in the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu in 1964–5 where young men immolated themselves in full public view.⁸² Not only were they expressing ‘devotion’ to their classical Tamil inheritance, they were also claiming the only possible tongue, English, as the guarantor of upward mobility and visibility in a fiercely stratified and regionally skewed nation. The outrage that ensued at the sight of this gruesome spectacle guaranteed the enshrinement of

English as the only acceptable pan-Indian language in the parliamentary Act of 1967 and an eventual triumph for the Nehruvian vision of English as a 'national cement'.⁸³ Hindi was not exactly dislodged from its national status, but it was now reconciled to sharing it with English, as its twin icon of cultural bridge-building. Sporadic acts of violence and intimidation motivated by linguistic chauvinism, nevertheless, continue to mar this precarious linguistic compromise, as we saw in the opening pages of this chapter, in the extreme Hindu Right's shrill upholding of Marathi as the only legitimate language in Mumbai. English and Hindi continue to delicately balance the competing claims of regional tongues.

Notes

1. Raj Thackeray, once destined to inherit his uncle, Bal Thackeray's mantle as the supremo of the Hindu extremist party, *Shiv Sena*, had a falling-out with the latter in 2007 and formed his own party, the *Maharashtra Navnirman Sena*, literally 'the newly born army of Maharashtra'.
2. Story on www.rediff.com, 'Analysis: what drove MNS to violence'; accessed 15 September 2008.
3. On 6 September 2008, at the music launch of her film *Drona* with her son, Abhishek Bachchan, Jaya Bachchan said, 'Hum UP ke log hain, isiliye Hindi mein baat karenge. Maharashtra ke log maaf kariye' (We're from UP and will speak in Hindi. People from Maharashtra, do excuse us') www.rediff.com//movies/2008/sep/o8rt.htm; accessed 21 October 2008.
4. I refer here to the creation of states in post-independence India on the basis of the linguistic composition of regions. In 1948, a Linguistic Provinces Committee constituting the Prime Minister Nehru, Vallabhbhai Patel and Pattabhi Sitaramayya was given the task of carving out new states on the basis of language from the British presidencies and the princely states.
5. Salman Rushdie, 'Introduction', *The Vintage Book of Indian Writing: 1947–1997*, co-edited with Elizabeth West (London: Vintage, 1997) p. x.
6. *Ibid.*, emphasis added.
7. *Ibid.*, p. xv.
8. See Leela Gandhi's, 'Indo-Anglian fiction: writing India, elite aesthetics and the rise of the "Stephanian" novel', *Australian Humanities Review* (November 1997), www.australianhumanitiesreview.org/archive/Issue-November-1997/home.html, for an incisive analysis of the debates surrounding Rushdie's claim. Amit Chaudhuri, in his edited *The Picador Book of Modern Indian Literature* (London: Picador, 2001), though avowing that the anthology is not a 'riposte' to any other anthology, does question Rushdie's assertions. 'Can it be true', he asks, 'that Indian writing, that endlessly rich, complex and problematic entity, is to be represented by a handful of writers who write in English?' Chaudhuri explicitly distances himself from Rushdie by claiming to bring to the world the riches of 'vernacular' Indian literatures.
9. See Rushdie, *Step Across this Line* (London: Vintage, 2003), p. 161.
10. Sadhna Saxena, 'Language and the nationality question', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 8, February 1997, pp. 268–72, at 269.
11. *Ibid.*

12. See Sumi Krishna, *India's Living Languages* (New Delhi: Allied Publishers, 1991); R. S. Gupta, Anvita Abbi and Kailash Aggarwal (eds.), *Language and the State: Perspectives on the Eight Schedule* (New Delhi: Creative Books, 1995).
13. It is important to note here that, contrary to popular perceptions, neither English nor Hindi is constitutionally upheld as India's 'national' language, at least in the sense that no citizen of India is required to swear allegiance to either. India's Constitution advocates linguistic secularism or multilingualism.
14. The term is Jonathan Green's. See his 'English in India – the grandmother tongue', *Critical Quarterly*, 40.1 (1998), 107–11, at 107.
15. Sheldon Pollock (ed.), *Literary Cultures in History: Reconstructions from South Asia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).
16. See variously *ibid.*; Susie Tharu, 'The arrangement of an alliance', in Svati Joshi (ed.), *Rethinking English* (New Delhi: Trianka, 1991); and Ganesh Devy, *After Amnesia: Tradition and Change in Indian Literary Criticism* (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1992).
17. Pollock, 'Introduction', *Literary Cultures in History*, p. 3.
18. Vinay Dharwadkar, 'Formation of Indian English literature', in Pollock (ed.), *Literary Cultures in History*, p. 261.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 202.
20. Michael Edwardes, *Ralph Fitch: Elizabethan in the Indies* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1973) p. 19.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 173.
22. Dharwadkar, 'Formation', p. 204.
23. Stanley Wolpert, *A New History of India* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 147.
24. Dharwadkar, 'Formation', pp. 206–16.
25. Muzaffar Alam, 'Persian in precolonial Hindustan', in Pollock (ed.), *Literary Cultures in History*, p. 137.
26. See especially Sisir Das, *A History of Indian Literature: 1800–1910* (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1991), pp. 26–7; and Alam, 'Persian in precolonial Hindustan', pp. 157–9.
27. *Janam Sakhi* from Punjabi (1806), Nawab Wali Leghari's *masnavi*, *Hir-wa-Ranjha* (1812), and Ibrati's *Ajaz-ul Mohabbat*, a Persian adaptation of the Nala-Damayanti love legend from the *Mahabharata*; Das, *A History of Indian Literature*, p. 26.
28. Muzaffar Alam notes the contribution of skilled Hindu philologists and lexicographers to the production of some of most authoritative Persian lexicons in the eighteenth century. These include Anand Ram Mukhlis's *Mirat as Istilah* (1751), Tek Chand Bahar's *Bahar-i Ajam* (1766), and Siyalkoti Mal Varastah's *Mustalahat-I Shuara* (1766). See his, 'Persian in precolonial Hindustan', in Pollock (ed.), *Literary Cultures in History*, p. 165.
29. Das, *A History of Indian Literature*, p. 26.
30. See Svati Joshi, 'Introduction', *Rethinking English: Essays in Literature, Language and History* (New Delhi: Trianka, 1991), p. 14.
31. The Third Anniversary discourse delivered at the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal on 2 February 1986, included in the republication of *The Works of Sir William Jones*, ed. Lord Teignmouth, vol. III (London: Stockdale, 1807), p. 34.
32. English translation of Kalidas's *Shakuntala* in 1789 and Georg Foster's into German in 1791.
33. Goethe and Herder cited in Das, *A History of Indian Literature*, p. 24.
34. See, for instance, Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things* (1966; London: Vintage, 1973). He identifies the discovery of language in early nineteenth-century Europe as

- the single most significant rupture heralding the onset of modern epistemology. In doing so he argues that 'it would be false – and above all inadequate – to attribute this mutation to the discovery of hitherto unknown objects, such as the grammatical system of Sanskrit . . . What changed at the turn of the century, and underwent an irremediable modification, was knowledge itself as an interior and indivisible mode of being between the knowing subject and the object of knowledge' (p. 252).
35. Revathi Krishnaswamy, 'Nineteenth century language ideology: a postcolonial perspective', *Interventions*, 7.1 (2005), 43–71.
 36. *Ibid.*, p. 69.
 37. *Ibid.*, p. 44.
 38. For a more detailed account of the impact of Sanskrit poetic and aesthetic traditions on the evolution of vernacular literatures in the eighteenth century, see Das's *A History of Indian Literature*, pp. 49–58.
 39. One of the best sources for this is Lynn Zastoupil and Martin Moir's *The Great Indian Education Debate: Documents Relating to the Orientalist-Anglicist Controversy, 1781–1843* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 1999).
 40. *Ibid.*, p. x.
 41. Jashodhara Bagchi in her essay, 'Shakespeare in loin cloths: English literature and the early nationalist consciousness in Bengal', argues the case of Raja Radhakanta Deb, a Hindu conservative, who signed a petition for the establishment of an institution of Western/English education in Bengal. Deb was otherwise opposed to every attempt at 'modernizing' the Hindu religion, including that of Raja Ram Mohan Roy's establishment of a more rational Vedantic form of religious practice through the Brahmo Samaj. Bagchi's essay appears in Joshi (ed.), *Rethinking English*, pp. 147–59.
 42. For more than two centuries since the advent of the British on India's shores, the Company officials had to develop extensive bilingual networks due to the dominance of Persian as the language of administration and political economy. Their dependence on *munshis* or communities of writers, highly skilled in Persian and key intermediaries in administrative and military matters, has been brilliantly documented by C. A. Bayly in his book, *Empire and Information: Intelligence Gathering and Social Communication in India, 1780–1870* (Cambridge University Press, 1997).
 43. Bruce McCully, *English Education and the Origins of Indian Nationalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1966), p. 76.
 44. Here it is important to mention Zastoupil and Moir's salutary caution against reading the ascendancy of Anglicists as a comprehensive defeat of the Orientalists: 'Rather than a complete victory of the partisans of English, the policy implemented after 1839 was a compromise one in which important Orientalist measures were retained', *The Great Indian Education Debate*, p. x. Yet further evidence of this complexity is to be found in Jashodhara Bagchi's 'Shakespeare in loin cloths', where she notes that 'Macaulay's Anglicist programme was too one sided to capture the full impact of English literary studies in Bengal . . . [for there was a] renewed alliance between Anglicism and Orientalism that defined the parameters within which the new class of Hindu male elite [drew up] its agenda', pp. 149–52.
 45. Cited in E. Annamalai, *Managing Multilingualism in India: Political and Linguistic Manifestations* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2001), p. 91.
 46. *Ibid.*, p. 93.
 47. Zastoupil and Moir, *The Great Indian Education Debate*, p. x.
 48. All quotes from the text of the 1835 'Minute' are taken from the *Selections from Educational Records, Part I (1781–1839)*, ed. H. Sharp (Calcutta: Superintendent

- Government Printing, 1920; repr. Delhi: National Archives of India, 1965, pp. 107–17; available online: www.languageinindia.com/april2003/macaulay/html).
49. This claim by Macaulay is unsubstantiated and evidence, in fact, points to the contrary. One of the key members of the Committee was H.T. Prinsep, also the Secretary in relation to education matters. He sent a strong memo of protest to Bentinck highlighting the flaws of Macaulay's argument, especially in regard to the value of Sanskrit and Persian to India, 'Latin and Greek were to the nations of Europe what Arabic and Persian are to the Mooslims and Sanscrit to the Hindoos of the present population of Hindoostan and if a native literature is to be created it must be through the improvements of which these are capable. To the great body of the People of India, English is as strange as Arabic was to the knights of the dark ages.' Source: www.languageinindia.com/april2003/macaulay/html.
 50. As mentioned in a note above, all quotes from Macaulay's 'Minute' have been accessed online: www.languageinindia.com/april2003/macaulay/html.
 51. R.J. Moore, 'The composition of Wood's educational despatch', *The English Historical Review* (January 1965), 70–85, at 70.
 52. Summary of points elaborated in *ibid*.
 53. Source: http://www.banglapedia.search.com.bd/HT/S_0214.htm, accessed 21 November 2008.
 54. From George Smith, *The Life of William Carey: Shoemaker and Missionary* (London: J. Murray, 1885); digitized version available online: www.wholesomeworlds.org-missions-bcarey13.pdf; accessed 21 November 2008.
 55. In the field of postcolonial studies, two of the best-known studies of this phenomenon include Gauri Vishwanathan's *Outside the Fold: Conversion, Modernity, Belief* (Princeton University Press, 1998) and Homi Bhabha's 'Signs taken for wonder', in *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 102–22.
 56. Srinivas Aravamudan's *Guru English: South Asian Religion in a Cosmopolitan Language* (Princeton University Press, 2006).
 57. Das, *A History of Indian Literature*, p. 77.
 58. For an elaboration on this South Asian variation of the European norm in language standardization vis-à-vis print technology, see Sheldon Pollock, 'Introduction', *Literary Cultures in History*, pp. 22–3.
 59. Charles Trevelyan, *On The Education of the People of India* (London: Longman, Orme, Brown, Green and Longmans, 1838), pp. 124–5.
 60. See, especially, Gauri Viswanathan's *Masks of Conquest: Literary Study and British Rule in India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989).
 61. For an elaboration of this last point, see Susie Tharu's 'The arrangement of an alliance: English and the making of Indian literatures', in Joshi (ed.), *Rethinking English*, pp. 171–4. Tharu notes the particular delegitimizing of Vaishnava singers and performers called *bauls* in Bengal for the sexual explicitness of their register, and the British government's seizure of Telugu poet and court dancer Muddupalani's *Radhika Santwanam* for its erotic exploration of female desire in the Radha-Krishna myth.
 62. See p. 29 of Sheldon Pollock's 'Introduction' to his *Literary Cultures in History* for instances of these new language spaces at odds with the dominance of Sanskrit. The rise of the *Bhakti* movement is critical to this vernacular revolution in precolonial India.
 63. Some of the key works include Vasudha Dalmia's *The Nationalization of Hindi Traditions* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997); Shamsur Rahman Faruqi's 'Privilege without power: the strange case of Persian and Urdu in nineteenth

- century India', *Annual of Urdu Studies*, 13 (1998), 3–30; Christopher King's *One Language, Two Scripts: The Hindi Movement in Nineteenth Century North India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994); Ali Jawad Zaidi's *A History of Urdu Literature* (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1993); and Amrit Rai's *A House Divided* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1984).
64. Cited in Shamsur Rahman Faruqi's 'A long history of Urdu literary culture, Part 1', in Pollock (ed.), *Literary Cultures in History*, pp. 805–63, at 816.
65. For a detailed account of the rise of Hindi since the mid nineteenth century, see Harish Trivedi's, 'The progress of Hindi, part 2: Hindi and the nation', in Pollock (ed.), *Literary Cultures in History*, pp. 958–1022.
66. Gauri Viswanathan, *Masks of Conquest: Literary Study and British Rule in India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 142–86.
67. Meenakshi Mukherjee cites an essay of the celebrated nineteenth-century Bengali author, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, where he argued that Bangla 'had become a site of contestation between Sanskrit and English, one pulling towards a heavily stylized diction and syntax – sonorous and formal – while the model of English deflected its growth towards a relatively informal prose, closer to the language actually spoken by the upper classes in the urban areas'. See Mukherjee's *The Perishable Empire: Essays on Indian Writing in English* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 2.
68. For a rich account of the interpenetration of English- and Indian-language literatures, especially in the emergence of the novel form in the nineteenth century, see Meenakshi Mukherjee's *Realism and Reality* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1982).
69. Das, *A History of Indian Literature*, p. 80. Dharwadkar too makes this point about ambivalence, critique and cautious adaptation of English in his comparative analysis of the three earliest Indian writers in English, Din Mohammad, Ram Mohan Roy and Cavelli Venkata Boriah. See his 'Formation of Indian English literature', pp. 217–22.
70. Dharwadkar notes that 'for mid nineteenth century Indians, English . . . metonymically represented increased social and economic mobility, professional rewards, community empowerment, individual growth and freedom, and the satisfaction of modernity and modernization', 'Formation of Indian English Literature', p. 235.
71. Mukherjee, *The Perishable Empire*, p. 23.
72. M.K. Gandhi, *Evil Wrought by the English Medium*, ed. K.N. Prabhu (Ahmedabad: Navjivan Press, 1958), p. 5.
73. Rammanohar Lohia, *Notes and Comments*, vol. 1 (Hyderabad: Rammanohar Lohia Samata Vidyalaya Nyas, Prakashan Vibhag, 1972), p. 327.
74. Lohia, *Notes and Comments*, pp. 106–7.
75. Gandhi, *Evil Wrought by the English Medium*, p. 10.
76. *Ibid.*, p. 8.
77. Quote found on the website, www.soc.worldjournal.net-20September2007.html, official language controversy, accessed 20 October 2008.
78. Cited in B.B. Mishra, *Government and Bureaucracy in India, 1947–1976* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 21.
79. Nehru's anxiety about separatist tendencies fostered by a focus on linguistic regionalism was expressed in this statement on page 4 of the *Report of the Linguistic Provinces Committee*: 'The context demands, above everything, the consolidation of India and her freedom . . . [T]he promotion of unity in India demands [the further]

- discouragement of communalism, provincialism, and all other separatist and disruptive tendencies' (published by the Manager, Government of India Press, New Delhi, 1948), pp. 1–56; digital version by University of California, August 2008.
80. For a succinct account of these developments, see Joseph Schwartzberg's 'Factors in linguistic reorganization of Indian States', in P. Wallace and R. L. Park (eds.), *Region and Nation in India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1985).
 81. Annamalai, *Managing Multilingualism in India*.
 82. See Sumathi Ramaswamy's *Passions of the Tongue: Language Devotion in Tamil India, 1891–1970* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997) for a novel reading of these riots which she argues erupted not just from the regionally fractured impulses of political nation-making, but also from what she calls 'language devotion' in southern India that goes back to precolonial times and is manifested in multiple spiritual and material practices.
 83. See Selma Sonntag's *The Local Politics of Global English* (London: Lexington Books, 2003), pp. 61–3, for a detailed account of these developments.

21(b) The language question in Africa

BHEKIZIZWE PETERSON

The language question in Africa is a long-standing and seemingly intractable problematic in the development, definition and appreciation of African literature. It is argued that colonialism (whether of the British, French, German, Portuguese or Spanish variety) imposed European languages on the subjugated African polities and that this was done to the profound detriment of the social, educational and cultural status of indigenous languages and their speakers. More so, it is the modern African writers and intellectuals, whose emergence is attributed to the spread of formal Western education, that are seen as the quintessential incarnates of the tensions and paradoxes of the language policies followed under colonialism.

There are two broad approaches to the politics of language in African literature. The first position emphasizes that Being is embodied in language which acts as the historical and experiential archives of individuals and groups in society. Language and literature, in this view, perform a foundational role – as repository and constitutive categories – in the construction and defence of senses of self and community, individual and national identity. Consequently, the production of African literature in European languages is symptomatic of a profound loss of cultural integrity and identity that is to be mourned, denounced and redressed by a return to writing in indigenous languages. The alternative argument claims texts written in English, French and Portuguese as part of African literature and it too, in crucial respects, accords a foundational role to literature. It embraces the ‘painful’ if ambivalent legacy of European languages, it also celebrates the ‘modern’, and transnational possibilities that, it is felt, can be brokered by the use of European languages. At times, this approach has tended to conflate indigenous languages with the

spectres of ethnicity and regionalism, suggesting that ethnic and regional conflicts can be inhibited by promoting foreign languages as national and unifying instruments. The language question, not surprisingly then, is often reduced to the enquiry whether African writers should be writing in African or European languages in 'the light of the 'colonial experience'. Yet reflections on this query immediately throw up concerns that raise the relationship between language, literature and ideology with a myriad of historical, socio-economic and political factors that are implicated in the elaboration of an African cosmology, epistemology and hermeneutics.

Historical precedents to the contemporary debates on the politics of language

The publication of Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* in 1958 marked a signal moment in creative achievement and the favourable metropolitan reception of African literature. Occurring in tandem with the peak of the nationalist struggles for decolonization on the continent (with Ghana being the first African country to regain its independence in the same year), *Things Fall Apart* seemed to deeply capture the 'spirit of the time' and its attendant calls for the need to embark on the processes of historical and cultural retrieval, reconstruction and regeneration. Such a programme hinged on the restoration of the social, cultural and political integrity of Africa, a move that necessitated a reappraisal and revalorization of precolonial societies in all dimensions and respects. It is no wonder that *Things Fall Apart*, and many other works that were subsequently published in short succession, were seen as signalling the emergence of modern African literature as a new and distinct literary tradition and discipline. Interestingly, the cultural nationalism that informed African literature in European languages meant that it also sought, in many crucial respects, to represent what it saw as a distinct African personality and experience amidst the eurocentric discourses of colonialism. Mindful of the tensions that inhered in the choice of language, Achebe, in a famous retort, hoped that the 'new English' that he was writing in 'will be able to carry the weight of my African experience'.¹ Later, Achebe acknowledged the difficulty of the matter. While he is critical of what he termed 'the fatalistic logic of the unassailable position of English in our literature [which] leaves me more cold now than when I first spoke about it', he is still of the opinion 'And yet I am unable to see a significantly different or more emotionally satisfying resolution of the problem'.² Not surprisingly, writers and critics were soon called upon to clarify whether African literature was indeed unique and not simply another branch

(even if a different one) in the canon of English literature and whether it could be appreciated using the same critical tools and approaches that were used in evaluating English writing. Language and 'culture', predictably, became the crucial factors that seemed to define responses to the problematic.³

The language debate in African Literature is commonly dated and associated with the deliberations at the Conference of African Writers of English Expression in 1962 in Kampala, Uganda. A session was devoted to the perennial attempt to define 'What is African literature?' In response, Obiajunwa Wali, in 1963, threw the gauntlet to writers and scholars with his declaration that African writers need to reject their 'uncritical acceptance' of English and French as 'the inevitable medium' available to African writers or else they will 'be merely pursuing a dead end, which can only lead to sterility, uncreativity, and frustration' or what Abiola Irele described as 'this truly agonizing situation'.⁴ Wali proclaimed that 'any true African literature must be written in African languages', a precondition for the possible 'development of a truly African sensibility'.⁵ Approximately twenty years later, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o gave renewed impetus to Wali's propositions. In *Decolonizing the Mind* Ngũgĩ castigated what he saw as the alienation, self-negation and neo-colonial dependency that writing in European languages had created in the African writer.⁶ By deciding to write in Gikuyu instead of English, Ngũgĩ saw himself as restoring the 'previously existing' homological relation between language and subject in African literature.⁷

The challenges, ambiguities and paradoxes that have confronted Africans with regards to the language question is historically first noted in the newspapers aimed at Africans that were established in the nineteenth century. It was also a regular staple in the deliberations and debates amongst the literary and debating clubs and societies formed by the new educated elite. The difficulty of deciding between European and African languages meant that often many of the newspapers ended up with bilingual editions, suggesting that the dilemma defied simple solutions. The problem was exacerbated by the allure of the 'gift of literacy' and literature as crucial markers of civility, progress and modernity.⁸ It is not surprising that genres such as the novel that evolved during the ascendancy of bourgeois society became, paradoxically, the dominant form in African literature.

In the elite circles of Lagos in the early 1880s, for instance, there was a fierce debate in the pages of the *Observer* (between 1882 and 1883) about 'the denationalization tendencies' that were manifesting themselves amongst the African intelligentsia. One side of the spectrum was unapologetic about its 'acquisition of one of the noblest of modern languages, the language of Milton

and Shakespeare'. If Africans were to develop along their own lines, 'what literature has he from which he could develop in his own lines?' According to this line of argument, '[The African has no literature] which could bear the scrutiny of the enlightened world and the test of the ages.' Africans, therefore, should 'take example from superior nations, study their works, make translations of them into any of the African languages, thereby providing himself with ideas, such as the brain could without detriment feed upon'. The contrary view argued that Africans and their cultures and institutions were not inferior to any other group or society, and the problem as far as the question of literature was concerned was the 'habit of disregarding and ignoring, and in some cases, totally crying down our native language'. After establishing parallels between European and indigenous legends and orations and noting the benefits that have resulted from the translations of the works of Homer, Milton and Dante, the correspondent concluded that: 'It is in their native languages that they have severally gained an immortal wreath for themselves in the world of literature ... It becomes us then, as those seeking the good and glory of their country, not to boast in borrowed plumes ...'⁹

When the Zulu weekly *Ilanga lase Natal* was launched in 1903, its editor John Dube solicited the opinions of readers as to what language they would prefer the newspaper to be in. The consensus was that Zulu and English should be used with the result that even editorials were often presented in both languages with the English version addressed at national constituencies while the Zulu version (often marked by significant differences in content, idiom, vocabulary and tone) was aimed at a local or internal audience. Similarly, there are many antecedents of the debates on the politics of language and alterity. In South Africa, two influential writers, B. W. Vilakazi and H. I. E. Dhlomo had a public spat in 1939 when Vilakazi, in response to an article by Dhlomo, opined that:

By Bantu drama, I mean a drama written by a Bantu, for the Bantu, in a Bantu language. I do not class English or Afrikaans dramas on Bantu themes, whether these are written by Black people, I do not call them contributions to Bantu Literature.

Despite his support for writing in indigenous languages and his appreciation of 'the power and beauty of our mother-tongue', Dhlomo preferred to write in English. Dhlomo was sceptical about the social role of African languages and particularly the ways they were being used by the colonial government in South Africa – under the guise of support in the 1920s – 'to exploit and keep down the people'.¹⁰ For many African writers, then, the language question conjures up the feeling of being caught between Scylla and Charybdis. While

the two tendencies often appear to be mutually exclusive, the range of intermediary locations or *manoeuvres* suggest otherwise. In many ways, the language question in African literature defies and exceeds the Manichean templates that have tended to inform its grasp, discussion and, seemingly, elusive resolution.

Language, literature and the entanglements of the contact zones

The emergence and practice of written literature in Africa has a complicated and uneven trajectory across the continent and it is the result of inherent and derived ideas, internal and external initiatives. Even though the politics of language in Africa are seen as ensuing with and embedded in the unfolding of Christian evangelism and the colonial project since the seventeenth century, and particularly from the 1840s, it is worth noting that most Africans, prior to colonialism, existed in a multilingual environment where different language communities interacted across linguistic and cultural boundaries. In addition, the adoption of Christianity in parts of Africa, such as Ethiopia, dates as far back as the first centuries of the Christian era. The Ethiopian state, with its capital in Aksum, adopted Christianity around the fourth century AD. In Ethiopia, the Old Testament, translated into Ge'ez, contains 81 books in comparison to the Catholic (46 books) and Protestant (39 books) versions.¹¹

While most African societies created graphic systems (of varying degrees of sophistication) for noting information, ideas, thoughts and symbolizing experience, writing in indigenous languages, in the generally accepted sense, can in a number of countries be traced back to antiquity. One of the oldest forms of writing in the world is the Egyptian ideographic-hieroglyphic writing (encompassing the evolution of hieroglyphic, hieratic and demotic variants). Hieroglyphic is dated from the start of the third millennium to the first centuries AD. It was then supplanted by Coptic writing which held sway until the seventeenth century, but continues to 'this day in the liturgy of the Coptic church'. There is also the complex history in North Africa of the deep influence of the various types of Semitic scripts (in particular the Phoenician alphabet) in the development of writing systems within the continent. The state of Carthage developed and used Punic writing up to its demise in 146 BC.¹² Writing in Ge'ez (developed out of Cushitic and Semitic languages) was produced in Ethiopia around the third or fourth century AD. Ge'ez was superseded by Amharic around the thirteenth century AD. When the Arabs conquered North Africa in the seventh century, the Arabic language and alphabet was initially used for religious, scientific and educational purposes. Afro-Arab contact, together with the rise of the semi-feudal states in East Africa during the tenth to nineteenth centuries, led to the emergence of Swahili language,

culture and literature. Swahili was the result of the linguistic integration of the languages spoken by its Bantu populations and Arabo-Persian settlers.¹³ The dominant genres in North, East and West Africa in antiquity were theological tracts, hymnals, religious courtly and secular songs and poetry and, on occasion, love poetry. It is since the nineteenth century that African Muslim scholars started to use Arabic script for historical and literary purposes as well.¹⁴ It also follows that apart from traditional intellectuals (kings, priests, chiefs and merchants), Africa, before colonialism, had a category of people (diviners, griots) who served the social function of being intellectuals. These specialists were the purveyors of indigenous knowledge systems that were organized around cultural practices and informal forms of education. Between the twelfth and sixteenth centuries, the Orthodox Church in Ethiopia had established three levels of schools for monks and priests. A formal educational system followed the spread of Islam in North, West and East Africa and a number of Islamic universities were created: the Karawiyyin University was founded in Fez in 859 AD; the Al-Azhar University in Cairo in the tenth century; and before the sixteenth century Sankore had a university in Timbuktu (Mali).¹⁵

In ways similar to the spread and influence of Islam in North Africa, many countries, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, owe a considerable degree of impetus for the development of written texts in indigenous and European languages to the spread of Christianity under the colonial project in the first half of the nineteenth century. Missionaries, ethnographers, travellers, anthropologists and colonial administrators, in their pursuit of converting or ‘civilizing’ Africans to either Christianity or acting as the labouring functionaries of the colonial economy and society, had to address the contending cosmological and epistemological frameworks that informed local and European politics and subjects. One of the results of such an engagement was the desire to ‘understand’, ‘communicate with’ and ‘transform’ the African from the ‘scourges’ of, amongst others, ancestor worship, witchcraft and polygamy. All these imperatives required that the modalities and grammars of colonialism be developed in order to effect the required sociopolitical, spiritual, moral, cultural and linguistic changes. One way of grasping the ‘overdetermined’ context in which language and, subsequently, literature interacted in modern Africa is by drawing on Mary Louise Pratt’s concept of the ‘contact zones’. It suggests ‘a space of colonial encounters’, ‘in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict’.¹⁶

Paradoxically, the occidental march of Christianity and 'civilization' on the African continent was contingent on negotiating the intrinsic relationship and cohabitation between African and European languages. This is because, 'among the preconditions for establishing regimes of colonial power was . . . communication with the colonized'. In other words, evangelists and colonists were acutely aware that conversion 'depended on a shared communicative praxis providing the common ground on which unilateral claims could be imposed'.¹⁷ As a result, as far as the church was concerned, European fluency in speaking and writing local languages was paramount if the foundational texts of Christianity were to be translated into local languages. This required that native speakers, especially amongst the first generation of converts, be also inducted into the lures and strictures of European languages, ideas and beliefs through, firstly, elementary, and later, secondary education. Beyond secondary education there were very few continental institutions where Africans could pursue tertiary education. There was Fourah Bay College (established in 1827 and upgraded to a university in 1876) in Sierra Leone in West Africa and the Lovedale Institution (established in 1841) in South Africa. The number was expanded in 1948 when, under the control and accreditation of the University of London, the universities of Ibadan, Legon and Makerere were established before the significant increase in numbers in the 1960s following the independence phase. The African intelligentsia possessed a degree of social significance and power that far exceeded their smallness in number. This is because mission and colonial education cast educated Africans as crucial interlocutors, especially in their roles as teachers, clerks, interpreters and translators. African converts, it must be emphasized, played a significant role in the evangelical, educational and writing activities undertaken by missionary societies.

As far as the imperatives of conversion and education were concerned, 'the civilizing mission' needed to record African languages and, concomitantly, to translate key texts and manuals such as books and stories from the Bible, catechisms, hymnals, grammars, readers and dictionaries into local languages. An attendant development was the setting up of publishing enterprises. The earliest printing presses were established at Lovedale in 1823 by the Glasgow Missionary Society; the Protestant British and Foreign Bible Society in Ethiopia in 1824; and in Lesotho in Beersheba in 1841 and Morija in 1861 by the French Protestants, Société des Missions Évangéliques de Paris; in Luanda in 1845 under the auspices of the Angolan government; Mariannhill in Natal in 1883; and the Swedish Evangelical Mission in Eritrea in 1885. Using the Latin alphabet, missionaries, in particular, were in the forefront of the writing and

standardization of orthographies for the indigenous languages and communities with whom they interacted. Frequently marked by the dedication, resources and idiosyncrasies of particular denominations or mission stations, the process was sporadic, disjointed and uneven. In certain cases, the haphazard nature of the endeavour ‘often led to a multiplicity of writing systems’ (even within the same linguistic group). This was the case with the Gikuyu (who had competing orthographies developed by Catholic and Protestant missionaries) and the Hausa (who used orthographies modelled on the English and French systems, depending on the respective colonial authorities in Nigeria and the Niger).¹⁸

It also proved rather difficult to reconcile the predominantly phonetic structure of African languages with the strictures of the Latin alphabet. The difficulties of how to graphically render the tonal intricacies of African languages led to many fractious debates between Africans, missionaries and colonial authorities over the appropriate orthography, spelling and publishing practices.¹⁹ The appearance of John Whittle Appleyard’s translation of the entire Bible into Xhosa in 1859 was met with enough criticism from Africans and missionaries to warrant the setting up of a committee (including Appleyard and Tiyo Soga) to look into the criticisms. A new Xhosa translation of the New Testament was produced in 1875 and the entire Bible in 1889.²⁰ In West Africa, some members of the Yoruba intelligentsia argued that Arabic script should be used across the continent since it offered a better and more dynamic alternative to Roman script.²¹ The ascetic lifestyle and silence that normally marked the daily rhythms at the Trappist mission station, Mariannhill, was roused in 1912 and in 1919 when public controversies surrounding the translation into Zulu of two catechisms went so far as to require the intervention of the Papal Office.²² Solomon Plaatje, in response to what he saw as the colonial authority’s unilateral imposition of a contentious Tswana orthography, with a new standardized spelling, dismissed the exercise as the imposition of ‘A Whiteman’s Native Language’.²³

The first generation of modern African writers and nationalists who emerged in the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century were acutely aware that, given the different and fractured publics that they were writing for and trying to mobilize, they needed to adopt tactical attitudes to the language question. The choice of language used in each instance was of less significance than the cultural and ideological purposes for which the language was being used. South African writers such as John Langa libalele Dube and Solomon Plaatje displayed an admirable linguistic and literary adroitness. Dube’s oeuvre includes *A Talk About My Native Land* (1892), *The Zulu Appeal*

for Light (1909), *Amagama Abantu* (Bantu Names, 1911), *Isitha Somuntu Nguye Uqobo Lwakhe* (The Weakness of the Blackman is Himself, 1922) and the first Zulu novel *uJeje insila kaShaka* (Jeje, Shaka's Bodyservant, 1930). Plaatje, whose *Mhudi* (1930), possibly completed before 1920 and, on the basis of current knowledge, is reputed to be the first published novel written in English by an African, was the editor of a number of newspapers in Setswana, and published, amongst others, *Native Life in South Africa* (1916) and translated *The Comedy of Errors* and *Julius Caesar* into Setswana. Jomo Kenyatta wrote *Facing Mount Kenya* (1930) in English and *Kenya: Būrūri wa Ngũĩ* 'in Gikuyu when he needed to mobilize workers and peasants'.²⁴

In short, colonialism ushered in encounters where indigenous and imperial representatives, interests and relationships were intricately and deeply entangled; and swayed between co-operation and contestation, patronage and restriction. Missionaries were cognizant of the complex articulation between indigenous and foreign languages because of the appreciation that both clusters of linguistic formations could be harnessed in the service of evangelism. As a result, the language policies followed by missionaries and colonial authorities were open to frequent strategic alterations depending on the needs and challenges facing white evangelists and colonial society. There was no homogeneity and the differing positions were sorely tested by the language needs and interests of the African intelligentsia.²⁵

In South Africa, for instance, the different ideological and political positions on the merits and demerits flowing from the use of African languages or English in education were further complicated by the changing and contending demands for labour by the agricultural, mining and manufacturing sectors that made up the colonial economy. Mining and agriculture relied on African migrant labour, while manufacturing wanted a stable labour force with some measure of education. This led to education and language policies that were multifaceted and contradictory in their attempts to address divergent opinions and needs. If one were to chart the trajectory of language policies and African education in twentieth-century South Africa one would find a range of significant continuities across the decades. Firstly, the racial segregation of South African society following the rise of industrial capitalism in the late nineteenth century meant that 'the legacy of colour prejudices which accompanied previous colonial practices, was revitalized and formalized in the form of job colour bars and of economic, social and political institutions based on racial discrimination . . .'.²⁶ As a result, segregated schooling predates the coming into power of the Nationalist Party in 1948 and the passing of the Bantu Education Act of 1953 but, more importantly, it remained 'an integral part of the complex

process by which industrial capitalism developed . . . bound up with the inter-related processes' of class, state and identity formation.²⁶

Mission schools, generally, followed a policy that provided literacy and numeracy, mother-tongue instruction and in addition a 'working knowledge' of one of the two 'official languages', English or Afrikaans for purposes of communication. Language policy had to negotiate between those who promoted 'detribalization' as a way of undermining traditional authority and creating their own neo-traditional structures in order to effect 'indirect rule' and those who were not always enchanted with the African intelligentsia's fluency in English. In either case, Africans occupied the most menial jobs in the colonial economy and needed some rudimentary knowledge of English if they were to secure employment. The 1920s witnessed the increasing influence of Social Darwinism, eugenics and social anthropology in South Africa with the result that the concepts of culture and identity were marshalled to critique what was seen as the promotion of assimilation and 'unreasonable expectations' by mission education. The mastery of English by Africans was denounced with shrill disparagements as signifying forms of social and cultural disempowerment and alienation and marking the loss of an African identity. Reverend Henri-Alexandre Junod of the Swiss Mission, who was in support of mother-tongue instruction, railed against what he saw as the African intelligentsia's 'unexpected . . . craving for English and English only'. He argued that the acquisition of English tended 'to disassociate them from their fellow men' and instead seduced them into 'the society of white people'.²⁷ Father A. T. Bryant is a good example of the changes in perspective. In 1883–4 Bryant was of the opinion that instruction in the mother tongue was short-sighted: 'supposing a boy read perfectly in his native lingo, where would be his gain? And if he could pen his Zulu thoughts in the most elegant and accomplished style, where the profit.' However, by 1920 Bryant argued that 'how great a part is played by a language in the preservation of a nation', and that 'the destruction of a nation's language is the first step to the extinction of that nation's identity'.²⁸

The next significant change in education policies occurred in the 1940s, following the ascendancy of the manufacturing sector over mining in 1943 as the main contributor to the economy and the political victory of the Nationalist Party in 1948. The Nationalist Party adopted the principle of Christian National Education and legislated separate educational and schooling systems based on ethnic and 'cultural background'. The Bantu Education Act of 1953 removed the control of African schools from missions to government, linked Bantu education to the imperatives of the government's

homeland or Bantustan policy, demarcated residential areas along ‘tribal lines’ in line with the principle that ‘Africans who speak different languages must live in separate quarters’²⁹ and instituted the ‘appropriate’ mother-tongue instruction in schools. In as much as the Bantu Education Act sought to facilitate the mass education of semi-skilled African labour needed by the manufacturing industry, the then Minister of Education and architect of apartheid, H. F. Verwoerd, was adamant ‘more institutions for advanced education in urban areas are not desired. Deliberate attempts will be made to keep institutions for advanced education away from the urban environment and to establish them as far as possible in the Native reserves.’ Verwoerd went on to pronounce one of his most notorious statements that sharply captures the socio-economic and sociocultural contradictions that informed apartheid’s championing of African languages, culture and self-development, that is, ‘The Bantu must be guided to serve his own community in all respects. There is no place for him in the European community above the level of certain forms of labour.’³⁰ Of course, the seemingly benign language policies pursued under apartheid could not mask the disenfranchisement and exploitation that underpinned apartheid and, interestingly, matters came to a head in 1976, because of the language question. This is when the government tried to enforce Afrikaans, instead of English, as the medium-of-instruction in high schools, a decision that spawned, amongst many others, the slogan ‘Kill Afrikaans’.

Clearly, the assumption of a monolithic language policy that was pursued across the continent ‘obscures policy differences that range from the French goal of linguistic-cultural assimilation to the exclusivist German approach that denied the colonial subject any access to the language of the colonial master’. And as Mazrui notes, paradoxically, ‘the latter policy in fact contributed significantly to the consolidation of the Swahili language in what was then German East Africa’.³¹ It is no wonder, then, that concerning language policies, there is no uniform trajectory or pattern that is applicable across the continent.

Mapping the interregnum and beyond: literary landmarks in Africa

Apart from the continuing attempts to standardize orthographies and spelling, the two seminal developments that marked the crystallization of a literary tradition and reading culture are the translations that were made of, in particular, the Bible, John Bunyan’s *The Pilgrim’s Progress* and to a lesser extent Shakespeare, and the emergence of newspapers aimed at an African readership. From around the middle of the nineteenth century, there are a number of

instances where complete or partial translations of certain books from the Bible were made across the continent. In the 1820s John Bennie translated parts of the New Testament into Xhosa; 1835 saw the appearance of the Bible in Malagasy in Madagascar; and in Nigeria, Bishop Samuel Ajayi Crowther translated an influential Yoruba version of the Holy Bible or *Bibeli Mimọ* (probably completed around/between 1856 and 1875, and first published in 1900).³² With regards to the writing of grammar books, milestones include, as far as the Bantu languages were concerned, the publication of the Reverend William Binnington Boyce's *Grammar of the Kaffir Language* in 1834 by the Wesleyan Mission in Grahamstown; and Bishop Samuel Ajayi Crowther's Yoruba grammar and dictionary books, both published in 1852.³³ Between 1835 and 1897 at least eighteen translations of *The Pilgrim's Progress* were published on the continent.³⁴ The influence of *The Pilgrim's Progress* can be discerned in a wide range of novels written in indigenous and foreign languages across a wide period of time. Key examples include Thomas Mofolo's *Chaka* (1931), Chief Fagunwa's *Ògbójú Ọdẹ Nínú Igbó Irinmale* (The Forest of a Thousand Demons: A Hunter's Saga, 1938) and *Irinkerindo Nínú Igbó Elégbe* (Expedition to the Mount of Thought, 1954), Amos Tutuola's *The Wild Hunter in the Bush of Ghosts* (1982), Ngũgĩ's *Caitani Mũthabaranĩ* (1980; translated as *Devil on the Cross*, 1982) and Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1989).³⁵

The launch of vernacular newspapers was crucial in the promotion of literary writing in contrast to the theological and educational texts that missions produced. Newspapers also inaugurated a community of authors and readers amongst the African intelligentsia. For many amongst the new African intelligentsia, newspapers were also an indication of progress and civilization on the continent. Newspapers were also crucial in the promotion of reading cultures where African readers could partake in the 'pleasures of reading' and perform civility as they entered into a 'marriage with Mr And Mrs Literature'.³⁶ With very few exceptions, the first literary endeavours by Africans were published in newspapers which, in many instances, were less censorial than the mission presses. Newspapers, as Walter Benjamin suggested, allow for the erasure of the distinctions that are usually made between literary genres and author and reader.³⁷ The African press carried genres spanning reportage, letters to the editor, travel writing, gossip columns, obituaries, essays, history, criticism, poetry, drama and prose. Many journalists and readers also tried their hand at writing creative works with quite a number, ultimately, succeeding at producing a significant body of work. The most significant generic development was the writing of prose since poetry, song, dance and drama formed part of indigenous performance traditions.

Amongst the Xhosa, pioneering newspapers included, amongst others, *Umshumayeli Indaba* (The Preacher's News, 1837–41) and *Ikhwezi* (The Morning Star, 1844–5). *The Kaffir Express* (a bilingual monthly) made its debut in 1876 and was superseded by the Xhosa-only *Isigidimi samaXhosa* (The Xhosa Messenger) edited by John Tengo Jabavu between 1881 and 1884. Jabavu then established the bilingual weekly *Imvo Zabatsundu* (Opinions of the Africans) in 1884. In Angola, the periodical *A Civilização da África Portuguesa* was launched in 1866. Lesotho had *Leselinyana la Lesotho* (The Little Light of Lesotho), a monthly bilingual paper, appearing from 1864, and from 1899 *Lentswe la Batho* (The Voice of the People) which, as intimated in its title, saw itself as offering a different perspective to that provided by *Leselinyana*. In the Maghreb, one of the earliest newspapers was inaugurated in 1860 in Tunisia under the apt title of *al-Ra'id al-Tunisi* (The Tunisian Pioneer). *Al-Ahram* was launched in Egypt as a weekly in 1876 before becoming a daily in 1881. It specialized in serializing important literary works, including, in the twentieth century, the novels of Naguib Mahfouz.³⁸ In East Africa, *Msimulizi* (The Narrator), which published short stories, appeared in 1888 in Tanganyika and it was followed by *Habari za Mwezi* (Monthly News) in 1894.³⁹ In many parts of the continent, key writers made their literary debuts within the pages of these newspapers. Amongst the Xhosa, one would include writers such as Tiyo Soga, William Wellington Gqoba, Isaac Wauchope, Walter B. Rubusana and Samuel Edward Krune Mqhayi; amongst the Basotho, Azariele M. Sekese.

Outside the pages of newspapers, the first published creative writing by Africans started to appear between 1849 and 1910. In Angola the poets José da Silva Maia Ferreira and Joaquim Cordeiro da Mata published the anthologies *Espontaneidades da Minha Alma* (1849) and *Delírios* (1888) respectively. Prose soon followed with the publication of two Angolan novels, Alfredo Troni's *Nga Mutiri* (serialized in Lisbon in the newspaper *Diário da Manhã* in 1882–3) and Pedro Félix Machado's *Scenas d' África* (1892). The latter was serialized in the newspapers *A Tarde* (1872) and *Gazeta de Portugal* (1880).⁴⁰ *Zemk' inkomo magwalandini* (The cattle are departing, you cowards), a collection of *izibongo* by W. B. Rubusana, was published in 1906. Thomas Mokupu Mofolo's *Moeti wa Bochabela* (Traveller to the East) was serialized in 1906 in *Leselinyana* before appearing as a book in 1907. It is reputed to be the first novel published by an African. Mofolo's *Pitseng* (In the Pot) was also serialized in *Leselinyana* before its publication in 1910, and *Chaka* was published in 1925 although it is speculated that the novel was completed by 1910. *Chaka* was translated into English in 1931, into French in 1940 and Gérard regards it to be 'the first major African contribution to world literature' and 'the earliest modern Bantu classic'.⁴¹ Afe

Werk' Gebre Yesus and Henry Masila Ndawo wrote the first novel in Amharic and Xhosa, *Libb-weled tarik* (An Invented Story) and *uHambo lukaGqoboka* (The Journey of the Convert / Gqoboka's Journey) in 1908 and 1909 respectively.⁴² Amongst the Yoruba, the first collection of Yoruba poems is *Iwe Ekini Šobo* (Sobo's First Book) by J. Šobowale Šowande in 1905. The first novelette, *Segilola, Eleyinyu Ege* (Segilola, Woman of Ensnaring Eyeballs) by Isaac Babalola Thomas, was first serialized in the Yoruba/English weekly newspaper *Akede Eko* (Lagos Herald) before its publication in 1929.⁴³ *Igbihin A Dun tabi Omo Orukan* (The Sweet Shall Succeed the Bitter, or The Orphan) by Awobo Akinitan was published in 1931 after being serialized in *Eleti Ofe* (News-monger). The first novel in Yoruba was published in 1938. This was *Ogboju Ode Ninu Igbo Irunmale* (The Brave Hunter in the Forest of Embodied Spirits) by Daniel Olorunfemi Fagunwa.

In the twentieth century, the emergence and proliferation of popular literature and magazines and the broadcast media (radio, television, video and film in particular) was to provide a stimulus similar to that provided by newspapers in promoting writing, creating markets and audiences, and in expanding the range of contexts and ways in which languages can be used in literary and cultural practices. The demand for local content on all the media platforms (driven largely by the prohibitive costs of importing material, the exigencies of securing foreign currency and the call for cultural affirmation) facilitated the production of new material and, on the other hand, the adaptation of pre-existing texts for broadcast. To give a few examples, the Ghana Broadcasting Company (GBC), established in 1937, has played a significant role in the promotion of the creation and consumption of 'short stories, essays, one-act plays and folk-tales; these are broadcast on Ghana radio and are thus made accessible to those who cannot read'. The GBC 'created a popular platform for young Ghanaian poets and writers. Authors writing in Twi, such as J. Ghartey whose play *Twer Nyame* (1960, The flower basket) was a success, D. K. Abbiw and E. A. Winful (born 1922) have had their works broadcast.'⁴⁴ The appearance from the 1950s of, amongst other genres, magazines, literary pamphlets, romance novels and thrillers, inaugurated the emergence of 'popular literatures' across the continent. The texts are usually written in English and in African languages such as Hausa and Swahili and they are generally dedicated to imparting didactic lessons concerning the pleasures and pains of urban life and matters of the heart. The introduction of television in the post-independence period allowed for novel mixing and presentations of traditional, performance and literary genres. Commencing with the production of *Borom Sarret* in 1964 by Sembene Ousmane, African cinema was to establish

itself, to varying degrees, across the continent. In the 1980s, in the wake of failed economic structural adjustment programmes, the large-scale explosion of video productions in Nigeria, Ghana and Kenya superseded cinematic productions. The videos, also in local and foreign languages, explore, in popular and melodramatic forms, a wide range of subject matter spanning tradition, the occult and the anxieties of city life.

It is no wonder that some scholars have questioned the saliency given to literature in the development of African languages. Chidi Amuta argues that 'language *qua* language is not the issue in African literature'. Amuta feels it is more pertinent to reflect on what are the 'strategies for cultural communication in a neo-colonial situation'. He advocates that 'all the avenues of cultural communication should be explored to get the benefit of progressive revolutionary literature across to the greatest possible majority'. Consequently, 'European and African languages, oral performance, written expression, radio broadcasts, films... are all implicated'.⁴⁵ Tellingly, such an expansive strategy is in place in areas such as Yorubaland where the synergies between different media forms and literature are continuously exploited. This means 'there was no sharp divide between a domain of orality, indigenous language and the traditional past on the one hand, and literacy, English and modernity on the other'. Instead, 'there was a continuous circulation and appropriation of materials and modes of transmission, fostering an extraordinary innovative and diverse, and satisfying verbal culture'.⁴⁶

In the realm of literature, Swahili literary traditions are particularly interesting and instructive because they indicate a long-standing mastery of expansive literary traditions in indigenous-language literatures. Swahili literature is consistent with the appropriation rather than 'assimilation' of derived influences that typify the development of the Swahili language and dialects.⁴⁷ Writing in Swahili exhibits the complex synthesis of its 'triple heritage' of indigenous, Oriental and Western influences. Forms such as the *ajami* tradition, for example, may have emerged to convey Qur'anic instruction to ordinary people and, as a result, they 'became the bridge between the legacy of a foreign medium and literacy in an indigenous language'. The iconic poet Fumo Liyongo (who oral sources place between the tenth and thirteenth centuries) is another exemplar of the practice and intricacies of hybridity in Swahili literature. Liyongo has confounded 'literary critics in search of easy answers' as far as his 'religious affiliation' is concerned. Based 'on the evidence of his poetry', he has been identified as 'pagan... a Muslim or a Christian'. Similarly, the prose, plays and poetry of seminal modern Swahili writers such as Shaaban Roberts, Euphrase Kezilahabi, Said Ahmed Mohamed and Ebrahim Hussein have evinced East

Africa's 'multicultural heritage' and the writers' search 'syncretic' and 'popular' forms. The aesthetic strategies used ranged from a fusion of African performance arts and Arabo-Islamic/Western traditions resulting in works that span the 'psychological novel' to 'socialist realism', detective and crime novels, and from Brechtian to Absurdist theatre.⁴⁸

Conclusion

The ethical, cultural and sociopolitical dimensions of language and writing require due cognizance of the layered and variegated histories, and social and production relations that have informed the modern emergence of African Literature. It also entails the acknowledgement of the heterogeneous contexts and practices of different linguistic formations across the continent that have, over a century, evolved distinct performance, literary and media cultures and publics. Such an approach should erase the Manichean binaries and temper the inferred homogeneity – as a result of the 'colonial experience' – that lies behind the rhetoric employed by the proponents of 'relativist' and 'universalist' positions. It should also reveal that the language question is not going to be resolved by ideological fiat and not much will be gained by the one-dimensional celebration of writers who write in European languages as 'language stealers'⁴⁹ or equally dismissing their work as a parasitic and paralytic exercise.

Abiola Irele has given a good intimation of the sociopolitical and cultural challenges, tensions and ambiguities that continue to inhere in the *problematic* of language and writing in Africa, and particularly so for writers who write in European languages. Even though Irele acknowledges that 'all languages are systems whose reference to reality is arbitrary', he emphasizes that, under normal circumstances, 'there is a "naturalization" of particular languages to specific environments', a process 'by which they not only come to signify but to achieve a correspondence with the total configuration of the perceived and experienced reality in that environment'. While he concedes that great writers such as Achebe, Soyinka, Senghor and Diop are capable of 're-appropriating the European language to place it at the service of an African vision', Irele notes that 'there is often apparent a lack of flexibility and a self-consciousness in their handling of language which betrays their distance from the affective centres of the European medium of expression'. Ultimately for Irele, 'no amount of "proverbialization" of the European language can remove the fact that the qualities sought for belong originally and are really truly at home in the African language'.⁵⁰ The nationalist attempts to Africanize foreign languages

ultimately lead to Wali's dead-end. This may indeed be the case but in making a case against foreign languages (especially concerning their colonial history, ethnocentric assumptions and contemporary recreations of whiteness), caution needs to be exercised against the explicit and implicit inscription of African languages as the antithesis (they are the authentic and unsullied manifestations of an African experience and worldview). Such an approach is erroneous because, in the modern experience, a considerable colonial imprint on African languages – particularly with regard to missionary contributions to the codification and promotion of writing in indigenous languages – is indisputable. In addition, the saliency that has been accorded to colonialism and imperialism has led to the penchant to engage the politics of language around various assumed notions of 'self' and 'nation' and their relationship to external forces of domination. In the process, other forms of self-identification and differentiation amongst Africans have tended to be overlooked. Since reflections on the language question have tended to concentrate on the contradictions that emanate from the use of colonial languages, it might be useful to recast the focus in this concluding section of the discussion by teasing out some of the complexities that inhere in language, cognition, writing and consumption.

In a number of seminal elaborations on language in Africa one can discern a tension between the assumed complementary nature of the material and metaphysical purposes that are assigned to language. Ngũgĩ, for instance, uses the materialist conception of history in *The German Ideology* to elaborate the intricate ways in which consciousness – of which language is a tool for verbal and written systems of communication – is 'interwoven with the material intercourse of man, the language of real life'. In Marx's famous statement, 'it is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness'.⁵¹ Ideally, 'in most societies the written and spoken languages are the same' with the result that 'in such a society there is a broad harmony' between language and subject. Since this is not the rule on the African continent following the imposition of colonial languages, this creates a profound contradiction since, for Ngũgĩ, language is also 'a carrier of culture'. Concerning its implication for literary and cultural expression, Irele has incisively argued how the lack of 'correspondence' between 'the perceived and experienced reality', in turn, further complicates the relationship between texts written in European languages and 'the African public, leading to ... the distortion of critical values'.⁵² However, there is a discord in Ngũgĩ's argument between his materialist conception of language and culture and, at the same time, an ahistorical and somewhat static

sense of both.⁵³ As Gikandi notes, Ngũgĩ's is a 'dualistic' theory where Ngũgĩ regards language 'as a "pure" category – capable of representing the innate consciousness of beings and communities – even as he advocates a linguistic practice that reflects a historical consciousness attuned to social differences and divisions'. The problem is 'how can language be both a medium of representing historical change and an immutable storehouse of collective memories and communal identities?'⁵⁴

Part of the weakness in Ngũgĩ is the reluctance to, firstly, grasp the synchronic and diachronic processes (and all their attendant conflicts and complications) that are at the centre of any dynamic development and use of any language. Secondly, a materialist praxis would emphasize that the struggle to secure the means of life and the collective senses of self and experience that are brokered through language and representation are equally fraught with horizontal and vertical divisions and differences even within a specific linguistic community. The instances of class, age, gender, region, religion are obvious ones that come to mind. Furthermore, since language functions differentially rather than referentially, the protocols that 'order' the arbitrary nature of language systems allow for *particular* significations or negotiations of lived and perceived reality, knowledge and desire, identity and alterity. Meaning, in such an enterprise, is a vexed enterprise. In the quest for representation, the 'word', according to Bakhtin, is always 'half someone else's' since 'language, for the individual consciousness, lies on the borderline between oneself and the other' and 'expropriating it, forcing it to submit to one's intentions and accents, is a difficult and complicated process'.⁵⁵

In this regard, it is important to note that African languages, like foreign languages, do not inscribe all native speakers, or Africans in general, into their universes in a harmonious, equal and collectivist manner. Writers, depending on their particular backgrounds and conditions, might find themselves wrestling with the ideological and sociopolitical implications of the hierarchical, class, ethnic, gender and age premises and divisions that are embedded in their mother tongues.⁵⁶ In the Maghreb, some writers have even argued that by writing in French instead of Arabic, they have been able to 'transgress boundaries' of, mainly, culture and religion, and treat themes that are considered as taboo. In cases where authors have pursued similar interests in Arabic, 'no Arabic editor has yet dared to publish their work'.⁵⁷ Also, African languages, as Soyinka has observed, are not above being manipulated to act as boundaries between and amongst Africans, especially where 'linguistic boundaries' are exacerbated by 'colonial boundaries'.⁵⁸ In the xenophobic violence that rocked South Africa in 2008, the

accents of so-called ‘foreigners’ were often cited as the aural signs that, according to their attackers, identified them as ‘alien’.

Arguably, the intricacies that inform the operations of language intensify for those who want to use language for literary purposes. For one, proficiency and mastery of a language, to the degree that it can be used as literary language, is not achieved simply on the basis of being a native speaker. Literary writing is of a distinct order and it requires a deep immersion in, rehearsal and marshalling of the specialized cultural and creative repertoires and stylistics that constitute a ‘literary tradition’. The degree to which a writer is able to command a specific or a number of narrative or literary traditions can sway the writer’s choice of language and genre. As Irele has observed, for many African writers, writing in European languages ‘is not a matter of deliberate choice, but of necessity’.⁵⁹ Even in Ngũgĩ’s case, the question is asked that ‘if he desires to break away from European literary traditions, why does he assume that the language of African fiction can only be fashioned in relation to unabashedly western novelistic traditions?’⁶⁰ At any rate, these factors are not insurmountable as Ngũgĩ, Achebe and other writers have brilliantly demonstrated.⁶¹

In addition, different cultural forms require different types of social investment from producers and consumers. Writing and publishing in any language is contingent on the ways in which literary studies are institutionalized (especially in education); the nature of the publishing and distribution systems in place; and the asymmetry in literary awards and prizes between different languages, literatures and genres. Reading, similarly, depends on one’s access to a range of social requirements such as literacy, time and capital. Access to these social investments is not solely in the provenance of the writer or reader. So whatever his or her individual ideological disposition on the language question, there is no gainsaying the range of social, economic and political interventions that are required in order to ameliorate the material conditions and social relations that influence the politics of language, writing and reading in Africa.

Notes

1. Chinua Achebe, *Morning Yet on Creation Day* (London: Heinemann, 1975), p. 103.
2. *Ibid.*, pp. xii–xiii.
3. For a sample of these debates see, for the first position, Adrian Roscoe, *Mother is Gold: A Study in West African Literature* (Cambridge University Press, 1971), p. x; and for a rebuttal, Chinweizu, Onwuchekwa Jemie and Ihechukwu Madubuike, *Toward the Decolonization of African Literature: African Fiction and Poetry and Their Critics* (Washington, DC: Howard University Press, 1983), pp. 10–12.
4. Abiola Irele, ‘African literature and the language question’, *The African Experience in Literature and Ideology* (London: Heinemann, 1981), p. 47.

5. See Obi Wali, 'The dead end of African Literature', *Transition*, 10 (1963), 13–15; and Irele, *The African Experience*, pp. 44–6. For an illuminating discussion of the evolution of Ngũgĩ's position on the language question see Simon Gikandi, 'Ngũgĩ's conversion: writing and politics of language', *Research in African Literatures*, 23.1 (1992), 131–44.
6. Césaire in his critique of the French policy of assimilation and its ethnocentrism saw the task of Negritude as to 'decolonize our minds'. See Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, trans. Joan Pinkham (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000), p. 94.
7. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (London: Heinemann, 1986).
8. Simon Gikandi 'African literature and the colonial factor', Abiola Irele and Simon Gikandi (eds.), *Cambridge History of African and Caribbean Literature*, vol. 1 (Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 383.
9. Michael J. C. Echeruo, *Victorian Lagos: Aspects of Nineteenth Century Lagos Life* (London: Macmillan, 1977), pp. 41–3.
10. Bhekizizwe Peterson, *Monarchs, Missionaries and African Intellectuals: African Theatre and the Unmaking of Colonial Marginality* (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 2000), p. 69.
11. See Aleksander Ferenc, 'Writing and literature in Classical Ethiopic (Giiz)', in B. W. Andrzejewski, S. Pilaszewicz and W. Tyloch (eds.), *Literatures in African Languages: Theoretical Issues and Sample Surveys* (Cambridge University Press; Warsaw: Wiedza Powszechna State Publishing House, 1985), pp. 255, 259.
12. Albert S. Gérard, *Four African Literatures: Xhosa, Sotho, Zulu, Amharic* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), pp. 273–4; Stanislaw Pilaszewicz, 'The rise of written literatures in African languages', in Andrzejewski et al. (eds.), *Literatures in African Languages*, pp. 49–50.
13. See Ferenc, 'Writing and literature', pp. 255–6; Rajmund Ohly, 'Literature in Swahili', in Andrzejewski et al. (eds.), *Literatures in African Languages*, pp. 460–1; and Alain Ricard, *The Languages and Literatures of Africa* (Oxford: James Currey, 2004), p. 46.
14. Pilaszewicz, 'Rise of written literatures', pp. 54–7.
15. Toyin Falola, *Nationalism and African Intellectuals* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2001), p. 3–5.
16. Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 2, 6–7.
17. Johannes Fabian, *Language and Colonial Power: The Appropriation of Swahili in the Former Belgian Congo 1880–1938* (Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 3.
18. See Ngũgĩ, *Decolonising the Mind*, pp. 66–7; and Pilaszewicz, 'Rise of written literatures', p. 57.
19. For Ngũgĩ's comments on 'the unsatisfactory Gikuyu orthography' and its inability to 'indicate tonal variations' see *Decolonising the Mind*, pp. 74–5.
20. Harold Scheub, 'Xhosa oral and literary traditions', in Andrzejewski et al. (eds.), *Literatures in African Languages*, pp. 545–6.
21. Echeruo, *Victorian Lagos*, pp. 110, 115.
22. See Peterson, *Monarchs*, pp. 72–7.
23. Brian Willan, *Sol Plaatje: Selected Writings* (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1996), p. 419.
24. Gikandi, 'Ngũgĩ's Conversion', p. 142.
25. See Peterson, *Monarchs*, pp. 70–7.
26. Michael Cross and Linda Chisholm, 'The roots of segregated schooling in twentieth-century South Africa', in Mokubung Nkomo (ed.), *Pedagogy of*

- Domination: Toward a Democratic Education in South Africa* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1990), pp. 44, 46, 47.
27. Henri-Alexandre Junod, 'The place of the native language in the system of native education', *Report of the Second General Missionary Conference* (Johannesburg: Argus Printing and Publishing Co., 1905), pp. 68–74.
 28. See A. T. Bryant, *Roman Legion on Lybyan Fields or The Story of the Trappist Missionaries* (Mariannhill: St Thomas-Aquinas Establishment, 1887), p. 62, and 'The speaking and writing of Zulu', *Native Teachers Journal* (July 1920), 149.
 29. Neville Alexander, *Language Policy and National Unity in South Africa / Azania* (Cape Town: Buchu Books, 1989), p. 21.
 30. Pam Christie and Colin Collins, 'Bantu education: apartheid ideology and labour reproduction', in Peter Kallaway (ed.), *Apartheid and Education: The Education of Black South Africans* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1984), p. 173.
 31. Alamin M. Mazrui 'Relativism, universalism and the language of African literature', *Research in African Literatures*, 23.1 (1992), 69, and 'The Swahili literary tradition: an intercultural heritage', in Irele and Gikandi (eds.), *Cambridge History of African and Caribbean Literature*, vol. 1, pp. 207–8.
 32. See Scheub, 'Xhosa oral and literary traditions', Zefaniyas Bemanjara and Suzy-Andr'ee Ramamonjisoa, 'Malagasy literature in Madagascar', and Adeboye Babalola, 'Yoruba literature', all in Andrzejewski et al. (eds.), *Literatures in African Languages*.
 33. Babalola 'Yoruba literature', p. 164.
 34. See Isabel Hofmeyr, *The Portable Bunyan: A Transnational History of the Pilgrim's Progress* (Princeton University Press, 2004), pp. 240–2. Hofmeyr estimates that *The Pilgrim's Progress* has been translated into at least eighty African languages.
 35. *Ibid.*, chapter 9.
 36. See Bhekizizwe Peterson, 'The Bantu world and the world of the book: reading, writing and "enlightenment"', in Karin Barber (ed.), *Africa's Hidden Histories: Everyday Literacy and Making the Self* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), p. 244.
 37. Walter Benjamin, *Understanding Brecht*, trans. Anna Bostock (London: Verso, 1984), p. 90.
 38. Farida Abu-Haidar, 'African literature in Arabic', in Irele and Gikandi (eds.), *Cambridge History of African and Caribbean Literature*, vol. 1, p. 184.
 39. Mazrui, 'The Swahili literary tradition', p. 208.
 40. Ana Mafalda Leite, 'Angola', in Patrick Chabal, Moema Parente Augel, David Brookshaw, Ana Mafalda Leite and Caroline Shaw (eds.), *The Postcolonial Literature of Lusophone Africa* (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1996), pp. 107–8.
 41. Gérard suggests that the delay in the publication of *Chaka* was due to its negative reception by priests such as Rev. H. I. Dieterlen, a strong advocate for mother-tongue instruction. See Gérard, *Four African Literatures*, pp. 116, 127–8.
 42. Ferenc, 'Writing and literature', p. 312. In Teodos Kirov, 'Ethiopian literature', Yesus's name is rendered as 'Afework Gebra Yesus'; see Irele and Gikandi (eds.), *Cambridge History of African and Caribbean Literature*, vol. 1, p. 170.
 43. Title also rendered as *Ìtán Ìgbésí Aiyé Èmi Sègìlólá* (The Life Story of Me, Sègìlólá); see Karin Barber, 'Literature in Yoruba', in Irele and Gikandi (eds.), *Cambridge History of African and Caribbean Literature*, p. 366.
 44. Nina Pawlak, 'Akan folk literature and the beginnings of writing in Twi', in Andrzejewski et al. (eds.), *Literatures in African Languages*, pp. 148–9.

45. Chidi Amuta, *The Theory of African Literature: Implications for Practical Criticism* (London: Zed Books, 1989), pp. 112–14.
46. Barber, 'Literature in Yoruba', pp. 374–5.
47. Ohly, 'Literature in Swahili', p. 461.
48. Mazrui, 'The Swahili literary tradition', pp. 199–200, 202, 210–13, 220. See also Ohly, 'Literature in Swahili', pp. 474, 480.
49. See Jacques Rabemananjara's declaration at the historic Congress of Black Writers and Artists held in Rome in 1959, quoted in Irele, *The African Experience*, p. 54.
50. Irele, *African Experience*, pp. 50–1.
51. See Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1975), p. 19.
52. Irele, *African Experience*, p. 55.
53. Ngũgĩ, *Decolonising the Mind*, pp. 13–16.
54. Gikandi, 'Ngũgĩ's conversion', p. 138.
55. Mikhail M. Bakhtin. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, trans. C. Emerson and M. Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), pp. 293–4.
56. See Ngũgĩ *Decolonising the Mind*, pp. 29–30, where, after noting that writing in African languages is not sufficient, Ngũgĩ then glosses these contradictions in terms that are too broad to be of much consequence.
57. See Jean Déjeax, 'Francophone literature in the Maghreb: the problem and the possibility', *Research in African Literature*, 23.2 (1992), 9–10.
58. Wole Soyinka, 'Language as boundary', in *Art, Dialogue and Outrage: Essays on Literature and Culture* (Ibadan: New Horn Press, 1988), pp. 134, 137.
59. Irele, *African Experience*, p. 58.
60. Gikandi, 'Ngũgĩ's conversion', p. 143.
61. See Ngũgĩ, *Decolonising the Mind*, pp. 70–1, 74–5, for his struggles on writing using the Gikuyu orthography and connecting to a literary tradition.

English and the development of postcolonial literature

GABRIELLA MAZZON

Introduction

When nations meet on terms of independence and equality, they tend to stress the need for communication in the language of the other. They choose the language of the other merely to ease communication in their dealings with one another. But when they meet as oppressor and oppressed, . . . , then their languages cannot experience a genuinely democratic encounter.¹

This chapter traces the intersection between the spread of English in postcolonial communities and its employment as a vehicle of postcolonial literature. Rather than listing developments in individual countries, or forms of English that have arisen there, the chapter looks at metadiscourse, at the methodological issues and ideological undercurrents that have contributed to shape the ways in which we describe such language phenomena and literary products. In spite of the fundamental differences in outlook, there are many similarities between the study of 'English languages' and that of 'English literatures', and there has been quite an amount of cross-fertilization, because on the one hand the symbolic value of language has been a key aspect in the development of postcolonial literatures, and on the other hand this development has been conducive to the emerging of new identities conveyed by language variation.

For these reasons, the second part of the chapter is devoted to literary statements on English, intended both as metacomments on the writers' lives and works, and as representations of language use within their works. The first part outlines some main concepts and models within linguistic studies on postcolonial English, and some points of contact with literary theory, starting from issues related to terminology, which are far from being irrelevant or neutral.

*Terminology and labelling: defying morphology and
word-formation*

I feel that the English language will be able to carry the weight of my African experience. But it will have to be a new English, still in full communion with its ancestral home but altered to suit its new African surroundings.²

A few decades ago, against conventional grammar, some linguists started to speak of *Englishes* in the plural. This eccentric morphological marking represented the recognition of a new scenario, a plurality of voices that were establishing themselves as alternatives to, and sometimes in opposition to, a unified, monolithic image of ‘the English language’. This brought about a revolution, since it forced scholars, intellectuals and, partly, the general public, to view language behaviour, and especially language variation and varieties, from a different perspective. More or less at the same time, *literature* went from uncountable to countable, in a parallel display of morphological flexibility, which mirrored a parallel increasing awareness of diversity. The modifiers accompanying these nouns, however, are often controversial.

The adjective *New* started to be often anteposed to these plural forms, and still has some currency, since many scholars think that it captures the idea of change over time and of recent recognition – others feel that this label is reductive, because it suggests inferior prestige (in relation to the traditional belief that antiquity is a positive value) and because some of these forms have been developing for a longer time than the label suggests, besides the fact that it creates problems of classification: should Irish English be considered ‘new’? Or American English, for that matter?³ In literary studies, the label has raised even more vocal objections, because in this context the adjective sounds like a denial of the traditions behind these literatures, and derogative with respect to British English literature. Still, it was considered better than the term previously applied, i.e. *Commonwealth literature*. This phrase was hardly ever used in the plural, because its focus was on the common experience and elements besides on local diversity, but it was soon discarded, because it retained patronizing and paternalistic overtones that were soon perceived as unacceptable. The pluralization into *literatures* became inevitable with the gaining ground of studies based on the specificity of the literary products of some communities; there was also the parallel variation between *literatures in English* and *English literatures*, subtly shifting the focus between English as a medium and English as a constitutive property of these literatures, similarly to the shift from *English in/around the world* to *World English*.⁴

The spread of the next term, *postcolonial*, was also fraught with issues, due to its connection with the temporal meaning of *post*-, allegedly also implying the end of the influence of the ideology of colonialism, which many authors object to, but also in relation to the fact that the dynamics that form the object of postcolonial studies actually start at the beginning of colonization, not at its end.⁵

More or less at the same time, the phrase *World Englishes* started to spread, largely due to the retitling of a prestigious journal using this phrase as indicating a belief in a pluricentric approach (aptly resumed by the acronym *WE*), and in the autonomy of postcolonial varieties, a tendency also revealed by publications entitled *The English Languages*;⁶ this and other expressions contrast with the singular *World English*, or also *global English* or *international English*, which are both wider and more restricted, since on the one hand they refer to uses of English in more communities and not necessarily only those with a postcolonial past, and as a lingua franca, on the other hand, they are phrases typical of those studies investigating the possibility of finding a universal standard, and downplaying the range of varieties employed within a community.⁷

The question of terminology is indicative, since it also recalls the problem of the 'ownership' of the language: *Englisc*, etymologically the language of the Angles' land. This was the reason for another innovation, originally introduced in the epoch-making *The Empire Writes Back*: 'we distinguish . . . between the "standard" British English inherited from the empire and the *english* which the language has become in post-colonial countries . . . we prefer to see the use of the lower case as a sign of the subversion of the claims to status and privilege to which English usage clings'.⁸ Doing without the capitalization should, therefore, turn the word into a common adjective or noun, detached from close association with one community; for the same reason, some authors would prefer to do away with the name altogether, to represent its de-possession fully.⁹ This does not seem to be happening, but the terminological battle has not really stopped to this day.

Successive strands in research on postcolonial Englishes

I liked the Englishes of Asia: the lilt in Singapore and Malaysia, the hesitation of Japan and Korea, the fluent musicality of India and the Philippines, the question mark in Thailand, the soft slur of Mainland China and Taiwan, and most of all, the slangy formality of Hong Kong. By trying to write a generic kind of anywhere English, I reasoned, I could properly convey this 'multi-culti' world that emanates from Hong Kong and the rest of Asia.¹⁰

Tracing these different naming practices can throw light on the different phases undergone by the theories and descriptions of English languages and literatures as they appear in postcolonial environments, and also on the parallels between literary and linguistic studies. This can help determine predominant and influential views on how postcolonial reality has been perceived in the last few decades, ranging from the first studies in the 1960s to modern surveys, which use computerized corpora such as the *International Corpus of English*.

The first descriptions characterized localized varieties in deviationist terms, i.e. through describing their features by comparing them to Standard British English. This approach has not really disappeared, since it is to some extent inevitable to define a variety of a language in comparison with some well-known and established entity – after all, the term *standard* was first introduced in nineteenth-century Britain in relation to units of measurement. What has changed is the recognition of the legitimacy of postcolonial varieties and of their complexity, as well as of their sociolinguistic roles within communities. The first decisive step towards more scientific research in the description of variation was William Labov's essay 'The Logic of Non-standard English' (1970), a defence of what is today called African American Vernacular English (AAVE), trying to demonstrate that no variety is 'deficient' as opposed to others.¹¹ The advent of sociolinguistics gave the spur for more studies on other varieties (see next subsection), and at the beginning of the 1980s, also due to the growth of literatures, interest in the New Englishes exploded, with the founding of dedicated journals and the publication of volumes about varieties of English in specific areas. The main interest centred on Asia, due mainly to the work of Braj Kachru, who provided a model for exploring and systematizing this emerging galaxy (see below), emphasized the role of post-colonial literatures, and carried out important academic debates in favour of a less 'British-centred' approach to these studies, which was still expressed, especially by Randolph Quirk.

In the early 1990s, while studies started to take into account variation within postcolonial communities using the sociolinguistic quantitative method,¹² a more critical attitude was formulated by scholars working with the notion of 'linguistic imperialism', whose most vocal proponent, Robert Phillipson, was followed by Arjuna Parakrama and Alastair Pennycook. Studies on the spread of English and language planning were reinterpreted in this critical key, although Phillipson's work was subject to heavy criticism, especially within a debate in the *International Journal of Applied Linguistics*, in which the author was accused of expressing, between the lines, a 'colonial' or 'hegemonic' attitude

himself. In his ensuing contributions, Phillipson not only tried to defend himself from the abovementioned charges, but also tried to counteract the 'centric' discourse of linguists like Alan Davies and David Crystal, who, according to Phillipson, are triumphalistic in their accounts of the success of English as a global language, and only reproduce centripetal attitudes.¹³

In more recent years, both strands of research have been accused of treating the colonized as passive patients, and of disregarding the active role of speech communities in deciding on their linguistic behaviour; newer approaches¹⁴ try therefore to build a wider picture with the spread of English enacted by a multiplicity of agents within a set of econo-cultural conditions, in which processes of globalization have a prominent role. Whatever imposition and pressure to conform exists, is coming now from within communities and not only from an all-powerful 'centre'.

The importance of sociolinguistics in postcolonial studies

I was born ethnically Chinese. I grew up speaking English. Am I not Chinese still? Or am I just half Chinese? Not because of a physical change but because of a language change.¹⁵

The development of studies on the 'new Englishes' (NEs) was thus closely linked to that of sociolinguistics as a discipline, starting from the crucial assumption that each manifestation of verbal behaviour, besides having a meaning encased in a specific formal structure, is also, and possibly principally, an action revealing something about the speaker's identity. The intuitive awareness of this within a language community is responsible for linguistic variation at all levels, from the unconscious opening or closing of a vowel to the calculated decision to choose one specific language for a certain context of interaction.

The introduction of the discourse of power and inequality in these studies alerted many scholars to the conflicts underlying many of these choices, and the contribution of the growth of English literatures should not be underrated; besides helping us conceptualize the dialectics between local and global,¹⁶ this growth gave voice to newly heard identities, and often helped define and understand them. The construction of identity is held to be at the core of the emergence of language variation, especially in a postcolonial context; although the start of a language change is mostly unconscious,¹⁷ once a change has been initiated extralinguistic values are often attached to it, and new forms can come to be considered typical of certain groups within a speech community, and to acquire symbolic status.

Variation in language can thus become attached to social and political issues, and from there these associations spill into the literary domain: language attitudes and prejudice are part of the background knowledge shared between writer and audience within a community, and become a tool for making statements, as well as for characterization (see below) – it is an even more powerful tool in the English-speaking world, where associations between linguistic and extralinguistic features are traditionally stronger, and therefore a whole range of attitudes expressing social discrimination, and associated now with the knowledge and use of English, have been ‘transplanted’ during colonialism.¹⁸ Literary criticism, in turn, which is often produced by individuals belonging to the same speech community, tends to interpret a literary work also on the basis of such language choices, as expressing thereby a statement of identity: such interpretations can be as biased as those of linguistics, although this is allegedly more ‘objective’ in describing variation.¹⁹ In the next section, some basic concepts and models in the study of postcolonial English, and the changes undergone by the discipline, will be reviewed in this perspective. Of course, no more than a cursory synthesis can be offered here:²⁰ parallels and elements of cross-fertilization between linguistics and literary criticism will be explored in the following section.

Concepts and models

I did not one day suddenly find the ‘right’ English for me. My ‘native language’ is English, but it is not a true ‘mother tongue’ since both my parents speak it as a second language.²¹

Shapes and metaphors

We are living in a chicken coop society, . . . Even if the door of the coop were to open, we would remain because here we are given food and shelter, we have grown fat. We have traded in our freedom for bread. We are kept people. We let the government do our thinking for us.²²

Both ‘diachronic’ and ‘synchronic’ models have been proposed: the former take into account the circumstances of the development of varieties of English, establishing steps or phases in this development mainly according to the extralinguistic processes in the spread of English and in the establishment and gradual acceptance of its varieties. The first of these models was proposed by Moag,²³ who spoke of a *life-cycle* of Englishes based on the successive phases of *indigenization* (a notion that will be fruitful in literary studies, too), *expansion* (referring to the spread to various intranational functions, including private

ones, of language use), *institutionalization* (the recognition of the new variety as acceptable as a local norm) and *restriction* (often connected with a policy of rejection of the colonial language).

More recently, Schneider²⁴ has proposed a dynamic model in which he highlights the processes that are common to ‘postcolonial English’ (significantly in the singular). The first phase is *foundation* (of the new variety, with the first settlements), followed by *exonormative stabilization*, when the first bases for the next stage are laid; the phase of *nativization* is characterized by strife towards independence, accompanied by changes in the boundaries between ‘us’ and ‘the Other’. The next phase is *endonormative stabilization*, accompanied by nation-building cultural processes, often including some forms of hybridity; the final phase is *differentiation*, which involves self-dependence, although many claim that total ‘independence’ from the postcolonial status is impossible. This model, similarly to Brutt-Griffler’s model based on *macro-acquisition*,²⁵ emphasizes the need to take into account whole speech communities and their internal sociolinguistic dynamics as the locus of language change and variety formation, and not the individual speaker.

The synchronic or taxonomic models, even recent ones, tend to reproduce hierarchical structures inherited by older studies; the so-called ‘English studies approach’ adopts versions of the *tree model*, which has been used in historical linguistics to indicate filiations. This model, derived from biology,²⁶ creates a hierarchy that, when interpreted in an evolutionary key, indicates that the more recent products of evolution are the most advanced (like *Homo sapiens* vs *Australopithecus*), and therefore the model has been used to argue for the legitimacy of acknowledging new varieties as autonomous, as in the development of Romance languages from Latin. More subtly, when combined with the long-standing belief that ‘original’ forms are ‘better’ and that language change equals decline, the model tends to perpetuate the idea of varieties as derivatives or surrogates of one English (meaning implicitly Standard British English; cp. the discourse on the alleged ‘colonial lag’ whereby ‘newer’ varieties are legitimized on the basis of their conservatism).²⁷

The hugely successful *circle model* proposed by Kachru,²⁸ based on three concentric circles, is surprisingly similar in its premises, in spite of its programmatic multicentricity. It reproduces the traditional differentiation between English as a first language (EL1, or the *Inner Circle*), as a second language with intranational uses (EL2 or the *Outer Circle*) and as a foreign/additional language (EFL or the *Expanding Circle*); the main point criticized is rather intuitive: the Inner Circle, the core of the model, is represented by EL1 communities and therefore, in visual and metaphorical terms, the model

reproduces monocentricity and, in spite of the various merits of its proponent, still seems to be based on the central idea of a radical distinction between native and non-native English (see below). This distinction, as emphasized already in early contributions, forms one of the ‘myths’ that are very difficult to eradicate: Kachru recognizes the difficulties himself, as he acknowledges that his model cannot easily accommodate important English-speaking communities such as Ireland, South Africa and Jamaica, because of the complexity of their socio-linguistic situations, and because some of the processes, attitudes, etc., are common to so-called ‘settler colonies’ and to EL2 communities.

Other, similar models have been proposed: Görlach’s and McArthur’s, in particular, are both circular in shape.²⁹ While McArthur’s model has ‘labelled Englishes’ at its periphery, Görlach’s model includes several English-based pidgins and creoles. These models do not establish, at least visually, a priority of ‘native’ varieties: the core of the circle is in both cases a mainly non-native type, though to some extent an abstraction, i.e. an international or world standard, but still, as an inevitable consequence of the visual metaphor, the central variant appears predominant. These models could be considered circular versions of the so-called *vertical models*, i.e. those based on stratifications of varieties and influenced by pidgin and creole studies, which entail problems that deserve to be discussed separately.

Modelling contact

I started to write the poem in English first, but shifted halfway to Chinese and finished it, then I ‘translated’ it back into English. English first, then Chinese, then English. But the two languages must have tangled deeper in my mind.³⁰

Models using a vertical representation try to incorporate the idea that any ‘new English’ is not homogenous, but represents a number of forms, which in turn represent layers of proficiency (in models drawing heavily from Second Language Acquisition – SLA – theory) and/or layers in society. The terminology is often taken from pidgin and creole studies: these models usually distinguish between *acrolects*, *mesolects* and *basilects*, which form a *cline*³¹ or continuum of varieties. The problems with such representations are mainly of two types: on the one hand they highlight the issue of whether creoles and pidgins with English as a lexifier can or should be considered varieties of English.³² Various types of evidence have been brought to indicate continuity in forms and contexts between NEs and creoles, although other scholars stress the qualitative differences – the debate has mainly involved AAVE and some Caribbean creoles, where a process of decreolization has taken place due to

contact with Standard English, and where creoles are perceived and classified by the speakers themselves as ‘English’.

On the other hand, these models reproduce the hierarchy of varieties that is employed as a social discriminator in many communities: by the very names, they suggest degrees of ‘full languagedness’ in these -lects, implying the insufficiency of some of them. The issue of the status of these varieties is also brought to the fore by their use in literature – Caribbean writers, although mainly writing in a diaspora condition, have been among the first to use localized forms in their works, and to give prominence to the social dialectics highlighted by shifts along the vertical axis of -lects (see below). The viewing of creoles as inferior forms of speech, which has a long tradition connected with the prejudice against language mixture, is far from being dead; in 2000, the following statement was published:

the main trouble with Creole is its variability although it comes all under the heading of ‘speaking badly’. I find this variability sometimes irritating. Every now and again I find myself having to say to someone, ‘speak properly if you expect me to understand what you are saying’. Upon which the speaker ninety-nine times out of a hundred immediately starts to speak to me in quite passable English, which makes me think that a lot of Creole is just plain laziness.³³

The term *creolization* has been introduced in postcolonial studies as a theorization of ‘mixing’ as new identity, based on the analogy between *contact languages* and *contact literatures*. The term was therefore adopted when mixture in language and culture started to be seen as an enrichment, yielding an independent, original product³⁴, and not just as failed mimicry.

Language *mixture* includes a range of phenomena that typically occur in language-contact situations, in contexts of extensive bilingualism; the minimal form is *borrowing*, which usually refers to individual lexical items, and which, although often justified by register (e.g. technical or culturally related terms), still carries indications of cultural prestige,³⁵ while *code-switching* and *code-mixing* indicate forms of language alternation which involve whole structures to different degrees. Various models have been developed to explain the structural constraints and regulations of mixture, but what is more relevant here is the sociolinguistic significance of the phenomenon. Given the long-standing tradition of purism in Western intellectual stance, mixed varieties are subject to prejudice and stigmatization (i.e. classified as ‘bad’ or ‘broken’) in many English-speaking communities, as the output of insufficient proficiency; this does not prevent mixing from being very widespread, and in some cases

associated with positive values, since it is a way of representing multiple competence and multiple identities.³⁶ The mixed or ‘hybrid’ varieties that emerge at the end of this continuum are used by many speakers, because they can signal allegiance to local culture and to ‘modernity’ at the same time; for other speakers, they are a compromise behaviour, a sort of ‘double betrayal’ typical of people who cannot be brave enough to declare their identity univocally. Nevertheless, the social role of such mixed varieties is such that in some communities they have been expanded and partly institutionalized (e.g. Mix-Mix in the Philippines, MIX in Hong Kong, Spanglish, etc.), and are now a quite prominent part of some communities’ linguistic profile.³⁷

The controversy over the stability and validity of these forms has been prominent in relation to literature, too; although the parallel with creole forms exists only to some extent, the concept of *hybridity* was imported into literary studies, and the strategic language mixing which has been operated by several authors has not only highlighted the issues related to these uses, but has also generated debates of its own, as illustrated in the section on ‘Literature and sociolinguistics’ below.

Attitudes to language varieties

English
Is my mother tongue
A mother tongue is not
Not a foreign lan lan lang
Language
l/anguish
anguish
a foreign anguish³⁸

As mentioned, that of *language attitudes* is a key notion in sociolinguistics, since it refers to the symbolic value of language forms in conveying identity. Studies in spontaneous speech have shown that most language choices take place below the level of consciousness, but in postcolonial communities there is the added dimension of the acute awareness of the colonial language, its presence, meaning and role, an awareness increased and deepened by the cultural debate in many such communities.

Studies on *motivation* for the acquisition and adoption of an L2 distinguish between *instrumental* and *integrative* motivation; the former is mainly linked to the advantages deriving from the knowledge of English, and is usually invoked for the maintenance of English in language planning;³⁹ the latter refers to the wish to identify with the community of English users, and therefore involves

issues of identity directly. One side of instrumental motivation that is typical of postcolonial discourse refers to the role of English as a *link language* or *neutral language*. This kind of motivation is connected with multilingualism and internal strife between groups in some postcolonial communities, and with the impossibility of finding other acceptable bridge languages for intranational communication. Therefore this motivation has been fostered in India and in West Africa, where debates on ‘national languages’ have been harsher, while it has not been so successful where another link language, like Swahili in East Africa, could be employed.⁴⁰ But the functionality of English as link language should not be identified with its alleged *neutrality*, which is largely a myth:⁴¹ this bridging function, while widely exploited, is also criticized, and considered itself a product of colonial ideology – already in the nineteenth century, the idea of spreading English as a ‘world language’ at the expense of ‘indigenous patois’ is prominent in the writings of many British officials and intellectuals,⁴² as it happens today.

This point is particularly relevant, since it brings us to the question of the *ownership* of English and of the identity it expresses in postcolonial communities. The influence of the colonial model is such that it initially creates an attitude of ‘hyperadaptation’, involving a denial of the existence or of the acceptability of local varieties (national labels like ‘Maltese English’ are often equalled to ‘broken English’), and insistence on adherence to the model (see p. 716 below), to the extent of claiming that the local educated form is ‘purer’ or ‘more correct’ because it is learnt through grammar books. This hyper-integrative attitude, subsumed in the typical claim ‘We’re more British than the British’,⁴³ can be very resilient, as it is the product of a mapping of colonial mentality on a different social reality, and is caused by the absorption of models and values projected by education, which induces a desirability of Westernization that can snowball considerably.

The same arguments can be applied to literature: educational systems create norms and a consequent integrative attitude, e.g. through the adoption of forms like the novel by some postcolonial writers, and through the perpetuation of systems of reference and imagery which extend to critical theory.⁴⁴ In the same way as for general language use, this attitude has been the object of different reactions: ‘our India’s English is anaphoric to the creativity of metropolitan English and quite devoid of independent creativity’ vs the explanation that the ‘best writers’ come now from the periphery because they have the advantage of having EL2, since this ‘makes the writer the master of the language, not its slave’.⁴⁵

Methodological comparisons

Indian English, sometimes unattractively called ‘Hinglish’, is not ‘English’ English, to be sure, any more than Irish or American or Caribbean English is. And part of the achievement of English language Indian writers is to have found literary voices that are as distinctively Indian, and also as suitable for any and all the purposes of art, as those of other English-language writers in Ireland, Africa, the West Indies, and the United States.⁴⁶

The placing of ‘Commonwealth literature’ as a subsection of English literature in many early textbooks can be considered the equivalent of a tree model; in more recent years, a new botanical metaphor has gained ground, i.e. the *rhizome model*, which has spread in postcolonial theory to indicate the binary relationship between centre and periphery, and the fact that this duality is intrinsic in the colonization process itself. In the same way as language varieties have been considered in terms of deviation and subordination to a ‘mainstream’ variety, the treatment of American, Welsh, Irish, Australian literature started, at the beginning of the twentieth century, as derivative of English literature, and this of course continued (and partly continues) with Asian and African literatures.⁴⁷ Still, in 1983, while not denying separate political and cultural discourse, Schäfer⁴⁸ claimed that these literatures use a medium that ‘is a language shaped and moulded by Shakespeare and the Authorized version, by Milton, Pope, and Jane Austen; perhaps even more important, they are immersed in a literary tradition common to all English language writers’. This has influenced the way both language and literature have been studied and discussed and, in spite of the differences between the two approaches, some concepts and terms have developed in parallel.

Localization

The language I speak becomes mine, its distortions, its queerness. All mine, mine alone⁴⁹

One of the main points of cross-fertilization lies in the notion variously indicated as *contextualization*, *indigenization*, *nativization*. In linguistics, this refers to the adoption of forms that emerge in local usage through influences from L1s or other processes, and that are considered representative of a local reality; the most obvious aspect has to do with vocabulary, through successive layers of borrowing, but it is reflected in grammar, too, as well as in rhetorical structures.⁵⁰ This is an effect for language contact and widespread bilingualism, but for a sociolinguist it is also a strategy of representing identity and

resistance to the colonial model. The problem for the linguist is often to define what exactly can be considered typical of one variety or of another, given the problematic nature of defining the boundaries of language varieties, and indeed of languages themselves – the conception of ‘a language’ as a unitary object is mainly a cultural and social construct.⁵¹ This process has to do not with the mere sprinkling of words from other languages, but rather with changing the rhythm, the syntax of English, or giving different meanings to English words, to map a different reality.

In literary studies, although all the above terms have been used, the homologue is often called *appropriation*, and it refers not only to expressive means, but also to the revision of the canon, following the *abrogation* or repudiation of external norms.⁵² We could consider wide-scale appropriation as part of globalization, taking place in many elements of culture – cricket in India and the Caribbean is an often quoted example, but the phenomenon is much older, and can concern food, clothing and other living habits. These forms of appropriation are not so hotly debated, although they show that, whether it is colonization or not that originates them, they create new cultural forms and can become part of different identities.

Schizoglossia

The fact that I am writing to you in English already falsifies what I wanted to tell you.⁵³

One of the most typical signs of colonial and especially postcolonial situations is the development of *schizoglossia*,⁵⁴ an inherently contradictory attitude: the dominant language is rejected as a symbol of oppression, but at the same time it is not only used, but also sought after and cultivated, for instance by using the media in that language or by sending one’s children to English-medium schools. Schizoglossia has a direct homologue in literature, since the writers belonging to such communities who write in English are considered to have ‘split identities’ or personalities, and are often accused by critics, in a derogatory key, of ‘utilitarian’ motives – the use of English only as a way to a wider audience and higher sales. This harsh criticism extends from writing in two languages (called ‘an affliction’) to translations by the writers themselves, a practice that Vilas Sarang refers to as ‘a means of reconciling the two halves of my divided psyche’.⁵⁵ Much of the sociolinguistic and literary debate has concentrated, over the past two decades, on whether English can be considered an ‘African language’ or an ‘Asian language’, i.e. whether it is acceptable as a means to convey the identity of members of postcolonial communities, and

whether to try and convey such identity in the dominant language can only result in reproducing hegemonic, ultimately centric, discourse that posits the ‘inferiority’ of that identity.⁵⁶

The persistence of schizoglossia, and of criticism of it, in postcolonial communities shows that the presence and uses of English are still felt by part of the community as external and alien,⁵⁷ and therefore not perceived as an acceptable strand of the individual’s linguistic repertoire and multicompetence. On the other hand, in many communities there is an ongoing debate about ‘falling standards’ of proficiency in English, with objections raised even against the *acculturation* or adaptation of textbooks to the exclusion of Euro- and West-centred content.⁵⁸ This has gone so far as to stop what seemed to be a restriction phase in countries like Malaysia and Tanzania, where movements in favour of ‘nationalistic’ solutions tending to exclude English or to reduce its presence in official contexts and in education have been reversed by recent policies; although this is argued in a seemingly purely instrumental key, it necessarily involves a duplicity in attitudes, including the idea of ‘speaking back’ or ‘writing back’, or the use of English as resistance.⁵⁹

Normativity and prescriptivism

Meck me get it straight Mass Charlie
... you gwine kill all English dialect
or jus Jamaica one?⁶⁰

The high degree of normativity that seems to be part of the British intellectual make-up at various levels (whose ‘popular’ counterpart is the so-called ‘complaint tradition’, which is absolutely not dead in Britain and has spread to other contexts) led to the consequence that the first attempts at establishing multi-centric models for the English language were made the object of a crusade, in which loaded terms like ‘heresy’ and ‘doctrine’ were employed – it is not an exaggeration to state that much of the subsequent specialized literature, till the end of the twentieth century at least, was produced as a reaction to statements such as those in Quirk’s contributions and in the seminal work by Prator: ‘the *heretical* tenet I feel I must take exception to is the idea that it is best, in a country where English is not spoken natively, but is widely used as the medium of instruction, to set up the local variety of English as the ultimate model to be imitated by those learning the language’. The counterargument was that these varieties of English are spoken only by small minorities, in a restricted range of situations (typically more public than private), and that they are anyway ‘bad’ varieties, as their speakers are characterized by ‘imperfect command’ and

subject to ‘interference’ from their mother tongues.⁶¹ This is particularly relevant for the strand of studies which is based on SLA frameworks, using concepts such as *interlanguage* and *fossilization*.⁶² This involves the conceptualization of certain varieties of English as imperfect products with reference to an external norm. The shift to endonormativism involves accepting the idea that the acquisition of a second language in a community is not comparable methodologically to that in an individual: in the development of a variety, ‘there is no fixed target language, but the language variety rather develops from the SLA process itself’.⁶³

The interesting thing is that the establishment of this doctrine is attributed to a ‘colonial’ attitude, and allegedly proceeds from the ‘centre’ itself, in the same way as the ‘authentication of non-native writers in English primarily depends on the Inner Circle’.⁶⁴ The literary counterpart of this attitude is the critical evaluation of literary works on the basis of the British canon: in the same way as professionals in linguistics have established some myths or ‘sacred cows’ such as that of the ‘native speaker’, so the critical yardstick of the ‘native writer’ has been very hard to dismantle. There are authoritative champions of a ‘standard’ in literature, as well as in language; it is only in the last ten or fifteen years that critics have started to consider alternative canons as original and productive. This does not cancel prescriptivism, but detaches it from reference to a ‘native’ standard, which necessarily precedes the process of appropriation as a strong political move to break away from the dynamics that induces *mimicry*, triggered by integrative motivation, and is the literary homologue of hyperadaptive attitudes.⁶⁵

Analysts of postcolonial sociolinguistic situations have mentioned, as one of the processes typical of the advanced phases in the life-cycle of postcolonial Englishes, the transition from *exonormativism* to *endonormativism*, i.e. the shift in attitude whereby a variety is no longer evaluated negatively because of its non-adherence to the British or American Standard, but starts to be considered ‘good’ (i.e. educated, pleasant, correct, etc.) in its own right. This shift has been considered important for ‘liberation’ from language imperialism, and possibly the most important marker of successful *de-hegemonization* of a foreign standard;⁶⁶ literature is prominent in this argument: ‘Nativized versions of English, novel English discourses in postcolonial literature, and substitution of vernacular in conventional contexts for English use – all these are quiet ways in which resistance against English has already begun, often challenging the values and ideologies which undergird the institutions that accompany the dominance of English.’⁶⁷ In the same way as Kachru has argued for multicentricity in language, he has also advocated *multicanonicity* in literature, speaking of

literature as one of the agencies of ‘invisible planning’ for its influence on the language profile of a community.⁶⁸

This shift has taken place with different paces in different communities, and has often been helped or accelerated by dramatic sociopolitical changes, as in the case of the American Revolution, which brought Noah Webster to state: ‘as an independent nation, our honour requires us to have a system of our own, in language as well as in government. Great Britain, whose children we are, and whose language we speak, should not longer be *our* standard; for the taste of her writers is already corrupted, and her language on the decline.’⁶⁹ Although paying lip service to Britain as the ‘mother country’, and based on the long-standing conception that language change equals deterioration (with the hyperadaptive attitude discussed above, i.e. ‘ours is better’), this early statement clearly marks detachment from exonormativism, as regards both general use and literary language. For the same external reasons, endonormativism has now gone further in Asian countries like Singapore than in some African countries, where British English is still perceived as the target norm.⁷⁰

Of course, a large role in the construction of attitudes and of normative orientations can be attributed to the ideological foundations of *language planning*, and especially to educational planning. Studies on planning, especially within Critical theories, are not only concerned with factual aspects of the organization of school systems and of the space allotted to the various languages, but also try to demonstrate that planning initiatives can trigger attitudes that lead to loss of mother tongues, as well as of local culture and therefore of identity.⁷¹ According to such studies, educational planning is crucial in colonization and imperialism, by cultivating feelings of inferiority in the colonized, whether through punishing children for using their L1 in the school, or for orchestrating syllabi which are accompanied by whole bodies of ideology, modes of categorization of reality and of perception, in short a ‘colonization of the mind’.⁷² The models transmitted and enforced in school through textbooks and classroom practices shape attitudes concerning both language models and literary canons⁷³ – it is only recently that syllabi in several postcolonial communities have reduced their emphasis on the study of British ‘classics’. The attitudes deriving from exposure to patterns, structures and stylistic trends can be powerful, to the extent that even many works written in other languages have been subjected to comparison with English models in colonial times and even afterwards.⁷⁴ The prescriptive attitudes inherited through the British educational system persist, as shown by the flourishing of purism at an institutional level in the USA or in South Africa.⁷⁵ Such attitudes are demonstrated by the appearance, within a scholarly paper on

variation in Australian Englishes, of the following statement without qualifications or disclaimer: 'Unfortunately, corrupted forms of English are not always recognised by those users who persist with them, and satisfactory performance should not be the point at which language learning stops.'⁷⁶ Attitudes in postcolonial communities do not depend on the 'native' status of English – the 'complaint tradition' is very strong in Hong Kong and also in other communities where a less standardized, or more hybrid, variety threatens to replace 'proper English', as in Singapore.⁷⁷

In spite of the changes in attitude, exonormative criticism is far from dead. The question of using English, and then *whose* English and *which* English, and responding to which norms, is part of the long-standing literary strand of the 'language question' in many communities, which will be briefly explored in the next section.

Literature and sociolinguistics

You speak good English
Little Brown girl
How is it that you speak
English as though it belonged
To you? ⁷⁸

It would be quite impossible to recap exhaustively the debate on postcolonial English literature with respect to language choice and use.⁷⁹ One first problem is English as imposition or as choice, i.e. the fact that models of postcolonial criticism, similarly to models of language varieties, started from ideological premises coming from the centre, as concerns both the active or passive role of the colonized, and the different status of settler colonies and EL2 communities. As for the exonormative–endonormative duality in language, this often involves mimicry of the centre in postcolonial literature and criticism,⁸⁰ with the consequent tendency to use a deviationist approach or try to break away from this through developing discourse about ownership of the language. This debate in literature started when Raja Rao voiced his belief that English could be 'not really an alien language to us' but rather 'one of our own', although not to be used under an exonormative paradigm, but including what was later called hybridity and appropriation, through stylistic experimentation.⁸¹ Like his famous foreword to *Kanthapura* (1938), most of Rao's statements are from the late 1930s, thus antedating by far both political independence and any talk of 'Indian English'. This was followed by similar statements by Tutuola, Walcott, Achebe and Soyinka, to name a few, and by constant claims that

English is a 'local language' representing a modernity which is not necessarily subservient to the West.⁸² Reactions to this included denunciation of 'betrayal' or accusations of imitative, derivative quality,⁸³ and of course reversals of the same arguments: 'more recent criticism has demonstrated that far from being imitations of the dominant Western modes, works written or performed within other cultural contexts, or from the margins of the metropolitan centres, often comprised remarkable innovations'.⁸⁴

Language choices often relate to issues of nationalism, at least since the use of the term *nation-language* by Caribbean writers in the 1950s, and the similar discourse on *nationalism-nationism* in connection with the sociology of language, particularly developed by Joshua Fishman.⁸⁵ Scholars remarked on the difficulty of identifying with 'nations' that were often themselves the product of colonialism, since identity cannot be mapped onto political borders: very often authors are judged for their allegiance, as happened for Emecheta Buchi, whose Igbo identity is questioned, as she is deemed to be too westernized.⁸⁶ On the other hand, Ngũgĩ was criticized also for using Gikuyo: how is it possible, it was argued, to speak about an 'African' voice and then entrust it to a language used by a very limited speech community?⁸⁷ The same objection was raised about Indian literature in local languages, contending that English is the only 'pan-Indian' language and the one real 'contact zone' in which intra-national differences can be overcome, even though only a small minority of speakers use it.⁸⁸

Another issue is which kind of English should be employed in literature; this is still very often discussed in terms of whether it adheres to the standard – the deviationist approach still lurks behind many critical contributions;⁸⁹ for instance, Narayan is still said to use a 'more standard' (meaning closer to British standard) English than other Indian authors, which is important because the more 'visible' (i.e. 'deviant') the language form used by an author, the more significant this is for the 'subversive' content and the message of the work.⁹⁰ Therefore, many greet with favour the 'Indianization', 'Africanization', etc. of language and literature, for the de-tribalization and the development of unity in the relevant states, an argument not dissimilar from that of English as a link/bridge/neutral language.⁹¹ Writers themselves are well aware of the opportunities to modulate their voices in this way, like Emecheta Buchi: 'I try to write for the world . . . I just try to keep my English language as simple as possible'.⁹² The value of localized English is also perceived differently, e.g. Achebe: 'There's no such thing yet as Nigerian English'.⁹³ Some decades ago (1964) he also spoke about fashioning English in order to convey one's message, but without losing the value of this language for international exchange.⁹⁴ This has

gone to the extent that a 2003 novel from Malawi has an English/English glossary, showing that contextualization has been exploited fully.⁹⁵ In India, the debate on appropriation was very harsh and is represented by Parthasarathy's 'my tongue in English chains' on the one side, and Shahid Ali's 'we can do things others cannot' on the other.⁹⁶ The 'burden' of Victorian standards has been raised only recently, according to Anita Desai:⁹⁷ 'When Salman Rushdie published *Midnight's Children*, it seemed to set tongues free in India in an odd way. Suddenly, younger writers realized that they didn't need to write correct and perfect English in the English tradition, but they could use Indian English ... for writing comic books, satiric books, or even for writing serious books.'

The category of hybridity has been particularly subject to criticism, especially since it very often implies modification and mixing of codes, a phenomenon that, as mentioned, is laden with negative attitudes. Yet mixing is the most common strategy employed by writers as a signal of cultural differences; literary practices have been crucial, according to Kachru, to the Indianization of English, but also to its counterpart of the *Englishization* of local languages, another phenomenon that has been criticized as a threat to identity, and that typically takes place on the part of speakers heavily exposed to English, and who somehow make this language part of their expression.⁹⁸

Various forms of mixing have been claimed to be an enrichment of writing, both in terms of expressive capacity and of audience design; the former argument is often quoted by Chicano writers who mix English and Spanish: Sandra Cisneros, for instance, claims that mixing adds 'a new spice' to English, and that it is 'fun' and 'enriching'.⁹⁹ The latter argument is invoked by Sam Selvon, who recaps his stylistic operation on language as follows: 'The modified version in which I write my dialect may be a manner of extending the language. It may be called artificial and fabricated ... I only resorted to a modified Trinidadian dialect because, much more than Jamaican or Barbadian English, it is close to "correct" standard English, and I thought it would be more recognisable to the European reader.'¹⁰⁰ In spite of its declared 'utilitarianism', this strategy was subversive, especially in the 1950s, when the use of 'non-standard' forms was less frequent, and therefore the choice appeared more marked. Roy Heath¹⁰¹ also comments on the choice of creole, admissible since it is 'a language of consciousness', and can be considered 'standard' in the sense that it is widely used and understood. Significantly, such statements come mostly from authors of Caribbean background, who have creole as an elective means of expression:¹⁰² mixing for them means moving along the standard-creole continuum. Mixed forms are the contact varieties *par excellence*, but they

are also associated with low sociolinguistic value, and therefore they suffered from stigma even from writers and critics.¹⁰³ This often depends on the specific value of these forms in a community; in Nigeria, where Nigerian Pidgin English is communicatively fundamental, Achebe proclaims that for literary uses ‘it’s there and it’s valid’; in India, even advocates of appropriation like Rao establish a clear hierarchy: ‘King’s and Queen’s English, yes; Indian English, permissible; pidgin, bombastic and gluey English, no.’¹⁰⁴

In any case, more than the use of lower lects in itself, it is the act of mixing that appears most important, even the presence or absence of *cushioning* (i.e. translation or explanation) or the use of italics or inverted commas, employed to mark off part of the text and therefore to represent a cultural stance, as aptly stated by Bamiro: ‘Since code-mixing implies the transfer of untranslated words into a text as a counter-discursive strategy of “Otherness”, code-mixing is a device that directly confronts and challenges the territoriality of a dominant discourse in the context of a multilingual and multicultural setting.’¹⁰⁵

Literary works and linguistic evidence

I sleep on a bed of burning languages¹⁰⁶

Quite interesting insights can be gained by looking at the ways writers themselves have dealt with the language question, encoding the debate over the choice of English as a literary language in their works. Of course, since the point of observation here is a linguist’s, the ensuing remarks will be framed in a linguistic, or better sociolinguistic, framework. There is no pretence of exhaustiveness, especially since most of this debate is widely known – only a few significant strands will be picked up, related to two main levels of discourse.

The author as language informant

I am Indian, very brown, born in Malabar, I speak three languages, write in Two, dream in one. Don’t write in English, they said, English is not your mother-tongue. Why not leave Me alone, critics, friends, visiting cousins, Every one of you? Why not let me speak in Any language I like?¹⁰⁷

A common practice in the field of sociolinguistic research on postcolonial varieties of English, especially in order to investigate the speakers’ language attitudes, is the questionnaire or interview; although we can never fully get rid of the so-called observer’s paradox, whereby interviewees, or language informants, may consciously or unconsciously modify their replies because they are keen on projecting a certain type of public self-image through their answers, the questionnaire remains to a certain extent a valid investigation tool. Extracts

from interviews or prefaces from postcolonial writers can be used and juxtaposed in this way, i.e. as declarations in which authors, as members of a speech community, talk about their relationship with English and with other languages, and make statements about their language choices in a more personal key than those quoted in the previous section.

‘[I] instantly fell in love with English literature. It was a lifelong obsession of mine . . . the reason I am so fascinated by the English language is that . . . it is so flexible, it is so elastic’;¹⁰⁸ she also said: ‘in my own home, we tended to snatch at whatever word or phrase seemed appropriate to the moment or situation without stopping to think about which part of the world it belonged to’.¹⁰⁹ Desai was brought up in English and went to a mission school – her attitude is typical of what critics object to as derived from exposure to colonial ideology and education. The attitude representing appropriation is expressed by Bapsi Sidhwa: ‘We the colonized have subjugated the language, beaten it on its head and made it ours! Let the English chafe and fret and fume.’ For Sidhwa, English was an imposition (‘I’m a tail-end product of the Raj’), but a successful and even advantageous one, since writers ‘are condemned to write in English, but I don’t think this is such a bad thing because English is a rich language . . . we have adapted English to suit ourselves’; it is pointless to insist so much on the ‘language question’, since English has become an international medium and writers, as well as the community at large, ‘are twisting it, changing its inner structure to suit their new expressions’.¹¹⁰ An overall positive attitude is also expressed by another author brought up in English in the family, Xu Xi, who, however, stresses the ‘schizophrenia’ of the language situation in Hong Kong.¹¹¹

The ‘alienness’ of English and the schizoglossic attitude derived from the contrast between this alienness and its convenience as a literary medium is strongly felt by other authors; Achebe expresses this paradox: ‘It was humiliating to have to speak to one’s countryman in a foreign language, especially in the presence of the proud owners of that language. They would naturally assume that one had no language of one’s own’.¹¹² In the same key, Jamaica Kincaid said: ‘For isn’t it odd that the only language I have in which to speak of this crime is the language of the criminal who committed the crime [of colonialism]?’¹¹³ Other statements are also enlightening in this respect: Mongane Serote said in 1980: ‘If I wrote in my own language, I could not convey to my oppressor and tormentor this important message: “I do not fear you anymore”’.¹¹⁴ For Arundhati Roy, English is ‘my element’, ‘the way I think’, but the memory of its imposition is always there: ‘being forced to identify with a conqueror, especially with a departed conqueror, . . . is like being the child of a

raped mother'.¹¹⁵ This typically includes arguments on the 'intrinsic' merits of English, i.e. its 'flexibility' and 'richness', clearly arguments derived from the mythology of the centre that are really difficult to discount: even Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o admits that the choice of writing in English seemed natural at first because of its value as 'intellectual language'.¹¹⁶

The author as sociolinguist

One reason so many Singaporeans cannot speak any language really well is their self-consciousness. Forced to speak an affected 1950s BBC English in public, they lapse into a looser, slangier hybrid tongue called Singlish in private, almost as though to spite the stern headmaster. Too stiff or too slangy – neither is likely to produce great literature.¹¹⁷

The other important strand of discourse is the way language issues are dealt with in literary works themselves; here, we could say that writers take on the role of linguistic fieldworkers, and can convey their observations on English either directly and explicitly, through comments, or in a more indirect way, through the forms used by characters in dialogue.

The use of localized or stratified forms for characterization has a long history in English; for many centuries, it has been a strategy to convey linguistic stereotypes. It is important to remember that most writers do not aim at linguistic accuracy: as with other aspects of characterization, linguistic features are hinted at, a few more typical ones are employed, consistency is not paramount – it is enough that readers draw the 'correct' inferences about the ethnic, educational, social status of the character from a few symbolic traits. It is necessary to keep in mind that, like Shakespeare's 'stage dialect', the forms reported in literary dialogues are not reliable sources of linguistic evidence, and any notion of realism in this respect is culturally and temporally relative; they can, however, constitute interesting sociolinguistic evidence, because such forms are introduced precisely on the basis of the shared knowledge, within the community, about the sociolinguistic, attitudinal values associated with the forms themselves.¹¹⁸

The insertion of metacomments on language use and on the prescriptive attitudes derived from the colonial experience is often conveyed through irony, including making fun of the affectations of exonormative speakers, itself a tradition inherited from English literature;¹¹⁹ this excursus can start from the well-known quote by Sam Selvon in *The Lonely Londoners*: "What did you say? You know it will take me some time to understand everything you say. The way you West Indians speak" "What wrong with it?" Galahad ask "Is English we speaking."¹²⁰

This is particularly effective because the narrator's voice is also 'non-standard'. Schizoglossia and divided attitudes towards English are also portrayed, e.g. by Jaishree Misra in *Ancient Promises*: 'speaking English would be misconstrued as attempting to be stylish and speaking in Malayalam had on occasion been greeted with sarcastic laughter'.¹²¹

Another example from the same environment is in Chuah's *Echoes of Silence*, showing attitudes towards different varieties on a 'cline': 'They had spoken in a mixture of Chinese and English, which I found by turns funny and incomprehensible, but they had communicated. Here my mother and I spoke in textbook English, almost untainted by Malaysianisms, because that was the way she had always spoken and had taught me to speak'.¹²²

The exonormative tradition is of course prominent in Narayan's *The English Teacher*, where it is dealt with ironically when a 'native' teacher says:

Could you imagine a worse shock for me? I came across a student of the English honours who did not know till this day that 'honours' had to be spelt with a 'u'? ... Brown ... began a lecture on the importance of the English language, and the need for preserving its purity. Brown's thirty years in India had not been ill-spent if they had opened the eyes of Indians to the need for speaking and writing correct English!¹²³

One of the most interesting cases in recent years, which has not escaped the attention of critics and linguists,¹²⁴ is Vikram Seth's *A Suitable Boy*, where a large fresco of Indian society immediately after independence is depicted also through humorous references to the 'language question', and where the intricate web of sociolinguistic attitudes is vividly represented: the colonial heritage and cultural dependence are portrayed at every level, and perceived as a threat to the survival of local culture. The literary debate itself is portrayed, as one of the characters is a poet who chooses to write in English, but the most prominent element is certainly the social discrimination connected with the knowledge and the use of English: 'Meenakshi and Kakoli, pheasants among the Brahmpur pigeons, looked around them with unfeigned contempt, especially at the Rudhia relatives and Mrs Mahesh Kapoor. Some of these people were incapable of speaking English. And the way they dressed!'¹²⁵

Seth stigmatizes the urban elite who show snobbery through depreciation of non-westernizing habits and language uses, down to the discrimination between prestigious and non-prestigious British accents:

... and her accent was not a heavy Indian accent, he was pleased to note, but light, almost British, because of her convent-school background.

Haresh, on the other hand, had surprised Lata by his accent, which bore traces both of Hindi and of the local Midland dialect which he had been exposed to in England. Why, both her brothers spoke English better than he did. She could imagine what fun Kakoli and Meenakshi Chatterji might have mocking Haresh's manner of speaking.¹²⁶

Language, and especially English, is shown to be a locus of conflict between characters, and a major discriminator in the general consideration of the personality of individuals, often in association with other features (clothes, eating habits, living quarters, reading and music choices). Seth represents a group of young Indians who declare English as their first language, are English-medium educated, and show this by their being immersed in centric prejudice; the way they use the language is shown to be deeply influenced by the British standard ideology and also common conceptions.

The neo-integrative motivation of social aspirers is aptly voiced by a peasant:

'Do you speak English?' he said after a while in the local dialect of Hindi. He had noticed Maan's luggage tag.

'Yes', said Maan.

'Without English you can't do anything', said the farmer sagely.

Maan wondered what possible use English could be to the farmer.

'What use is English?' said Maan.

'People love English!' said the farmer, with a strange sort of deep-voiced giggle.

'If you talk in English, you are a king. The more people you can mystify, the more people will respect you.'¹²⁷

Code-switching and mixing are also portrayed; switching to and from English is explicitly depicted as strategic, to express either social deference or distance, or to impose on others when the switch is towards English, to express more intimacy and spontaneity when it is towards an Indian language. Seth resolves his own language dialectics by inserting quite a number of unexplained words and phrases in Indian languages in his narration – similarly to other writers, he uses strategies of mixing as his own identity compromise.

Global language, global literature?

A language for the world? A world of languages! The two concepts are not mutually exclusive provided there is independence, equality, democracy, and peace among nations. In such a world, English, like all the other languages, can put in an application, and despite its history of imperialist aggression against other languages and peoples, English would make a credible candidate.¹²⁸

With the spread of more unified and comprehensive models, the terminological question outlined at the beginning of the chapter will have to be overcome, although this does not seem easy: on the one hand, there is an ever-increasing recognition of the multiplicity of the agents involved in the processes of language change and variation, which is leading to dissatisfaction with traditional labels such as ‘Indian English’, labels implying an internal homogeneity which is largely mythical. On the other hand, there is the awareness of the common features that represent a unifying factor in the contexts and processes presiding over the formation of varieties, which leads to the tendency to the return to singular/collective *English*.¹²⁹

Thus, there is a tendency to overcome the notions of contextualization, localization and appropriation, while striving to resist the triumphalism of British-based linguists; the concept of international/global English is also often considered mythical.¹³⁰ At the same time, the development of common elements is recognized, both on the formal level, in terms of the features developed by many postcolonial varieties which are shared with EL1 types, as well as of the sociolinguistic dynamics they are based on,¹³¹ and on the literary level, with the development of the notions of *transculturality* and *glocalization*.¹³² Although many recent contributions still follow the contextualization model offered by Kachru in the 1980s, trying to find specific linguistic and stylistic elements that define a literary voice as pertaining to a specific community,¹³³ the common elements have been emphasized since the beginning of such studies.¹³⁴

On the other hand, it is also important to recognize specificities and to avoid that these be drowned in ‘universalistic’ and ‘globalized’ statements, allegedly a tendency of linguistics rather than of literary theory;¹³⁵ in literary studies, this goes back to statements by Achebe,¹³⁶ while in language studies there are several voices rejecting the idea of ‘world English’ as a typically Western construct, if not a notion directly fostered by imperialism; there is no denying that the myth of a universal language has always been a typically Western tension, linked to the story of the tower of Babel, and it is argued that the triumphalism about the spread of English may form a convenient basis for the maintenance of one (typically ‘native’) standard and for the spread of the homogenization of world culture.¹³⁷ As a side-product of globalization, ‘global/world English’ is considered a phenomenon that runs counter to the process of *decolonization*, which for many is not the appropriation and contextualization of a cultural system such as language, but rather its complete rejection.¹³⁸ The connection between postcolonial theory and the phenomenon of globalization is delicate, precisely because of the idea of the

suppression of identity that many studies on globalization bring to the fore; this is connected with the idea of English as a *killer language*, an idea that was quite successful in the 1990s and that now is downplayed in many studies,¹³⁹ in the same way as many stress the fact that since literature in English is quantitatively marginal in many postcolonial communities, it cannot be considered a threat to literatures in other languages.

As part of this dynamics, critics of language imperialism maintain that it is too easy to consider the spread of English only the product of a well-orchestrated conspiracy, and that the colonizers were actually not aiming at spreading English to this extent, to preserve their privilege of 'ownership' of the language, and that they actually adopted measures to limit its acquisition to some elite groups – the generalized adoption of English was thus rather an aspect of decolonization and liberation, a form of appropriation on the part of the colonized communities.¹⁴⁰ On the contrary, others claim that precluding generalized access to English was a precise strategy of colonialism, to create the 'desirability' of English as a marker of social prestige, which has then enabled the centre to implant the big business of English teaching worldwide, still accompanied in some textbooks by more or less explicit propaganda for Western culture and values, following a precise economic and political strategy.¹⁴¹ Many critics extol the advantages of using English, or indeed downplay the significance of this language choice, considering it as sort of incidental with respect to the more important fact that such literatures convey their native landscape, sensibility and values.¹⁴²

Similarly, writing literature in English can be considered appropriation and liberation, not subservience to the models transmitted by colonial agents. In the same way as bilingualism started by being viewed as leading to imperfect language competence and is now considered an enrichment, the multiculturalism of postcolonial literatures is now seen as positive and not considered only as a sign of inadequacy and imperfect mimicry: the use of English is accepted if it can be employed 'as weapon of choice, as domain for . . . imaginations, and as cultural wealth to enrich . . . resources of feeling, thought, and knowledge'.¹⁴³ To this aim, linguistics and literature studies can co-operate in their respective ways.

Although it cannot be considered an established reality yet, the following statement is still a good conclusion on the parallels between English languages and literatures:

In the same way that the existence of varieties of English has meant that the concept of a Standard English has been exploded, the very existence of

post-colonial literatures completely undermines any project for literary studies in English which is postulated on a single culture masquerading as the originating centre.¹⁴⁴

Notes

1. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 'Imperialism of language' (1993), quoted from Steven Kellman (ed.), *Switching Languages: Translingual Writers Reflect on Their Craft* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002), p. 170.
2. Chinua Achebe, 'The African writer and the English language', in *Morning Yet on Creation Day* (London: Heinemann, 1975) (available at <http://chisnell.com>).
3. For discussion of the terminology see John Skinner, *The Stepmother Tongue: An Introduction to New Anglophone Fiction* (London: Macmillan, 1998), pp. 5–6; Tom McArthur, 'World English and world Englishes: trends, tensions, varieties, and standards', *Language Teaching*, 34 (2001), 7–8; Kingsley Bolton *et al.*, 'Futures for Hong Kong English', in Kingsley Bolton (ed.), *Hong Kong English: Autonomy and Creativity* (Hong Kong University Press, 2002), pp. 296–7; E.W. Schneider, 'The dynamics of new Englishes: from identity construction to dialect birth', *Language*, 79.2 (2003), 233–81; Raymond Hickey, 'Englishes in Asia and Africa: origin and structure', in Raymond Hickey (ed.), *Legacies of Colonial English: Studies in Transported Dialects* (Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 503–5.
4. For this terminology and related debates see Helen Tiffin, 'Commonwealth literature: comparison and judgement', in Dieter Riemenschneider (ed.), *The History and Historiography of Commonwealth Literature* (Tübingen: Gunter Narr, 1983), pp. 31–2; Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-colonial Literatures* (London: Routledge, 1989; 2nd edn 2002), p. 23; Faroza Jussawalla and Reed Way Dasenbrock, *Interviews with Writers of the Post-colonial World* (University of Mississippi Press, 1992), pp. 223, 244; Robert Phillipson, *Linguistic Imperialism* (Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 26; Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *Key Concepts in Post-colonial Studies* (London: Routledge, 1998), pp. 63–4; Dennis Walder, *Post-colonial Literatures in English: History, Language, Theory* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), pp. 64–6; John McLeod, *Beginning Postcolonialism* (Manchester University Press, 2000), pp. 10–15; Lars Eckstein, 'Introduction', in Lars Eckstein (ed.), *English Literatures across the Globe: A Companion* (Paderborn: Wilhelm Fink, 2007), p. 15; Frank Engler-Schulze, 'Theoretical perspectives: from postcolonialism to transcultural world literature', in Eckstein (ed.), *English Literatures*, pp. 21–2; Alastair Pennycook, 'Review article: Multilithic English(es) and language ideologies', *Language in Society*, 37 (2008), 435–44.
5. See summaries of the debate in Ismail S. Talib, *The Language of Postcolonial Literatures: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 19–20; Neil Lazarus, 'Introducing postcolonial studies', in Neil Lazarus (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Postcolonial Literary Studies* (Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 2–13; Vaidehi Ramanathan, *The English-Vernacular Divide. Postcolonial Language Politics and Practice* (Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 2005), p. 3; and in chapter 6 of the Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back*, 2nd edn.
6. Gabriella Mazzon, *Le lingue inglesi* (Rome: Carocci, 1994); Tom McArthur, *The English Languages* (Cambridge University Press, 1998).

7. For a detailed discussions of these naming practices and their implications, including the currency and overtones of these terms, pluralization and capitalization issues, see e.g. Tom McArthur, 'World English(es), world dictionaries', in Bruce Moore (ed.), *Who's Centric Now?* (Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 1–22; for objections to the singular, see Braj B. Kachru, *Asian Englishes Beyond the Canon* (Hong Kong University Press, 2005), p. 235; see also Kingsley Bolton, 'World Englishes', in Alan Davies and Catherine Elder (eds.), *The Handbook of Applied Linguistics* (Oxford, Blackwell, 2004), pp. 367–96; Jennifer Jenkins 'Current perspectives on teaching world Englishes and English as a lingua franca', *TESOL Quarterly* 40.1 (2006), 157–81.
8. Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back*, pp. 8, 217; italics added.
9. A statement from 1965 runs: 'Strictly speaking, English cannot be called "English" at all, since it is a universal language belonging to all. It is difficult to understand why it is still known under that horrible name; it should have had another name' (reported by Alamin M. Mazrui, 'A sociolinguistics of "double consciousness": English and ethnicity in the black experience', in Janina Brutt-Griffler and Catherine Evans Davies (eds.), *English and Ethnicity* (New York: Macmillan, 2006), p. 53. This kind of view never prevailed, but is still occasionally voiced nowadays; see Janina Brutt-Griffler, *World English. A Study of Its Development* (Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 2002), p. 8.
10. Xu Xi, 'Writing the literature of non-denial', *World Englishes*, 19.3 (2000), 418.
11. William Labov, 'The logic of non-standard English', in James Alatis (ed.), *Georgetown Monograph on Languages and Linguistics*, 22 (1970), 1–44.
12. See, for example, the studies in Jenny Cheshire (ed.), *English Around the World: Sociolinguistic Perspectives* (Cambridge University Press, 1991), and the numerous contributions in the journals *English World-Wide* and *World Englishes*.
13. Robert Phillipson, *Linguistic Imperialism* (Oxford University Press, 1992); Alan Davies, 'Review article: Ironising the myth of linguisticism', *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 17.6 (1996), 485–96; Margie Berns et al. '(Re)experiencing hegemony: the linguistic imperialism of Robert Phillipson', *International Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 8.2 (1998), pp. 271–82; Robert Phillipson, 'Realities and myths of linguistic imperialism', *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 18.3 (1997), 238–7, and, 'Linguistic imperialism re-visited – or re-invented: a rejoinder to a review essay', *International Journal of Applied Linguistics* 9.1 (1999), 135–57; Margie Berns et al., 'Hegemonic discourse revisited', *International Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 9.1 (1999), 138–41; Robert Phillipson, 'Voice in global English: unheard chords in Crystal loud and clear', *Applied Linguistics* 20.2 (1999), 265–76.
14. Brutt-Griffler, *World English*; E.W. Schneider, *Postcolonial English: Varieties around the World* (Cambridge University Press, 2007).
15. Suchen Christine Lim, *Fistful of Colours* (Singapore: EPB Publishers, 1992), pp. 82–3.
16. Wimal Disnayake, 'Cultural studies and world English: some topics for further exploration', in Larry E. Smith and Michael L. Forman (eds.), *World English 2000* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1997).
17. For different opinions on this see Schneider, *Postcolonial English Varieties around the World*, p. 28, vs Peter Trudgill, *New-dialect Formation: The Inevitability of Colonial Englishes* (Edinburgh University Press, 2004), pp. 156ff.
18. Rajendra Singh et al., 'On "new/non-native" Englishes: a quartet' (1995), reprinted in Rajendra Singh (ed.), *The Native Speaker: Multilingual Perspectives* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1998), pp. 52–3.

19. For examples see Braj B. Kachru, 'South Asian English: toward an identity in diaspora', in Robert J. Baumgardner (ed.), *South Asian English: Structure, Use and Users* (Urbana-Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1996), pp. 15–16; Gabriella Mazzon, 'The ideology of the standard and the development of Extraterritorial Englishes', in Laura Wright (ed.), *The Development of Standard English 1300–1800: Theories Descriptions Conflicts* (Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 85–7.
20. For a detailed history of approaches see e.g. Kingsley Bolton, 'Where WE stands: approaches, issues, and debate in world Englishes', *World Englishes*, 24.1 (2005), 63–83.
21. Xu Xi, 'Writing the literature of non-denial', p. 420.
22. Lau Siew Mei, *Playing Madame Mao* (Rose Bay, NSW: Brandl & Schlesinger, 2000), p. 20.
23. Rodney Moag, 'The life cycle of non-native Englishes: a case study', in Braj B. Kachru (ed.), *The Other Tongue: English across Cultures* (Urbana-Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1982).
24. E.W. Schneider, 'The dynamics of new Englishes: from identity construction to dialect birth', *Language* 79.2 (2003), 233–81; Schneider, *Postcolonial English*.
25. Brutt-Griffler, *World English*.
26. For the relationship between these disciplines, which now continues with the adoption of the metaphor of 'ecology' in linguistics, see Alastair Pennycook, 'Language policy and the ecological turn', *Language Policy*, 3 (2004), 231–39; Salikoko S. Mufwene, *The Ecology of Language Evolution* (Cambridge University Press, 2001).
27. E.W. Schneider, 'The English dialect heritage of the Southern United States' in Hickey (ed.), *Legacies*, pp. 265ff.
28. Braj B. Kachru, 'The spread of English and sacred linguistic cows', in Peter H. Lowenberg (ed.), *Language Spread and Language Policy: Issues, Implications and Case Studies* (Georgetown Press, 1988). On the limitations of the model and related issues see summaries and references in: Jenny Cheshire, 'Introduction: sociolinguistics and English around the world', in Cheshire (ed.), *English around the World*, pp. 2–3; Robert Burchfield, 'Introduction', in Robert Burchfield (ed.) *The Cambridge History of the English Language*, vol 5: *English in Britain and Overseas: Origins and Development* (Cambridge University Press, 1994); Arjuna Parakrama, *De-hegemonizing Language Standards: Learning from (Post)Colonial Englishes about 'English'* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1995), p. 17; Singh *et al.*, 'A quartet', p. 48; Kingsley Bolton and Gerald Nelson, 'Analyzing Hong Kong English: sample texts from the International Corpus of English', in Bolton (ed.), *Hong Kong English*; Hickey, 'Englishes in Asia', p. 507; Bolton, 'Where WE stands', p. 19.
29. Manfred Görlach, *Studies in the History of the English Language* (Heidelberg: Winter, 1990); Tom McArthur, 'The English languages?' *English Today*, 11 (1987), 9–11.
30. Leung Ping-Kwan, 'Writing between Chinese and English', *World Englishes*, 19.3 (2000), 403.
31. Braj B. Kachru, *The Alchemy of English: The Spread, Functions and Models of Nonnative Englishes* (Oxford: Pergamon, 1986).
32. On this debate see e.g. Salikoko S. Mufwene, 'New Englishes and criteria for naming them', *World Englishes*, 13 (1994), 21–13, and *The Ecology of Languages*, pp. 10–11, vs Brutt-Griffler, *World English*, p. 135.
33. Morris Cargill, 'Creole talk again', *Jamaica Gleaner*, 20 March 2000.
34. Braj B. Kachru, 'The Bilingual's creativity: discorsal and stylistic strategies in contact literatures', in Larry E. Smith (ed.), *Discourse Across Cultures* (New York: Prentice Hall, 1987), p. 127; Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and*

- Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 8. For objections see Edwin Thumboo, 'The literary dimensions of the spread of English', in Kachru (ed.), *The Other Tongue*, p. 255.
35. A. Suresh Canagarajah, 'Dilemmas in planning English/vernacular relations in post-colonial communities', *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, 9.3 (2005), 428–33.
 36. Brutt-Griffler, *World English*, p. 150; Charles Stewart, 'Creolization: history, ethnography, theory', in Charles Stewart (ed.), *Creolization: History Ethnography Theory* (Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, 2007), pp. 3–7.
 37. J.C. Richards, 'Rhetorical and communicative styles in the new varieties of English', in John B. Pride (ed.), *New Englishes* (Rowley, MA: Newbury House, 1982); John Gibbons, *Code-mixing and Code Choice: A Hong Kong Case Study* (Philadelphia: Multilingual Matters, 1987); Schneider, *Postcolonial English*, pp. 309–17.
 38. Marlene NourbeSe Philip, *She Tries Her Tongue; Her Silence Softly Breaks* (1989), quoted from Denise Decaires Narain, *Contemporary Caribbean Women's Poetry: Making Style* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 204.
 39. Statements supporting the continued presence of English in postcolonial contexts are innumerable; one example may suffice: English is important 'to provide access and links to the wider outside world and the science and technology that is necessary for Nigeria to develop and successfully compete with other countries. Without a well-established proficiency in English (or some other language of wider international communication) among its educated elite, Nigeria would be severely disadvantaged in a wide range of areas involving access to developing knowledge.' Andrew Simpson and B. Akínúndé Oyètádé, 'Nigeria: ethnolinguistic competition in the giant of Africa', in Andrew Simpson (ed.), *Language and National Identity in Africa* (Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 194.
 40. Ibid: 'precisely because of its foreign-sourced nature, English is seen to be an ethnically neutral language which has the capacity to unify the many different ethnolinguistic groups in Nigeria without according an explicit advantage to one group over the others. It is widely recognized that English does indeed constitute a unifying force in Nigeria and that there may well be more conflict in the country if English were not available as a neutral language.'
 41. Parakrama, *De-hegemonizing*, pp. 21–2; Otto M. Ikome, 'Language nativization in West Africa: acculturation and acquisition of "native" speakers in Cameroon', in Singh (ed.), *The Native Speaker*, pp. 64–5.
 42. As reported by Alastair Pennycook, *The Cultural Politics of English as an International Language* (London: Longman, 1994), pp. 99–100, and *English and the Discourses of Colonialism (Politics of Language)* (London: Routledge, 1998), pp. 133–5.
 43. Gabriella Mazzon, *L'inglese di Malta* (Naples: Liguori, 1992); for the close connection between the establishment of colonialism and the spread of the idea of a 'King's English' see Talib, *Language of Literatures*, p. 15; N. Krishnaswamy and Archana S. Burde, *The Politics of Indians' English: Linguistic Colonialism and the Expanding English Empire* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 27, report about one such statement from 1968; see also Parakrama, *De-hegemonizing*, p. 29; Devyani Sharma, 'Dialect stabilization and speaker awareness in non-native varieties of English', *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, 9.2 (2005), 194–224.
 44. Simon Gikandi, 'Poststructuralism and postcolonial discourse', in Lazarus (ed.), *Cambridge Companion*, pp. 97–8; on literature in English as both an indicator and a catalyst of language attitudes, see Susanne Mühleisen, *Creole Discourse: Exploring Prestige Formation and Change across Caribbean English-lexicon Creoles* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2002), pp. 177–8; Jussawalla and Dasenbrock, *Interviews*, pp. 5–9.

45. Quotations respectively from: Probal Dasgupta, *The Otherness of English. India's Auntie Tongue Syndrome* (New Delhi: Sage, 1993), p. 110, and Jussawalla and Dasenbrock, *Interviews*, p. 147.
46. Salman Rushdie, and Elizabeth West (eds.), *The Vintage Book of Indian Writing, 1947–1997* (London: Vintage, 1997), quoted from Kellman, *Switching Languages*, p. 250.
47. Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, *Key Concepts*, pp. 207–8; Thumboo, 'Literary dimensions', pp. 278–9.
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Religion and postcolonial writing

JAMIE S. SCOTT

Introduction

Scholars working at the interstices of the religious, the literary and the postcolonial have concerned themselves almost exclusively with the role and representation of Christianity. Occasionally confessional in tone, historians of various stripes have detailed the religion's global dispersion and assessed the continental, regional and local impact of different Christian denominations, focusing upon their evangelizing agendas and missionary wings.¹ Some accounts examine the work of individual clerics and ecclesiastical institutions, while others analyse vying forms of scriptural interpretation and understanding during and after empire and colonization,² as well as the innovative Christian critiques of Europe's overseas legacy that constitute so-called 'liberation' and 'local' theologies.³ A few commentators have subjected Christian scriptures, literary classics and theological categories, as well as church publications and missionary writings, to critical interrogation from decidedly non-theological perspectives and for expressly non-theological ends.⁴ And still others have explored the ways in which the Christian figures in the representation and misrepresentation of identity and power in encounters, conflicts and occasional accommodations between colonizer and colonized.⁵ In addition, drawing variously upon such resources, a handful of critics writing under the banner 'postcolonial' have gathered close readings of particular plays, poems, novels and instances of other literary genres into collections of scholarly essays focused upon particular theological or religious themes, tropes or topoi.⁶

Still, no full, properly interdisciplinary account of relations between the Christian, the literary and the postcolonial exists, let alone a more expansive study exploring the ways in which postcolonial writers depict other religious traditions and the complex interrelations among them and with Christianity. What follows, therefore, is less a definitive mapping of religions and

postcolonial literatures, and more a palimpsest of text and context. Suspicious of monolithic historiography, this chapter traces the movement of overlapping and interweaving layers of literary meaning, motif and influence, primarily though not exclusively in prose forms, to take account of the myriad ways in which the identifiably religious helps to constitute what we might meaningfully describe as postcolonial.⁷ The chapter focuses first upon Christianity, which in Catholic and Protestant forms accompanied Europe's various colonial and imperial adventures from the sixteenth to the twentieth century. For more complex reasons, however, it then turns to the transnational community of the *Dar-al-Islam* (Abode of Islam): on the one hand, like Christianity, Islam's monotheistic aspirations to universality have often been linked to empire; on the other hand, though, like Buddhists, Hindus, Jews, Sikhs and adherents to indigenous and other spiritualities, Muslims have frequently endured the mixed effects of the West's unsolicited imperial and colonial attentions. At the same time, these discussions of the Christian and the Islamic include pertinent asides to other religious traditions, and an Afterword surveys areas of developing research.

Christianity and postcolonial literature

Christianity has often been complicit with empire, colonialism and conquest. A partial list of such associations would include Constantine's attribution of his Roman imperialism to the God of the Christians in 313 CE; the Byzantine Empire (330–1453); the coronation of Charles V as Holy Roman Emperor at Aachen, Germany, on Christmas Day, 800 CE; various European principalities and kingdoms and the medieval crusades against Islam; Roman Catholic Christianity and different incarnations of Portuguese, Spanish and French hegemony from the late fifteenth to the late twentieth century; Eastern Orthodox Christianity and the Russian Empire (1721–1917); Lutheran Christianity and several Swedish and Danish overseas exploits between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries; Protestant Reformed Christianity and Dutch activities abroad from the seventeenth to the twentieth century; and Anglican and diverse kinds of non-conforming Christianity and the British Empire from the late fifteenth to the late twentieth century. Similarly, Christian clerics often accompanied nineteenth- and twentieth-century Belgian, German and Italian colonial and imperial adventurers. Invariably, Christian expansion has mirrored colonial and imperial expansion, thanks specifically to religious professionals exercising the proselytizing mandates of national churches and missionary societies, and more generally, to the less

easily discernible, but likely far more durable effects of daily interaction between the colonized and Europeans, whose everyday economic practices, social values, cultural attitudes and even military postures were hardly separable from the habits of Christian heritage.

Christian beliefs and practices are rooted in canonical scriptures comprising the Hebrew Bible, known as the Old Testament, and the New Testament, which includes the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, reflecting the life and teachings of the itinerant Jewish rabbi, Jesus of Nazareth (c. 6/4 BCE – c. 27/29 CE), as well as interpretations of this oeuvre by early followers, notably the letters of the apostle Paul (d. 67 CE). Paul's theological virtues sum up the teachings of Jesus: 'faith, hope and love [charity, grace], the greatest of which is love'.⁸ Despite the Great Schism (1054) dividing Christendom into Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox, and a series of ecclesiological reconfigurations in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries known collectively as the Reformation, which resulted in the first Protestant churches breaking with Rome, almost all Christians share a common core of beliefs: that the divinity comprises three persons eternally coexistent – God the Father, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Spirit; that Jesus was the messiah of Jewish prophecy, that is the 'Christ' or 'Anointed One', who was crucified and died to atone for the sins of humanity, then rose from the dead and ascended into heaven; that the Holy Spirit guides the church, or *ecclesia*, that is, those called to salvation by grace through faith; and that Jesus will return on the Day of Judgment, when the faithful will receive eternal salvation in heaven. In addition, though Catholic and Orthodox denominations enjoy a richer sacramental life than Protestants, almost all Christians mark initiation into the church with baptism by water and maintain their membership, and hence their relationship with God, by consuming bread and wine emblematic of the crucified Christ's body and blood in a ritual commemoration known as the eucharist. Christians celebrate the birth of Jesus at Christmas and his resurrection from the dead at Easter, and most denominations enjoy other festivals associated with religious figures, miraculous events or sacred places.

From the apostle Paul to the present, Christians have sought to convert non-Christians, and even each other, to one form or another of ritual orthopraxy and theological orthodoxy. Commentators often identify this missionary impulse with a scriptural injunction: 'Go therefore and make disciples of all nations', says Jesus to his disciples, 'baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you'.⁹ As a redemptive monotheism thus aspiring to universal status, Christianity accommodates easily to imperial and colonial

ambition. At the same time, though, differences among Europe's Christians sometimes spawned settler communities overseas, while Catholic, Anglican and non-conformist ecclesiastics and missionaries, as well as lay evangelists, might temper their apologies for European expansion with expressions of outrage at the ravages so rendered upon other ways of life. These ambiguities have attracted the attention of a number of postcolonial writers, for whom Christianity frequently serves as institutional or ideological context for exploring relations between colony and metropole, between different colonial communities, and between colonizer and colonized.

Postcolonial portrayals of the settler cultures of Australia, Canada, New Zealand and South Africa exemplify these complexities. A severe Scots Presbyterian ethos pervades Canadian fiction like Margaret Laurence's *The Stone Angel* (1964) and *The Diviners* (1975), while novels as different as *The Wars* (1977) and *Not Wanted on the Voyage* (1984), by Timothy Findlay (1930–2002), problematize bonds between colonial periphery and imperial centre in terms of a christology of atonement involving the sacrifice of Jesus the Son and the satisfaction of God the Father. *The New Age / Le Nouveau Siècle*, by Hugh Hood (1928–2000), constitutes a twelve-volume Catholic reading of Canada's national destiny, epitomized in the story of Matthew Goderich, the offspring of an English father and a French mother. Alistair MacLeod's novel *No Great Mischief* (1999) dramatizes ways in which conflicts among Christians in Europe translate to the colonies, as ancestral legends haunt the Nova Scotian descendants of Catholic families cleared from their Scottish highland homes by Protestant English overlords. The British conquest of *La Nouvelle France* in the Seven Years' War (1756–63) lies behind the tensions between Catholics and Protestants underlying a good deal of Québécois literature, most notably Michel Tremblay's magnum opus, the novel sequence *Chroniques du Plateau-Mont-Royal* (2000). Rudy Wiebe's *A Discovery of Strangers* (1995) depicts members of an expedition to Canada's northwest (1819–22), led by Sir John Franklin (1786–1847), abusing Dené charitableness and ignoring their narratives of the land in an attempt to demonstrate 'the superiority of Christian knowledge' totally unsuited to the local environment.¹⁰

Among Australian and New Zealand poets, Les A. Murray likens God's intermittent presence in organized religion to 'the action of those birds – crested pigeon, rosella parrot – who fly with wings shut, then beating, and again shut'.¹¹ In *Riders in the Chariot* (1961), the title of which refers to scripture's Book of Ezekiel, Patrick White (1912–90) gives us a quartet of suburban visionaries: Mordecai Himmelfarb, a mystical Jew strung up at work in mock crucifixion; Ruth Godbold, a beneficent evangelical; Alf Dubbo,

an Anglican Aboriginal alcoholic artist; and Mary Hare, who, like Saint Francis, hand-feeds birds in the garden of her tumble-down mansion, Xanadu. In Peter Carey's *Oscar and Lucinda* (1988), an Anglican cleric falls in love with a colonial businesswoman. Addicted gamblers, they wager whether he can safely transport her glass church into the bush, a figure for the weighty, yet transparent authority of old-world Christianity imported into an alien Australian environment. New Zealand poets like James K. Baxter (1926–72) and Allen Curnow (1911–2001) read South Pacific landscapes in Christian theological terms. A few lines of Curnow's 'Dialogue with Four Rocks' move from the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* to rehearse the miracle of Pentecost, when, according to scripture's Book of Acts (2:1–4), the Holy Spirit appears to the resurrected Christ's untutored disciples, who begin to speak the languages of the world to be missionized. 'The creator knows he's made it!' writes Curnow, 'his mate matter / out of nothing / a tied tongue loosed the stony ghost / before all of us talking all / at once in our own languages.'¹² By contrast, Paul Prior, the protagonist of Maurice Gee's *In My Father's Den* (1972), struggles to come to terms with his mother's 'grim and fundamental' Presbyterianism. 'Everything took its tone from Mother', says Prior, who might as easily be talking about Scotland.¹³

A Christian ethos pervades postcolonial depictions of settler South Africa, too. Peter Abrahams's *Wild Conquest* (1950) and *The Fair House* (1955), by Jack Cope (1913–91), capture the sense of divine election infusing Dutch Afrikaaner culture, from the Great Trek of the 1830s and 1840s to the formal institution of apartheid in 1948. Published that year, *Cry the Beloved Country*, by Alan Paton (1903–88), dramatizes the debilitating climate of fear and violence such a reading of Christianity foments. *Down Second Avenue* (1959), by Ezekial Mphahlele (1919–2008), regrets Christianity becoming the 'churchianity' of Christians too preoccupied with worldly status. Other authors echo Paton. André Brink, for example, wrote *Looking on Darkness* (*Kennis van die aand*) (1974) in the 'sacred' language of Afrikaans, then translated it into English, medium and message calling into question Afrikaaner self-fashioning as a chosen people. An intensely biblical sensibility pervades novels as diverse as *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980), *Age of Iron* (1990) and *Disgrace* (1999), by J.M. Coetzee, exposing the indifference that may underlie apparent magnanimity and the humiliation that often accompanies genuine charity in the fallen world of apartheid and its difficult aftermath of unrealistic expectations. Later works like Antjie Krog's *Country of My Skull* (1998) and Zoë Wicomb's *Playing in the Light* (2006) bring to mind the role of Anglican Archbishop Desmond Tutu and traditions of Christian testimony in the efforts of the Truth and Reconciliation

Commission (1996–8) to salve the wounds of apartheid, while Stephen Gray invokes a Christian hymn in ironic critique of President Thabo Mbeki's refusal to recognize the plague of HIV and AIDS: 'Onward Christian soldiers marching as to war, / From ward to church, then repeat as before.'¹⁴

In addition to the broadly Christian ethos of settler culture, missions in Australia, Canada and New Zealand served not only as outposts of European expansion, but also as centres for the dissemination of Western intellectual and technological knowledge to indigenous communities, introduced through schools, hospitals, farms and cottage industries, and the printing press. Numerous writers portray missions and missionaries of various stripes.¹⁵ Wiebe's *First and Vital Candle* (1966), for example, suggests that both Catholic and Protestant missions to Inuit peoples were interested only in ecclesiastical formalities, whereas non-conformists like the novel's 'Good News Man', the Reverend Joshua Bishop, converted by example.¹⁶ *Black Robe* (1985), by Brian Moore (1921–99), explores the interplay between indigenous and European cultures in *La Nouvelle France*. Tortured by self-doubt and the Iroquois, a zealous Father Laforgue resolves to restore the Jesuit mission of Saint Marie, but ends a sadder and wiser man, his compassion for the doomed Hurons displacing doctrinal dogmatism. Indigenous writer Tomson Highway's *Kiss of the Fur Queen* (1998) is far less sanguine about Catholic ministrations. Father Roland Lafleur, Oblate of Mary Immaculate, sexually abuses Cree Indian boys at Birch Lake Residential School, a fictional instance of a nationwide system of educational institutions intended to solve Canada's 'Indian question'. Originating in a 'Report on Industrial Schools for Indians and Half-Breeds' (1879), by Nicholas Flood Davin (1840–1901), the church-run, federally financed system totalled eighty institutions at its peak in 1931, the last of which closed only in the mid 1980s. The metaphoric patterning of Highway's novel associates Lafleur with the cannibalistic *weetigo* spirit of ancient Cree myth.

Australian and New Zealand fiction depicts Christian missionaries in a variety of colours, too. In *Capricornia* (1938), by Xavier Herbert (1901–84), the Gospel Mission makes a healthy profit from coconut plantations worked for free by the Reverend Theodore Hollower's Aborigine converts, who receive free Christian indoctrination in return. Randolph Stow's *To the Islands* (1958) portrays a disillusioned Anglican missionary who, mistakenly believing he has killed an Aborigine, flees into the desert, not to avoid justice but to explore the frontiers of his tormented soul. Set in 1937, Herbert's *Poor Fellow My Country* (1975) satirizes denominational rivalries between the teetotaler Reverend James Tasker, head of the Protestant Mission Society, and

Father Glascock, who welcomes visitors to the Leopold Islands Mission with a beer. Aboriginal Australian perspectives have in large part tended to perpetuate these unfavourable images. Mudrooroo's *Dr Wooreddy's Prescription for Enduring the Ending of the World* (1983), for example, portrays Christian collusion in the economic exploitation of Aboriginals, while Philip McLaren's *Sweet Water, Stolen Land* (1993) offers us a crazed missionary who murders settlers so that panicked authorities will herd Aborigines into the mission station where he might convert them. Later antipodean novels like Judy Corbalis's *Tapu* (1997) and Annamarie Jagose's *Slow Water* (2003) further complicate the picture. Beginning in 1814, *Tapu* follows the story of evangelists Thomas (1778–1832) and Jane (1781–1866) Kendall, who violate the *tapu* world of the Maoris they hope to convert, while *Slow Water* draws a sympathetic picture of William Yate (1802–77), an Anglican missionary whose homosexual affair with a crew member, shipboard from London to Sydney, draws attention to earlier relationships with Maori boys in Waimate, New Zealand. Yate returns to Dover, England, where he ministers to seamen till his death in 1877.

The missionary presence in Africa is still more complex. Before the Abolition of Slavery Act (1833), sponsored by the evangelical William Wilberforce, delegitimized the trade across the British Empire, many clerics easily reconciled the trafficking of humans with their Christian calling. The Reverend Thomas Elias Thompson (1708–73), for example, ministered aboard slave ships running between West Africa and the Caribbean and received plaudits from the Archbishop of Canterbury for *The African Trade for Negro Slaves, Shewn to Be Consistent with Principles of Humanity, and with the Laws of Revealed Religion* (1772). Thompson's book recognizes the plight of slaves, but finds sound theological reasons for the trade. Unsurprisingly, the legacy of Christian collusion in slavery persists as a ubiquitous, often unspecified backstory to postcolonial African writing. Second, Christian evangelism, and in particular mission schooling, looms large in the history of relations between Europe and the peoples of Africa. By the late nineteenth century, the British and the French were the dominant powers across the continent. In anglophone and francophone domains alike, Christian missions and colonial education became so thoroughly intertwined that the mission classroom not only instilled Christian beliefs and practices into African converts to established churches, but also laid the foundations for indigenous churches on the one hand, and on the other, produced educated Africans capable of spearheading powerful independence movements.

Instances of postcolonial African fiction concerned with mission schooling include Peter Abrahams's novel, *A Wreath for Udomo* (1956), in which Anglican clerics take away the brightest boy in a South African village to educate him.

When he returns to join the liberation movement, Udomo is murdered by his own people, who fear his learning. In *Blade among the Boys* (1962), by Nigeria's Onuora Nzekwu, Catholic schooling makes a priest of Patrick Ikenga, who rejects his ancestral birthright and allows his family line to die. Missions disrupt tribal ties in Nigerian John Munonye's *The Only Son* (1966) and Malawian Legson Kayira's *Jingala* (1969), too. In another vein, *The Mourned One* (1968), by Zimbabwe's Stanlake J.W.T. Samkange (1922–88), tells of Ndatshan, native teacher at a mission school, who is falsely accused of rape and sentenced to death. The missionary testifies against him, Christian virtue yielding to legalism and racial bigotry. In *A Fighter for Freedom* (1983), by Zimbabwe's Edmund O.Z. Chipamaunga, Tinashe, the mission school's star pupil, joins the movement against Ian Smith's racist Rhodesia Front. Also set in Zimbabwe, Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1988) and *The Book of Not* (2006) dramatize the ambiguous effects of Protestant and Catholic education upon the traditional roles of Shona women. Nor do mission schools fare well in Central African francophone writing. In *La Mort faite homme* (1986), by Zaire's Pius Ngandu Nkashama, the Father Director of a Catholic institution is a bullying hypocrite. But not all accounts are negative. In *Weep Not, Child* (1962), for example, Kenya's Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o describes a mission school as 'a paradise where children from all walks of life and of different religious faiths could work together without any [race] consciousness'.¹⁷ And despite her cousin Ndatshan's fate, Chibinha marries a Catholic schoolteacher, Mayikoro, in a wedding ceremony at once Bantu and Christian in Samkange's *The Mourned One*.

The legacy of missionary education plays out in verse and prose from across Africa in numerous ways. Among West African poets, Achebe's 'Christmas in Biafra (1969)' contrasts an emaciated baby of the Biafran War (1967–70), 'flat like a dead lizard', with the '[c]hild Jesus, plump wise-looking and rose-cheeked', in a Christmas crèche constructed by 'good nuns' outside a Biafran hospital.¹⁸ In fact, the war claimed the life of Christopher Okigbo (1932–67), whose poetry draws ironically upon a number of things Christian. Conceived as a Catholic mass, but offered to 'Mother Idoto', the sacred stream of Okigbo's village, 'Easter Sequence' portrays ancestral gods purifying themselves in imitation of the 'stations of the cross', while 'Silences' renders the Congolese leader, Patrice Émery Lumumba (1925–61), as a Christ figure, betrayed to Belgian colonial authorities by local rivals, while comrades stand by impotently, like nuns lamenting their saviour's death.¹⁹ The verses of Ghanaian poets Kwesi Brew (1928–2007) and Kofi Awoonor abound in Christian iconography, as well. Awoonor's 'The Cathedral' portrays Christianity as a 'huge, senseless cathedral of doom', its grand architecture a pretentious contrast to

nature's sacred landscape.²⁰ Similar sentiments characterize the work of West African francophone writers associated with the Négritude movement, notably Senegal's Léopold Senghor (1906–2001) and David Diop (1927–60). Senghor's 'Snow upon Paris' (1945) identifies the suffering of Africans with the suffering of Christ, a theme Diop reworks in 'Nigger Tramp' (1956).²¹ Again, however, some poets find images of love and justice in Christianity. In 'Prayer for Peace' (1948), Senghor writes of '[c]rucified Africa' and appeals to Jesus to forgive France her imperial sins: 'Bless this nation that brought me Your Good News, Lord.'²² Similarly, in poems like 'Apocalypse', 'The Outsider' and 'The Philosopher', Sierra Leone's Syl Cheney-Coker pleads with God to purge Africa of white colonial and black neo-colonial oppressors alike.²³

Christianity influences West African fiction in numerous ways. *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* (1952), by Nigeria's Amos Tutuola (1920–97) blends indigenous folklore and Christian beliefs, a strategy Tutuola repeats in *Ajayi and His Inherited Poverty* (1967), in which the title character uses an unexpected inheritance to build churches to bring people to Christ. By contrast, in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958), the missionaries Mr Brown and Mr Smith represent the benevolent and domineering aspects of colonial Christianity, while his *Arrow of God* (1964) dramatizes antagonism between John Goodcountry, an indigenous Christian missionary, and Ezeulu, titular head of the priesthood of the traditional god Ulu. In both novels, the python does double duty as an Igbo sacred totem and as a Christian figure of original sin. Similarly, in *The Land's Lord* (1976), by Nigeria's T. Obinkaram Echewa, the protagonist Philip commits suicide, unable to reconcile Christianity and his vocation as Njoku, the acolyte of the yam god of his people. In another vein, tensions between Christian and traditional attitudes towards wedlock enliven T.M. Aluko's *One Man, One Wife* (1959) and *Efuru* (1966), by Flora Nwapa (1931–93), both Nigerian. While marriage between a Muslim and a Christian represents hope for interfaith peace in Soyinka's *The Interpreters* (1965), Catholic dogma prevents a character from securing a divorce from an unfaithful wife in *The Second Round* (1965), by Gambia's Lenrie Peters. In Soyinka's *Season of Anomy* (1973), Taiila admires the chaste serenity of Christian nuns, though the novel interlaces biblical references to Herod and the parable of the sower with Yoruba, Graeco-Roman and even Hindu iconography. The tenets of liberation theology inform *Search Sweet Country* (1986), by Ghana's B. Kojo Laing. 'The church suffers with the people', asserts Osofo, assistant to Bishop Budu of the 'Anglican Church of the Smiling Saints'.²⁴ And 'the church should know healing trees and sacred trees, powders and herbs', for recognizing the needs of the people includes recognizing the importance of traditional spirituality.²⁵

Indignant lament characterizes the work of several East and South African poets. *Valley of a Thousand Hills* (1937), by South Africa's Herbert I.E. Dhlomo (1903–56), portrays whites as satanic and the indigenous African as a Christ figure, nailed to the 'Cross of Truth Divine'.²⁶ In *Song of Lawino: A Lament* (1966), Uganda's Okot p'Bitek (1931–82) satirizes African converts, Christian names, the Eucharist as cannibalism, and missionary priests as liars and lechers. Biblical figures inspire other poems in other ways, however. Redolent of apartheid injustices, Dennis Brutus's 'Our aim our dreams our destinations' echoes Job's rebellion against God: 'Is He the infinite hangman? / Executioner? / Torturer?'²⁷ And in *Another Nigger Dead* (1972), Uganda's Taban lo Liyong regrets the way in which missionaries have rendered belief of any kind almost impossible: 'id have loved god more / had christian missionaries confirmed my superstitions / its hard to believe / after being undeceived.'²⁸ Kenya's Jared Angira echoes this complaint. Failing as pastors, the priests in 'They Will Go On' are calculating professionals who 'insist / on preparing soul / before the body', according 'to those laws / Hypothesised / by the church's consultants', while 'Unction' questions their intermediary authority: 'my sins / confessed / through the oval hole / forgiven by father / for a millet basket'.²⁹ In the last analysis, though, lo Liyong's 'bless the african coups' expresses hope for a Christ-like resurrection of African culture, and for Angira, the shortcomings of the Catholic Church do not diminish God's goodness: 'I have suffered enough / after all / You are God of mercy / God of grace.'³⁰

East and South African novelists also make use of Christian scriptural, historical and theological motifs. In Ngũgĩ's *The River Between* (1965), conflict arises between the traditionalist Kamenno and the Christian Makuyu villages when the Siriana mission's Reverend Mr Livingston tries to ban female circumcision. Cynicism haunts two novels from Zimbabwe. For Shona characters in Charles Mungoshi's *Waiting for the Rain* (1975), '[to] mouth incantations to the ancestors with the same mouth that addresses the God of the Bible' risks 'blasphemy', so better to pray 'neither to [the] ancestors nor to the God of the Bible', while consorting with Smith's Rhodesian regime compromises the moral authority of the Anglican missionary church in *The House of Hunger* (1978), by Dambudzo Marechera (1952–87).³¹ Focusing on ethical issues, *Veneer of Love* (1975), by Tanzania's Osija Mwanbundu, regrets how 'big Christian boys and girls' have transformed an ancient Wanyakyusa game of hideaway into an opportunity for clandestine sex-play, while a youngster in Timothy Wangusa's *Upon This Mountain* (1989) catches the head teacher fornicating with the girl he loves on the altar of the mission school chapel.³² Religion and politics intertwine in Brink's *Praying Mantis* (2005), which

reimagines the ministry of the London Missionary Society's J. T. van der Kemp (1747–1811) and James Read (1777–1852), who founded the Cape colony's Bethelsdorp community in 1803. The missionaries abandon the convert Kupido Kakkerlak (c. 1760–c.1825), who reverts to ancestral tradition, symbolized by the praying mantis, which Khoikhoi mythology associates with the trickster figure, Heitsi-Eibib. Again, though, some writers represent the missionary legacy with approval. Faced with a choice between Gikuyu polygamy and Christian monogamy, for example, the protagonist of Stephen Ngubiah's *A Curse from God* (1970) rejects the latter, then turns into an alcoholic wife-beater and commits suicide.

Central African writers raise similar issues, especially those writing in French. Verses in *Le Mauvais Sang* (1955) and *Épitomé* (1962), by Zaire's Felix Tchicaya U'Tam'si (1931–88), repeat tropes of 'blood', 'wound' and 'water' to identify the poet's prophetic self-exposure with Christ's self-sacrifice. 'Le Contempteur' contrasts the 'Christ' of the Catholic Church with the 'Christ' of black African suffering: 'How dirty you are Christ, to be with the bourgeois', while 'thorn for thorn / we have in common a crown of thorns'.³³ Several central African novelists frame Catholic hypocrisy in terms of sexual immorality. Both Father Gilbert in *Houseboy* (1956), by Ferdinand Léopold Oyono, and Father Drumont in *The Poor Christ of Bomba* (1956), by Mongo Beti (1932–2001), assume Catholicism will bring civility to Cameroon; instead, French decadence brings gonorrhoea and syphilis. Later works from Zaire expose the extent to which missionary success may result in African self-degradation. In Thomas Mpoyi-Buatu's *La Re-production* (1986), a black priest revels in scatological sex with a whore, while Thomas Bolya Baenga's *Cannibale* (1986) features another black cleric indulging in necrophilia and masturbating over a Christian altar. Less lurid, though equally scandalous, a priest in Oyono's *The Old Man and the Medal* (1956) banishes a respected tribal elder for drinking palm wine, though the old man takes alcohol only to relieve rheumatic pain. As before, though, glimmers of light flicker across this dismal Central African picture. Throughout his work, U'Tam'si invokes the Christian gospel of love, and V. Y. Mudimbe's *Entre les eaux* (1973), which is subtitled 'Dieu, un prêtre, la révolution', dramatizes the struggles of a black priest to enact an indigenous African gospel, where 'God would neither have the face of a banker, nor one that has been sculpted by [western] civilization'.³⁴ Similarly, *The White Man of God* (1980), by Kenjo Jumbam (d. 2005), suggests a common humanity between European and African in its depiction of Father Cosmas, a compassionate young priest who fights tirelessly to prevent an epidemic among the local people, only to die from the disease himself.

Finally, vernacular writings in verse and prose portray the missionary legacy to Africa, as well. In *Umulirimbyi wa nyili-ibiremwa* (The Song of the Master of Creation, 1952), Catholic cleric Alexis Kagame (1912–81) transforms a traditional Kinyarwandar praise-song into a triumphalist Tutsi epic locating Rwandan history within a Christian mythic cycle, from creation to the world's end, purgatory, heaven and hell. Prose narratives like the Bemba *Abapatili bafika ku babemba* (The Catholic Priests Arrive among the Bemba, 1956), by Zaire's Stephen A. Mpashi (b. 1920), the Ndebele *Uvusezindala* (In Days Gone By, 1958) and the Shona *Rudo ibofu* (Love Is Blind, 1962), by Zimbabwe's David Ndoda and Patrick F. Chakaipa (1932–2003), glorify the Catholic Church for saving indigenous Africans from tribal superstitions, and even from the ravages of slavery. Among later authors, Ngũgĩ advocates vernacular writing, despite commercial and professional pressures in favour of global languages. Like his earlier fiction in English, the Gikuyu novels *Caitani mutharaba-ini* (1980; translated as *Devil on the Cross*, 1982), *Matigari ma njirungi* (1986; translated as *Matigari*, 1984) and *Mũrogi wa kagoogo* (2004; translated as *Wizard of the Crow*, 2006) draw upon biblical and theological motifs to reveal ambivalence towards historical Christianity. *Caitani mutharaba-ini* parodies the beatitudes from Jesus's seminal 'Sermon on the Mount': 'Blessed is the man who burns down another man's house / And in the morning joins him in grief, / For he shall be called merciful'.³⁵ Ngũgĩ politicizes the biblical figures of the righteous prophet and the suffering servant for the title character of *Matigari*, while the Genesis myth of the Tower of Babel serves as governing trope in *Mũrogi wa kagoogo*. Here, sycophants propose 'Heavenscrape', a giant edifice designed to enable His Excellency President the Second Mwathani to speak to God daily, suggesting that the tyrant may eventually usurp the divinity's role as 'lord and creator of humankind'.³⁶

Christianity also figures importantly in the work of Caribbean poets and novelists, especially those of African descent. In Derek Walcott's words: 'What was captured from the captor was his God, for the subject African had come to the New World' and 'understood too quickly the Christian rituals of a whipped, tortured, and murdered redeemer'.³⁷ In *Another Life* (1973), Walcott enlists scripture and theology to mediate the travails of diaspora and his role as collective autobiographer of Saint Lucia. Similar in sentiment, *The Arrivants* (1973), by Barbadian poet Edward Kamau Brathwaite, draws in part upon Christian tropes in an effort to fashion 'nation language' for African cultures displaced to the Caribbean.³⁸ Later, Walcott's epic *Omeros* (1990) casts the No Pain Café's Ma Kilman as a female Christ-figure for the New World, while another Saint Lucian, John Robert Lee, domesticates the Christian in more

conventional ways. In the title poem of *Possessions* (1984), Lee casts the poet as caretaker of Christian virtues: 'The times aren't good for poetry or for faith', Lee laments, 'all that is left us now is careful patience, / that stubborn heart of love, hope, faith, / the ordering line and the turning word.'³⁹ But if the determination of these lines betrays diffidence, it is not the diffidence of despair. On the contrary, as 'Ground' makes clear, Lee finds strength in doubt: 'Let certainties of doubt make faith a firm / foundation', he writes.⁴⁰ By contrast, *A Rainbow for the Christian West* (1967), by Haiti's René Depestre, summons ancestral West African deities to avenge Catholic complicity in the neo-colonial atrocities of François 'Papa Doc' Duvalier (1907–71), though the narrative closes with reconciliation between Erzulie, the *vodun* goddess of love, and Western icons Helen of Troy and the Virgin Mary, Mother of God.

Caribbean fiction makes extensive use of Christian materials, too. Addressing black pupils at Groddeck's Boy School, for example, a white inspector in *In the Castle of My Skin* (1953), by Barbadian George Lamming, explains *Pax Britannicum* as 'the job assigned to [the British] by God ... And together we shall always walk in the will of God.'⁴¹ But the cosy forecasts of colonial officials hardly match the desperation depicted in Jamaican novels like *A Quality of Violence* (1959), by Andrew Salkey (1928–95). Here, members of a Pacomania congregation scourge one another to death exorcising demons they deem responsible for a drought. Jan Carew's *The Wild Coast* (1958) stresses the divided consciousness of Guyanese villagers, who 'wore their Christianity like the clothes they put on to go to church on Sunday only, for the rest of the week the Shango gods Dunball, Legba, Moko were theirs'.⁴² In *While Gods Are Falling* (1965), by Trinidad and Tobago's Earl Lovelace, God is simply absent: '[L]ook at this city and ask really ask yourself, if there is anything or anyone like God in it and you must answer no, there is no God here.'⁴³ Elsewhere, contrasts in liturgical styles reflect economic, social and cultural issues. In Austin Clarke's 'Easter Carol', a Pentecostal service allows an elderly woman to 'testify how God helped her when she didn't know how the hell she could get six cents to buy flour and oil and lard to make bakes for her children', unlike the Anglican Church, where the minister 'used words that simple common people could not understand'.⁴⁴ Christian hypocrisy preoccupies other Caribbean writers. In *Aelred's Sin* (1998), by Trinidad and Tobago's Lawrence Scott, creole Jean-Marc de la Borde joins an English monastery, taking the name 'Aelred'. Novices are directed to gather '[a]lways in threes, never in twos', but Aelred is drawn into affairs with white monks who are attracted to his 'golden' body and 'darkness'.⁴⁵ As always, though, not every depiction of Christianity is unsympathetic. In Zee Edgell's *Beka Lamb* (1982), Sister Gabriela, a kindly teacher at

Saint Cecilia's Academy, encourages Beka to learn about herself and her country by assigning an oral history project for an essay competition. Beka wins the competition. On a grander scale, Wilson Harris's *The Guyana Quartet* (*The Palace of the Peacock*, 1960; *The Far Journey of Oudin*, 1961; *The Whole Armour*, 1962; *The Secret Ladder*, 1963) and *The Carnival Trilogy* (*Carnival*, 1985; *The Infinite Rehearsal*, 1987; *The Four Banks of the River of Space*, 1990), which are generally agreed to be among the most challenging of postcolonial writings, blend Christian iconography with African, Amerindian, Graeco-Roman, Hindu and Islamic themes and tropes into the multilayered varieties of spiritual syncretism that characterize Harris's persistent efforts to conjure visions of hope out of the historical horrors of colonial and imperial oppression.

Lastly, we have depictions of Christianity in South Asia. Early postcolonial writings like *Untouchable* (1935), by Mulk Raj Anand (1905–2004), and *Swami and Friends* (1935), by R.K. Narayan (1906–2001), adopt a gently sardonic attitude towards the Christian. In Anand's story, Salvation Army Colonel Hutchinson is confident Jesus 'sacrificed himself to help us all, for the rich and the poor, for Brahmin and Bangi', but Bakha the toilet-cleaner remains convinced that the technology of the flush lavatory offers more effective salvation from untouchability.⁴⁶ At the start of Narayan's novel, we hear of Swaminathan's dislike for Malgudi's Albert Mission School, especially Ebenezer, the 'fanatic' scripture teacher.⁴⁷ Swami enjoys heroic biblical stories, but challenges Ebenezer's assertion that Jesus was 'a real God'.⁴⁸ 'Why did he eat flesh and fish and drink wine?' asks the brahmin boy, who cannot reconcile divinity with such practices.⁴⁹ Happier portraits appear in *Nectar in a Sieve* (1954) and *Pleasure City* (1982), by Kamala Markandaya (1924–2004). Cast as a flawed Christ-figure in *Nectar in the Sieve*, the medical missionary Dr Kennington grows increasingly exasperated at the fatalistic attitude of the villagers he is trying to help. 'It is no use whatsoever to suffer in silence', he protests to a villager, '[t]here is no grandeur in want or in endurance.'⁵⁰ By contrast, in *Pleasure City*'s Mr and Mrs Bridie run a school for impoverished fisherman's children 'in one shuttered room of their tumbledown house'.⁵¹ Revealing an unusual empathy for the missionary vocation, Markandaya's description of the couple's funeral dissolves long-standing colonial divisions: 'They were buried together, on the same day, in the small cemetery where Indian soil had taken care, over three centuries, of the bones of the missionary English.'⁵²

Later fiction depicts other kinds of South Asian Christianity, notably the Syrian and dalit communities. Famously, these communities collide in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997), at the heart of which lies the love between Ammu, an upper-caste Syrian Christian, and Velutha, a carpenter

and mechanic from the lowly paravan caste, whose technical skills maintain the Paradise Pickles and Preserves factory owned by Ammu's family. Family jealousies and political tensions conspire to deny the couple happiness and both die abandoned and alone, he a sacrificial Christ-figure falsely accused of murder and beaten to death by police for transgressing codes of caste, class and sexual convention. In Roy's words, the ethos of intolerance underlying Velutha's fate 'began long before Christianity arrived in a boat and seeped into Kerala like tea from a tea bag', began with the formulation, interpretation and application of the sacred Hindu *Laws of Manu*, 'the love laws ... [t]he laws that lay down who should be loved, and how. And how much.'⁵³ Although novels like Abraham Eraly's *Night of the Dark Trees* (2006) further explore Syrian Christian life, a larger number of works have appeared portraying dalit Christianity, mostly in the vernacular. Translated from Tamil, Bama Faustina's autobiographical *Karukku* (1992) confirms the complicity of institutional Christianity in the continued oppression of dalits. Entering a convent, Faustina discovers that 'if Dalits become priests or nuns, they are pushed aside and marginalized'.⁵⁴ At once the righteous prophet and suffering servant of biblical tradition, Faustina leaves the convent, urging dalits to remember that they 'were created in the likeness of God' and to live 'with honour, self-respect and with a love towards all humankind [for] this alone is true devotion'.⁵⁵ A few titles depicting dalit Christianity have been written in English, notably Vinod George Joseph's *Hitchhiker* (2005). This novel tells of a lower-caste *verumar* family who convert into the Global Evangelical Church in rural Aaroor, Tamil Nadu. The son, Ebenezer, plans to wed Gayathri, an upper-caste *edayar* girl, but her parents will not accept a *verumar* as son-in-law. Ebenezer's life collapses, as he finds himself caught between the irremovable taint of untouchability and government affirmative action policies to hire untouchables, but not casteless Christians. Here, as we have seen so often elsewhere, the Christianity represented promises a redemption the world will not allow.

Postcolonial literatures and the Abode of Islam

If the history of Christianity is inseparable from the history of European expansion, so also is the history of Islam in many respects a history of empires. The tradition's development, from Muhammad's triumphant return to Mecca from Medina in 630 CE to its present status as the world's second largest and fastest growing religion, includes the empires of the Rashidun (632–61), Umayyad (661–750) and Abbasid (750–1258) caliphates in the Middle East; the Seljuk (1040–1307) and Ayyubid (1169 – c. 1490) dynasties in Central Asia

and the Middle East; the Mamluks in Egypt and Syria (1250–1517); the kingdoms of Mali (1230–1390), Songhay (c. 850–1594), and the Sokoto caliphate (1804–1904) in sub-Saharan Africa; the Safavids of Persia (1501–1722); the Mongol Great Khans (1043–1370); the Mughals of South Asia (1274–1858); and the Ottoman Empire (1281–1924), centred on Istanbul, which means ‘City of Islam’.⁵⁶ Muslim traders and Sufi missionaries, whose work is known as *daʿwa* [‘invitation’], helped to consolidate Islam as the dominant religion in much of the Middle East; North, West and East Africa; and Central, South and Southeast Asia. And in modern times, the migration of Muslims living under non-Muslim rulers, like the Dutch in Southeast Asia, the British in India and the Serbs in Bosnia, has seen majority Sunni (85 per cent) and minority Shi’a (15 per cent) Islam, as well as such heterodox sects as the Ahmadiyya Muslims, disseminated still further, with significant African, Arab, South and Southeast Asian, and Turkish and Bosnian Muslim diaspora communities in Australia, the Caribbean, Europe, North America and the South Pacific.

Like Christianity, Islam assumes a universal mandate, an assumption embodied in the absolute authority of the Qurʾan and in Muhammad’s prophetic role as the bearer of God’s final revelation to humankind. At the existential level, this mandate is expressed as sharia, that is, the systematic interpretation of daily life in terms of religious law derived ultimately from the Qurʾan and from written accounts of Muhammad’s sayings and deeds collectively known as Hadith. Of especial import are the sacred duties of *shahada* (profession of faith), *salat* (regular prayer), *sawm* (fasting during Ramadan), *zakat* (charity) and *hajj* (pilgrimage to Mecca), which together constitute the *arkan al-Islam* (Five Pillars of Islam), as well as *jihad*, which is often translated as ‘holy war’, but which more accurately means ‘striving for moral and spiritual purity’ against both inward impulses and outward temptations to sin. In addition, Arabic, as the language of God’s final revelation, unites Muslims across historical and geographical boundaries within the Abode of Islam. Islam thus features extensively in postcolonial writings, though sustained scholarship on things Islamic, literary and postcolonial remains rare, especially beyond texts in Arabic, and translators into English from Arabic, Urdu, Swahili, Bosnian and other ‘Muslim’ languages often inadvertently silence echoes of the Qurʾan, the Hadith and other Islamic writings, notably the voluminous library of Sufi devotional works.⁵⁷ We ought also to note that certain forms of religious militancy have attracted the prejudicial label ‘Islamist’. This extremism has posed particular worries for Muslim authors, from the *fatwa* (legal opinion) issued in 1989 by Iran’s Ayatollah Ruhollah Musavi Khomeini (1902–89) calling for Salman Rushdie’s death as punishment for the supposed blasphemies of

The Satanic Verses (1988), to less widely known incidents, like the murders of Algerian writers Tahar Djaout (1954–93) and Abdelkader Alloula (1929–94) by the *Groupe islamique armé* and the *Front islamique du djihad armé*.

Writers with roots in former British and French possessions in North and West Africa, where Islam enjoyed a strong presence long before the arrival of modern Europeans, offer an important instance of Islam in postcolonial literatures. The Qur'an, Hadith and Sufi writings resonate throughout this work. Take *Ambiguous Adventure* (1961), an early novel by Senegal's Cheikh Hamidou Kane (1928–80), which opens with the Sufi teacher Thierno drilling the Qur'an into young Samba Diallo and closes with a mystical reverie as Samba dies envisioning 'the place where there is no ambiguity . . . the luminous arena of [God's] duration'.⁵⁸ Subtler references suffuse *Season of Migration to the North* (1966), by Sudan's Tayeb Salih (1929–2009) and *Bound to Violence* (1968), by Mali's Yambo Ouologuem. Beginning and ending with Qur'anic calls of 'Mashallah! wa bismillah!' ('Whatever God wills! And in the name of God!'), *Bound to Violence* rehearses Sufi conventions of irreverent parody to satirize alike colonial French arrogance and the false devotion of the tyrannical 'Saif' dynasty.⁵⁹ By contrast, 'the Prophet El-Khidr', unnamed counsellor to Moses in the Qur'an's eighteenth *sura* (chapter) haunts *Season of Migration*, which appropriates Islam's founding event, the *hijra* (migration), to conjure parallels between Muhammad, Mecca and Medina and the travels of the story's main characters north from Sudan through Egypt to England and back.⁶⁰ In Tahir Wattar's *The Earthquake* (1974) apocalyptic images from Islamic tradition provide a powerful lexicon for allegorizing the chaos and confusion of Algeria's transition from colonial dependency to independent nationhood, while scripture serves as moral and spiritual touchstone for the Somali patriarch Deeriye, in Nuruddin Farah's *Close Sesame* (1983), who listens 'with elaborate relish to his favourite litanies of the Koran being recited by his favourite sheikh'.⁶¹ For a study in Islamic conservatism, though, we need look no further than Alhaji Usman, the title character of Nigerian Ibrahim Tahir's *The Last Imam* (1984). 'Allah is with me', announces Usman, 'and I fight not for the glory of the world but for the Kingdom of God'.⁶²

At the same time, East and North African literatures reflect the way in which indigenous animist traditions blend with orthodox Islam, as well as tensions associated with the modernizing influence of the secular West. Guinea's Camara Laye (1928–80), for instance, weaves Malinké traditions into *L'Enfant noir* (1953; translated as *The Dark Child*, 1954). When young Fatoman leaves the village to attend French school, his mother gives him a bottle of the water used to wash boards carved with Qur'anic verses, while his father gives him a ram's

horn full of charms for protection against evil spirits. In a parody of Islamic theodicy, the title character of *L'Étrange Destin de Wagrín* (1973; translated as *The Fortunes of Wangrin*, 2000), by Mali's Amadou Hampâté Bâ (1901–91), commits to the Bambara trickster god Gongoloma Sooké, who weeps over good news and guffaws over bad. Libya's Ibrahim al-Koni suggests that spirits may lead the dutiful Muslim to paradise. In his novel *The Bleeding of the Stone* (1990), a modern hunter murders a pious Bedouin herder of rare mountain sheep; he dies cruciform upon an ancient rock painting of 'the great *jinni* ['spirit'], the masked giant rising alongside his dignified *waddan* ['wild sheep'], his face turned towards the *qibla*, awaiting sunrise and praising Almighty God in everlasting prayer'.⁶³ Elsewhere, modernity takes other forms. *Les Bonts de bois de Diou* (1960; translated as *God's Bits of Wood*, 1962), by Senegal's Ousmane Sembène (1923–2007), reimagines a workers' strike on the railway between Dakar and Bamako on the River Niger in 1947. The pious Fa Keita promotes Western ideas about the rights of workers over inequalities perpetuated by hypocritical religious leaders who dally with the French colonial authorities at the expense of their own people. Also Senegalese, Aminata Sow Fall spins a witty twist on such preoccupations in *The Beggars' Strike* (1979). Here, a *marabout* advises an ambitious Director of Public Health to reinstate the Islamic duty of charity by distributing sacrificial meat to beggars he himself has banned from the capital city, in an effort to encourage Western tourists. Adopting a Western tactic in turn, however, the beggars go on strike, perpetuating the official's religious infelicity and precipitating his political downfall. Far more tragic, *Allah Is Not Obligated* (2000), by Côte d'Ivoire's Ahmadou Kourouma (1927–2004), subsumes with bitter irony the brutal effects of modern weapons in the hands of West African child soldiers under the Islamic theodicean apothegm, 'Allah is not obliged to be fair about the things he does here on earth.'

Issues of marriage, motherhood and women's rights preoccupy other West and North African writers. In *Une si longue lettre* (1979; translated as *So Long a Letter*, 1981), by Senegal's Mariama Bâ (1929–81), a devout widow adapts the Islamic practice of *mirasse*, which lays bare the life of the recently deceased, to contrast orthodox Muslim and liberal Western attitudes towards romantic marriage, polygamy, divorce and inheritance. More impassioned, the protagonist of Malika Mokeddem's *The Forbidden Woman* (1993) condemns the 'feminine apartheid' imposed upon rural Algerian women by fundamentalist village elders, and as an exile in France expresses gratitude for the 'invaluable source of freedom' republican *laïcité* permits.⁶⁴ Perhaps wary of simple oppositions between Western and Islamic ways, however, writers like Algeria's Assia

Djebar, Sudan's Leila Aboulela and Egypt's Ahdaf Soueif explore Islam's own resources for improving women's situations. Djebar's *Far from Medina* (1991) exercises the Islamic principle of *ijtihad*, which is related etymologically to *jihad* and means 'independent interpretation'. The novel models a role for contemporary Muslim women by embodying in Muhammad's wives – the Qur'an's 'Mothers of the Believers'⁶⁵ – the virtue of *rahma*, or 'mercy', which the prophet Muhammad himself epitomizes and which is a primary name of God, who is *al-Rahman*, 'the merciful'. In Aboulela's *The Translator* (1999), a devout Muslim widow settles in Scotland with an Islamic Studies scholar who converts from Presbyterianism out of love for her. Islam 'isn't a religion of suffering', writes Aboulela, 'nor is it tied to a particular place'.⁶⁶ More ambitious in range, Soueif's *The Map of Love* (1999) follows an Egyptian family across ten decades and three continents, revisiting along the way the Islamic status of veiling, gender roles, interfaith marriage and reforming works like *The Liberation of Women* (1899) and *The New Woman* (1901), by Qasim Amin (1863–1908).

Also predating the arrival of Europeans, the Muslim presence in Southeast Asia significantly begins with Arab traders and Sufi missionaries in the ninth century and continues with migration from South Asia, especially under British hegemony in the nineteenth century. Not surprisingly, therefore, Islamic themes in Southeast Asian writings are reminiscent of what we have seen in North and West African literatures. Notable for its postcolonial prescience, Achdiat K. Mihadja's *Atheis* (1949) undermines orthodox preoccupations with 'eschatological mysteries' and suggests *kemanusiaan*, that is, 'sheer humanity', as an Islamic liberation theology capable of moving Indonesia beyond Dutch and Japanese hegemony towards a 'classless' society based on relationships of duty 'to Nature, God, our fellow beings and ourselves'.⁶⁷ Awaiting translation, the novella *Robohnya surau kami* (The Collapse of Our Small Mosque, 1956), by Ali Akbar Navis (1924–2003), projects the problems of postcolonial Indonesia onto the Day of Judgment, as God calls the people to task for reducing Islam to formalities: 'You only prefer to practice your religious duties, because they do not need energy', says God, 'whereas I order you to do good, then perform your religious duties'.⁶⁸ Dramatizing Indonesia's nationalist independence struggles, *The Buru Quartet* (*This Earth of Mankind* [*Bumi manusia*], 1980; *Child of All Nations* [*Anak semua bangsa*], 1980; *Footsteps* [*Jejak langkah*], 1985; *House of Glass* [*Rumah kaca*], 1988), by Pramoedya Ananta Toer (1925–2006), offers an explicitly materialist religiosity in which the main protagonist, Minke, establishes the grassroots *Syarikat dagang Islam* (Association of Islamic Trade) so that in postcolonial Indonesia 'a native middle

class . . . would determine life in the Indies, with Islam as a basis for solidarity and free trade'.⁶⁹

Other aspects of Southeast Asian Islam appear in the work of Malaysian writers. In *Srengenge: A Novel from Malaysia* (1973), Shahnnon Ahmad interweaves animist and Islamic tropes. Meaning 'sun' in Javanese, *Srengenge* is named for the wild mountain home of spirits venerated in a remote village in the frontier region of Sik. When modernizers wish to clear the mountain to make rice paddies, the village leader Imam Hamad mysteriously dies, apparently the victim of an avenging spirit. Villagers interpret Hamad's demise as the will of God and revert to their fatalistic ways. Elsewhere, another of Ahmad's Malaysian peasant characters sums up such fatalism: 'Life and death, dearth and plenty, are in the hands of God.'⁷⁰ In *Kemarau di lembah: Drought on the Meadows* (1968), by the activist Kassim Ahmad, poems in parallel Malay and English subject to Islamic humanist scrutiny the injustices and hypocrisies both of British and American hegemony in Southeast Asia and of an anachronistic Malay sultanate and reactionary clerical establishment. *Sajak-sajak saleh: Poems Sacred and Profane* (1987), by Salleh ben Joned, is similarly scathing of Islamic conservatives: 'Armies of the Dark', for example, lambasts the 'silent *jihad* against the word' of fundamentalism's 'enthusiastic herd', who, like rats, termites, worms and silverfish, wreak havoc not only on libraries of Western learning and the colonial and imperial power they represent, but on 'every product of the mind'.⁷¹ Related issues are raised in Shahnnon Ahmad's *Tok guru* (1988), which satirizes a lascivious cleric's abuse of polygamy, and *Tivi* (1995), in which television represents the threat of Western immorality to traditional Islamic values, though these novels await translation into English.

Writers from South Asia and the South Asian diaspora communities in East and South Africa, North America, Southeast Asia, Australia, the Caribbean, the South Pacific and the United Kingdom have created a third important library of postcolonial texts portraying Islamic beliefs and practices. The coincidence of Arab and South Asian influences in East Africa produces a different tone from the North and West African corpus, in part because of the contribution of Ismaili Shia and Ahmadiyya Muslims, whose forebears arrived from South Asia as British indentured labour. Translations into English of Swahili texts are scarce, but Tanzanian novels like *Siku ya watenzi wote* (*The Day of Reckoning*, 1968), by Shaaban bin Robert (1909–62), Euphrase Kezilahabi's *Dunia uwanja wa fujo* (*The World Is a Chaotic Place*, 1975), and Said Ahmed Mohamed's *Kiza katika Nuru* (*Darkness within Light*, 1988), the plays of Ebrahim N. Hussein, also Tanzanian, and the poetry of Kenya's Abdilatif Abdalla variously interweave motifs from Western democratic politics, Christian ethics and African notions of *ujamaa* or

'familyhood' with Qur'anic visions of justice and paradise and Sufi teachings on charity and communal responsibility. Authors in English, like Moyez G. Vassanji and Abdulrazak Gurnah, locate East African Islam within the transnational context of the Indian Ocean littoral and beyond. Vassanji's novels *The Gunny Sack* (1989) and *The Book of Secrets* (1992), as well as the stories collected in *Uhuru Street* (1991), explore ways in which the intertwining of religion and ethnicity grounded Isma'ili efforts to negotiate German and British colonial rule in East Africa, decolonization and the indigenous nationalist prejudices that forced many South Asian Africans into exile in the 1960s and 1970s. Set just before World War I, Gurnah's *Paradise* (1994) reworks the Qur'anic reworking of the biblical story of Joseph. Sold into bondage, Gurnah's Yusuf falls in love with his master's second wife. The paradisaical bliss of scripture eludes Yusuf, however, and he joins a company of German *askaris*, as imperial and colonial Europe draw East Africa into the horrors of 1914.

Indentured workers also landed in South Africa, as well as other South Asian Muslims independently seeking economic opportunities. These groups swelled the country's Muslim population of Cape Malays, descendants of Dutch East India Company slaves. Set in the 1830s, Rayda Jacobs's *The Slave Book* (1998) recovers the story of this community, for whom Islam meant solace and solidarity. By contrast, writers like Achmat Dangor and Ahmed Essop explore the conflation of racial distinctions and religious prejudices during and after apartheid. In Dangor's *Kafka's Curse* (1997), a coloured Muslim recreates himself as a Jew to gain white acceptance, then endures a lingering death for supposedly denying 'his station in life, the *takdier* – the destiny – of religion, language, and people into which all humans are born'.⁷² Such dislocations persist in South Africa's post-apartheid 'Rainbow Nation'. Included in Essop's *The King of Hearts and Other Stories* (1997), 'The Silk Scarf' portrays black shoppers misreading a South Asian merchant's abstinence from alcohol as a sign of Islamic militancy, while a parliamentarian's traditional Muslim dress prompts a similar reaction in *The Third Prophecy* (2004). More propitious pictures of Islam emerge elsewhere, however. In Jacobs's *Confessions of a Gambler* (2003), the devout Abeeda Ariefdien's life almost collapses under the weight of a gambling addiction exacerbated by the discovery that her gay son is dying from AIDS. Gambling and homosexuality are both *haram* ('forbidden') in Islam, but a liberal cleric helps Abeeda work through the challenges to her faith. 'The right thing by God', she concludes, 'meant not hurting people.'⁷³ As if to confirm the judiciousness of this theodicy, the novel closes with Abeeda marrying her deceased sister's widower, whom she had secretly loved from childhood.

Other South Asian Muslims went as indentured labour to Southeast Asia, the Caribbean and Fiji. Such novels as Lloyd Fernando's *Green is the Colour* (1993) and K.S. Maniam's *In a Far Country* (1993) reflect the way postcolonial isomorphism between puritanical Islam and Malay ethnicity marginalizes Muslim South Asians. Somewhat analogously, depictions of South Asian Fijian life, like Raymond C. Pillai's *The Celebration: A Collection of Short Stories* (1980) and Satendra P. Nandan's *The Wounded Sea* (1991), reveal how the shared legacy of indenture and ongoing differences with indigenous Fijians, who are mainly Christian, cloud religious tensions among Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs. In fiction from Guyana and Trinidad and Tobago, which enjoy the Caribbean's largest South Asian presence, Islamic identifiers jostle among competing signs of ethnic, national and even religious adherence. Take the way *The Junbie Bird* (1961), by Trinidad's Ismith Khan (1925–2002), depicts the festival of Muharram, when Shi'ites mourn the death of Muhammad's grandson Husayn, killed by Sunnis at the battle of Kerbala (680). In Khan's novel, the festival's prohibition against aggression has metamorphosed into stick-fighting contests popular with Shi'ites and Sunnis, Hindus and Christians alike. Similarly, Willi Chen's *King of the Carnival and Other Stories* (1988) gently satirizes Islamic proscriptions against alcohol and pork: in 'No Pork, Cheese', for example, a Trinidadian Muslim gets drunk with Hindu friends and to their amusement vomits violently after unwittingly eating pork and cheese sandwiches. In early Guyanese fiction like *Song of the Sugar Canes* (1957), by Sheik Sadeek (1921–87), Islamic religious identity often blurs into South Asian ethnic identity. But ancient prohibitions against religious intermarriage between Muslims and Hindus haunt later works like Roy Heath's *The Shadow Bride* (1988), while Ryhaan Shah's *A Silent Life* (2004) portrays a Guyanese student in London bonding not with undergraduates from India or the Caribbean, but with a Nigerian girl, because both are Muslims.

The postcolonial literatures of Australia and Canada also feature South Asian diaspora Islam. Mena Kashmiri Abdullah's *Time of the Peacock* (1965), written in collaboration with poet Ray Matthews, depicts an idyllic upbringing near Bundarra, New South Wales. An earlier ballad, 'The Red Koran' (1954), captures 'the wild delights' of these years, spoiled only by 'the white child's scorn', against which '[t]he wandering *hadji*, Muhammad Khan', provided comfort and strength with readings from 'his red Koran'.⁷⁴ Adib Khan's later novels, *Seasonal Adjustments* (1994) and *Spiral Road* (2007), present a less appealing picture. Of ancient Mughal *zamindari* lineage, the protagonist of *Seasonal Adjustments* finds a privileged education leaves him suspended between 'the Brothers of the Holy Cross and the Peshawari mullah whose job it was to

indoctrinate us at home after [Catholic mission] school', an ambiguous situation only exacerbated in adulthood, where the bigotry of Muslim parents in Bangladesh and Catholic in-laws in Australia have him resisting all religious instruction for his daughter.⁷⁵ Still less hopeful, *Spiral Road* leaves Masud Alam wavering in Melbourne between 'agnosticism and atheism', alienated from family in Bangladesh for whom 'restoring Muslim dignity' means ending 'global dominance by white nations, especially the English-speaking ones'.⁷⁶ Canada offers happier options in Nazneen Sadiq's *Camels Can Make You Homesick and Other Stories* (1985) and Vassanji's *No New Land* (1991). Born in Toronto to Muslim immigrants from Pakistan, Sadiq's schoolgirl Shanaz Ali mediates the details of her faith to her 'best friend . . . Jennifer Morris': 'There were two Eids every year', writes Sadiq, 'It was like having two Christmases'.⁷⁷ In Vassanji's novel, Nurdin Lalani's migration from Dar es Salaam, which means 'Abode of Peace', rehearses Isma'ili eschatology, as the novel's religious leader, Missionary, declares 'Canada a veritable Amarapur, the eternal city, the land of the west in quest of which his community had embarked some four hundred years ago'.⁷⁸

Fiction portraying South Asian Muslims in Great Britain also thematizes the consequences of migration on attitudes towards faith. Ghettoized in communities revolving around home and mosque, Muslims of South Asian heritage feature in works set in London, like the novels *The Housing Lark* (1965) and *Moses Ascending* (1975), by Samuel Selvon (1923–94), and collections of short stories like Farrukh Dhondy's *East End at Your Feet* (1976) and *Come to Mecca* (1978). In Dhondy's 'Salt on a Snake's Tail', the language of religion captures the frustration of many migrant Muslims: 'This is jihad [*sic*], a holy war', says the Bangladeshi Khalil, '[i]f we want to stay in this country we have to fight'.⁷⁹ Dramatizing the migration not just of people, but of texts, values and the word of God, Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* includes magic realist sequences which satirize Muhammad and his family and belief in the literal infallibility of the Qur'an. Revealing a potential for militancy among young South Asian Muslims, students in Hanif Kureishi's *The Black Album* (1995) join an international campaign to burn *The Satanic Verses*. 'We fight for our people who are being tortured in Palestine, Afghanistan, Kashmir', they declare.⁸⁰ Here and there *The Black Album* celebrates the harmony in diversity of the migrant South Asian community: the congregation of a local mosque includes businessmen in expensive suits, London Underground and Post Office workers, old men in *salwar kamiz* fiddling with beads, ponytailed computer techies, and '[f]orty Ethiopians . . . to the side of one room, addressed by one of their number in robes'.⁸¹ But elsewhere ambiguities persist. Militant Islamic groups appear in

Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* (2000) and Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* (2003), and in Nadeem Aslam's *Maps for Lost Lovers* (2004), honour killings, forced marriages, notions of cultural purity and strict gender roles associated with reactionary readings of the Qur'an, Hadith and sharia define life in an unnamed provincial town the Pakistani immigrants themselves call *Dasht-e-Tanhaii*, Urdu for 'The Desert of Loneliness', even though a conservative matriarch recognizes that in Islam 'only one thing was required: love'.⁸²

As we have seen, South Asian diaspora writers and their characters sometimes glance back at the effects of the British presence on Muslim life in the subcontinent. This topos has preoccupied other authors. Expressing the first distinctively Muslim voice in South Asian postcolonial writing in English, *Twilight in Delhi* (1940), by India's Ahmed Ali (1910–94), laments 'the decay of a whole culture'.⁸³ Similarly, *Sunlight on a Broken Column* (1961), by India's Attia Hosain (1913–98), paints a nostalgic picture of the *zenana* for three generations of Sunni women belonging to Lucknow's Taluqdars of Oudh, a privileged lifestyle revisited with dry irony in *Salt and Saffron* (2000), by Hosain's grand-niece, Kamila Shamsie. Perhaps more importantly, though, these novels contextualize religion's governing role in the Partition of the British Indian Empire in 1947, expressed in Hindu nationalism and Pakistan's founding as an Islamic state. Sardonicly, Pakistani writer Yaspal labels resulting antagonisms between Muslims and Hindus 'a holy war', a situation perpetuated in 1971 with East Pakistan's transformation into independent Bangladesh and continuing with still unresolved tensions over Kashmir.⁸⁴ Other literature in English exploring this traumatic history ranges from *The Loss of India* (1964), a collection of poetry by Pakistan's Zulfikar Ghose, to *A Golden Age* (2007), a novel by Bangladesh's Tahmima Anam. In Hindi, the ten chapters of Rahi Masoom's *A Village Divided* (1966) parallel a *zamindari* family's history with the ten days of Muharram. As Partition divides the family, the village and the subcontinent, an 'Introduction' divides chapters eight and ten, when the distracted narrator declares: 'I, Saiyid Masson Reza Abidi ... am constantly asking myself where I belong – Azamgarh or Ghazipur?'⁸⁵ In 'Muslim' Urdu, fiction ranges from the short stories of Pakistan's Saadat Hasan Manto (1912–55) to the novels of Manto's fellow countrywoman Intizar Husain and India's Qurratulain Hyder (1926–2007). Husain's novel *Basti* (1995), meaning 'community', exploits the trope of *hijra* as both dislocation and settlement – end and beginning – to capture not only the disruptions of 1947 and 1971, but also long-standing tensions between Muslims and Hindus on the one hand, and on the other, Sunnis and Shi'ites within the Abode of Islam. In 'Ya Khuda' (Oh God), Pakistan's Qudratullah Shahab

(1917–86) makes explicit this analogy with *hijra*: ‘Lahore was not Lahore it was Medina, the people of Lahore were not of Lahore, they were the *ansars* of Medina offering help to the Holy Prophet.’⁸⁶ Many commentators view Hyder’s *River of Fire* (1959) and Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* (1981) as the most ambitious explorations of Partition. In quite diverse ways, both narratives gather the ambiguities and antinomies of the subcontinent’s history and geography within an overarching theme of transience that refuses static oppositions of race, ethnicity, gender and even ideas, and mobilizes difference, including religious difference.

Finally, Islamic fundamentalism and the tradition’s persistent ambivalence towards the West preoccupy numerous postcolonial writers. V.S. Naipaul’s travelogues *Among the Believers: An Islamic Journey* (1981) and *Beyond Belief: Islamic Excursions among the Converted Peoples* (1998) lambast reactionaries for crippling the tradition’s ability to come to terms with modernity. In Ghose’s ‘The Marble Dome’, a *muezzin*’s ‘combative, challenging’ call to prayer reminds Parvez Sharif of films about ‘Nazi rallies’.⁸⁷ Ostensibly set in Saudi Arabia, *Mirage* (1998) and *Eye for an Eye* (2001), by Sri Lanka’s Bandula Chandraratna, vividly describe extremist religious violence, including a murderous assault on a liberal mosque and the stoning to death of a sexually assaulted woman accused of adultery by the *mutawah*, or ‘religious police’. Rushdie’s *Shalimar the Clown* (2005) exposes threats posed to *Kashmiriyat*, which celebrates Kashmir’s ethnic and religious diversity, by Islamist groups like Hizb-ul-Mujahadeen (Party of Freedom Fighters) and Lashkar-e-Pak (Army of Purity) on the one hand, and on the other, India’s Hindu nationalists. Likewise the difficulties of life under Afghanistan’s Taliban distinguish Khaled Hosseini’s *The Kite Runner* (2003) and *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (2007). Still, a few writers offer more hopeful views of Islam going forward, albeit hesitantly. As allegorical lures for interreligious tolerance, Rushdie’s *The Moor’s Last Sigh* (1995) and *The Enchantress of Florence* (2008) portray a more cosmopolitan Islam, associated in the first case with the mixed Moorish, Jewish and Catholic world of medieval Iberia, and in the second, with the elite cultures of Renaissance Florence and Fatehpur Sikri under the Mughal emperor, Akhbar the Great (1542–1605). Other writers turn quite explicitly to Islam’s Sufi heritage for inspiration, though in quite diverse ways. In *The Season of Love, Bitter Almonds and Delayed Rains* (2006), for example, Mazhar ul Islam problematizes materialist attitudes towards life by rehearsing classical Sufi conceits in contemporary Pakistani contexts: ‘a bit of the Way, some burning coals, the thirst of seeking, the forty days’ retreat of attraction, the loaf of wood, the sun of love, the cup of an empty heart, the shawl of shame, the frost of separation’.⁸⁸ By contrast, Vassanji’s *The*

Assassin's Song (2007), narrated by the central character, Karsan Dargawalla, fictionalizes the history of the shrine of the Sufi *wali* (saint) Pir Bawa, founded in 1260 in Haripir, Gujarat, and a site of interreligious harmony till riots between Muslims and Hindus in 2002. Though Karsan's brother, Mansoor, who is wanted for terrorist acts, seems to reincarnate links between Pir Bawa and a murderous medieval Shi'ite sect known as the Assassins, the novel closes on an optimistic note. Karsan overcomes his reluctance to become *saheb*, or 'guardian', of the shrine and its mystical legacy, a responsibility captured in a *bol*, or secret *mantra*, passed from father to son, who thus embody a divine presence sacred to Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs alike.

Afterword

The religious figures as an elemental and ubiquitous ingredient in Europe's colonial and imperial past and in the creative rehearsal of that history in what have come to be known as postcolonial literatures. Classically, scholars have distinguished between the religious and the sacred, holy or spiritual, often associating these latter terms with 'first-order' expressions of what Rudolf Otto called *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* (frightful and fascinating mystery), that is, 'the uncanny', 'numinous' or 'wholly other', on a spectral spectrum ranging from ghosts to God almighty, and the former with 'second-order' articulations of this rudimentary, but radically ambivalent experience in the practical and theoretical lexicons of social institutions and cultural forms.⁸⁹ Such a distinction usually locates personal conviction about the meaning and end of religion at the centre of a phenomenology of its outward manifestations in myths, doctrines, ethics, rituals, institutions and material resources in nature and culture. Proponents of the 'secularization thesis', however, have argued not only that the very notion of religion, and hence of particular religions, originates as a Western construct, but also that human reason, steadily and systematically applied not only in fields of hard science, but also to the softer arrangements of economic, social, political and cultural life, progressively unmask the inauthenticity of religious aetiologies and eschatologies and accompanying efforts to explain the unruliness of history in between such mythologized beginnings and endings.⁹⁰

Far from witnessing the eclipse of the religious, though, the late capitalist West continues to experience religious resurgence, notably varieties of Evangelical and Pentecostal Christianity, which have in turn travelled to nearly every region of Africa, Asia and Latin America.⁹¹ Nor is this 'desecularization' or 're-enchantment' of the world a peculiarly Christian phenomenon, witness Islamic radicalism in the Middle East, North Africa, and South, Central and

Southeast Asia; Hindu nationalism and Buddhist militancy in South, Central and Southeast Asia; the proliferation of New Age movements and ostensibly new religions; and the revival of indigenous spiritual traditions.⁹² In addition, globalization and the politics of scale frequently entail the exponential diversification of belief and practice across and within religious traditions, while the dispersion of religions worldwide and of missions and analogous movements within a given tradition give rise to unorthodox syncretisms on the one hand, and on the other, to tensions between centralized metropolitan hierarchies, national or regional officialdom, and the demands of everyday life at the local level. There are many Christianities, for example, and what a Zulu Zionist believes and practices in a rural South African village may or may not ring bells with Anglican, Dutch Reformed or Catholic officials in Cape Town, let alone their overseers in Canterbury, The Hague and Rome.

In various ways, as we have seen, representations of things Christian and things Islamic in postcolonial writings at once embody and express such scholarly reflections upon the nature and reality of the religious. A fuller account of this phenomenon would involve wide-ranging and in-depth analysis of the ways in which the beliefs and practices of other religious traditions figure in postcolonial literatures, in particular the Middle Eastern monotheisms of Zoroastrianism and Judaism, the South and Southeast Asian traditions of Hinduism, Buddhism and Sikhism, and the numerous varieties of indigenous spirituality. Here, a few representative suggestions must suffice. For example, fiction like Bapsi Sidhwa's *The Crow Eaters* (1980), Dhondy's *Bombay Duck* (1990) and Rohinton Mistry's *Family Matters* (2002) integrates different aspects of Zoroastrian religiosity, while Jewish motifs figure widely across postcolonial literatures. 'Diaspora' and 'exile', of course, are defining postcolonial preoccupations, but 'exodus' and 'Holocaust' provide thematic focus, too: if Ngũgĩ's *The River Between* (1965) casts Kenyan independence leader Jomo Kenyatta as a 'black Moses', Palestinian Mourid al-Barghouti's *I Saw Ramallah* (2004) opposes religious Zionists, who reiterate Jewish claims to Palestine from the Mosaic covenant with Yahweh, to Islamic *mujahideen*, who commit as holy warriors to Muslim Palestinians dispossessed of their homeland by Jewish colonial interlopers.⁹³

As for South and Southeast Asian religious traditions, numerous English, Hindi and vernacular writings draw upon Hindu themes, tropes and topoi: Narayan's Malgudi novels recontextualize Hindu mythology in a modernizing India, for example, while a host of writers of Hindu heritage in South Asia and in South Asian diaspora fictionalize the role of religion in the rise of Hindu nationalism, and like their Muslim contemporaries, in the reconfiguration of

the British Indian Empire, as well as the trials of indenture and the travails of later migrations. Novels like *Train to Pakistan* (1956), by India's Khushwant Singh, and Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice Candy Man* (1988; republished as *Cracking India*, 1991) offer Sikh and Parsi perspectives on the Partition of the subcontinent, as well, while various aspects of Buddhist belief and practice feature prominently in the work of Sri Lankan writers like Martin Wickramasinghe (1890–1976) and Colin de Silva, as well as Southeast Asian poetry and prose by such authors as Malaysia's Lee Kok Liang and Shirley Geok-lin Lim, Myanmar's U Win Pe and Ma Sandar, and Singapore's Arthur Yap (1943–2006) and Boey Kim Cheng. We have seen animist spirituality persisting in writings otherwise permeated by Christianity and Islam. Elsewhere, indigenous traditions predominate, whether Zulu, as in *The Ancestors and the Sacred Mountain: Poems* (1982), by South Africa's Mazisi Kunene (1930–2006); Maori, as in *The Matriarch* (1986), by New Zealand's Witi Ihimaera; Yoruba, as in Nigerian Ben Okri's *The Famished Road* (1991); or North American Indian, as in Canadian Thomas King's *Green Grass, Running Water* (1993). Indeed, instances of the depiction of indigenous religiosity vary as widely as the geography of indigenous cultures and societies. In turn, lastly, a more fully developed scholarly examination of the representation of the religious in these and related materials must of necessity engender some reassessment of a range of methodological and theoretical issues in postcolonial studies, especially in postcolonial hermeneutics and the comparative study of sacred scriptures, and more broadly, in comparative studies in world religions and postcolonial literatures.

Notes

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11. Les A. Murray, *The Daylight Moon* (Manchester: Carcanet, 1988), p. 57.
12. Allen Curnow, *Early Days Yet: New and Collected Poems, 1941–1997* (Auckland University Press, 1997), pp. 83–4.
13. Maurice Gee, *In My Father's Den* (Wellington: Oxford University Press, 1972), p. 131.
14. Stephen Gray, 'The Leper Band', *South Africa – Poetry International Web*, (http://southafrica.poetryinternationalweb.org/piw_cms/cms/cms_module/index.php?obj_id=13309), accessed 5 May 2009.
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21. Léopold Sédar Senghor, *Collected Poetry*, trans. Melvin Dixon (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1991); and David Diop, *Hammer Blows and Other Writings*, trans. and ed. Simon Mpondo and Frank Jones (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1973), pp. 28–9.
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28. Taban lo Liyong, *Another Nigger Dead: Poems* (London: Heinemann, 1972).
29. Jared Angira, *Soft Coral* (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1973), p. 26, and *Silent Voices* (London: Heinemann, 1972), pp. 15–16.
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- (New York: SUNY Press, 2004); Muhsin Jassim al-Musawi, *The Postcolonial Arabic Novel: Debating Ambivalence* (Boston: Brill, 2003).
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 59. Yambo Ouologuem, *Bound to Violence*, trans. Ralph Manheim (London: Secker & Warburg, 1971), pp. 3, 181.
 60. Tayeb Salih, *Season of Migration to the North*, trans. Denys Johnson-Davies (London: Heinemann, 1969), p. 107.
 61. Nuruddin Farah, *Close Sesame* (London: Allison & Busby, 1983), p. 20.
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 63. Ibrahim al-Koni, *The Bleeding of the Stone*, trans. May Jayyusi and Christopher Tingley (Moreton-in-Marsh: Arris, 2003), p. 2.
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 67. Achdiat K. Mihadja, *Atheis*, trans. R.J. Maguire (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press 1972), pp. 147, 148.
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Postcolonial responses to the Western canon

ANKHI MUKHERJEE

'It was as if a Briton, of the time of Severus, had suddenly written a poem in good Latin', read the 1829 *Oriental Herald Review* appraisal of the 1827 and 1829 volumes of Henry Derozio's poetry.¹ This was high praise indeed by a reviewer (quite possibly the editor of the *Oriental Herald*, J.S. Buckingham) who had earlier puzzled over the viability of Indian writing in English: 'the very language . . . can hardly be called English'.² The poet in question was Henry Louis Vivian Derozio, a Calcutta 'Eurasian' of Portuguese and Indian ancestry, and a pioneer Indian English writer. Derozio's poems imagined and apostrophized a unified India from the limited scope of the plains of 'Bhaugulpore' or the rock of 'Jungheera' and gave tremulous form to its nascent nationalist imagination. Derozio's elegiac poems of India situate him as a belated arrival to the once glorious but now subjugated country. In 'The Harp of India' (March 1827), for instance, he writes:

Thy music once was sweet – who hears it now?
Why doth the breeze sigh over thee in vain?
Silence hath bound thee with her fatal chain;
Neglected, mute, and desolate art thou,
Like ruined monument on desert plain!³

Derozio's 'postcoloniality' inheres not in dates but in the postimperial tone of the nationalist poetry. And his enthusiastic appropriation of the English literary canon to write of the emancipation of India testifies to the predicament of the postcolonial writer, whose conscious or unconscious affiliation and allusiveness to the Western literary tradition is an inheritance that is often as unwanted as it is laboured for. 'The brilliant hues of the Byronic sunset flung their glow over Derozio's sky', said E.W. Madge in his famous 1904 lecture on Derozio at the YMCA Hall in Chowringhee, Calcutta. 'His style has been termed the echo of Byron, Moore and L. E. Landon'.⁴ Lines from *The Fakir of Jungheera* attest that Scott heavily influenced Derozio, as did the radicalism of

Shelley. Commentators recommended severer reading, Elizabethan and Augustan texts instead of Byron's poetic romances, Moore's 'Lallah Rookh' and Saunders's 'Troubadour', or Letitia Landon's 'extatic damsels, whose only occupation is to kiss – and die'.⁵ 'How much better for him, had his attention been directed to the volumes of Shakespeare and Milton', the *Oriental Magazine* once speculated.⁶ 'Their delineation of human character and the passion of the one, and the sober and classic Muse of the other would have constrained him to reflect [before he] sat down to write his thoughts.'⁷

The critique was specifically targeted at Derozio's luxuriating in the works of his immediate predecessors in England, which precluded a humbler, more studied imitation of classics. The poet who has since been reclaimed in twentieth-century postcolonial criticism as an iconoclast, revolutionary, and possibly the first Indian nationalist poet, was widely perceived in his time as a creative reader but a derivative writer, whose borrowings, according to *The Oriental Magazine*⁸ were 'like diamonds that sparkle on the person of an Indian king, which instead of lighting up the beauty of the countenance by their lustre, dazzle the eyes and destroy the effect of the natural appearance'.⁹

Harold Bloom defines canonicity as a 'strangeness, a mode of originality that either cannot be assimilated, or that so assimilates us that we cease to see it as strange'.¹⁰ Both definitions are relevant for Derozio's youthful imbibing of the canon without registering its strangeness, as it were, and for the strangeness and recalcitrance of the canon that made for failed interpellations. The young poet did not see his relationship to English classics as one of unqualified adoration or imitation. He was no apologist of the empire, and worried in print about the practicability of colonization. As the *India Gazette* of 30 October 1828 proclaimed, he had 'some title to be considered as a national poet' – Derozio was, after all, 'a son of the soil, born, bred, and entirely educated in India', unlike other expatriates and 'Eurasians' who wrote 'in a state of modified exile, yearning after other climes and modes of life'.¹¹ Derozio's canonical extrapolations were primarily in the service of an emergent corpus of Indian writing in English: they also made possible the use of English as a global vernacular for social and political mobilization and contestations of modernity in the colony. Derozio's 'The Harp of India', written in the style of Moore's 'The Harp of Erin', is not simply clever imitation but marks the canny use of serviceable form and style for a brutalized national imagination that is nevertheless attempting to come to its own in Derozio's time:

– but if thy notes divine
May be by mortal wakened once again,
Harp of my country, let me strike the strain!¹²

The eurocentric canon, routinely associated with imperial hierarchies, is often represented as a carceral or reformatory force, and an exclusive club. This study proposes that the canon, and the dominant modalities in which it is received, afford a site of historical emergence through which both postcolonial literature and literary criticism can fruitfully attempt to rethink their cultural identity and politics. How is the canon historically constituted, how does it survive, and how is it inherited? Does postcolonial revisionism make it an open category, politically relevant and sustainable? Do these revisions then run the risk of congealing into what Vilashini Cooppan calls ‘a catalogue of thematics and a canon of fiction and poetry, in which characteristic concepts of hybridity, creolization, and diaspora are not contextualized within related discourses of colonial and imperial knowledge . . . subaltern opposition, and subject formation?’¹³ Is there an alternative canon for our postcolonial, global age, or has the distinction between canonical and non-canonical been neutralized in lateral and contrapuntal readings, and the transmissions, migrations and intersections of literary texts? I look at the emergence of what David Damrosch calls ‘world literature’¹⁴ – books that exist in literary systems beyond their culture of origin – to examine whether in this mode of circulation and cultural contestation, where there is no fixed canon, canonical ideals and standards of excellence can possibly hold.

This chapter treats the canon of English literature as a living issue, open to interventions that dislodge familiar reading formations. It combines different foci – postcolonial, psychoanalytical, literary historical and pedagogical – to examine ideas of canonicity, literary tradition, counter-readings, the ‘anxiety of influence’, ‘enchantment’ and nostalgia. What does postcolonial literature take away from the literary canon, and what life does it give back? Canonicity itself is a changeable category: canons tend to be selective yet inclusive, and endlessly renewable. Perhaps canonicity is the collective name for what Antonio Benítez-Rojo describes as ‘dynamic states or regularities that repeat themselves globally’¹⁵ and is best interpreted through an understanding of complex processes within disorder and chaos. I examine the stranglehold of the ‘empire writes back’ model of postcolonial riposte, which, in the absence of an imperial ‘centre’, reduces postcolonial writing to dead letters, and offer alternative ways of reading this transferential circuit. The Western canon, I argue, is a subject of fantasy against which the postcolonial *Bildungsideal* pits its narrative mechanism. While the European metropolis often stands for the disappointment of history for hopeful arrivistes – for Jean Rhys, for example, England was perhaps the greatest disappointment of her life – the canon is a derealized body, autonomous from the depredations of history and the public

sphere, which mobilizes postcolonial self-invention and renewal in the English language. Postcolonial responses to the canon signify a historical becoming, the third person of dialogue becoming first and second person. Canonicity, according to Suleri, becomes a trope through which the belated writer ‘can delineate the strange interaction of power and debasement that constitutes colonial history’.¹⁶ It is in relation to a ‘canonical clock’ that postcolonial writers map out their ‘idiom of perpetual arrival’.¹⁷

In a Pushcart Prize-winning essay, ‘The Testimony of my Grandfather’s Bookcase’, Amitav Ghosh describes the pride of place given to the glass-fronted bookcase in middle-class Bengali households. A quarter of the novels in the bookcases in his grandfather’s house, Ghosh writes, were in Bengali, the works of Bankim, Sarat Chandra, Tagore, Bibhuti Bhushan. The rest were in English, largely translations from European languages: Russian, French, Italian, German and Danish. Most dust had gathered on the masterpieces of the nineteenth century, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, Turgenev, Hugo, Flaubert, Stendhal, Maupassant. Books by Maksim Gorky, Mikhail Sholokov, John Steinbeck and Upton Sinclair bore proud testimony to the political urgencies of a different time, while forgotten Nobel winners in literature – Grazia Deledda, Gorky, Hamsun, Sienkiewicz and Andrić – brought home to the young writer the vagaries of literary taste and value. For Ghosh, the Nobel collection in this ancestral bookcase in particular testified to the widespread appeal of the notion of universal literature, ‘a form of artistic expression that embodies differences in places and culture, emotion and aspiration, but in such way as to render them communicable’.¹⁸ Ghosh alleges that the sliding address to which the (third world) novelist writes is this vast and cosmopolitan ‘fictional bookcase’.¹⁹

It is unsurprising then that the canon is often represented in fiction as portable property, a library of carefully vetted works that carries out its work of global dominance in the farthest outposts of empire. In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, the books in Rochester’s dressing room are gradually destroyed by the West Indian climate, as Rochester himself feels poisoned and deracinated. In Tayeb Salih’s *Season of Migration to the North*, the narrator stumbles upon the hidden room in Mustafa Sa’eed’s house to be accosted by the replica of an English study. I reproduce a substantial section of this representative list, which tellingly includes the Qur’an in English translation:

Books on economics, history and literature. Zoology. Geology. Mathematics. Astronomy. The Encyclopaedia Britannica. Gibbon. Macaulay. Toynbee. The complete works of Bernard Shaw. Keynes. Tawney. Smith. Robinson. *The*

Economics of Imperfect Competition. Hobson, *Imperialism*. Robinson, *An Essay on Marxian Economics*. Sociology. Anthropology. Psychology. Thomas Hardy. Thomas Mann ... Virginia Woolf. Wittgenstein. Einstein ... *Gulliver's Travels*. Kipling. Housman. *The History of the French Revolution*, Thomas Carlyle ... What play-acting is this? What does he mean? Owen. Ford Madox Ford. Stefan Zweig. E.G. Browne. Laski. Hazlitt. *Alice in Wonderland*. Richards. The Qur'an in English.²⁰

Naipaul creates a similar scenario for Jimmy Ahmed, the Black Power poseur in *Guerrillas*, who lives in a house furnished with English carpets and furniture, replete with 'The Hundred Best Books of the World'. Jimmy is a derivative intellect whose political fantasy is carved by (mis)readings or incomplete understandings of Western political and literary masterpieces. The upshot of the historical novel is that Jimmy's revolution on the Caribbean island is tragically 'dependent on metropolitan sources – both economic and literary', as Judie Newman points out.²¹

Wai-Chee Dimock's theorization of the 'extraterritorial' character of literature, with 'random radii linking a text to an ever more dispersed readership', discredits both territorial sovereignty and numerical chronology, and sees literature as a spatio-temporal fabric that necessarily makes non-synchronous entities collide.²² Postcolonial rewritings of the canon are constitutive of what Dimock describes as 'a global process of extension, elaboration, and randomisation ... [that] turns literature into the collective life of the planet':

Coextensive neither with the territorial regime of the nation nor with the biological regime of a single human being, this life derives its morphology instead from the motion of words: motion effected when borders are crossed, when a new frame of reference is mixed with an old, when foreign languages turn a native tongue into a hybrid.²³

Judie Newman's *The Ballistic Bard* charts the genesis of postcolonial literature in textual violence and violations: this Manichean schema between colonial and postcolonial texts, however, reduces postcolonial narrativization to counter-readings of master plots. Timothy Brennan's *Salman Rushdie and the Third World: Myths of the Nation* and Graham Huggan's *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins* offer disenchanted critiques of the processes through which cultural fields are created and value is attributed to certain modes of postcolonial representation.²⁴ This chapter follows Brennan's and Huggan's lead in locating the postcolonial canon, but moves away from the reactive and antagonistic mode of the above

works to reimagine instead the place of the canon in English studies, and the role it could or should play in historicist practice and critical interrogation.

The chapter has five broad sections. In the first, I would like to chart some of the active afterlives of Shakespeare, Defoe, Austen, Brontë, Stevenson, Dickens, Conrad, Kipling, Shaw, Joyce and Eliot in postcolonial literature and the postcolonial cultural imaginary. The wide-ranging historical survey in this part will examine the colonial context and content of canonical English novels and how these form the vexed terms of engagement in belated responses. The twentieth and twenty-first century offer a wide variety of writing in the reactive mode – Creole, Caribbean, African, Australian, South Asian, North American, Scottish and Irish – in particular works by Rhys, Gordimer, Naipaul, Ngũgĩ, Coetzee, Emecheta, (Anita) Desai, Jhabvala, Rushdie, Carey, Harris, Warner and Tennant that have been inspired, influenced, or negatively determined by questions of canonicity and cultural transmission. In this section I would also like to analyse the logic and politics of key Shakespeare adaptations on the Indian stage and page and in post-independence Hindi cinema.

The second section will look at extrapolations from and radical reappraisals of European literary genres or movements in postcolonial literature. European cultural forms such as the travelogue, the *Bildungsroman*, the detective story, the gothic and the Romantic, the epistolary novel, tragedy and melodrama, the Shakespearean sonnet or the Cubist poem have undergone postcolonial translations in the works of Rhys, Achebe, Naipaul, Seth, Suleri, Ghosh, Rushdie, Karnad, Walcott, Atwood, Coetzee, Chaudhuri, and I will dwell on selected examples. The focus of the third section is English language as literary medium. The English literary canon – as English works of Michael Madhusudan Dutt, Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay and Rabindranath Tagore testify – often represents to the colonial intellectual a zone of autonomy that makes possible self-invention or self-renewal in language. It maps alternative genealogies for the emergent or modern postcolonial subject, offering escape into impersonality and a timeless classicism from binds of autochthonic tradition, social hierarchy, orthodoxy, provinciality, the national and the vernacular. In this section I would like to narrow the focus to ‘Indian English’ and capitalize on the desiring dialectic set in motion by writers like Madhusudan Dutt, Raja Rao, Rabindranath Tagore, Sarojini Naidu, A. K. Ramanujan, O. V. Vijayan, Anantha Murthy, Nirad Chaudhuri, Salman Rushdie and

Arundhati Roy, between empire and indigenous culture, English and mother tongue, the dream of disowning and the dream of homecoming.

The fourth section is about the postcolonial critic's 'worldly self-situating' and responses to the canon which take the form of setting literary texts 'in the world'.²⁵ The task of recuperating and reinstalling Austen in our world – or Joyce or Conrad, for that matter – Rajeswari Sunder Rajan argues, 'is not one critical "approach" among others, propagated by postcolonial critics, but an inescapable historical imperative of our times'.²⁶ It is an engagement that is attentive to all forms of relations of domination and identifies their complicities with the present. The final section close reads Coetzee's revisionist essay 'What is a classic?' to chart the inexorable move from postcolonial responses to the canon to the formation of a postcolonial canon. The idea of a postcolonial canon and classics is a very timely one. English studies today is a global phenomenon, and as Edward Said has suggested, the cultural identity of nations in the era of cultural-economic globalization should be conceived in terms of space rather than time. According to Said, 'Spatiality becomes . . . the characteristic of an aesthetic rather than of political domination, as more and more regions – from India to Africa to the Caribbean – challenge the classical empires and their cultures'.²⁷ A key symptom of this planetary system, as Franco Moretti describes it, is the phenomenon of world literature, a heterogeneous body of literature produced, circulated and consumed beyond the cultural contexts of individual nation states. It is pertinent to ask, in this context, whether terms like 'classic', 'masterpiece', 'canonical' still hold as markers of foundational literary value, and whether the classic criterion continues to speak to a new geomorphic category of literature arising out of the transnational movement of capital, commodities, services and discourses.

Rewriting the canon

In a recent essay, 'In the neocolony: destiny, destination, and the traffic in meaning', Mary Louise Pratt writes of a young Colombian *guerrillero*, who in April 1999 had escaped to the jungle with one of the captured soldiers she had been assigned to guard. For five days the fugitives travelled through the forest to an army post where she laid down her arms. She justified her betrayal thus: 'Me gusto su piel blanca' (I liked his white skin).²⁸ She had not, she claimed, joined the guerrillas voluntarily – her mother had sold her to the cause when she was ten years old. The story, Pratt reports, appeared in a Mexican newspaper with the headline 'New Romeo and Juliet'. The Shakespearean image, Pratt writes, is noteworthy, because 'the much more obvious parallel lay in

Mexico's own mythology, in the story of La Malinche. Shakespeare, and his current Hollywood revival, however, trumped the hemispheric imaginary.³²⁹ The last European colonies have become independent and globalization is widely seen as supplanting Western imperialism, but, Pratt states, 'white skins continue to seduce, brown-skinned daughters continue to be sold, and imperial myths continue to generate meanings, desires, and actions'.³⁰ What can be said of the persistence of the postcolonial as a historical marker of our times? 'Is "postcoloniality" a state which has been achieved, or one to which we aspire?' speculates Pratt. Her argument is that the term 'postcolonial' is perhaps most useful as a way of historically situating and interrogating one's coloniality. The prefix *post* implies change and discontinuity, the assumption of a critical distance, which facilitates a belated understanding of the workings of empire. Pratt suggests that the prefix *post* be used to call forth not a subject paralysed between nostalgia and cynicism in a Fukiyaman 'end of history', but a subject newly capacitated to read the present in light of a broadened, more discerning, reading of the past. This subject is oriented not towards a future frozen in a post-progress eternity but toward a renewed anti-imperial, decolonizing practice.³¹

At the same time the postcolonial method should not be allowed to colonize to the degree that it identifies everything with respect to European dominated power relations, as if coloniality were the only register along which ex-colonial or colonial history could be studied. The postcolonial critic faces the complex intellectual challenge of apprehending imperial dynamics in their continuing adjustments, transformations and permutations. As Mary Pratt cautions, if one seeks simply to establish the continuity across time of a 'colonial legacy' one will fail to explain the processes by which this legacy has been and continues to be ongoingly invigorated and reintegrated into a changing world through continuing permutations of its signs, practices and legacies.

The phenomenon of postcolonial rewriting reflects the decolonization of postcolonial literature itself, the move from the phase of 'nauseating mimicry', as Fanon termed it,³² to one in which former colonies defined their own literatures and cultures reactively and aggressively from within. Peter Childs's *Post-Colonial Theory and English Literature: A Reader* brings together the best-known examples of such revisionism. These include reworkings of *The Tempest* by Lamming, Césaire and Mannoni in the late 1950s to the early 1970s for black political and cultural ends; fictional and critical reappraisals of the history, geography and mythology of *Robinson Crusoe*, and postcolonial assessments of class, gender and race in *Jane Eyre*. The collection also showcases reworkings of the 'darkness' of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* in fiction and critical

exegeses as both phobic and racist figurations of the dark and mute heart of the colonized, as well as anti-colonial resistance, and belated responses to a mode of colonization embodied in Kipling's *Kim* that works not through ethnocide, deportation and slavery but, to quote Thomas Richards, through 'the mediated instrumentality of information'.³³

According to Rob Nixon, Caribbean intellectuals used the Shakespearean text to get out of what Lamming described as 'the mausoleum of [Western] historic achievement'.³⁴ Lamming's non-fictional *Pleasures of Exile* rewrites the history of Shakespeare's Caliban for the future. *Pleasures of Exile* offers poignant testimony to the experience of West Indian immigrants arriving at Britain in the 1950s, their faces turned in expectation towards the anglophone Caribbean that had yet to achieve decolonization and self-determination. Lamming usurps Caliban's unforgettable cry, 'You taught me language; and my profit on't / Is, I know how to curse',³⁵ to articulate the British Caribbean writer-intellectual's fear that colonized as he is by language, he is condemned to live out the slave's destiny forever. Rob Nixon sees in Lamming's extrapolation of Shakespeare not simply an aggressive gesture of manipulating the meanings of a European text to bear on Caribbean history, but 'the desire to mount an indigenous countertradition, with a reinterpreted Caliban from 1611 and the contemporary, about-to-be-liberated Antillean of 1959 flanking that tradition'.³⁶ Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*, the celebrated retelling of *Jane Eyre* from the point of view of Bertha Mason Rochester, the white Creole wife of Brontë's Rochester, is not just a move in the direction of a novelistic countertradition, but foregrounds the increased visibility and audibility of the Creole returning to the metropolis in the 1950s. Similarly, the reworkings of *Heart of Darkness* in fiction by Naipaul, Harris, Emecheta and Salih not only re-emphasize the role of phobic configurations of Africa in shaping European cognition and civilization, but also appropriate what Brantlinger calls the 'imperialist adventure romance'³⁷ to chart postcolonial arrivals and returns. In Naipaul's *A Bend in the River*, which reworks Conrad's fictional journeys in *Heart of Darkness* and *The Congo Diary*, the travelogue novel leads nowhere even as African bush gives way to the London Underground. Salim thinks of himself as a man passing through: 'But where was the good place?'³⁸ If in Naipaul's Africa, dawn is always receding into darkness, the London that he escapes to is also something 'shrunk and mean and forbidding'.³⁹ Salim returns to Africa simply because the idea of the 'other place' 'comforted only to weaken and destroy'.⁴⁰ In Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North*, Mustafa Sa'eed is the troubled figure of Kurtz, who reverses the heart-of-darkness tradition by leaving Sudan for London. In London, his sexual conquests seem to re-enact ancient Arab victory

over Europeans – his violence towards a series of English women, who are seduced and driven to suicide by him, could also be interpreted as a correction of the modern European supremacy over Arabs. He populates their Orientalist fantasy, ‘a den of lethal lies’, eventually to act out its venal stereotyping of the Arab and African as inherently brutal and bestial. Mustafa Sa’eed is himself a lie, a revenant and a mess of contradictory selves: Richard, Hassan, Charles, Amin and Mustafa. After serving a prison term for murdering his English wife, Sa’eed returns to the Sudan, to a sleepy village along the banks of the Nile. No one knows of his past except the narrator, a native of the village who too has returned to Africa with an English education, and Sa’eed finishes decanting his life story little by little only to disappear in the floodwaters of the Nile. It is as if there is ‘no escape, no place of safety, no safeguard’ for the translated man.⁴¹ After his death, the narrator discovers in Sa’eed’s mud house a secret room, an exact replica of the salon in his London apartment: the bookshelf, heaving with masterworks of the Western humanistic tradition, and which the narrator likens to ‘A graveyard. A mausoleum. An insane idea. A prison. A huge joke. A treasure chamber’, contains ‘not a single Arabic book’.⁴²

It is important to not reduce the phenomenon of postcolonial rewriting of canonical texts to the ‘first in the West, and then elsewhere’ formula of global time, as Dipesh Chakrabarty puts it.⁴³ Aamir Mufti suggests that such hierarchical modalities of knowledge be supplanted by a ‘global comparativism’, which stems from the realization that ‘societies on either side of the imperial divide now live deeply imbricated lives that cannot be understood without reference to each other’.⁴⁴ Mufti’s avowed model is Said’s notion of ‘contrapuntality’, elaborated in his 1984 essay ‘Reflections on Exile’ and more fully in *Culture and Imperialism* in 1993. Contrapuntality speaks to Said’s vision of the interimplication of discrete traditions in the modern era, and of a ‘transnational, even trans-human perspective on literary performance’.⁴⁵ It is, as Mufti says, about ‘opening up’ and ‘crossing over’,⁴⁶ and elicits a radical change in our modes of critical and cultural reception. Tayeb Salih’s masterpiece lends itself to such a contrapuntal reading. As critics like Saree Makdisi and Barbara Harlow have pointed out, the novel writes back not only to Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* but Shakespeare’s *Othello* and *King Lear*. It is presented in the old *hakawati* style of Arabic oral tradition, and also contains elements of the Arabic literary technique of *mu’arada*, a dialectical process involving at least two writers, the first of whom writes a poem that the other will deconstruct by writing along the same lines, but reversing the meaning. It re-enacts the Oedipal scenes and hallucinatory reality of Freudian case studies. Finally, through the revived political and cultural awareness of the narrator in the final

pages of the novel, Salih traces what Said calls ‘the voyage in’,⁴⁷ and that Mufti describes as ‘the emergence of an oppositional consciousness that is neither fully inside nor entirely outside metropolitan, Western culture, a critical consciousness that will undertake a radical critique of Western culture’⁴⁸ and shore up progressive and non-repressive alternatives to Orientalism.

The afterlives of Shakespeare constitute a veritable industry, and this section will dwell on selected instances of postcolonial adaptation and reinterpretation. According to Harish Trivedi, ‘the complex fate of loving Shakespeare while living in India is a classic instance of the colonial double-bind’:

Can eminent English or American academics in this day and age proclaim the love for Shakespeare obtaining in their respective countries with such straight faces, or is such a strong sentiment on our part in some ways overcompensatory? ... Can such a difference of critical sensibility, if permitted free play, generate any new Shakespearean meanings universally worth having, or is the disjunction too great to allow of any bicultural dialogic engagement?⁴⁹

Trivedi documents the mixed fortunes of Shakespeare reception in colonial India: the unflagging appeal of Shakespeare translations from 1870 to the first decades of the twentieth century, the nationalist boycotting of Indians like Smarajit Dutt (‘Slavery enforced by brute force is degrading enough ... But slavery of the mind is truly a hundred times more deplorable’) in the 1920s, and the subsequent camp warfare between translators.⁵⁰ One group saw in Shakespearean heroes an emancipatory force for ‘the idlers of India’,⁵¹ while the other asserted the supremacy of Sanskrit literature. Following Indian independence in 1947, Shakespeare studies entered an apolitical phase, its popularity unabated. By 1979 Raghuvir Sahay would say of his translation of *Macbeth* that he had ‘sought to universalise the story without deliberately Indianizing it in any way’.⁵² During the 1980s and 1990s colonialism, race and gender became key interpretive tools for studying Renaissance literature and culture, and Shakespeare was political again: if English colonialism had previously been in the historical background for Shakespeare’s *Tempest*, colonial discourse was now seen to be central to the play’s thematic as well as formal concerns, constituting one of its ‘dominant discursive contexts’, as Francis Barker and Peter Hulme argue.⁵³

As the work of Trivedi, Jyotsna Singh, David Johnson and Ania Loomba has demonstrated, Shakespeare is at large in the former colonies: in the classroom, in performance, in English studies and cultural and critical thought. The Cuban writer Roberto Fernández Retamar calls Caliban the symbol of ‘our *mestizo* America’, adding that ‘I am aware that it is not entirely ours, that it is also an

alien elaboration, although in our case based on our concrete realities'.⁵⁴ The Shakespearean classic seems to at any rate address the continuous present. According to Vishal Bhardwaj, director of two critically acclaimed Hindi adaptations of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* (*Maqbool*) and *Othello* (*Omkara*), the plays depict 'universal human emotions, only the settings are alien to us'.⁵⁵ The Shakespearean text is provincialized and its meaning liberated in the 'conflict of interpretations', to borrow a phrase from Simon Gikandi. The poetry and historical context is lost in translation as *Othello* becomes the undercaste *Omkara* in the hinterlands of Uttar Pradesh or *Macbeth*/*Maqbool* is imbricated in bloody power struggles in the Bombay underworld. Speaking to Arthur J. Pais about *Maqbool*, Bhardwaj says his inspiration was Akira Kurosawa's 1957 classic, *Throne of Blood* (*Kumonosu Jo*), based on *Macbeth*. Bhardwaj wanted to make 'a powerful film of guilt and its denial': the film, he adds without hostility, 'is not meant for Shakespearean scholars'.⁵⁶

Critical reappraisals of race and colonialism in Shakespeare are often wary of confusing the distinction between the colonial context of early modern Europe and the postcolonial, global structure of our contemporary world. Rewritings of *The Tempest* are particularly useful in this context. Nationalistic African novels of the 1950s and 1960s radicalized the Prospero-Caliban configuration. Hugely influential theoretical interventions, such as Octave Mannoni's *Psychology of Colonization*, Lamming's *Water with Berries*, Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks*, Césaire's *A Tempest*, followed. As Thomas Cartelli points out:

The names Prospero, Caliban, Ariel, and Miranda now operate as interpretive touchstones for critics who search out their permutations in writing as far afield as the poetry of Seamus Heaney and the novels of the Canadian Margaret Atwood, the Australian David Malouf, and the South African Nadine Gordimer.⁵⁷

Critics like Rob Nixon even argue that the declining relevance of plays like *The Tempest* for African and Caribbean intellectuals since the 1970s is due to the play's lack of 'a sixth act which might have been enlisted for representing relations among Caliban, Ariel, and Prospero once they entered a postcolonial era'.⁵⁸

Rewriting genre

Leela Gandhi observes that postcolonial literature treats the colonial encounter as a 'textual contest' and a 'bibliographic battle', but this agonistic relationship defines merely one aspect of postcolonial appropriations of European literary

genres.⁵⁹ It is true, as Spivak says, that ‘the invention of the telephone by a European upperclass male in no way preempts its being put to the use of an anti-imperialist revolution’,⁶⁰ but postcolonial efforts to rewrite Western genres are not limited to anti-colonial resistance and have often been deployed to formally authorize individual and collective awareness and identifications, imagined communities, and the reimagining of the social contract in the postcolonial state. As Dipesh Chakrabarty notes, novels, diaries, letters and autobiographies have proliferated in Indian literature since the mid nineteenth century, but they do not necessarily deliver bourgeois subject formation or the buried life as readily as their European counterparts. ‘Our autobiographies are remarkably “public” . . . when written by men, and they tell the story of the extended family when written by women’, Chakrabarty claims of autobiographies published in India between 1850 and 1910.⁶¹ These are not poor copies of Western models, but make evident the inconsistencies of the model autobiography: the blind-spots of self-observation and the limits of self-knowledge; the difficulties attendant upon tracing back an origin; the impossibility of self-transparency or neutrality; the constitutive – and false – opposition of private and public; the counterfeit nature of repetition, recall and regroupings of self.

Imaginative literature has long been one of the most irrepressible and effective modes of decolonization and postcolonial revisionism in Africa. The historian Ade Ajayi famously privileged Kole Omotoso’s historical narrative, *Just Before Dawn*, over the twelve volumes of Nigerian history commissioned by the Nigerian government. The modern African history play came to being in a cultural desert, ‘arrested by a cultural policy which represented European drama as the ideal’, to quote Okunoye.⁶² This is particularly true of the settler colonialism in East Africa, where the systematic oppression of indigenous cultural production led to the rise of a radical theatre, committed to ‘unearthing the buried history of the struggle and resistance’, as Ngũgĩ described it.⁶³ In *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*, Ngũgĩ and Mugo synthesize the Christian belief in the messiah with African songs and myths, and old notions of heroism to present the portrait of a traditional hero. The belated consciousness also shines through in the collaborator’s shared mistrust of capitalism, which provides continuity between the history of slavery and the plight of the dispossessed in the postcolonial era. In Ngũgĩ and Mugo’s intervention, the struggle for independence in Kenya, which culminated in the Mau Mau war, is theatricalized, and I quote Michael Etherton here, ‘not only as a war against colonialism and imperialism but also a class war which is by no means over’.⁶⁴

The *Bildungsroman* and *Künstlerroman*, showcasing, as they do, upward mobility and ambition in bourgeois society, have been widely used in postcolonial

delineations of the colonial upstart or the emergent artist, the social climber, the parvenu and mimic man. Bruce Robbins points out that ‘the young person’s “coming-of-age” story and the immigrant’s “coming-to-America” story . . . are also concerned, if only inadvertently, with attaining greater access to economic goods and services’.⁶⁵ Tsitsi Dangarembga’s *Nervous Conditions*, Tayeb Salih’s *Season of Migration to the North*, Jamaica Kincaid’s *Lucy*, V.S. Naipaul’s *The Mystic Masseur*, Doris Lessing’s *In Pursuit of English*, Caryl Phillip’s *The Final Passage*, Hanif Kureishi’s *The Buddha of Suburbia*, Amitav Ghosh’s *The Shadow Lines* and Zadie Smith’s *White Teeth* are self-conscious and sometimes ironical adaptations of the Western novel of intellectual formation and metropolitan arrival. An interesting variant of the *Bildungsroman* in 1980s India is the ‘nationsroman’, which Priya Joshi defines as ‘novels of the nation, including I’.⁶⁶ Allan Sealy’s *The Trotter-Nama*, Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* and Shashi Tharoor’s *The Great Indian Novel* answer to this category, and emphasize the importance of the novel form in foregrounding questions of identity in both national and post-national space.

Naipaul’s use of the *Künstlerroman* for *The Mimic Men* is startling in the way it insists on the non-relation between the individual’s rise and the welfare of the social whole. Disenchanted with his stint as a political leader on the island of Isabella, Ralph Singh discovers that he has no affinity with the culture and politics of the Caribbean states where his ancestors arrived as immigrant labourers. He repairs to London and the home counties to document the broad history of the impact of European imperialism, but writes a personal memoir instead. Like the charlatan heroes of *The Mystic Masseur* and *A House for Mr Biswas*, Ralph Singh ends up a stateless actor: ‘I could never feel myself as anything but spectral, disintegrating, pointless, fluid.’⁶⁷ *The Enigma of Arrival* confounds most of the conventions associated with mobility narrative or the portrait of an artist as young man in *Künstlerroman* mode. The book identifies itself as a novel, but asks to be read as literary autobiography. The novel’s form reminds Patrick Parrinder of a predecessor text, a ‘fictional literary memoir, George Gissing’s *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*’, though as Parrinder himself points out, Gissing did not live in the settings he describes, as Naipaul does.⁶⁸ At times Waldenshaw has the atemporal quality of a pastoral, with Naipaul celebrating ‘the gift of the second life in Wiltshire, the second, happier childhood as it were’.⁶⁹ At others, the grand, ruined house, stands for the insurmountable legacy of empire that ‘explained my birth in the New World, the language I used, the vocation and ambition I had’⁷⁰ and also ‘in the end explained my presence there in the valley, in the cottage, in the grounds of the manor’.⁷¹ *The Enigma of Arrival* is not about the colonial’s

bittersweet reconciliation with the England of Constable, Ruskin, Goldsmith, Gray and Hardy. Nor does it document the ‘creation, maintenance, decay, and cross-fertilization of the national identity’, as Parrinder seems to suggest. The benighted traveller does find himself at the quayside of arrival, as in Giorgio de Chirico’s painting *The Enigma of Arrival*, but with the sinking realization that the ‘antique ship has gone’.⁷²

Global English

Closely implicated with postcolonial responses to the canon is the use of English as literary language by non-Western writers. In this section, I would like to dwell on a couple of key moments of colonial/postcolonial self-definition through the use of English as a global vernacular.

In a paper given to the English Institute in 1979, Edward Kamau Brathwaite describes the use of unconventional English in Caribbean poetry. ‘You may know of the Caribbean at least from television, at least now with hurricane David coming right into it’, he says cheerfully, before providing a potted history of the archipelago to account for the prevalence of conquistador languages over Amerindian, African and Asian languages.⁷³ English is one of the imposed official languages in the Caribbean – there is also Creole English, a mixture of English and other imported languages on the islands, and ‘nation language’, the language of slaves and labourers, and servants of imperial masters. Nation language, Brathwaite states, is English in terms of its lexicon, but not in terms of its syntax, ‘its rhythm and timbre, its own sound explosion’.⁷⁴ Nation language is different from dialect, which Brathwaite treats as a perversion or inferior version of an official language, and should be treated as an area of development in Caribbean English that speaks to the African aspect of the New World heritage. Nation language, according to Brathwaite, ‘is like a howl, or a shout, or a machine-gun, or the wind, or a wave’.⁷⁵ Interestingly, Brathwaite evokes the imperial classic standard twice to describe the genesis of the anti-imperial nation language. The forerunner of nation language is Dante Alighieri, he says, who argued in *De vulgari eloquentia* (1304) that his own Tuscan vernacular should replace Latin as the most natural means of verbal expression. More recently, T. S. Eliot had inspired many a mainstream poet to move from standard English to nation language by introducing ‘the notion of the speaking voice, the conversational tone’.⁷⁶ It was Eliot’s recorded voice, property of the British Council (Barbados), which turned the nation poets on. The ‘dry deadpan delivery, the “riddims” of St. Louis’, spoke to Caribbean poets listening to the dislocations of Bird, Dizzy and Klook. This unlikely

allegiance, instead of underlining a pathological colonial dependency on European models, complicates instead Eliot's status as a mainstream 'English' poet: while Eliot was to become undisputed literary arbiter in the cultural capital, 'the establishment', as Brathwaite points out, 'could not stand Eliot's voice'.⁷⁷

The Indian use of English in the 1930s also demonstrates the curious adaptability of the medium. English as a global language afforded the Indian writer an escape from provinciality and national literature into the transnational conversations of world literature, and because English was reconfigured in these reactive tellings by non-Western modes of knowledge and narration, it was also, at the same time, vernacularized and tropicalized. In her influential essay, 'The Anxiety of Indianness', Meenakshi Mukherjee cites an early case of self-alienation in an Indian writer in English. In his 1938 foreword to *Kanthapura*, Raja Rao states:

The telling has not been easy. One has to convey in a language that is not one's own the spirit that is one's own. . . . I use the word 'alien', yet English is not really an alien language to us. It is the language of our intellectual make-up, like Sanskrit or Persian was before – but not of our emotional make-up.⁷⁸

Mukherjee details how Raja Rao sets up his acquired language against the contesting claims of memory and myth, oral tales, fabulation and gossip, the sensory overload of life in a village on the slopes of the Sahyadri Mountains. Mulk Raj Anand, R. K. Narayan and Ahmed Ali variously used English for indigenous narrative material in the 1930s: in each case, the use of English represents a curious compromise formation between estrangement from the legacy of imperialism and a process of mutation, translation and a new cross-cultural relation. R. K. Narayan's use of English enabled him to create what Meenakshi Mukherjee identifies as 'Hindu upper-caste pan-India, resistant to change, eternal and immutable'.⁷⁹ The use of a global language helped Narayan to escape the demands of ethnographic representation as it were, and bypass the clashing cultural imperatives and ethnic or communal conflicts for which the regional language writer struggled to find a serviceable style. Anand wrote in English to claim a wider circulation for his tales of the socially abjected and oppressed. 'The English-writing intelligentsia in India', he stated, 'was thus a kind of bridge trying to span, symbolically, the two worlds of the Ganga and the Thames through the novel'.⁸⁰ Similarly, Ahmed Ali used English to retrieve the lost stories and the unofficial history of pre-British Delhi because he did not want his readership to be confined to 'a narrow belt rimmed by Northwest India'.⁸¹ While he borrowed the language and novel form from English

literature, his cultural influences were Arabic, Persian and Hindustani. Priya Joshi describes Ali's *Twilight in Delhi* as 'a complex transaction with both anglicist and Oriental priorities combined in a project to reinscribe a new history of India on terms different from and even irrelevant to the versions presented by the colonial state'.⁸²

While Ahmed Ali's characters lament the predicament of being homeless at home, 'the generation of writers after Ahmed Ali', Priya Joshi observes, 'engages with something else altogether: the experience of being homeless in the world'.⁸³ This condition of transcendental homelessness has given rise to distinctive cultural vernaculars in English fiction in India and beyond: the high melancholic style of a Naipaul contemplating the ruined empire, the excessive inclusivity of Rushdie's lexicon, 'chutneyfication' and the rise of '*Angrezi*', 'Babu English' or the language of Indian embourgeoisement, the clipped classic realism of Vikram Seth, the 'mobile republic' that is Arundhati Roy's breakaway aesthetic, or the formally constrained babel of Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* and *On Beauty*.

Postcolonial Joyce/Austen/Conrad

Ania Loomba and Martin Orkin, editors of *Postcolonial Shakespeares*, speculate if both metropolitan and 'Third World' critics can possibly 'interrogate the limits of their present position and function within institutions established during the period of colonization and imperialism and powerfully inflected by what became, over the centuries, colonial epistemologies':

To what extent are the relationships between these two sets of academics structured by global imbalances? And to what extent is imbalance inherent in the very structure of our knowledge-systems and the institutions in which they are housed?⁸⁴

Loomba and Orkin insist that the term 'postcolonial' not be allowed to gloss over either the colonial history and make-up of Western epistemologies or the global imbalances of power. It is absurd to talk about postcolonial responses to the canon, they argue, when humanities study in India and Africa remains beleaguered and underfunded, and terms of exegesis are largely drawn from the Western academy. The term 'postcolonial' should also not be treated as a mere placeholder for diverse postcolonialities. In this section, drawing on select examples of 'postcolonializing' three canonical English novelists (Austen, Conrad and Joyce), I would like to investigate what is entailed in declaring a canonical literary figure 'postcolonial'. Terry Collits begins his *Postcolonial*

Conrad with a quote from Žižek's *The Sublime Object of Ideology*: 'there is more truth in the later efficacy of a text, in the series of its subsequent readings, than in its supposedly "original" meaning'.⁸⁵ The book surveys the shifting contexts in which Conrad has been read for more than a century. By relocating his novels of imperialism in the discursive field of postcolonial studies we can trace the reception of Conrad's works since F. R. Leavis located him in *The Great Tradition* in 1948 and also map and analyse the interpretive tradition that the novels have generated. Collits reminds us that Conrad saw from the start that his writing mission was discontinuous with settled English social life, and involved speaking for ('representing') non-Europeans. While the full implications of that recognition remain to be negotiated, there is no doubt that the Conrad text is rich in contrapuntal readings. Conrad's first exercise in literary criticism was an Author's Note intended for publication as a Foreword to *Almayer's Folly*. He begins by taking up the question of the exotic in the novel which he had subtitled *A Story of an Eastern River*:

The critic and the judge seems to think that in those distant lands all joy is a yell and a war dance, all pathos is a howl and a ghastly grin of filed teeth, and that the solution of all problems is found in the barrel of a revolver or on the point of an assegai. And yet it is not so. But the erring magistrate may plead in excuse the misleading nature of the evidence.⁸⁶

Conrad recognized from the start that his writing would have to be in some respects ethnographic, and that his readers could not be relied upon to accept that mission automatically. Writing with muted anger on behalf of unrepresented and misrepresented strange peoples, he anticipates the diagnostic polemics that their descendants would produce in the late twentieth century itself. James Clifford describes Conrad's 1890s as a complex decade of choice, beginning with the African voyage and ending with its narration. The choice involved career, language and cultural attachment. *Heart of Darkness* disrupts the traditions of both the Service and novel writing by breaching narratological and ideological contracts. Collits demonstrates how Conrad's bad faith in these matters results in a novel that, centring the scene of writing and treating it as the primary problem to address, becomes 'a paradigm of ethnographic subjectivity'.⁸⁷

Semicolonial Joyce, a collection of essays edited by Derek Attridge and Marjorie Howes, attempts to situate Ireland's colonial history in Joyce's work and examine what the editors call the 'limited compatibility' between postcolonial studies and Joyce's writing.⁸⁸ According to Attridge and Howes, Joyce's writings, in their dealings with questions of imperialism and nationalism, 'evinces a complex

and ambivalent set of attitudes, not reducible to a simple anticolonialism but very far from expressing approval of the colonial organization and methods'.⁸⁹ Joyce's achievement cannot be understood without relating it to the Irish struggle for independence – regarded not merely as a storehouse of images, characters and narrative possibilities, but as a bitter, complex and protracted conflict, with a history still alive in Irish political memory, a constantly changing course during Joyce's lifetime, and an unforeseeable future.⁹⁰

This collection follows the lead of scholarship by Vincent Cheng, Enda Duffy, Emer Nolan, David Lloyd and Colin MacCabe to revise and rewrite a history of critical reception that neutralizes Joyce's politics and relegates his works to the homogenous empty time of the classic. Duffy calls *Ulysses* Joyce's definitive 'guerrilla text',⁹¹ which has had a secret life as a postcolonial novel. While Joyce's postcoloniality remains arguable, Joyce scholars are less ambivalent about his antagonism to cultural nationalism and speculate whether his 'revolution of the Word'⁹² and deconstruction of conventional literary norms and grammar are comparable to political acts of disavowing colonial and nationalist ideologies. The postcolonializing of Joyce aims to counteract his mainstreaming or canonization, a process that David Lloyd condemns as 'a process of appropriation, abstracting works from their dialogical relation to traditions which the canon cannot accommodate'.⁹³ Postcolonial readings of Joyce destabilize the opposed categories of colonial and metropolitan, mainstream and margin, aesthetics and politics. They follow the trace of a writerly desire that is anti-colonial but not strictly nationalist, and that speak to what Eagleton calls the 'free state' of Joyce's fiction,⁹⁴ free from the limitations of both art and nationalism.

The Postcolonial Jane Austen both consolidates recent developments in Austen criticism and, in a deconstructive mode, represents the resistant voices that unsettle canonical English literature. While it follows Said's lead in exposing the links between British literature and imperial activity in the nineteenth century, the collection does not simply shore readings of Austen's imperial thematics and determinations, her nationalism or Englishness, and brings to bear instead, under the auspices of the 'postcolonial', questions of class, race and gender. As Sunder Rajan puts it, 'Why we read Jane Austen is also a function of how we read Jane Austen.'⁹⁵

The postcolonial canon

In a lecture titled 'What is a Classic?' given in Graz, Austria, in 1991, J. M. Coetzee revises T. S. Eliot's lecture of the same title given to the Virgil Society

in London in 1944. Eliot articulates his topic by pitting the classic ideal against the contingent and the provincial, and espousing a utopian cultural homogeneity as a precondition for the emergence of the classic. Eliot identifies Virgil's *Aeneid* as the originary classic of all Europe, a mind that maintains an unconscious balance between past tradition and the originality of its contemporary moment. Virgil is a poet of the eternal metropolis, not provincial, but Roman and European. He is a man of genius actuating the genius of his language. In his belated address Coetzee says that what struck him when he reread Eliot's famous lecture in preparation for his present one, was the fact that, and I quote Coetzee here: 'nowhere does Eliot reflect on the fact of his own Americanness, or at least his American origins, and therefore on the somewhat odd angle at which he comes, honouring a European poet to a European audience'.⁹⁶

As Coetzee points out, Eliot's project not only involves inventing a fully European identity for Virgil but also claiming for England a problematic European identity. 'How and why [did] Eliot himself become English enough for the issue to matter to him', asks Coetzee. 'Why did Eliot become English at all?'⁹⁷ The motives, according to Coetzee, were confused and complex: anglophilia, a strong identification with the English middle class, a certain American self-loathing. Arguably, the World Wars were instrumental in turning Eliot's *avant guerre* cosmopolitanism to a paranoid and displaced nationalism. 'England is a "Latin" country', Eliot had proclaimed in 1923.⁹⁸ By 1944, Eliot had become an Englishman, or a 'Roman Englishman', to quote Coetzee.⁹⁹

According to Coetzee, Eliot uses the story of Aeneas as a fable of exile followed by nation-founding to evoke the trajectory of his own life history, appropriating the cultural weight of the epic to back himself. Coetzee argues that Eliot is remaking his national identity here by inserting it in a Western European and Catholic cosmopolitanism. He is, as Coetzee says, claiming 'a line of descent less from the Eliots of New England and/or Somerset than from Virgil and Dante'.¹⁰⁰ 'What is a classic? It is not a new question', Eliot had said by way of introducing his topic. So what is Coetzee's investment in this old question, and how does he answer it?

In his 1980 acceptance speech for South Africa's most prestigious literary prize, the CNA award, Coetzee had made a clear distinction between provincial, national and metropolitan literature. Can the 'bodies of writing in English coming out of Africa' be deemed as 'national literatures', Coetzee wonders.¹⁰¹ The crucial challenge of writing, Coetzee claims, was to find expedient form for content. With 'passion, imagination, fluency, enough sense of what the

world is like and what it could be like, and one or two other qualities', the writer does not lack for things to say. The problem is that 'what you can say, what you can think, what you can feel' are defined and delimited by formal considerations and structures that were 'not easily changed, much less invented'.¹⁰² Literary history shows that forms do not move as easily from the periphery to the centre, or from periphery to periphery, as they do from centre to periphery. Important modifications of literary form, Coetzee observes, tend not to take place on the periphery but 'where the overlay of old forms is densest and where the resistance of old form to new expression is felt most oppressively, that is to say in the cultural centres of the civilization, which I will gather under the name of the metropolis'.¹⁰³ The relationship of the South African writer to the metropolis, Coetzee concludes disquietingly, 'is not all that different from what it was seventy years ago'.¹⁰⁴ What the CNA award seeks to recognize and nurture then is not an emergent national literature, but an accreted provincial literature. Provincial literature, however, need not imply derivative minor literature. Coetzee unconvincingly pits the provincial as a counter-force within the national, which aspires to the very material and symbolic hegemony that it proposes to dismantle. By defending the idea of the 'provincial writer', Coetzee seems to be 'attempting to position himself on an alternative, necessarily inexact, and specifically literary map and to create space for his own metropolitan 'affiliations' as Peter McDonald comments:

At a time when his identification with a cosmopolitan modernist literary heritage that extended from Joyce to Beckett, via Kafka and Faulkner, was considered at best contentious, at worst politically irresponsible, his revisionist anti-nationalism had a personal as well as a broader public significance.¹⁰⁵

In this lecture too, Coetzee activates the problematic provincial/metropolitan binary. Eliot the provincial is indeed a pattern and figure of the author, we learn. Just as Virgil spoke across the ages to Eliot, Coetzee, age fifteen, had undergone the impact of the classic: an afternoon in the back garden in the suburbs of Cape Town, the music of Bach from the house next door, 'after which everything changed'.¹⁰⁶ Does the classic choose and enthrall us, or do we choose to be thus elected and reconfigured by a transcendent ideal? Was that experience in the garden mystic or material, Coetzee wonders?

[Was] I symbolically electing high European culture, and command of the codes of that culture, as a route that would take me out of my class position in white South African society and ultimately out of what I must have felt, in terms however obscure or mystified, as an historical dead end – a road that

would culminate (again symbolically) with me on a platform in Europe addressing a cosmopolitan audience on Bach, T.S. Eliot and the question of the classic?¹⁰⁷

According to Coetzee, the classic is historically constituted by the criticism it receives down the ages. It is also that something that escapes ideological determination. ‘What is a classic?’ refers to that which survives sceptical questioning – in fact it defines itself by surviving. Coetzee shows a strong affinity with Eliot in the way he brings his topic to a close. According to Eliot, the classical criterion is of vital importance to literary criticism. Coetzee goes on to assert that the function of criticism itself is determined by the classic:

The function of criticism is defined by the classic: criticism is that which is duty-bound to interrogate the classic. Thus the fear that the classic will not survive the de-centring acts of criticism may be turned on its head: rather than being the foe of the classic, criticism, and indeed criticism of the most sceptical kind, may be what the classic uses to define itself and ensure its survival.¹⁰⁸

As Coetzee observes, it is not the possession of some essential quality that makes it possible for the classic to survive barbarism. Rather, ‘what survives the worst of barbarism, surviving because generations of people cannot afford to let go of it and therefore hold on to it at all costs – that is the classic’, he asserts.¹⁰⁹ In a 2001 interview with Eleanor Wachtel, Coetzee is asked to comment, as critic, on ‘what makes a classic’. His answer echoes that of Horace 2,000 years ago:

When it comes to the question of *What is a classic?*, I have nothing better to offer than to fall back on what Horace said, which is that it’s a book that has somehow managed to stay around for a long time. The implication is that if people have been reading it for a long time and have not consigned it to the dust heap then there must be something to be said for it.¹¹⁰

‘He said that about 2,000 years ago and he said it well enough for me to be repeating it today’, Coetzee insists.¹¹¹ It is not surprising then that Coetzee counts as canonical (or ‘essential’, responding to the terms of Wachtel’s question), works and writers of antiquity: the Bible, *The Iliad*, Plato and Aristotle.

This Eliotic turn away from the ‘new’ to the ‘present moment of the past’ is reworked in a very different way in Derek Walcott’s aesthetic. ‘We think of tradition as history’, claims Walcott in the ‘Muse of History’.¹¹² Instead of a tradition that is deadening and deterministic, and privileges sequential time, however, Walcott proposes a tradition that is invented by imagination, and which synthesizes past and present. ‘Poetry conjugates both tenses

simultaneously: the past and the present.¹¹³ In his 1974 essays Walcott speaks of the way the Caribbean is looked at: rootless, mongrelized, ruined, no real people but fragments and echoes. The victims' history is both the deep amnesiac blow that cleaves the brain – the loss of genealogy, recall of race and cultural memory in the sea-crossings – and a remembered past of slavery and brutalization. And the history of heroes is a sordid affair, which proves equally debilitating. Walcott famously states in 'The Muse of History' that:

In the New World servitude to the Muse of History has produced a literature of recrimination and despair, a literature of revenge written by the descendants of slaves or a literature of remorse written by the descendants of masters.¹¹⁴

Walcott translates the anxiety of history that haunts the West Indian into a resolution to make the 'nothing' of history a ground of possibility. He calls for New World writers to reject the idea of history as time for its 'original concept as myth':

For them history is fiction, subject to the fitful muse, memory. Their philosophy, based on a contempt for historic time, is revolutionary, for what they repeat to the New World is its simultaneity with the Old.¹¹⁵

In this schema, the anxiety of influence is not a matter of being enslaved to the past, but a creative condition of being 'inhabited by presences'.¹¹⁶ Walcott's work bears complex testimony to what Christopher Ricks calls the 'predicaments and responsibilities of "the poet as heir"',¹¹⁷ but the legacy is imagined and the history 'nonsynchronous' (to quote Ernst Bloch)¹¹⁸ or out of sync with the 'here' and 'now' of global capital. As Paul Breslin observes, Walcott's influences are postmodern, premodern and antimodern.¹¹⁹ His poetry brings into play the works and words of classic modernists such as Conrad, Crane, Eliot, Joyce, Pound, Dylan Thomas and Yeats ('I blest myself in his voice', the speaker of *Omeros* says of Joyce while travelling in Ireland) alongside less canonical moderns like Césaire, Chamoiseau, Harris, Glissant and Rhys.

In *What Is World Literature?*, David Damrosch presents world literature not as a canon of texts but as a dynamic field, a mode of circulation and reading whereby books exist in literary systems beyond their culture of origin. The literary corpus that constitutes world literature at any given time is not fixed, but variable. The ways in which the works of world literature are read are also (ideally) variable. A given work may enter into world literature and fall out again, depending on the 'complex dynamics of cultural change and contestation'.¹²⁰ 'Very few', Damrosch states, 'secure a quick and permanent place in the limited company of perennial World Masterpieces'.¹²¹ Damrosch's

definition of a masterpiece updates the classic for a world that is, to quote Franco Moretti, ‘simultaneously *one*, and *unequal*: with a core, and a periphery (and a semiperiphery) that are bound together in a relationship of growing inequality’.¹²² While the classic is a work of lasting value, identified primarily with Greek and Roman art, and often closely associated with imperial hierarchies, the masterpiece can be an ancient or modern work and need not have any foundational cultural force. The greatness of the masterpiece seems to lie in its perpetuation of a transcendent difficulty level, a form of lasting consequence, a classic ideality:

In this literary analog of a liberal democracy the (often middle-class) master-works could engage in ‘a great conversation’ with their aristocratic forebears, a conversation in which their culture and class of origin mattered less than the great ideas they expressed anew.¹²³

Damrosch discredits the culture of ‘presentism’ that entails opportunistic, erratic, and often unhistorical appropriations of the past for a perpetual present.¹²⁴ The canons of the earlier periods, suggests Damrosch, should be re-examined and opened up rather than abandoned, and a masterpiece is a work in which the past is reconfigured and put to use. In postcolonial literature and criticism such reconfiguring of a hypertrophic past is not merely relatable to the function of criticism or the Oedipal generational struggle between poets and their predecessors, but it has nevertheless frequently taken the form of filiative repetition (paternal precursor and late-comer son) outlined by Bloom in *The Anxiety of Influence*.¹²⁵ ‘The postcolonial’, according to Gyan Prakash, ‘exists as an aftermath, as an after – after being worked over by colonialism.’¹²⁶ ‘We are always *after*’, says Gayatri Spivak – ‘after the empire of reason, our claims to it always short of adequate.’¹²⁷ Bloom’s theory of influence is predicated on the idea of a time lag – a great work has symbolic preeminence because it came before – and this insidious connection between priority and novelty has haunted literary production in the erstwhile colonies. It is as if ‘history were like a series of children being born one after the other from past to present *ad infinitum*’.¹²⁸ Said warns against the easy application of the model of influence on all forms of repeating discourse:

An irreducibly, serial, filiative conception of sociohistorical time such as this totally obscures the interesting problems of emergence, in which cultural phenomena are not simply ascribed priority of a miraculous birth, but are treated as a family of ideas emerging ‘permanently in discourse’.¹²⁹

Said is more positive on affiliative models of repetition, such as the one described by Marx in *The Eighteenth Brumaire*, where repetition is not symptomatic and immediate, but an analytic technique of belated regrouping and redistribution. As Gyan Prakash observes, postcolonial literature and criticism in the twentieth (and twenty-first) century occupies a space that is neither inside nor outside the history of Western domination but in a tangential relation to it. This is what Homi Bhabha calls an in-between, hybrid position of practice and negotiation, or what for Spivak constitutes the praxis of 'reversing, displacing, and seizing the apparatus of value-coding'.¹³⁰ I would like to end this section with a brief discussion of colonial/postcolonial mimicry. If Coetzee's (and Eliot's) questioning of the classic activates the possibility of mobility between unequal historical and literary systems, the idea of mimicry enjoins us to mind the temporal as well as spatial aspects of postcolonial emergence.

In 'Of mimicry and man: the ambivalence of colonial discourse', Homi Bhabha defines colonial mimicry as a discursive operation in which 'the excess or slippage produced by the *ambivalence* of mimicry (almost the same, but *not quite*)' interrupts the disciplinary power/knowledge networks of the colonial system and makes them amenable to structures of historical difference. Mimicry transforms master discourses into 'into an uncertainty which fixes the colonial subject as a "partial" presence'.¹³¹ In mimicry, says Bhabha:

the representation of identity and meaning is rearticulated along the axis of metonymy . . . mimicry is like camouflage, not a harmonization or repression of difference, but a form of resemblance that differs/defends presence by displaying it in part, metonymically.¹³²

The mimic responds to the colonial desire to replicate its authority by a creative misprision/misuse of the appurtenances of that authority and through a repetition that is parodic and subversive. In an essay on parrots and parrotry in Caribbean literature, Graham Huggan says of the mimic man that:

Like the parrot, he mimics His Master's Voice only to mock it: the simulated obedience of mimicry is revealed as a form of camouflaged disobedience, a means by which the totalising discourses supporting colonial hierarchies of power are made to confront their own partiality.¹³³

Colonial presence is split between its appearance as original and authoritative and its articulation as mediated repetition and open textuality. As Bhabha states, such a display of difference produces a mode of authority that is agonistic, rather than antagonistic,¹³⁴ and allows us to deploy the psycho-analytic question of the desire to the pathology of the colonial subject.

Enunciation is the scene of creative heterogeneity, of differing and deferring: 'It is through the vicissitudes of enunciation that the borders between objects or subjects or practices are being constituted.'¹³⁵ Bhabha undermines the model of mimicry that locates the other as a fixed phenomenological point, opposed to the self. In the foreword to Fanon's *Black Skin*, he turns Fanon's idea of the hysterical ambivalence – black skin, white masks – of colonial pathology into an altogether philosophical meditation on the idea of Man as his alienated image, not self and other, but the alienated and othered self psychically integrated to constitute postcolonial identity. The task of the postcolonial critic, according to Bhabha, is that of translation, seizing upon the ambivalent space and disjunctive present of cultural statements. For Bhabha, the signifiatory and representational undecidability of colonial discourse and postcolonial acts of relocation and reinscription of subaltern agency mark a time of liberation. But this inmixing of culture and politics through the lived practice of mimicry brings up the old feminist historian question: if the master discourse is split in enunciation, does that necessarily mean that the woman, native, other, has spoken? Can postcolonial repetition and recurrence be wholly redeemed as difference? Can postcolonial rewriting of the canon lead to the emergence of what Pascale Casanova calls 'literary time' and 'the creation of a literary space endowed with its own laws?'¹³⁶ And can this time and space be called 'international'?

Conclusion

Contestations of transcendent literary value occur in some form whenever there is in process any kind of what Kermode calls 'secular canon-formation',¹³⁷ as reflected in curricula setting, pedagogical imperatives of coverage, what Spivak calls the 'museumization' of masterpieces, the compulsory reading we list for students. The old imperial idea of the canon may be undermined and restructured in postcolonial writing, but persists under varying dispositions. Postcolonial responses to the canon are inevitably tied to the politics of the classroom, and I would like to end there with the aid of an exemplary fictional instance. Lloyd Jones's *Mister Pip* is set in a small village on the Papua New Guinea island of Bougainville in the South Pacific. It is an island in the throes of civil war and eighty-six days have passed since Matilda's last day of school when Mr Watts, the only white man on the island, reopens the school and tells the children he will introduce them to Mr Dickens. 'I will be honest with you. I have no wisdom, none at all ... whatever we have between us is all we've got. Oh, and of course Mr Dickens.'¹³⁸ Mr Watts

recounts the tale episodically each night to avert danger. The improvised Dickens's retelling extrapolates freely from his life and the lives of the islanders while offering the children 'another piece of the world'.¹³⁹ The thirteen-year-old narrator, Matilda, closely identifies with the orphan protagonist, Pip, and even builds him a beachfront shrine. She seems to survive the most horrendous personal and historical trauma with little more than the power of story, a classic mobility narrative (*Great Expectations*) that gives her voice and hope. Fiction and reality clash when 'redskin' soldiers mistake Pip for a rebel fighter, but in the end Mr Watts's and Matilda's faith in literature's transfiguring power holds. Matilda emerges a postcolonial subject newly capacitated to read the present in the light of a broadened, more discerning, reading of the past. 'Pip was my story, even if I was a girl, and my face black as the shining night.'¹⁴⁰

Notes

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Island writing, Creole cultures

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Is it possible to speak of island literatures in global, comparative terms? Are geography and colonial history both so influential that we can say that they have produced an identifiable body of postcolonial island literatures? This chapter explores methodologies for comparing island writing by turning to contemporary literature in English from the Caribbean, Indian and Pacific archipelagoes, foregrounding the important contributions made by island writers to postcolonial discourse and literature. Although one might arguably define every land mass on the globe as an island, this chapter focuses on the literary production of former European colonies in the global south, particularly tropical islands with plantation, diaspora and creolization histories, as well as indigenous literatures in white settler nations.¹ Although the concerns explored here are not restricted to island contexts, this chapter suggests that the collusion of geography and history has made these particular issues more prevalent in contemporary island writing than in other bodies of postcolonial literature.

Colonial narratives and the tourist industry have long depicted island space as remote, isolated and peripheral to modernity. Yet island writers have demonstrated the ways in which centuries of transoceanic diaspora and settlement have rendered island spaces as vital and dynamic loci of cultural and material exchange. Contrary to the assumption that the privileged sites of history and modernity are continental (or generated from the British archipelago), many scholars have demonstrated that tropical islands and peoples were integral to the development of anthropology, botany, environmentalism, plantation capitalism, nuclear weapons and even the English novel. From the early British texts of island colonialism, such as William Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (1610–11) and Daniel Defoe's *The Life and Strange Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* (1719), the island has provided the material, ideological and imaginative space for forging new social relations and literary genres. Island writers have turned to this complex history in order to reshape the colonial

myth of island isolation, foregrounding how accessibility by sea ensures that island spaces have experienced complex patterns of migration, diaspora, 'exisle' and settlement. In fact, the sea is a vital component of island identity and has contributed to the formation of a complex maritime imagination in historical, literary and cultural production. Moreover, far from being isolated, most islands are part of archipelagoes and have simultaneous national and regional alliances. As a series of small nations (or colonial territories) connected by the sea, islands are often constituted by the activity of regional bodies of water such as the Caribbean, Pacific and Indian Oceans, allowing for more fluid, transcultural and multilingual relationships than those associated with the terrestrial borders of the nation state. Writing about the Caribbean, Martiniquan writer Édouard Glissant explains 'each island embodies openness. The dialectic between inside and outside is reflected in the relationship of land and sea. It is only those who are tied to the European continent who see insularity as confining.'² Building upon Glissant and others, Chris Bongie has argued:

the island is a figure that can and must be read in more than one way: on the one hand, as the absolutely particular, a space complete unto itself and thus an ideal metaphor for a traditionally conceived, unified and unitary, identity; on the other, as a fragment, a part of some greater whole from which it is in exile and to which it must be related – in an act of (never completed) completion that is always also, as it were, an ex-isle, a loss of the particular. The island is thus the site of a double identity – closed and open.³

St Lucian poet Derek Walcott explains that this tension between land and sea is vital to the spatial scale of the island imagination. 'There is a strength that is drawn from island peoples in that reality of scale in which they inhabit. There is a sense both of infinity and acceptance of the possibility of infinity . . . It provides a kind of settling of the mind that is equal to the level of the horizon.'⁴ For island writers, turning to the infinity of the oceanic imaginary provides an alternative model of space and time, a 'tidalectic' between past and present, land and sea, the local and the global. A term coined by Barbadian poet-historian Kamau Brathwaite, 'tidalectics' draws upon 'the movement of the water backwards and forwards as a kind of cyclic . . . motion, rather than linear'⁵ and provides a dynamic methodology for approaching island literatures. In an effort to destabilize colonial myths of island isolation and linear models of progress, this chapter adopts Brathwaite's tidalectics as a method for examining the relationship between land and sea, diaspora and indigeneity, and arrival and settlement in island literatures.

This chapter is divided into four sections. The first section examines influential colonial literary models of island space such as *The Tempest* and *Robinson Crusoe* and how these texts set a precedent for discussions about cultural and colonial entanglement in island literatures in English. Importantly, the patriarchal colonial power relations between Shakespeare's Prospero and Caliban as well as Defoe's Crusoe and Friday have been reconfigured by many island writers and interrogated in terms of their literary patrilineage. This section foregrounds the question of genealogical and racial origins, an important concern in island writing, by turning to works by George Lamming (Barbados), Dev Virahsawmy (Mauritius) and Keri Hulme (Aotearoa/New Zealand). The second section turns to Derek Walcott's assertion that 'the sea is history' and foregrounds the transoceanic imaginary in island writers, positioning the trope of colonial arrival by sea and its subsequent cross-cultural entanglements as vital elements of the history of island writing and its post-colonial revisions. Writers explored here include Edwidge Danticat (Haiti/US), Epeli Hau'ofa (Tonga/Fiji), Witi Ihimaera (Aotearoa/New Zealand) and Khal Torabully (Mauritius). Although the maritime imaginary encompasses diverse experiences, ranging from middle-passage crossings in slave and indenture ships to indigenous voyaging across the Pacific, the writerly engagement with the transoceanic provides a vital trope to explore narratives of cultural and ontological origin. The third section shifts from the focus on maritime diaspora to narratives of the land, indigeneity and national belonging, touching on the works of Sam Selvon (Trinidad), Merle Collins (Grenada) and Patricia Grace (Aotearoa/New Zealand). While the transoceanic imaginary provides an important way to think through histories of diaspora and contemporary outmigration patterns in the wake of globalization, the focus on local and terrestrial concerns allows for a closer scrutiny of issues such as indigenous sovereignty and its relationship to the settler state, postcolonial nation building, local resource development, and the relational virtues of small islandness which prioritize local communities and genealogies. The final section turns to postcolonial island texts concerned with a creolizing 'tidalectic' between land and sea through tropic figures of the contact zone such as the beach and the plantation. Overall this chapter foregrounds the creative ways in which postcolonial island writers have utilized their unique geographic surroundings to explore the relationship between roots and routes, to theorize local concerns of sovereignty in the wake of globalization as well as to demonstrate historical connections across space to other island archipelagoes with similar colonial histories.

Colonial models

While the etymology of the term ‘island’ simply means land surrounded by water, the popular understanding of this space is of a timeless, tropical, ‘desert’ island often associated with abundant flora, fauna and sunny beaches positioned outside the ambit of global history. In fact, in contemporary tourist discourse, the traveller generally leaves the industrialized urban north, a space understood to be the locus of history-making, to escape to a tropical island that is alluring precisely because it is positioned outside the progressive historical pace of modern time.⁶ Yet the discursive construction of the island as an especially isolated and remote space is a consequence of European colonialism and has been naturalized by the popular castaway narrative which upholds an accidental model of colonial invasion.⁷ Over the centuries of European expansion into the Atlantic, Indian and Pacific archipelagoes, the island became represented – paradoxically – as increasingly distant in time and space from a presumably modern and civilized Western metropole. Even as the forces of colonialism, slavery, anthropology, tourism and diaspora altered island communities and landscapes, the tropical island was increasingly rendered as inaccessible, a space only visited through remarkable circumstances such as shipwreck or capture by pirates. Yet this has been challenged by scholars in a variety of disciplines. Focusing on what he terms ‘green imperialism’, historian Richard Grove has shown how tropical islands across the globe were vital to the development of human and botanical transplantation, as well as theories of evolution and environmental resource conservation. In anthropology, Fernando Ortiz and Sidney Mintz have demonstrated how African and European relations in the Caribbean plantation system resulted in the complex social process of transculturation and creolization. Literary scholar Diana Loxley has demonstrated the ways in which the muscular Christianity of nineteenth-century British fiction was constituted through boys’ adventure novels about colonized islands across the globe. Writing about the Pacific, archaeologist Patrick Kirsch and historian Greg Denning have both criticized the general neglect of islands in the rendering of global history, and shown how vital islands and their residents have been to staging the history of European expansion as well as theories of human and cultural difference. From different vantage points, these scholars have established that island communities – often unwillingly – have provided the knowledge, labour and space for European laboratories and the development of global modernity.⁸

From Thomas More’s *Utopia* (1516) to Johann David Wyss’s *Swiss Family Robinson* (*Der Schweizerische Robinson*, 1812), European texts have depicted

islands as remote spaces to ponder philosophical origins, renovate social structures, address cultural and biological difference, and to explore and experiment with the relationship between humans and the natural environment. Kevin Carpenter's research has shown that between 1788 and 1910, over 500 desert-island stories were published in England alone.⁹ These Robinsonades, or island solitude and adventure stories so popular in Western Europe, may have been inspired by *Robinson Crusoe*, but the genre's origins extend to the East. Ibn Tufail's twelfth-century text *Hayy ibn Yaqdhan*, a philosophical treatise from Islamic Spain on precisely these representations of island isolation, origins, and the trope of the castaway and his native servant, became a vital influence after its late seventeenth-century translation from Arabic into Latin and English. This text was an important influence on Daniel Defoe and, by extension, centuries of Robinsonades to follow.¹⁰ Importantly, Ibn Tufail's novel (a revision of an earlier Persian work) expanded the concept of *tabula rasa* or 'blank slate' through the motif of the isolated castaway who recreates social, material and philosophical relations on an isolated island. This concept of *tabula rasa* was adopted by John Locke, who emphasized the self-authoring of human subjectivity.¹¹ I suspect that this concept of the 'blank slate' for human imprinting – which provided the epistemological space for the debate between nature and nurture – was deeply tied to the construction of the island as empty space, *terra nullius*, in which one might imprint imported desires. Moreover, the shift from the philosophical concept of *tabula rasa* to the denial of sovereignty associated with the colonial construction of *terra nullius* (an erasure of indigenous presence by declaring empty lands for European control) had obvious political consequences.

From a colonial perspective, the boundedness of islands provided an ideal laboratory for social and biological experimentation: a panopticon, a contained society, *terra nullius*, a figure for the ship and the world in miniature. The colonial model of the deserted island suspends history in a bounded, controlled space in which to render its narration possible. In *The Tempest* and its rewrites, the island provides a space to address issues of political and biological reproduction as well as literary succession. Yet the discourses of reproduction and succession are fraught with erasures. Loxley has shown that colonial-era authors grafted imported ideologies, technologies and histories onto the island (such as Crusoe's handy cache of shipwreck supplies) rather than acknowledging indigenous presence, thus circumventing the thorny issue of native sovereignty.¹² Ultimately colonial writers imagined the island as a European world in miniature, a discursive space in which to perform and experiment

with the material realities of colonial expansion. After hundreds of Robinsonades, this island *tabula rasa* accrued a layered textuality, becoming ‘the site of a radical rehearsal of words already spoken, a rewriting of books already written’.¹³ Importantly, this textuality is specifically gendered. Popular colonial texts from J. M. Ballantyne’s *The Coral Island* (1857) to Jules Verne’s *The Mysterious Island* (1874) inscribe ‘science, technology, empire and exploration [as] *indissolubly* anchored to masculinity’, a gendered mobility that is often projected upon a passive, feminized island space.¹⁴ In the popular boys’ island adventure novel of the nineteenth century, the island provides for the fantasy of autogenesis in which men produce boys through the dissemination of technology, the English language and Christian education.¹⁵

Although this colonial island fantasy produced many parodies and critiques from within the colonial metropole,¹⁶ the first generation of postcolonial island writers who have ‘written back’ to the English canon have, generally speaking, focused on questions of textual inheritance through the metaphors of patrilineage and exile. Drawing on both *The Tempest* and *Robinson Crusoe*, French sociologist Octave Mannoni offered a psychoanalytic model of colonial parent/child relations in *Prospero and Caliban: The Psychology of Colonization* (1950). Although they took issue with Mannoni’s model, it was influential to Martiniquan writers Frantz Fanon and Aimé Césaire, who offered more materialist critiques of the patrilineal model of colonialism.¹⁷ This question of succession and inheritance has been vital to both colonial and postcolonial literary discourse. Edward Said has demonstrated a shift from filiative to affiliative relationships in Western art since the era of modernism. He explains that in this break with tradition, ‘natural’ and familial bonds are ruptured and substituted by more heterogeneous affiliations that are ‘transpersonal’, professional and class conscious.¹⁸ Building upon Said, John Thieme traces a similar shift away from colonial filiation to affiliation in postcolonial revisions of canonical texts. He explains, ‘problematic parentage becomes a major trope in postcolonial con-texts, where the genealogical bloodlines of transmission are frequently delegitimised by multiple ancestral legacies... Orphans and bastards abound in postcolonial texts and the engagement with issues of parentage is often... intense.’¹⁹

The patriarchal parent/child model of island colonization has become a vital point of interrogation for postcolonial writers, many of whom have revised Shakespeare’s depiction of Prospero and Caliban with particular attention to the question of language and representation. Caliban’s famous retort to Prospero and Miranda, ‘you taught me language, and my profit on’t / Is, I know how to curse’ (1.ii.366–8), has been an important inspiration, particularly

in the Caribbean where *The Tempest* is thought to be set. As Peter Hulme has shown, the name Caliban is an anagram for the term cannibal, Columbus's mistranslation of Carib/Caniba/Caribbean.²⁰ But if Prospero with all of his books can be seen to represent the power of colonial literacy and language, Caliban, as the inheritor of his language and ultimately the island, has been a primary figure for the postcolonial island writer.²¹ Caribbean authors as diverse as George Lamming, Aimé Césaire, Kamau Brathwaite, Roberto Fernández Retamar and Derek Walcott have all to some extent reclaimed the rebellious character Caliban, emphasizing his exile from land and language, issues of sovereignty and independence, and the power embedded in canonical narrative traditions.²²

The boundedness of the island has been translated as omnipotence over space, an assumption nicely epitomized by Prospero's attempts to control the island through the knowledge gleaned by his books and yet simultaneously critiqued in Shakespeare's play by Prospero's inability to anticipate Caliban's revolt. In an era of decolonization, this tension between social control and native revolt has been a key element of postcolonial island rewrites. Aimé Césaire's *Une Tempête* (1969) for instance stages a debate between Ariel and Caliban about complicity in the colonial project and the best possible route towards liberation, positioning Ariel's mixed racial heritage as determinative of his political alliances and associating Caliban, who calls for *uhuru*, with African epistemologies and 'transcolonial' models of liberation.²³ This revolutionary potential – and failure – of the colonized subject has been explored in Kamau Brathwaite's poem 'Caliban', a figure who appears in his trilogy *The Arrivants* under various forms of colonial and social rule. Reconfiguring Caliban's misdirected pledge of allegiance to the drunken Stefano – 'Ban' ban' Ca-caliban / Has a new master' (II. ii. 178–9) – Brathwaite substitutes the Jacobean drama of *The Tempest* for the liberating political and artistic potential of the region's Carnival celebration, specifically situating it in the recuperative power of folk language and rhythm: 'And / Ban / Ban / Cal- / iban / like to play / pan / at the Car- / nival'.²⁴ In their construction of a modern and creolized figure of Caliban, many of these engagements with *The Tempest*, as Peter Hulme has noted, are less invested in critical readings of Shakespeare's Renaissance play or context than adopting it as an allegorical device to explore the complexity of contemporary postcolonial concerns.²⁵

Postcolonial island writing has often staged the entanglement between islander and arrivant, master and slave, metropole and colony, and their overlapping discourses of physical and cultural 'ex-isle'. The title of George Lamming's novel *Water with Berries* (1972), for instance, adopts Caliban's

poignant complaint to Prospero: 'When thou cam'st first / Thou strok'st me and made much of me; wouldst give me / *Water with berries* in't, and teach me how / To name the bigger light' (i.ii.334–7). Lamming depicts Caribbean migration to postwar England as a legacy of exile that can be traced to Prospero's patrilineage. In his essays in *Pleasures of Exile* (1960) he writes:

I am a direct descendant of slaves, too near the actual enterprise to believe that its echoes are over with the reign of emancipation. Moreover, I am a direct descendant of Prospero worshipping in the same temple of endeavour, using his legacy – not to curse our meeting – but to push it further, reminding the descendants of both sides that what's done is done, and can only be seen as a soil from which other gifts, or the same gift endowed with different meanings, may grow towards a future which is colonised by our acts in this moment, but which must always remain open.²⁶

Like Derek Walcott, who has also explored the patrilineal model of Prospero/Caliban and Crusoe/Friday as literary figures of the Caribbean colonial condition and the region's production of art, Lamming suggests these questions of racial and literary inheritance are intertwined. As Walcott's poem 'A Far Cry from Africa' has famously queried, 'I who am poisoned with the blood of both, / Where shall I turn, divided to the vein?'²⁷

In his depiction of three exiled male artists in England (a painter, composer and actor), Lamming explores but does not limit his engagement with *The Tempest* to the racialization of colonial heritage and patriarchal fears of miscegenation, such as Prospero's concern with a union between Caliban and his daughter Miranda.²⁸ Importantly, Lamming expands the legacy of colonial and artistic inheritance to other figures in the play. In *Pleasures of Exile* he analyses the remarkable textual and physical absence of Miranda's mother, questioning the colonial island trope of masculine ontogenesis. In an effort to explore the complex gendering of empire, *Water with Berries* fills in this absence with the landlady Old Dowager, a reflection of a matrilineal legacy in colonialism that results in profound ambivalence towards the 'mother country'.²⁹

Other postcolonial writers have been similarly concerned with how women figure into the genealogy of this ur-text of island colonialism.³⁰ Jamaican author Michelle Cliff has similarly emphasized the problem of island 'ex-isle' and called attention to the gendering of the patriarchal model of colonial relations. Her essays have questioned the patrilineage of Prospero/Caliban and her novels have highlighted the agency of characters such as Ariel and Miranda, Caliban's original language teacher, particularly in her novel *No Telephone to Heaven* (1987). In fact, this recuperation of Miranda's white Creole identity as a legacy of colonialism can be traced back to Jean Rhys's

novel *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966).³¹ David Dabydeen (Guyana) has contributed to Lamming's call for an engagement with *The Tempest's* suppressed matrilineage in his 'Miranda/Britannia' poems, as well as exploring Miranda's sexual relationship with Caliban.³² Jamaican scholar Sylvia Wynter has demonstrated the ways in which *The Tempest* has staged a colonial hierarchy with Prospero reflecting the epitome of masculine rationalist knowledge, Caliban as native irrationality, and Miranda's entrance, through the patriarchal exchange of marriage, into this courtly model of colonial power. She remarks that the text occludes the presence of native or racialized women as 'an alternative sexual-erotic model of desire', thereby erasing an indigenous system of biological and cultural reproduction which would have threatened the expansion of Europe.³³ In a similar effort to develop alternative spaces of knowledge outside patriarchal colonialism, other writers have recuperated the character Sycorax, Caliban's African mother and Prospero's greatest perceived threat. Famously, Kamau Brathwaite interprets Sycorax as a historical presence that is represented in a visual font (Sycorax Video Style), a typeface that allows him to articulate 'dub riddims and nation language and calibanisms' on the page, an inspiring metaphor generative of the suppressed African mother tongue.³⁴

Later generations of island writers have not adhered so closely to Shakespeare's original narrative and have transformed the meanings of the play by emphasizing local island concerns and languages. Dev Virahsawmy's play *Toufann: A Mauritian Fantasy* (1991), for instance, is written in Mauritian Creole (Morisyen) and integrates multiple Shakespeare texts into the narrative: Miranda is substituted by the more forthright 'Kordelia', and Iago and Polonius enter into the story. (Virahsawmy had already translated *MacBeth* into Creole.) Importantly Mauritius is one of the few islands on the world that did not have an indigenous population at the time of European contact. Accordingly, in terms of cultural origins it is decidedly a Creole that draws from multiple European, African and Asian cultures, a formulation reflected in characters such as the *metis* Kalibann. The problem of Prospero's omnipotence over island space is articulated in modern terms of computer surveillance, and the question of patrilineage is substituted by the naturalization of Prospero's fears of miscegenation: Kalibann and Kordelia produce a child, but as Françoise Lionnet (Mauritius) points out, this emphasis on biological reproduction does not necessarily reflect a resolution of the plot.³⁵

Questions about patrilineal origins and future descendants have been a concern for Pacific writers such as Keri Hulme (Aotearoa/New Zealand), whose novel *The Bone People* (1983) loosely draws from both *The Tempest* and *Robinson Crusoe* but positions the European as a mute arrivant child, washed

ashore and adopted by indigenous Maori characters named Kerewin and Joe. These colonial island texts travelled with the empire: *Robinson Crusoe* was one of the first secular texts to be translated into Maori in 1852. Hulme's vision of familial relations supports Thieme's observation about postcolonial concerns with ancestry and orphanage. Importantly, Hulme's depiction of the island does not uphold the colonial trope of *terra nullius* or *tabula rasa*, and the European arrivant does not bring language, technology, rational discourse, or new social hierarchies as his portmanteau. Instead her novel explores the violence in both colonial and familial relations, particularly between adult and child, but leaves it to the indigenous characters to excavate their precolonial history, which they do – literally – by uncovering a Polynesian voyaging vessel that preserves the island's *mauri* (spirit). This vessel situates Maori as first arrivants and therefore sovereign, as well as agents of a complex history of maritime voyaging and technologies that predate Europe. In contrast, the European arrivant is adrift in the oceanic; in his origin story, 'in the beginning, it was darkness, and more fear, and a howling wind across the sea'.³⁶ As such, Hulme foregrounds the genealogical import of indigenous sovereignty embedded in Caliban's declaration that 'This island's mine by Sycorax my mother' (i.ii. 333). Shifting the emphasis to the indigenous or island subject who receives the (silent) European arrivant, these revisionary texts foreground questions of land and sovereignty, and denaturalize the trajectory of European appropriation of island space.

The sea is history

Because this body of literature is defined by the dynamic interrelation between land and sea, the transoceanic imagination is a constitutive component of island writing. Derek Walcott has famously declared that the 'sea is history', highlighting the difficulties in inscribing a place which is vast and always in motion and flux. This model of history demands a different methodology than the monumentalizing models of Europe. In his poem 'The Sea is History' Walcott stages a dialogue between the colonials who ask, 'Where are your monuments?' and the poet who responds, 'The sea has locked them up.' The traditional markers of history are inaccessible and perhaps not even relevant to the island writer excavating other historiographies in submarine coral and in the middle-passage bones at the bottom of the sea. To Walcott, the sea holds what 'the historian cannot hear, the howls / of all the races that crossed the water'.³⁷

Influenced by Walcott and Brathwaite, Édouard Glissant has also used an oceanic model for African diaspora history, writing in *Poetics of Relation* that:

the abyss is a tautology: the entire ocean, the entire sea gently collapsing in the end into the pleasures of sand, make one vast beginning, but a beginning whose time is marked by these balls and chains gone green.³⁸

The ocean as origin has been a vital trope to island writers, particularly those who have positioned the contemporary expulsion of ‘boat people’ in a longer historical trajectory that begins with the middle passage. For instance, Edwidge Danticat’s short story, ‘Children of the Sea’ explores the ways in which the abyss becomes a tautology for Haitians fleeing the *tonton macoutes* after President Aristide’s (first) expulsion. Caught adrift in the Caribbean with other refugees, the unnamed narrator writes back to his girlfriend that:

it was always meant to be, as though the very day that my mother birthed me, she has chosen me to live life eternal, among the children of the deep blue sea, those who have escaped the chains of slavery to form a world beneath the heavens and the blood-drenched earth where you live.³⁹

Later the narrator comments, ‘there are special spots in the sea where lost Africans who jumped off the slave ships still rest, that those who have died at sea have been chosen to make that journey in order to be reunited with their long-lost relations’.⁴⁰ Danticat inscribes the ongoing process of transoceanic diaspora for island subjects and responds to Walcott’s call to mark the sea as history, a space literally inhabited by the bodies of refugees and slaves.

Building upon the metaphor of fathoming oceanic depth, island writers have also used the breadth of the sea as a trope for regional unity. Glissant has utilized the sea as a model of regional history. Inspired by Brathwaite’s dictum that Caribbean ‘unity is submarine’, Glissant determines the islands are connected by ‘submarine roots: that is floating free, not fixed in one position in some primordial spot, but extending in all directions in our world through its networks and branches’.⁴¹ He works against the model of the isolated island by turning to Caribbean migration – originating with the earliest migrants such as Carib and Arawak – in determining that the regional sea ‘extend(s) in all directions . . . a sea that explodes the scattered lands into an arc. A sea that diffracts’.⁴²

This focus on watery trajectories is a hallmark of island writing. Cuban writer Antonio Benítez-Rojo has also developed an aquapoetic vision of the region, asserting that the Caribbean is a ‘meta-archipelago’ with the ‘virtue of having neither a boundary nor a centre’.⁴³ He highlights the dispersal of

Caribbean peoples and configures the region as much in flux as the waters that surround it. 'The culture of the Caribbean... is not terrestrial but aquatic... The Caribbean is the natural and indispensable realm of marine currents, of waves, of folds and double folds, of fluidity and sinuosity.'⁴⁴ Water appeals because of its lack of fixity and rootedness; in the words of Gaston Bachelard, water is a 'transitory element ... the essential ontological metamorphosis between heaven and earth. A being dedicated to water is a being in flux.'⁴⁵ Since migration and creolization are characteristic of island cultural formations, watery trajectories provide an apt metaphor for ethnicities 'in flux', and are vital to imagining human and cultural origins. To Walcott's characters in his epic poem *Omeros*, 'Mer was both mother and sea', whereas in Grace Nichols's (Guyana) poetry, Afro-Caribbean origins are traced back to the traumatic birth through the 'middle passage womb'.⁴⁶ Tracing a connection to the past through genealogy or filiation, a characteristic trope of postcolonial writing, this model of oceanic origins destabilizes the abstract universal narrative of colonial history and makes a familial claim to time through ancestry, rendering memory as history.

Writers from the eastern Pacific Islands have also emphasized the complex histories of indigenous voyaging, using these trajectories to configure patterns of modern migration and globalization. For instance, Samoan writer Albert Wendt has referred to himself as 'a pelagic fish on permanent migration'.⁴⁷ Anthropologist and novelist Epeli Hau'ofa (Tonga/Fiji) has reconfigured the mapping of an isolated Pacific by asserting, 'There is a gulf between viewing the Pacific as "islands in a far sea" and as "a sea of islands"'. The first emphasizes dry surfaces in a vast ocean far from the centers of power... (which) stress(es) the smallness and remoteness of the islands. The second is a more holistic perspective in which things are seen in the totality of their relationships.'⁴⁸ Hau'ofa reorients land-based bias towards the complex processes of interculturalization generated by transoceanic movement. Inspired by Walcott's sentiment that 'the sea is history', Hau'ofa concludes that 'our roots, our origins are embedded in the sea', which is 'our pathway to each other'.⁴⁹

Pacific writers such as Hau'ofa, Wendt, Sir Tom Davis (the former prime minister of the Cook Islands), Robert Sullivan (Aotearoa/New Zealand), Caroline Sinavaiana-Gabbard (Samoa/US) and Teresia Teaiwa (Fiji) have all emphasized the transoceanic history of indigenous migration across the region, establishing a larger familial relationship between islanders in which Tahitians, Maori, Hawaiians and others in the eastern Pacific refer to each other as Polynesian kin.⁵⁰ While one may not expect indigenous Pacific poetry

to reflect the same concern with transoceanic diaspora, Samoan writer Albert Wendt writes in his poem, 'Inside Us the Dead':

my polynesian fathers
who escaped the sun's wars, seeking
these islands by prophetic stars,
emerged
from the sea's eye like turtles
scuttling to beach their eggs.⁵¹

Maori author Witi Ihimaera's work has also been deeply informed by the history of transoceanic migration. In *The Whale Rider* (1987) the prologue begins with a lyrical description of Kahu, a Maori ancestor who rode a whale from Hawaiki, 'the land of the Ancients' to Aotearoa to settle his community. This migration is naturalized, for when the island is sighted, 'the land and sea sighed with gladness: *We have been found . . . Our blessing will soon come.*'⁵² Generations later his young namesake saves the same bullwhale and companions from expiring on the shore, foregrounding an ancient human/whale relationship and the role of environmental guardianship, as well as invoking human evolutionary origins in the sea. Ihimaera's vision of the boundless horizon echoes Walcott's observations of the global scope of islandness as the former inscribes the 'huge seamless marine continent which we call Te Moana Nui a Kiwa, the Great Ocean of Kiwa'.⁵³

While Ihimaera expands our vision of transoceanic migration by inscribing non-human travellers, other writers have broadened the gendered parameters of Pacific literary production about migration.⁵⁴ Teresia Kieuea Teaiwa's poetry collection *Searching for Nei Nim'anoa* (1999) calls upon 'one of only a few female figures in the male-dominated field of Pacific Island navigational traditions' as she moves between the Gilbertese, Fijian and Hawaiian islands.⁵⁵ Albert Wendt's novel *Ola* also foregrounds Pacific women travellers, depicting his protagonist Ola's subjectivity as constituted by her relationship to the sea. Through the vehicle of water Ola comes into her subjecthood at the age of six; seeing her reflection in the ocean she observes, 'Yes, it was me, I existed, I am, I am separate. I was myself.'⁵⁶ Years later at the New Zealand shore she 'felt at home, remembering: the sea which cups my islands, washes each night through my dreams, no matter what shore I reach'.⁵⁷ As a pelagic text, *Ola* privileges water as constitutive to island identity:

We are sixty-five percent water . . . Our brains are eighty per cent water. We are more water than blood. So our water ties to one another are more important than our blood ties! We carry within us the seas out of which we came.⁵⁸

Indian diaspora writers such as J. S. Kanwal and Satendra Nandan, both from Fiji, have written historical novels and poetry that reinscribe the crossing of *kalapani*, or black waters, to the islands of indenture, drawing from both historical accounts of the *girit*, or labour contract, and African middle-passage narratives.⁵⁹ Nandan, using the historical crossing as a metaphor of the second diaspora of Indo-Fijians after the 1987 coup, writes of ‘*Kalapani*, black waters, a cross across the seven seas / With blood, betrayal, grief that never cease.’⁶⁰ This body of Indian diaspora literature often demarcates a difference between a genealogical and historical relationship to the sea. Indo-Fijian writer Subramani’s novella ‘Gone Bush’ begins, ‘In the beginning was the sea—everything came out of the sea . . . from it came the goddess of life.’ Although the Indian protagonist ‘seemed . . . [like] someone sent to a landlocked culture whose people were riders of horses’,⁶¹ like Walcott’s narrator, the process of migration to the islands has realigned this character’s relationship towards the sea in a way that foregrounds the historical process. As all arrivants before the twentieth century came to islands by boat and have configured new relationships to the sea through island living, Hau’ofa argues that ‘all of us in Oceania today, whether indigenous or otherwise, can truly assert that the sea is our common heritage’.⁶²

Often travelling in refitted slave ships, Indian indenturers from Mauritius, Trinidad and other island regions have inspired an important new body of literature in which island identity is articulated in global terms. Like most maritime narratives of the middle passage or of transoceanic voyaging, the transoceanic imaginary has been traditionally imagined in terms of a shipload of male travellers or *jahaji bhai*.⁶³ Like the island, the ship is represented as a world but a peculiarly homosocial one. In general these narratives construct a maritime fraternity where women are absent from the public space of migration yet the feminine symbolic is apparent in representations of a fluid, maternal sea and a feminized, receptive land. Novels such as Ramabai Espinet’s (Trinidad) *The Swinging Bridge* (2003) have done much to recuperate the history of women in the diaspora, imagining transoceanic origins in terms of personal genealogy.⁶⁴ Mahadai Das’s (Trinidad) poem ‘They Came in Ships’ (1977) inscribes a detailed historical trajectory of the crossing of *kalapani* as cultural memory, in which the omniscient narrator translates oral to written: ‘At the horizon’s edge I hear / Voices crying in the wind.’⁶⁵ Like middle-passage narratives, these literatures inscribe the sea in terms of containment and terror as well as the creolizing possibilities of new social and cultural relations. Moreover, these inscriptions often engage corporeal images of the crossing, exploring how both the body and identity are reconfigured through

the migration process in the poetry of Lelawattee Manoo-Rahming (Trinidad) and in the work of Mauritian novelists Ananda Devi and Natacha Appanah-Mouriquand.⁶⁶

In historicizing transoceanic migration for nineteenth-century Indian indentureds (derogatorily called ‘coolies’), some authors such as David Dabydeen (Guyana) have reclaimed epic narrative to articulate the experience of the subaltern in terms of a ‘coolie odyssey’.⁶⁷ More recently Khal Torabully (Mauritius) has reclaimed the term and refashioned it into a theory of ‘coolitude’ which is deeply tied to the transoceanic imaginary. He explains, ‘It is impossible to understand the essence of “coolitude” without charting the coolies’ voyage across the seas. That decisive experience, that coolie odyssey, left an indelible stamp on the imaginary landscape of coolitude.’⁶⁸ Moreover, ‘Coolitude explores the concept of the ocean as a nodal moment of migration, a space for destruction of identity, yet also one of regeneration, when an aesthetics of migration was created.’⁶⁹ These narratives have been crucial to offering an alternative site of island historiography, destabilizing the myth of island isolation, and offering new genealogical models of oceanic origin across time and space.

Mapping the I-land

The past decade or more of postcolonial scholarship has emphasized the trajectories of diaspora in ways that are often gendered masculine and by focusing on migrancy has often deflected attention from ongoing struggles for decolonization and indigenous sovereignty. Glissant has warned about facile celebrations of migrancy and has argued for a return to local island concerns: ‘when one rediscovers one’s landscape, desire for the other country ceases to be a form of alienation’.⁷⁰ If we adopt Brathwaite’s tidalectics, facilitating a dialogue between land and sea, our scrutiny of island writing will not privilege routes over roots, and we will uncover localized island concerns that may not necessarily speak to cosmopolitan discourses of exile. This section on the ‘I-land’ discusses texts which are concerned with reterritorializing and naturalizing the subject’s relationship to the land in the wake of colonial alienation and exile. Thus a refusal to migrate from the island may reflect a resistance to colonial trajectories rather than a lack of cosmopolitanism.

In her essay, ‘A piece of land surrounded’, Marlene NourbeSe Philip (Tobago) calls attention to how island history has been recorded by outsiders without the presence of the ‘I-lander’. She writes, ‘For me, the “story” that

wanted out, wanted to tell itself, is one of islandness and its transformation into *I-landness*.⁷¹ Amidst a global geopolitics that prioritizes size, might, military and technological power, the I-land voice is often cartographically diminished to the supposed insignificance of its very landscape. Drawing attention to local island subjectivities and cultural production, and shifting away from definitions of the island as a ‘piece of real estate’, Philip’s concept of the ‘I-land’ recentres island geography as crucial to historical analysis. The I-land can be defined alternately as ‘a piece of land surrounded by seas of colonialism. Or, perhaps, afloat in its own history.’⁷²

This attempt to map a local geography can also be seen in Sam Selvon’s (Trinidad) early novel, *An Island Is a World* (1955). Like Earl Lovelace’s later work *Salt* (1996) – in which the title refers to a substance whose ingestion makes it impossible to ‘fly back to Africa’ in popular folk narrative – Selvon’s novel seeks to naturalize national belonging, resisting the tug of exile and migration.⁷³ His protagonist Foster despairs over his lack of identification with his repatriating Indian family and his inability to feel a sense of national roots in his (still colonial) Trinidad. He despairs: ‘of what material loss would it be to the world if the island suddenly sank under the sea?’⁷⁴ Foster senses that in this world which entirely ‘consisted of the continents’,⁷⁵ the disappearance of a small island like Trinidad would not alter political cartographies.

Naipaul’s infamous lament that ‘Trinidad was too unimportant and we could never be convinced of the value of reading the history of a place which was, as everyone said, only a dot on the map of the world’⁷⁶ is anticipated in Selvon’s novel (published seven years earlier), which begins with a remarkably similar image:

The world spun in (Foster’s) brain, and he imagined the island of Trinidad... He saw it on the globe, with the Americas sprawled like giant shadows above and below, and the endless Atlantic lapping the coastlines of the continents and the green islands of the Caribbean... Foster imagined Trinidad as it was, a mere dot on the globe.⁷⁷

Here Selvon demonstrates how the ‘I-land’ voice is reduced to the presumed irrelevance of its landscape; small size becomes a metonymy for the lack of history, anticipating Naipaul’s sentiment that ‘history is built around achievement and creation; and nothing was created in the West Indies... There were only plantations, prosperity, decline, neglect: *the size of the islands called for nothing else*.’⁷⁸ In his poem ‘Homage to Gregorias’ Walcott’s narrator parodies Naipaul, lamenting, ‘there was no history. No memory / Rocks haunted by seabirds, that was all.’⁷⁹ This tension about representing small island concerns

with colonial technologies and discourses is apparent in Hau'ofa's short story 'Blessed are the Meek', which describes a resident of the fictional island of Tiko as:

A citizen of a tiny country, so small that mankind is advised not to look for it on a classroom globe for it will only search in vain. More often than not cartographers leave Tiko out of their charts altogether because they can't be bothered looking for a dot sufficiently small to represent it faithfully and at the same time big enough to be seen without the aid of a microscope.⁸⁰

Hau'ofa's quote is a parody of a nineteenth-century missionary text that reported that the Fijian is said to 'look with pleasure on a globe, as a representation of the world, until directed to contrast Fiji with Asia or America, when his joy ceases, and he acknowledges, with a forced smile, "our land is not larger than the dung of a fly"; but, on rejoining his comrades, he pronounces the globe a "lying ball"'.⁸¹

Here 'geography serv(es) as a metaphor for history – as well it might in islands whose history has been so deeply influenced by geographical factors'.⁸² It is in this way that narrative, cartography and colonial history are shown in shifting relation to each other and highlighted as central to the process of historical excavation. Louise Bennett (Jamaica) has drawn attention to – and gently mocked – the important nationalist remapping of island spaces in an island tongue. In her poem 'Independance' she writes:

She hope dem caution worl'-map
Fe stop draw Jamaica small
For de lickle speck can't show
We Independantniss at all.

Morsomever we must tell map dat
We don't like we position –
Please kindly teck we out a sea
And draw we in de Ocean.⁸³

By anthropomorphizing 'worl'-map', Bennett calls attention to cartography's subjective rather than purely scientific production and the ways that colonial mapping marginalizes island spaces. These lines also foreground the ways in which independence movements metaphorically (and sometimes literally) enlarge 'I-land' cartographies. If 'an island is a world, and everywhere that people live, they create their own worlds',⁸⁴ then the island might be reclaimed as a space of belonging rather than marginalization and exile.

Merle Collins's (Grenada) novel *The Colour of Forgetting* (1995) engages specifically with these questions of small islandness and how to articulate the 'I-lander' in a way that values local cultural production. The concern with local landscape is of historical importance because, as Glissant explains, the violence of the Caribbean plantocracy has prevented 'nature and culture' from forming 'a dialectical whole that informs a people's consciousness'.⁸⁵ As Michelle Cliff asks, 'When our landscape is so tampered with, how do we locate ourselves?'⁸⁶ Reconfiguring 'I-land' discourse is thus possible through what Glissant terms 'the language of landscape'.⁸⁷ Collins's novel animates indigenous history and the landscape through her character Carib, the presence of tree spirits, the ghosts of slaves, a whispering mountain and speaking animals, depicting a dynamic exchange between a deeply historical landscape of flora and fauna and its human residents, whose labour has reconfigured both the geography and botany of island space. A conflict arises between the older generation who work on the land, those who 'know red mud', and the urbanized youth whose vision of social revolution dismisses small land holding as 'uneconomic'. As one of the novel's elders exclaims, 'If you think a two acres here (are) uneconomic, then you have somebody in another bigger country thinking the whole of (our island) . . . uneconomic because it so small . . . so you do away with me and my land and they do away with you.'⁸⁸ After centuries of monocrop plantation labour, island writers and residents are rethinking sustainable land use in ways that uphold a mutually constitutive relation between nature and culture. Like Selvon and Lovelace, Collins resists the valorizing discourse of ex-isle and inscribes the tremendous pressures upon island attempts to build a sustainable, self-governing community. After the novel's conflict results in violence (the US invasion of Grenada), it concludes by suggesting – but not depicting – a potential new pathway forged by the next generation of women leaders, a cautious hope for a (re)productive future.

Island writers in the Pacific have been deeply concerned with questions of sovereignty, especially in the wake of neo-colonial development schemes and global tourism. Solomon Islands' writer Celo Kulagoe writes of this 'second wave' of imperialism in his dual poem, 'White-Land', the first version written in pidgin (pijin), the second in 'standard' English:

Compatriot,
 You see that white-man coming? . . .
 He was here before too . . .
 He is here again
 to help you,
 help you in selling your

land,
 in selling your beach . . .
 when WHITE-LAND
 is well-established
 where will you be?⁸⁹

In this poem, ‘He is here again’ invokes a long history of colonialism in the Pacific articulated in terms of ancestry, for this figure of capitalist appropriation who is named ‘white-land’ appeared ‘during our grandfather’s days, / and again during our father’s times’. Highlighting the trajectory between state-facilitated imperialism of the nineteenth century and the forms of global capitalism that relegate island beaches to pieces of real estate, Kulagoe warns, ‘keep a good look-out, / for this WHITE-LAND / also comes / in black skin’. As such, ‘white-land’ becomes an inheritance in terms of colonial patronymy and the reification of genealogical land.

Other writers have addressed this question of ‘I-land’ sovereignty by naturalizing indigenous relationships to the landscape as an effective political and ontological strategy for land claims in white settler nation states. Patricia Grace’s novel *Potiki* (1986), for instance, depicts a coastal Maori community’s efforts to reclaim ancestral land in the wake of a tourist development scheme that draws from previous colonial land confiscations. After refusing the sale of their land to a developer nicknamed ‘Dollarman’ who wants to build a ‘theme park’, the community experiences a series of attacks on the primary spaces of community sustainability – the gardens, the cemetery and the meeting house. While the characters debate and devise various responses to the attacks, I believe Grace’s most effective intervention is to offer a narratological response that disrupts the linear novel and capitalism’s narrative of progress through the language of ancestral place. *Potiki* has no central narrator or character, reforming the individualistic narrative into a communal Maori narration of spiral time. Rather than segregating the ‘past time’ of the ancestors from the ‘present time’ of the contemporary community, Grace employs a spiral temporality where past and future time is narratively re-experienced in a specific space of land, an experience of space and time which she terms the ‘now-time, centred in the being’.⁹⁰

Reforing a more sustainable relationship to the land is currently a global concern, one that is experienced in more urgent terms in island spaces which are more vulnerable to rising ocean levels, hurricanes, depleted fish stocks, desertification and resource contamination. From works such as Mayra Montero’s (Cuba) *In the Palm of Darkness* (1998) about naturalists and species

extinction, to Jacques Roumain's (Haiti) *Masters of the Dew* (1977), about deforestation, water scarcity and its impact on the labouring peasant class, island writers have long been engaged with the relationship between the text, the people and the land.⁹¹ Like Édouard Glissant, who has argued that the Caribbean island 'landscape is its own monument: its meaning can only be traced on the underside. It is all history', his compatriot Daniel Maximin has argued that the land is 'a character in our history'.⁹² Caribbean writers such as Derek Walcott, Jamaica Kincaid, Olive Senior, Aimé and Suzanne Césaire and many others have turned to local flora as a way to explore the entangled history of 'green imperialism', colonial botany and island history.⁹³ Similarly, Pacific writers such as Konai Helu Thaman (Tonga) have turned to the history of flora to excavate colonial history, while Maori author June Mitchell (Aotearoa/New Zealand) has inscribed the introduction of new plants and peoples to New Zealand as incorporated (and thereby contained) into a primary cosmological genealogy. This is in keeping with Epeli Hau'ofa's call to rethink linear models of time and inscribe what he terms an 'ecological time', a turning to the natural world which he argues is 'vital to reconstructing our histories'.⁹⁴

Creolization and tidalectics

In this chapter I've organized postcolonial island literature by history and geography, demonstrating how both land and sea might be understood as thematic concerns shared between disparate islands. The final section looks at the ways in which this long historic dialogue between residents of the land and travellers by sea has contributed to the history of creolization in island spaces. Geography and history of course are integral to understanding the history of creolization, a process that while not limited to island spaces, is made all the more likely due to the constraints of island size and perpetual arrival of new settlers by sea. Yet in this last section I want to emphasize the limitations of this comparative methodology because while geography contributed to the complex racial and cultural settlements in the Pacific, the history of some of these islands prohibits a description of this process as 'creolization'. So when we speak of islands of creolization we are generally thinking of the process of European, Asian and African diaspora and settlement in the islands of the Caribbean and the Indian Ocean. But this is a vexed term in the Pacific due to the continuity of indigenous communities and languages whose access to land claims is expressed, legally and culturally, through a local rather than transcultural genealogy. So while discourses of creolization in the Caribbean and the Mascarene Islands may bolster national sovereignty,

these same discourses may weaken nationalist indigenous claims to land in the Pacific, precisely because they undermine what J. Kehaulani Kauanui refers to as the 'blood logic' of the colonial state.⁹⁵ This does not mean that writers deny mixed racial and cultural heritage; in describing his German and Samoan ancestry, Albert Wendt explains 'I am both indigenous and one of the newcomers.' Teresia Teaiwa, who is of African American and Banaban descent and grew up in Fiji, describes 'The native (as) hybrid. Hybridity is essential.'⁹⁶ But in the larger political and legal arena in which blood is quantified and determinative of access to land, fishing, language, and culture rights, the discourse of creolization can be perceived as threatening or irrelevant.⁹⁷

At the 2008 MLA conference, Ato Quayson remarked that the process of comparison is necessarily distortive. In other words, in our efforts to trace out connections between texts, we generally ignore those aspects that do not fit easily into our hermeneutic circle. Quayson called for a mode of comparison that is not limited to thematics but rather turns to configuration as a potential mode of comparison.⁹⁸ Thus my final section here does not turn away from the three previous thematic models (the colonial island canon, the sea as history, and excavating the land) to argue that a separate body of island literatures is concerned with creolization. Instead, I argue here and elsewhere that these are mutually constitutive elements of island writing. There is no progression in which creolization represents the pinnacle of island articulation; rather, these island texts surpass and complicate their interpretive frames. It's important to note that the discourse of creolization does not 'travel' evenly across all island spaces nor does it represent all island histories, just as we must recognize that the popular mode of a diasporic postcolonialism has been perceived as threatening to or oblivious to indigenous studies. It is by recognizing the comparative process of distortion and configuration that we might better understand how literary works that inscribe, for instance, the sea as history might also be simultaneously articulating a genealogy of creolization. In this case we might interpret creolization as a mode of tracing history through ancestry and memory.

Like other postcolonial literatures, island writing has turned to certain spaces to theorize the events of time. The chronotopes (compressions of time/space) discussed earlier include the sea, the ship and the landscape haunted by history, but we might also turn to contained spaces within the island such as the space of maronnage, the provision grounds, the port, the master's house, the slave barracks, the prison, the market and other spaces.⁹⁹ In these last few pages, I will briefly turn to two island tropes of cultural contact and creolization: the beach and the plantation.

In his *Islands and Beaches* (1980), Pacific historian Greg Dening has theorized the beach as a transitional space of crossing, of cultural contact and of exchange. It is a space of vulnerability, of translation, of mistranslation, of violence and of new friendship. From the footprints discovered by Robinson Crusoe on the shore to the sailors washed up onto Prospero's (or Sycorax's) island, the beach has long been represented as an ambivalent space of change. Returning to Patricia Grace's novel *Potiki* we might rightly emphasize the ways in which the novel is concerned with Maori land sovereignty, but we might also notice how, to this seaside community, the shore plays a vital role, signalling moments of radical change such as when the novel's titular character is born in the sea. In June Mitchell's novel *Amokura* (1978), a text which is also about a self-sustaining Maori community resisting Pakeha encroachment, Mitchell revisits ancient legends about land birds and seabirds fighting for sovereignty on the beach in a way that parallels the tensions between her nineteenth-century Maori ancestor and her diasporic English husband. In a more recent work, James George (Aotearoa/New Zealand) inscribes the vast militarization of the Pacific from the nuclear attacks on Japan and Bikini Atoll to the Vietnam War, but inscribes how this impacts a Maori family by staging most scenes of cross-cultural intimacy, revelation and death on the strand of a small town in New Zealand's North Island, at the border between land and sea.¹⁰⁰ In sum, the beach is an important space to reimagine the 'contact zone' between cultures – or the refusal of contact if we consider the way many tourist resorts ban locals – and has been developed by other writers who have theorized creolization through other coastal symbols such as coral and the mangrove.¹⁰¹

While the beach is a compelling figure to explore cross-cultural encounter, Indian and African diasporic writers have turned to the plantation to historicize creolization. Fernando Ortiz theorized the concept of transculturation as integral to the labour in Cuban sugar and tobacco fields, while Sidney Mintz and Richard Price have turned to anglophone island plantations to develop their theory of creolization, arguing against the 'cultural death' or *tabula rasa* model of African diaspora cultures. Kamau Brathwaite's *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica 1770–1820* turned to the plantation to theorize the process of creolization between Europeans and Africans, later building upon this to develop a theory of 'nation language', a cultural articulation that resulted specifically from the violence of forced labour and language. Unlike models of multiculturalism promoted by global capitalism, these scholars specifically theorized cultural production from subaltern histories of violence and cultural continuity.¹⁰²

The plantation novel has been associated with the creolization process in the islands of the Americas and has generally been understood in terms of the interaction between diverse groups of Europeans and Africans.¹⁰³ Yet it has also been a significant trope of Indian diaspora writers such as J.S. Kanwal, whose novel *The Morning* inscribes the recruitment from India, the crossing of the *kalapani*, and the creolization of diverse South Asians – across caste, region, language and gender lines – in their adopted lands of Fiji. Moreover the novel, like its anti-indenture predecessor, Totaram Sanadhya's *My Twenty-one Years in the Fiji Islands and the Story of the Haunted Line* (1914), inscribes an additional layering of creolization through interactions with indigenous Fijians, which were banned by the colonial administration.¹⁰⁴ Although the novel does not depict interracial marriage between Indian and indigenous Fijian subjects, the novel, like Subramani's Fiji-Hindi novel *Duaka Puraan* (2001), reflects a cultural and linguistic creolization that remains largely separate from the question of racial inheritance, even as it queries modes of cultural and biological reproduction.

The concept of creolization has been adopted for many cultural and political expressions. It refers to language, linguistics, epistemology, cultural contact and cultural violence, racial and ethnic inheritance, the brutal legacy of colonialism and a utopian model for future societies. In writing about francophone island cultures, Françoise Lionnet has called for a way to 'bypass the ancient symmetries and dichotomies . . . of thought', and finds that '*Métissage* is such a concept and a practice: it is the site of undecidability and indeterminacy, where solidarity becomes the fundamental principle of political action against hegemonic languages'.¹⁰⁵ Thus she reads Virahsawmy's play *Toufann* as less a 'writing back' to the past than a 'transcolonial' engagement with postcolonial works that address the question of Creole power in the public sphere. Her reading of creolization's potential is decidedly hopeful: 'the way *Toufann* brings together European and Non-European traditions and realities is precisely what makes the play a creative statement about the openness of Creole cultures to an infinite array of cultural transpositions'.¹⁰⁶ Lionnet's emphasis on creolization's modes of language, orality and alternative models of knowing can be seen in the work of Glissant, who has argued that island geography (or archipelagraphy) helps destabilize colonial epistemologies of time and space. He writes, 'without necessarily inferring any advantage whatsoever to their situation, the reality of archipelagoes in the Caribbean or the Pacific provides a natural illustration of the thought of Relation'.¹⁰⁷ 'Poetics of Relation' are defined as 'the dialectics between the oral and the written, the thought of multilingualism, the balance between

the present moment and duration, the questioning of literary genres, the power of the baroque, the nonprojectile imaginary construct'.¹⁰⁸

Other models of creolization have turned to the history of racial and political filiation, particularly spaces that share a violent history of slavery and indenture in the sugar plantations. Françoise Vergès (Réunion) describes creolization as 'an invention of everyday life, an aesthetics and a creative practice in a world dominated by brutality, domination, violence'.¹⁰⁹ She theorizes the discourse of anti-colonial revolution as an attempt to break with the colonial metropole in a way that is entangled with a larger issue of filiation, a break which relieves the colonized subject from a legacy of complicity and shame. In its place a colonial family romance is created in which the maternal parent becomes the colonial motherland (symbolizing cultural mores, liberty, rights), the colonized become children, creating an ambivalent role for métissage. In Vergès's view, the acceptance of métissage is the acceptance of a genealogy of slavery, rape, violence, shame and complicity which undermines the popular narrative of postcolonial innocence.¹¹⁰ In her work, engagement with the history of creolization means accountability for the past and for the future.

Despite the discourse of colonialism, insularity does not preclude an engagement with creolization. As Chris Bongie writes:

If insular thinking is at the heart of traditional identity politics, the relational politics that emerges out of the cross-culturalizing dynamics of the creolization process puts this insularity into question . . . We live in a hybridized world of transcultural, transnational relations in which every island (ethnicity, nation, and the like) is but a fragment of the whole that is always already in the process of transforming the particular into something other than its (original, essential) self.¹¹¹

In an effort to keep pressing these methodological frames, to foreground their own comparative processes of distortion and configuration, I conclude by turning to how the concept of creoleness itself often invokes a mutually constitutive space of non-creoleness, a binary relation that needs to be deconstructed in order to destabilize the ways in which the discourse of authentic origins often upholds a notion of cultural purity. Given that the origins of the concept of creolization arose from the Caribbean historical context, I leave these last cautionary words to Glissant:

Creolization as an idea is not primarily the glorification of the composite nature of a people: indeed, no people has been spared the cross-cultural process. The idea of creolization demonstrates that henceforth it is no longer valid to glorify 'unique' origins that the race safeguards and prolongs. In

Western tradition, genealogical descent guarantees racial exclusivity . . . To assert peoples are creolized, that creolization has value, is to deconstruct . . . the category of 'creolized' that is considered as halfway between two 'pure' extremes.¹¹²

Notes

1. Regretfully I do not have the space to explore the literature of Sri Lanka, which shares many similar themes.
2. Édouard Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*, trans. J. Michael Dash (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1989), p. 139.
3. Chris Bongie, *Islands and Exiles: The Creole Identities of Post/Colonial Literature* (Stanford University Press, 1998), p. 18.
4. J. P. White, 'An interview with Derek Walcott', in William Baer (ed.), *Conversations with Derek Walcott* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1996), p. 159.
5. Kamau Brathwaite, *CONVERSations with Nathaniel Mackey* (Staten Island, NY: We Press, 1999), p. 44. This larger argument is explored in Elizabeth DeLoughrey, *Routes and Roots: Navigating Caribbean and Pacific Island Literatures* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2007).
6. On tourist construction in the Caribbean, see Mimi Sheller, *Consuming the Caribbean: From Arawaks to Zombies* (London: Routledge, 2003); and Ian G. Strachan, *Paradise and Plantation: Tourism and Culture in the Anglophone Caribbean* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2002). On Pacific discourses of island tourism see Teresia K. Teaiwa, 'bikinis and other s/pacific n/oceans', in David L. Hanlon and Geoffrey M. White (eds.), *Voyaging Through the Contemporary Pacific* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), pp. 91–112. For a comparative literary perspective, see Anthony Carrigan, *Postcolonial Tourism: Literature, Culture and Environment* (London: Routledge, 2010).
7. DeLoughrey, *Routes and Roots*.
8. Fernando Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint, Tobacco and Sugar*, trans. Harriet de Onís (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995); Sidney Mintz, *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1985); Richard H. Grove, *Green Imperialism: Colonial Expansion, Tropical Island Edens and the Origins of Environmentalism, 1600–1860* (Cambridge University Press, 1995); Diana Loxley, *Problematic Shores: The Literature of Islands* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1990); Patrick V. Kirch, 'Introduction: the archeology of island societies', in Patrick Kirch (ed.), *Island Societies: Archeological Approaches to Evolution and Transformation* (Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 1–5; Greg Denning, *Islands and Beaches: Discourse on a Silent Land, Marquesas, 1774–1880* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1980).
9. Kevin Carpenter, *Desert Isles & Pirate Islands: The Island Theme in Nineteenth-Century English Juvenile Fiction: a Survey and Bibliography* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1984), p. 8.
10. Nawal Muhammad Hassan, *Hayy bin Yaqzan and Robinson Crusoe* (Baghdad: Al-Rashid House, 1980).
11. See Samar Attar, *The Vital Roots of European Enlightenment: Ibn Tufayl's Influence on Modern Western Thought* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2007). See Loxley on the way some colonial island narratives create a *tabula rasa* for a self-validating scientific masculine subject, *Problematic Shores*, p. 48.
12. Loxley, *Problematic Shores*, p. 37.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 47.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 57.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 61. On white imperial masculinity, see also Rebecca Weaver-Hightower, *Empire Islands: Castaways, Cannibals, and Fantasies of Conquest* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007). See also Rod Edmond and Vanessa Smith (eds.), *Islands in History and Representation* (London: Routledge, 2003).
16. See Weaver-Hightower, *Empire Island*, pp. 170–204.
17. See introduction to Margaret Paul Joseph, *Caliban in Exile: The Outsider in Caribbean Fiction* (New York: Greenwood, 1992).
18. Edward W. Said, *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983), pp. 18–20, 174.
19. John Thieme, *Postcolonial Con-texts: Writing Back to the Canon: Literature, Culture, and Identity* (London: Continuum, 2001), p. 8.
20. See Peter Hulme, *Colonial Encounters: Europe and the Native Caribbean 1492–1797* (London: Methuen, 1986).
21. On its revisions see Peter Hulme and William H. Sherman (eds.), *'The Tempest' and its Travels* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000); Thieme, *Postcolonial Con-texts*; Helen Tiffin, 'Post-colonial literatures and counter-discourse', *Kunapipi*, 9.3 (1987), 17–34, and 'The empire writes back: *The Tempest*' at <http://faculty.pittstate.edu/~knichols/colonial3a.html>; Rob Nixon, 'Caribbean and African appropriations of *The Tempest*', *Critical Inquiry* 13.3 (1987), pp. 557–78; A. James Arnold, 'Caliban, culture, and nation-building in the Caribbean', in Nadia Lie and Theo D'haen (eds.), *Constellation Caliban: Figurations of a Character* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1997), pp. 231–44. Vera M. Kutzinski, 'The cult of Caliban: collaboration and revisionism in contemporary Caribbean narrative', in A. James Arnold (ed.), *A History of Literature in the Caribbean*, vol. 3 (Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 1997), pp. 286–302.
22. See Lamming's essays in *The Pleasures of Exile* (London: Michael Joseph, 1960) and his novel *Water with Berries* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1972). On Lamming's engagement with Shakespeare see Supriya Nair, *Caliban's Curse: George Lamming and the Revisioning of History* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996). See 'Caliban', in Kamau Brathwaite, *The Arrivants; A New World Trilogy* (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), and 'Caliban's garden', *Wasafiri*, 16 (1992), 2–6. See Roberto Fernández Retamar, *Caliban and other Essays* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989) and Nadia Lie, 'Countering Caliban: Roberto Fernández Retamar and the postcolonial debate', in Lie and D'haen (eds.), *Constellation Caliban*, pp. 245–70, and Derek Walcott, *Collected Poems: 1948–84* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1986).
23. See Aimé Césaire, *A Tempest*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: TCG Translations, 2002) and Judith Holland Sarnecki, 'Mastering the masters: Aimé Césaire's creolization of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*', *The French Review*, 74.2 (2000), 276–86; Joan Dayan, 'Playing Caliban: Césaire's *Tempest*', in Sarah Lawall (ed.), *Reading World Literature: Theory, History, Practice* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994), pp. 136–59. I adopt the term 'transcolonial' from Françoise Lionnet, 'Creole vernacular theatre: transcolonial translations in Mauritius', *MLN*, 118 (2003), 911–32.
24. See Thieme, *Postcolonial Con-Texts*, p. 139; Brathwaite, *The Arrivants*, p. 192.
25. 'Caribbean readings of *The Tempest*', paper delivered at *Toufann and other Tempests: Shakespeare in Post-Colonial Contexts Conference*, Birkbeck College/The Africa Centre, Saturday, 11 December 1999.
26. *Pleasures of Exile*, p. 15; see also Thieme, *Postcolonial Con-Texts*, p. 130, Jonathan Goldberg, *Tempest in the Caribbean* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press,

- 2004), pp. 18–19 and their relation to both Mannoni and Fanon’s interpretation of colonial dependency.
27. See Jahan Ramazani, *The Hybrid Muse: Postcolonial Poetry in English* (University of Chicago Press, 2001), for Walcott’s use of Caliban as a figure.
 28. On the question of Caliban’s purported desire for Miranda, see Lamming *Pleasures of Exile*, p. 102.
 29. See Thieme, *Postcolonial Con-Texts*, p. 135; Peter Hulme, ‘The profit of language: George Lamming’s *Water with Berries*’, in Jonathan White, *Recasting the World: Literature After Colonialism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1993), pp. 38–52; Goldberg, *Tempest in the Caribbean*, pp. 20–30. On the homosocial logic of the Prospero–Caliban line of descent which excludes women, see Fernández Retamar, *Caliban and other Essays*, its critique by Kutzinski, ‘The cult of Caliban’, and Goldberg, *Tempest in the Caribbean*, pp. 18–20.
 30. On the gendering of *The Tempest* rewrites see Chantal Zabus, *Tempests after Shakespeare* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002).
 31. Michelle Cliff, *No Telephone to Heaven* (New York: Random House, 1987), and ‘Caliban’s daughter: *The Tempest* and the Teapot’, *Frontiers* 12.1 (1991), 36–51; Judith Raitskin, *Snow on the Cane Fields: Women’s Writing and Creole Subjectivity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).
 32. See David Dabydeen, *Coolie Odyssey* (London: Hansib, 1988). I include Guyanese writers in my model of island tidalectics due to the way in which they have engaged with the transoceanic imaginary, plantation capitalism, and other histories that link this nation closely to the anglophone island Caribbean.
 33. Sylvia Wynter, ‘Beyond Miranda’s meanings: un/silencing the “demonic ground” of Caliban’s woman’, in Carol Boyce Davies and Elaine Savory Fido (eds.), *Out of the Kumbia: Caribbean Women and Literature* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1990), pp. 355–72.
 34. Kamau Brathwaite, *X/Self* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987). In *Barabajan Poems*, Brathwaite includes ‘Sycorax’s Book’ as a counterpart to ‘Prospero’s Book’. See Elaine Savory, ‘Wordsongs & wordwounds /homecoming: Kamau Brathwaite’s *Barabajan Poems*’, *World Literature Today*, 68.4 (Autumn 1994), 750–7.
 35. *Toufann: A Mauritian Fantasy*, trans. Nisha and Michael Walling, ed. M. Banham, J. Gibbs and F. Osofisan, *African Theatre: Playwrights and Politics* (Oxford: James Currey, 1999), pp. 217–54; Françoise Lionnet, *Autobiographical Voices: Race, Gender, Self-portraiture* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989); Shawkat Toorawa, ‘Strange bedfellows? Mauritian writers and Shakespeare’, *Wasafari*, 30 (Autumn 1999), 27–31.
 36. Keri Hulme, *The Bone People* (1983; London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1985), p. 3.
 37. See Walcott, *Collected Poems*, p. 285. This argument is expanded in DeLoughrey, *Routes and Roots*.
 38. Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, trans. Betsy Wing (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), p. 6.
 39. Edwidge Danticat, *Krik? Krak!* (London: Abacus, 1996), p. 27.
 40. *Ibid.*, p. 168.
 41. Kamau Brathwaite, *Contradictory Omens: Cultural Diversity and Integration in the Caribbean* (Mona, Jamaica: Savacou Publications, 1974) p. 64; Édouard Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays*, trans. Michael Dash (Charlottesville: Caraf Books/University of Virginia, 1989), p. 67.
 42. Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*, pp. 33–4.
 43. Antonio Benítez-Rojo, *The Repeating Island*, trans. James Maraniss (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1992), p. 4.

44. Ibid., p. 11.
45. Gaston Bachelard, *Water and Dreams: An Essay on the Imagination of Matter*, trans. Edith R. Farrell (Dallas: Pegasus Foundation, 1983), p. 6.
46. Detek Walcott, *Omeros* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1990), p. 231; Grace Nichols, *I Is a Long Memoried Woman* (London: Karnak House, 1983), p. 5.
47. Albert Wendt, 'Pacific maps and fiction(s): a personal journey', in Suwendrini Perera (ed.), *Asian and Pacific Inscriptions* (Bundoora, VIC: Meridian, 1995), pp. 13–43, at 13.
48. Epeli Hau'ofa, 'Our sea of islands', in Eric Waddell, Vijay Naidu and Epeli Hau'ofa (eds.), *A New Oceania: Rediscovering Our Sea of Islands* (Suva, FJ: Beake House, 1993), pp. 2–16, at 7.
49. Epeli Hau'ofa, 'The ocean in us', *Dreadlocks in Oceania*, 1 (1997), 124–48. See Margaret Jolly, 'On the edge? Deserts, oceans, islands', *The Contemporary Pacific*, 13.2 (Fall 2001), 417–66, on the diversity of island topographies and why the transoceanic is not applicable in all cases.
50. Tom Davis, *Vaka: Saga of a Polynesian Canoe* (Auckland and Suva, FJ: Institute of Pacific Studies and Polynesian Press, 1992); Robert Sullivan, *Star Waka* (Auckland University Press, 1999); Teresia Kieuea Teaiwa, *Searching for Nei Nim'anoa* (Suva, FJ: Mana Publications, 1999).
51. Albert Wendt, *Inside Us the Dead* (Auckland: Longman Paul, 1976), p. 7.
52. Witi Ihimaera, *The Whale Rider* (Auckland: Reed Publishing, 1987), p. 5.
53. Ibid., p. 26.
54. For more on oceanic literatures, see Paul Sharrad, 'Imagining the Pacific', *Meanjin*, 49.4 (Summer 1990), 597–606, and 'Pathways in the sea: a pelagic post-colonialism?', in Jean-Pierre Durix (ed.), *Literary Archipelagoes* (Universitaires de Dijon, 1998), pp. 95–108; and DeLoughrey, *Routes and Roots*.
55. Teaiwa, *Searching for Nei Nim'anoa*, p. ix.
56. Albert Wendt, *Ola* (Auckland: Penguin, 1991), p. 35.
57. Ibid., p. 76.
58. Ibid., p. 124.
59. J. S. Kanwal, *The Morning (Savera)* (New Delhi: Diamond Publications, 1992); Satendra Nandan, *Lines Across Black Waters* (Adelaide: CRNLE, 1997), and 'Migration, dispossession, exile and the diasporic consciousness', in Ralph J. Crane and Radhika Mohanram (eds.), *Shifting Continents/Colliding Cultures: Diaspora Writing of the Indian Subcontinent* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2000), pp. 35–54.
60. Nandan, *Lines Across Black Waters*, p. 9.
61. Subramani, 'Gone Bush: A Novella', *The Fantasy Eaters* (Washington, DC: Three Continents Press, 1988), p. 77.
62. Epeli Hau'ofa, 'The ocean in us', in *Dreadlocks in Oceania*, 1 (1997), 124–48, at 142.
63. This gendering is explored in DeLoughrey, *Routes and Roots*, as well as 'Gendering the voyage: trespassing the (black) Atlantic and Caribbean', in *Thamyris: Caribbean Women's Writing/Imagining Caribbean Space*, 5.2 (1998), 205–31.
64. Ramabai Espinet, *The Swinging Bridge* (Toronto: HarperCollins Canada, 2003).
65. Das in David Dabydeen and Brinsley Samaroo (eds.), *India in the Caribbean* (London: Hansib, 1987), p. 288–9.
66. These texts have not been translated into English. See Veronique Bragard, *Transoceanic Dialogues: Coolitude in Caribbean and Indian Ocean Literatures* (London: Peter Lang, 2008).
67. David Dabydeen, *Coolie Odyssey* (London: Hansib Publications, 1988).
68. Khal Torabully, 'The coolies' odyssey', *UNESCO Courier* (October 1996), pp. 13–16.

69. Marina Carter and Khal Torabully, *Coolitude: An Anthology of the Indian Labour Diaspora* (London: Anthem Press, 2002), p. 17.
70. Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*, p. 234.
71. Marlene NourbeSe Philip, 'A piece of land surrounded', *Orion*, 14.2 (1995), 41–7, at 41.
72. *Ibid.*, p. 44. See Ramabai Espinet's poem 'An Ageable Woman', written as Sycorax who claims the land through labour, not 'because I sell / Trade or use it / Or find it to be / 'A lovely piece of real estate', in Espinet, *Nuclear Seasons* (Toronto: Sister Vision Press, 1991), p. 81.
73. Earl Lovelace, *Salt* (London: Faber and Faber, 1996), p. 3.
74. Sam Selvon, *An Island is a World* (1955; Toronto: TSAR, 1993), p. 212.
75. *Ibid.*, p. 211.
76. V. S. Naipaul, *The Middle Passage* (New York: Vintage Books, 1962), p. 42.
77. Selvon, *An Island*, p. 1.
78. Naipaul, *The Middle Passage*, pp. 29, 27.
79. Walcott, *Collected Poems*, p. 256.
80. Epeli Hau'ofa, *Tales of the Tikongs* (Auckland: Longman Paul, 1983), p. 69.
81. Thomas Williams and James Calvert, *Fiji and the Fijians* (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1860), p. 95. My thanks to Jolisa Gracewood for this reference.
82. Gordon Rohlehr, *Pathfinder: Black Awakening in 'The Arrivants'* (Port of Spain: The College Press, 1981), p. 235.
83. Louise Bennett, *Jamaica Labrish* (Kingston, Jamaica: Sangster's Books, 1966), pp. 169–70.
84. Selvon, *An Island*, p. 73.
85. Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*, p. 63.
86. Cliff, 'Caliban's daughter', p. 37.
87. Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*, p. 145.
88. Merle Collins, *The Colour of Forgetting* (London: Virago Women's Press, 1995), p. 164.
89. Celo Kulagoe, 'White Land', in Albert Wendt (ed.), *Lali: A Pacific Anthology* (Auckland: Longman Paul, 1980), p. 215.
90. Patricia Grace, *Potiki* (London: The Women's Press, 1986), p. 39; discussed in more detail in Elizabeth DeLoughrey, 'The spiral temporality of Patricia Grace's *Potiki*', *Ariel*, 1.30 (1999), 59–83.
91. Mayra Montero, *In the Palm of Darkness* (New York: HarperCollins, 1998); Jacques Roumain, *Masters of the Dew*, trans. Langston Hughes and Mercer Cook (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1978).
92. Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*, p. 11; Maximin, *Lone Sun* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1989), p. 10.
93. See Elizabeth M. DeLoughrey, Renée K. Gosson and George B. Handley (eds.), *Caribbean Literature and the Environment: Between Nature and Culture* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2005).
94. Epeli Hau'ofa, 'Epilogue: pasts to remember', in R. Borofsky (ed.), *Remembrance of Pacific Pasts* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2000), pp. 459–60.
95. J. Kehaulani Kauanui, *Hawaiian Blood: Colonialism and the Politics of Sovereignty and Indigeneity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008).
96. Wendt, 'Pacific maps and fiction(s)', p. 18; Teresia Kieuea Teaiwa, 'L(o)osing the edge', *The Contemporary Pacific*, 13.2 (Fall 2001), 344.
97. See Haunani-Kay Trask, *From a Native Daughter: Colonialism and Sovereignty in Hawai'i* (Monroe, ME: Common Courage Press, 1993).

98. Ato Quayson, 'Postcolonial comparisons: methodologies', Modern Language Association conference, San Francisco, 28 December 2008.
99. See the 'American Tropics: towards a literary geography' project which is dedicated to tracing out the relevance of many of these spaces to history and literature. www.essex.ac.uk/lifts/American_Tropics/index.htm.
100. James George, *Ocean Roads* (Wellington: Huia Press, 2006).
101. Torabully writes, 'In choosing the metaphor of coral to define coolitude, I wanted to underscore the symbolic importance of the "rock" for Césaire, in the context of the struggle for the decolonization of minds. It had to be forceful. The coral can be both soft, and hard, it can be found in two states, and it is traversed by currents, continuously open to new thoughts and systems. It is a living body with elements which are both vulnerable and solid, it is a symbol of the fluidity of relationships and influences', in Carter and Torabully, *Coolitude*, p. 152. On the mangrove see Maryse Condé, *Crossing the Mangrove*, trans. R. Philcox (New York: Doubleday, 1995); Patrick Chamoiseau, *Texaco*, trans. Rose-Myriam Réjouis and Val Vinokurov (New York: Random House, 1997); and Richard and Sally Price, 'Shadowboxing in the mangrove', *Cultural Anthropology*, 12.1 (1997), 3–36.
102. Fernando Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar*, trans. Harriet de Onís (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995); Sidney W. Mintz and Richard Price, *An Anthropological Approach to the Afro-American Past: A Caribbean Perspective* (Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, 1976); Kamau Brathwaite, *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica, 1770–1820* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971). There is a vast body of work on the topic but starting points might be Benítez-Rojo, *Repeating Island*; Verene A. Shepherd and Glen L. Richards (eds.), *Questioning Creole: Creolization Discourses in Caribbean Culture* (Kingston, Jamaica: Ian Randle, 2002) and Kathleen M. Balutansky and Marie-Agnès Sourieau (eds.), *Caribbean Creolization: Reflections on the Cultural Dynamics of Language, Literature, and Identity* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1998). On francophone concepts of *créolité* and *métissage*, see Lionnet, *Autobiographical Voices*; Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau and Raphaël Confiant, *Éloge de la Créolité/In Praise of Creoleness*, bilingual edition, trans. M. B. Taleb-Khyar (Paris: Gallimard, 1993); Françoise Vergès, *Monsters and Revolutionaries: Colonial Family Romance and Métissage* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999).
103. On the Caribbean plantation novel, see Benítez-Rojo, *Repeating Island*; Bongie, *Islands and Exiles*; Alison Donnell, *Twentieth-Century Caribbean Literature* (London: Routledge, 2006); and Strachan, *Paradise and Plantation*.
104. Totaram Sanadhya, *My Twenty-One Years in the Fiji Islands and the Story of the Haunted Line*, trans. and ed. J.D. Kelly and U.K. Singh (Suva: Fiji Museum, 1991).
105. Lionnet, *Autobiographical Voices*, p. 6. On creolization in the Indian Ocean islands, see also Peter Hawkins, *The Other Hybrid Archipelago: Introduction to the Literatures and Cultures of the Francophone Indian Ocean* (New York: Lexington Books, 2007).
106. Lionnet, 'Creole vernacular theatre', pp. 917, 919. See also Françoise Lionnet, 'Créolité in the Indian Ocean: two models of cultural diversity', *Yale French Studies*, 82 (1993), 101–12.
107. Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, pp. 33–4.
108. *Ibid.*, p. 35.
109. Françoise Vergès, 'Open session, cosmopolitanism, urban culture and creole identity in the twenty-first century', in Okwui Enwezor *et al.* (eds.), *Créolite and Creolization: Documenta 11 Platform 3* (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz Publishers, 2003), p. 180.

110. Vergès, *Monsters and Revolutionaries*, p. 11.
111. Bongie, *Islands and Exiles*, p. 18.
112. Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*, p. 140. See Lionnet, *Autobiographical Voices*, p. 4, which points out the translation of Glissant's 'métissage' into 'creolization' and its erasures.

Magical realism

MARIANO SISKIND

As it is the case with most *keywords*, critical discussions of magical realism should not avoid asking questions about the history, geography and cultural politics of the concepts and practices at stake in such examinations. When was the concept of magical realism articulated? Is magical realism a Latin American or a universal aesthetic form? And what is the cultural, historical and political relation of magical realism with the discourse of postcolonialism? Scholars are in general agreement about the facts, but often differ on how to interpret them. How can we make sense of the fact that the first critic to think about magical realism as an aesthetic category was a German art critic, Franz Roh (1890–1965), and not the Latin Americans Arturo Usler Pietri (1906–2001) and Alejo Carpentier (1904–60)? What does this transatlantic (pre)history of the concept of magical realism say about the particularist (peripheral, Third World, post-colonial) claims or universalist inscriptions of this narrative form? Answers to these questions vary, but what seems to be missing in the vast bibliography on magical realism that started growing exponentially since the mid 1980s is a historical narrative of how magical realism was transformed from a narrowly defined concept capable of explaining the scope of post-expressionist painting in Franz Roh; to the aesthetic that was supposed to define the Latin American cultural difference in Usler Pietri and Carpentier, and later in Gabriel García Márquez (b. 1927); to finally come to be seen, as Homi Bhabha suggested, as ‘the literary language of the emergent postcolonial world’.¹ This chapter will trace the transcultural genealogy of a critical concept and aesthetic form through its various articulations prior to its becoming the highly celebrated postcolonial form we know today.

The explicit coupling of magical realism and postcolonial discourse is a rather recent development. Almost at the same time as Bhabha’s acknowledgment of magical realism as the narrative form most capable of expressing the cultural particularity of the postcolonial periphery in 1990, Gayatri Spivak had suggested the need to reflect upon the trajectory of magical realism, from its

Latin American origin to a larger transnational stage: 'Why is "magic realism" paradigmatic of Third World literary production? ... It is interesting that "magic realism", a style of Latin American provenance, has been used to great effect by some expatriate or diasporic subcontinentals writing in English'.² Both Bhabha and Spivak hinted towards this transition, this travel of magical realism, from Latin America in the 1960s to the postcolonial world at large since the end of the 1970s; from a restricted Latin American specificity, to a more universal form of particularism: magical realism as a postcolonial universal.

Few concepts have generated more polemics about their meaning than magical realism. Debates and divergence about the ways in which to characterize the term seem to be a central part of the aesthetic and critical tradition of magical realism. The proliferation of conflicting definitions does not have to do with the apparent oxymoron implied in the articulation of the realms of the marvellous and extraordinary, with a conventionally conceived reality. Almost without exception critics agree on the fact that magical realist narratives attempt to bridge the contradiction between its two terms – to depict reality as naturally interposed by magic and by phenomena that ordinary common sense cannot explain. The world of magical realist texts is one where the ordinary and the extraordinary coexist without conflict, without even calling attention to one another's otherness. In this sense, the Brazilian critic Irlemar Chiampi provides a working definition of magical realism that most critics would agree with: 'The denaturalization of the real and the naturalization of the marvellous'.³

But the dialectic of estrangement and normalization that magical realism points to is as far as the agreement on its definition goes. What divides specialists is whether magical realism is (a) a faculty of artists (inherited from a romantic lineage that conceives the poet as seer) to unveil the spiritual determinations of the real in order to shed light on the marvellous that constitutes it, and cannot be explained through a rational logic of causes and consequences; or (b) whether it is a code of representation that accounts for particular cultural formations where the historical experience of modernity coexists with a perception of the supernatural, understood in the broadest possible sense. To state it differently: is magical realism a universal aesthetic that unveils the supernatural core of the real *anywhere*, or is it an aesthetic that belongs organically to non-Western, or rather marginal, cultures? The coupling of magical realism and the postcolonial seems to have settled the dispute in favour of the latter definition. As both Bhabha and Spivak suggest, the kind of aesthetic, cultural and political anxieties that define the postcolonial geography of peripheries

and margins found in magical realism (although by no means exclusively) constitute a narrative protocol and a way of interpellating a history marked by a desire for emancipation and the necessity to resignify colonial territories and pasts.⁴

Tales of origins

If origins are fictional, retrospective and conventional constructions, it is not surprising that literary history assigns two different points of departure for magical realism, each of them corresponding to one of the two ways of defining this narrative form: magical realism as the result of a universally available aesthetic perception of the ways in which the marvellous intersects the real; and magical realism as a narrative mode that carries the particular postcolonial experience of the underdeveloped world. Franz Roh, on the one hand, and Arturo Uslar Pietri and Alejo Carpentier, on the other, laid out the discursive matrices for each of these understandings of the cultural politics of magical realism.

In 1925, Franz Roh was the first to give critical substance to the concept of magical realism, albeit not to interpret narrative art forms, but post-expressionist works of art. Roh, an art historian, wrote a book/catalogue on and for an exhibition of paintings that Gustav Hartlaub had organized in Mannheim, Germany, under the title *Neue Sachlichkeit*, New Objectivity, or New Realism, or post-expressionism, with works by Otto Dix, George Grosz and Max Beckmann among others. Roh saw *Neue Sachlichkeit* as a resolution of the historical opposition between impressionism and expressionism. In his book *Nach-Expressionismus, Magischer Realismus: Probleme der neuesten europäischen Malerei* (Post-Expressionism, Magical Realism: Problems of the Most Recent European Painting), Roh explains that whereas impressionist artists were concerned with objective representations, ‘giving maximal value and meaning to chromatic texture’,⁵ ‘Expressionism shows an exaggerated preference for fantastic, extraterrestrial, remote objects.’⁶ He saw this new school of *Neue Sachlichkeit* as an attempt to reconcile the referentiality of impressionism with the expressionist attempt to uncover the spiritual and mystical nucleus of reality: ‘Post-Expressionism sought to reintegrate reality into the heart of visibility’ while trying to ‘discover a more general and deeper basis [for it] . . . This [art offers a] calm admiration of the magic of being, of the discovery that things already have their own faces.’⁷ But this is as far as Roh went. He never gave a precise and cogent definition of magical realism and because he limited himself to the reference in the title of his book, it could be

said that only thanks to posterior elaborations on the concept, can we recognize in his interpretation of post-expressionist art, *ex post facto*, a foundational moment of the conceptual history of magical realism. In fact, Roh himself dropped the concept when he published *Geschichte der Deutschen Kunst von 1900 bis zur Gegenwart* (German Art in the Twentieth Century) in 1958 ‘in recognition that his terms *Magischer Realismus* and *Nach-Expressionismus* had been eclipsed by Hartlaub’s *Neue Sachlichkeit*’.⁸

According to critics such as Irene Guenther and Chris Warnes, Roh inscribes his interpretation of post-expressionist painting in terms of magical realism in a Germanist philosophic tradition inaugurated by Novalis (Friedrich Freiherr von Hardenberg), who was the first one to delineate the concept of magical realism, in 1798. Warnes explains that the German romantic envisioned in his notebooks the figure of a prophetic intellectual, whom he referred to as *magischer Idealist* and *magischer Realist*: prophet poets living outside the boundaries of enlightened discourse without losing touch with the real.⁹ A mixture of poetic idealism grounded in reality. ‘What Novalis and Roh have in common, then, is a concern with the limits of mimesis and a reliance on dialectics as pronounced features of the post-Kantian tradition in general, the striking point of overlap lies in the two thinkers’ attempts to synthesize such dialectical opposites through their uses of the term magical realism.’¹⁰

Between the mid 1920s and the 1940s, Roh’s concept of magical realism travelled through marginal channels of Europe’s avant-garde landscape. In 1927 Massimo Bontempelli, writer and director (with Curzio Malaparte) of ‘900’ *Cahiers d’Italie et d’Europe*, published (in French) several articles calling for a magical realist aesthetic, a new form of ‘realistic precision and magical atmosphere’, and for the invention of ‘fresh myths from which the new atmosphere we long to breathe in will emerge’.¹¹ Erik Camayd-Freixas explains that Bontempelli’s ‘magical realism sought to overcome futurism, but also a pastless primitivism, that zero degree of culture proposed by surrealist artists. From the very beginning, then, the literary concept of magical realism was contaminated with primitivism.’¹² Bontempelli’s proposal coincided with Roh’s in the estimation that the roots of magical realism could be found in realism proper, but they differed in that Bontempelli wanted to broaden the scope of magical realism in order to include the representation of magical occurrences with realist techniques.¹³ The bilingual nature of Bontempelli’s journal helped spread the concept throughout Europe.¹⁴ When it reached Paris in the late 1920s the history of magical realism merged with surrealism’s attempt to reach deeper truths through non-rational, oniric associations and the unexpected encounter of dissimilar objects and worlds.

What is clear in the European elaboration of the concept is the construction of magical realism in ahistorical terms. Neither Roh, or the romantic tradition he recuperates, nor Bontempelli and the avant-garde appropriations that followed suit thought of a magical realist aesthetic historically conditioned by the cultural particularities of its differential spaces of emergence. Magical realism was born unbound by specific social relations; a discourse whose universality was determined only by an epochal anti-positivist exploration of the limits of rational approaches to the real. Only in its later displacement to the Caribbean will Alejo Carpentier conceptualize it as the aesthetic particularity of Latin America, opening up the theoretical horizon to think about its relation to marginality, subalternity and postcolonialism.

Theories of the Latin American marvellous

Magical realism came of age when a group of Caribbean and Central American writers – Arturo Usler Pietri, Alejo Carpentier and Miguel Ángel Asturias (1899–1974), who had befriended each other in Paris in the late 1920s and early 1930s – reformulated the concept to propose it as an aesthetic form derived directly and organically from the hybrid nature of Latin American culture and society. In the essays and novels they wrote in the late 1940s, one can read magical realism being presented as the moment of Latin American cultural emancipation, when the region gives itself, for the first time, an aesthetic identity of its own, markedly differentiated from those inherited from Europe. While it was Carpentier who made the most significant contribution to the redefinition of the concept, which he renamed in the preface to his novel *The Kingdom of this World* (*El reino de este mundo*, 1949) as marvellous real, the Venezuelan novelist Arturo Usler Pietri was the first to produce, albeit tentatively, a Latin American appropriation of the concept. For all three, when they met in Paris, the main concern was how to conceive a cogent aesthetic programme capable of expressing their region's cultural particularity. In an essay published in 1986, Usler Pietri reminisces about those years:

For several years since 1929, three young Hispanic American writers gathered frequently on the terrace of some Parisian café to talk endlessly of the things they cared about the most: the literature of the hour, and the political situation in Latin America, which ultimately, were one and the same thing . . . In Asturias there was the almost obsessive manifestation of the dissolved Maya culture, the henchmen of the dictator, the improbable contrast of situations and conceptions, and a supernatural vision of an unreal reality, all mixed up as if in a Guignol theatre of strange figures. Carpentier was passionate for the black

elements of Cuban culture. He could talk for hours about *santeros*, voodoo rites, the magical mentality of the average Cuban in the presence of many pasts and heritages. I, on the other hand, was coming from a country where neither the indigenous nor the African predominated; a country marked by the unclassifiable mix of a contradictory cultural miscegenation... What came out of all those stories and evocations was the notion of the peculiar condition of the American world which was irreducible to any European model.¹⁵

These concerns (or obsessions, as Uslar Pietri calls them) about the cultural difference of Latin America would define the early literary work of all three writers. In 1927 Asturias published the first Spanish translation of the Mayan sacred book, the *Popol Vuh* ('the book of the community' in Quiché), and in 1930, *Legends of Guatemala* (*Leyendas de Guatemala*), a reinvention of the Mayan civilization, and of the mythical elements in its culture, written with an avant-gardist consciousness of the need to reappropriate the inherited language.¹⁶ During those same years, Carpentier would publish his first novel *Ecué-Yamba-ó* ('Praise be to God' in Yoruba, 1933), which he had begun writing while imprisoned in Cuba in 1927. The novel depicts the reality of Afro-Cuban populations in Cuba, with special attention to the sorcery and mystical elements of the religious ceremonies of black *ñáñigo* groups, which the text presents in striking contrast to the urban modernity of Havana. The exoticism of this novel's primitivist and ethnographic aesthetic was in fact common to the works of all three writers. In Uslar Pietri's novel *The Red Lances* (*Las lanzas coloradas*, 1931), the subject matter is not the attempt to give voice to marginalized subjects but to retell the history of the Venezuelan wars of independence interspersed with popular myths; an attempt to decode the Latin American particularity in national rather than in ethnical terms. Shortly after, the Venezuelan wrote 'Rain' ('La lluvia', 1935), a short story usually included in anthologies as a typical example of this incipient magical realist period, about the everyday and apparently banal lives of two old rural peasants in their interaction with an environment that becomes eerie during a drought.¹⁷ Mario Roberto Morales explains that Asturias, Carpentier and Uslar Pietri had to be inscribed in

a whole Latin-American avant-garde that appropriated, included, re-signified and fused subaltern cultures into the project of the modern nation-state that was beginning to shape up specially in the minds of liberal intellectuals... an appropriation that tended to reinvent a traditional popular culture, seen as raw material to create aesthetic versions of hybrid identities for different Latin American countries, transcending, of course, any type of assimilationist *negritudes* and indigenisms.¹⁸

If these three authors share the drive to go back to the drawing board to redefine Latin America's historical specificity in terms of popular and subaltern subjectivities, they do so by appealing to different poetic strategies which, grouped together, will establish the foundation of a certain Latin American narrative of marvels articulated around an incipient postcolonial consciousness of the need to remap and retell the history of a region whose narrative had been told from the outlook of the hegemonic *cultura criolla*.¹⁹ Writing about mythical tales of talking animals that interact with archetypal human beings, Asturias recasts the place of the majoritarian Mayan culture in Guatemala. Writing about the African-Cuban world in his ethnographic account of *Ecué-Yamba-ó*'s main character, Menegildo Cué, and his religious and cultural practices (from music to rites of initiation), as well as his incursions into an urban world that martyrs him, Carpentier begins the inquiry into the magical dimension of Latin American reality, and the constitutive antagonism of hegemonic and subaltern subject positions as the region's trademark.²⁰ Defamiliarizing a received and unquestioned national culture and local *mores* by interweaving in his writing popular myths and a strikingly modernist style, Uslar Pietri explores the cultural potential of effecting the encounter of universally modern narrative techniques with local histories, narratives and subjects. 'It was a reaction', wrote Uslar Pietri many years later. 'A reaction against the kind of descriptive and imitative literature that was being written in Hispanic America, but also a reaction against the usual submission to European trends and schools.'²¹ In the same essay, Uslar Pietri defines the literature that he and his colleagues were writing in the 1930s and 1940s in terms of an apprenticeship in learning how to see Latin America with Latin American eyes, or to put it differently, learning to naturalize a type of strangeness that was specific to Latin America due to its hybrid culture.

Read with European eyes, a novel by Asturias or Carpentier can be seen as artificial or as a disconcerting and unfamiliar anomaly. It was not an aggregate of characters and fantastic events, of which there are many good examples since the beginning of literature, but the revelation of a different situation, unusual, that clashed with realist patterns. For Hispanic Americans themselves it was a rediscovery of their cultural situation. This line goes from *Legends of Guatemala* to *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. What García Márquez describes that seems pure invention, is nothing else than the narration of a peculiar situation, seen from the eyes of the people that live and create it, almost without alterations. The *criollo* world is full of unusual and strange magic.²²

This 1975 essay has the benefit of posterior definitions and the general consolidation of magical realism as now a clearly designated non-European

aesthetic form. Usler Pietri emphasizes that the Latin American writer's ability to perceive the magical core of the region's cultural reality was a rediscovery enabled by their separation, their distance from that reality. Indeed, the two crucial factors that explain the reasons why these Latin American expatriates produced – out of the anxiety about Latin America's historical specificity – proto-magical realist fictions, and years later fully developed the concept of magical realism, have to be found in the type of international artistic interactions made possible by the coincidence of émigrés in Paris during the 1920s and 1930s. Carpentier had arrived in Paris in 1928 thanks to the help of his friend the poet Robert Desnos, at the exact time when Desnos and others were breaking away from André Breton's brand of surrealism. Desnos had pushed the Cuban on board the ship *España* with his own passport, helping him escape an asphyxiating and dangerous political situation in Havana. With Desnos's aid, Carpentier befriends all of the surrealist dissidents (while also frequently visiting Breton and Aragon), joins the chorus of reaction against Breton, and starts collaborating on the journals *Documents* (1929–30) and *Bifur* (1929–31), which were edited by Bataille and other former surrealists.²³ Breton's *Surrealist Manifesto* (1924) and its anti-realist, anti-positivistic aesthetic through which the artist would gain access to a 'superior reality' (*Manifesto*),²⁴ had clearly made an impact in Carpentier; most especially the investment of the marvel with aesthetic and even extra-aesthetic potential: 'Let us not mince words: the marvelous is always beautiful, anything marvelous is beautiful, in fact only the marvelous is beautiful.'²⁵ Within months of his arrival Carpentier had written an article on the surrealist movement for the Cuban publication *Social*, and it is apparent that his relationship with it 'marked a turning point in his literary development . . . it brought him a greater sense of the role of faith in the magical, in the noncausal, the supernatural, as a factor in artistic creation'.²⁶ Together with the theorization of the marvel, the ethnographic and primitivist dimension present in the artistic practice of many surrealists²⁷ resonated with Carpentier's sensibility and, evidently, intersected with the writing of *Ecué-Yamba-ó*. This cultural climate certainly favoured his novel's (as well as Asturias's *Legends*) warm reception in Paris.²⁸

Neither Carpentier nor Usler Pietri wrote about Latin American marvels or magical realism as a defining aesthetic of the region until 1948–9. The first one to do so was the Venezuelan writer in an otherwise forgettable book-length essay, *The Literature and Men of Venezuela* (*Letras y Hombres de Venezuela*, 1948). Reflecting upon the narrative written in his country and in the whole continent since 1930, he tries to foreground the defining trait of this group of texts: 'What became prominent in the short story and left an indelible mark

there was the consideration of man as a mystery surrounded by realistic facts. A poetic prediction or a poetic denial of reality. What for lack of another name could be called magical realism.²⁹ The definition is ambiguous and does not provide a path for aesthetic innovations, underscoring the need to concentrate on the mysterious nature of the empirical world, and mandating a critical-aesthetical attitude towards the real. In Uslar Pietri, as in his European predecessors, magical realism is an individual, historically undetermined (and, in that sense, potentially universal, universally applicable) attitude towards a given reality. No traces yet of a conceptualization of magical realism as an aesthetic dictated by the particular nature of Latin American culture and society. But even if Uslar Pietri's introduction of the concept in the Latin American literary field and imaginary did not contribute greatly to its critical definition (not nearly as much as Carpentier's explanation of the marvellous real would months later), Uslar Pietri was in fact the first to connect, more than two decades later, the first European conception and the Latin American incarnation of magical realism. In his 1986 essay, he explained why so many years after having taken part in discussions that circled around the idea of magical realism in Paris, the concept came back when he was preparing a series of lectures that he was going to deliver at Columbia University in New York, that would later become the aforementioned book. 'Where did a concept that was going to have such an impact come from? From the dark side of the unconscious. In the late 1920s I had read a brief study by the German art critic Franz Roh about Post-Expressionist European painting titled "Magical realism". I had long forgotten that book, some obscure mechanism in my mind brought it back spontaneously.³⁰ According to González Echevarría, the repressed concept might not have returned 'spontaneously', as it was fairly common in the writings of New York art critics at the time.³¹ In any event, what is important about Uslar Pietri's quotation is that he puts to rest the critical discussions about where he (and, most likely, Carpentier and Asturias) got in touch with the notion of magical realism. The answer: in Paris, in 1927, in the version of Roh's piece that was translated into Spanish by Fernando Valente and published in the influential *Revista de Occidente* published by José Ortega y Gasset and widely circulated in European and Latin American circles.³²

The marvellous and the Latin American novel

The true breakthrough in this global history of conceptualizations of magical realism was Carpentier's article 'On the marvellous real in America' ('Lo real maravilloso de América', 1948), later published as the preface to *The Kingdom of*

This World (*El Reino de este mundo*, 1949), a novel based on historical events that took place in Haiti between 1751 and 1822, the chronological arc of the rise of the Haitian revolution and of its long demise: from the scheming of the voodoo priest François Macandal and the uprising led by the Jamaican shaman Bouckman, to the Napoleonic invasion of the island and the failed institutionalization of the revolution under King Henri Christophe.³³ Carpentier interweaves these different moments narrating the story from the point of view of a fictional character, Ti Noel, a slave who begins as a witness of the rebellion and ends up as delusional hero of his own imaginary kingdom. Magical realism is intrinsically linked to the narration of historical events. Perhaps as a residue of the Surrealist influence, Carpentier's marvellous real presents itself as an account of the *real* history of Latin America, an interpellation of the Truth (to put it in Hegelian terms) of the region's history. The unearthing, manipulation and rewriting of historical references will be a strategy omnipresent in magical realism in Latin America and elsewhere.

During the eleven years he spent in Paris (he went back to Cuba in 1939, when World War II loomed in the horizon), Carpentier worked as a correspondent for Latin American publications and also as a radio technician and an editor. Yet his main intellectual investment was in his quest to rediscover Latin American culture through his novel *Ecué-Yamba-ó*, as well as in his journalistic practice and in his research and reading:

I felt an ardent desire to express the [Latin] American world. I still did not know how. I was attracted by the difficulty of the task because of the lack of knowledge of American essences. I devoted myself for long years to read everything I could about [Latin] America, from the letters of Christopher Columbus through the Inca Garcilaso to the eighteenth-century authors. For the space of eight years I don't think I did anything except read [Latin] American texts.³⁴

Back in Latin America these energies would be poured into the writing of *The Kingdom of This World*, and the conceptual construction of the concept of the marvellous real. In 'On the marvellous real in America', Carpentier explains that it was during a trip to Haiti in 1943, from his Venezuelan exile, that he started to delineate the concept that, in his eyes, defined Latin American reality. In this essay he explains that in Haiti he encountered a kind of marvel he had never seen or thought of before, made out of the ruins of Henri Christophe's kingdom with its shattered palace of Sans-Souci and the bulk of the Citadel of La Ferrière, and the colonial Cap Français, where black men lived for a short period of time in the nineteenth century as if they were the rulers of

Versailles. The marvel which, according to the surrealist mandate that he had absorbed in Paris, gave access to a 'superior reality', became apparent to him as the result of the hybridization of cultures, religions and polities.³⁵ A culture where the very modern desire of freedom was articulated in terms of magical emancipations: 'a land where thousands of men, anxious for freedom, believed in Macandal's lycanthropic power to the extent that their collective faith produced a miracle on the day of his execution'.³⁶ The remnants of a kingdom of slaves was a miniature of Latin America, a region where the marvellous arises 'from a privileged revelation of reality, an unaccustomed insight that is singularly favored by the unexpected richness of reality or an amplification of the scale and categories of reality, perceived with particular intensity by virtue of an exaltation of the spirit that leads it to a kind of extreme state'.³⁷

The key contribution of Carpentier's essay – one that would open up the possibility of conceptually linking magical realism and postcolonialism – lies in the notion of the 'unexpected richness of [Latin American] reality' that favoured 'privileged revelations'. There was something about Haitian and Latin American culture that was different from those of other regions of the world, particularly Europe. Other cultures may have experienced the marvellous (he cites Marco Polo's belief in birds capable of carrying elephants with their claws, Luther seeing a demon and throwing an inkwell at it, and Victor Hugo's belief in ghosts and apparitions), but these were fantastic imaginations of a hyper-rationalist culture trying to compensate for the magic it lacked organically, like people who 'admire the supermacho because of their own impotence'.³⁸ In Latin America, according to Carpentier, the marvellous was a constitutive, organic element of reality. 'I found the marvelous real at every turn. Furthermore, I thought, the presence and vitality of the marvelous real was not a privilege unique to Haiti but the heritage of all of America, where we have not yet begun to establish an inventory of our cosmogonies. The marvellous real is found at every stage in the lives of men who inscribed dates in the history of the continent'.³⁹ Carpentier formulates a novel idea – indeed, foundational – that was not present in Roh, Bontempelli or Uslar Pietri: the marvellous real is a cultural condition, and not an aesthetic perception of reality universally available; it is the defining particular trait of Latin American reality. According to Carpentier, if Latin America had a literary and artistic tradition that, in the past, had dealt with the marvellous nature of the region (from the chronicles of conquest to his own *Ecué-Yamba-ó* and now, *The Kingdom of This World*), it was because these narratives stemmed directly, immediately, from a naturalized experience of the reconciliation of the real and the marvellous in the region.

This proposition of a marvellous Latin American cultural specificity allows Carpentier to criticize Breton's brand of surrealism, and to burn the bridges that could have led critics to think of the marvellous real as a Third World offspring of surrealist aesthetics. If in Latin America, the marvellous is an organic, omnipresent component of reality, in Europe and metropolitan cultures in general, it is a mere artifice, an entertaining gimmick, a

tiresome pretension of creating the marvelous that has characterized certain European literatures over the past thirty years. . . The marvelous, inadequately evoked by the roles and deformities of festival characters – won't young French poets ever get tired of the *fête foraine* with its wonders and clowns, which Rimbaud dismissed long ago in his *Alchimie du verbe*? The marvelous, manufactured by tricks of prestidigitation, by juxtaposing objects unlikely ever to be found together: that old deceitful story of the fortuitous encounter of the umbrella and the sewing machine on the dissecting table that led to ermine spoons, the snail in the rainy taxi, the lion's head on the pelvis of a widow, the Surrealist exhibitions.⁴⁰

While in Latin America, according to Carpentier, the marvellous does not have to be invented by poets because it can be found 'at every turn'⁴¹ and therefore its literary presentation results from an apparently simple mimetic operation, in Europe, the preeminence of a positivistic social structure lacking in magic, the marvellous can only be artificially invoked through the mediation of an aesthetic artifice determined by its own historical horizon.⁴² Uslar Pietri also underscored the break between magical realism and surrealism. The European avant-garde, on the one hand, was merely 'an autumnal game of a literature that was beginning to be extinguished . . . It was painting melted watches, burning giraffes, cities without men, or putting together the most absurd notions or objects, like the white-haired gun, or the umbrella over the dissecting table . . . a game ending in an artificial and easy formula'; but the marvellous real and magical realism that Asturias, Carpentier and Uslar Pietri himself were attempting aimed at 'revealing, discovering, expressing fully that almost unknown and almost delusional Latin American reality, to penetrate the big creative mystery of cultural hybridity'.⁴³

But the importance of Carpentier's marvellous real for the conceptualization of the postcolonial determinations over the definition of magical realism may be said to reside in the contradiction between what the preface of *The Kingdom of This World* says and what the novel *does*. While the preface stresses the lack of mediations in the way aesthetic formations – such as these new *marvellous* novels – express a Latin American social reality constituted by marvellous phenomena visible 'at every turn', the novel itself presents the cultural

presence of the marvellous as the result of mediation marked by the socially bound perspective of the spectator. Nowhere is this more evident than in the famous scene of Macandal's miracle, in the closing pages of the first chapter.

Macandal, mentor of Ti Noel and leader of a slave uprising, had gone into hiding. Clandestinely, he was coordinating a network aimed at terrorizing whites by poisoning them and their animals, and had been recognized by slaves as a *houngán*, a voodoo priest in touch with *Radá* divinities. Slaves attributed the success of Macandal's conspiracy to the fact that he operated in animal disguises that enabled him to be simultaneously at different plantations.⁴⁴ Once captured, the French colonial authorities announced a spectacular exemplary punishment for the leader of the revolt, and set out to burn him on a pyre in the central square of the Cap Français. From the point of view of Ti Noel, the narrator explains that the sentence was meaningless; they did not know that Macandal was going to metamorphose into a mosquito and escape⁴⁵ and that 'this was what the masters did not know; for that reason they had squandered so much money putting on this useless show, which would prove how completely helpless they were against a man chrised by the great Loas'.⁴⁶

Macandal was now lashed to the post. The executioner had picked up an ember with the tongs. With a gesture rehearsed the evening before in front of a mirror, the Governor unsheathed his dress sword and gave the order for the sentence to be carried out. The fire began to rise towards the Mandigue, licking his legs. At that moment Macandal moved the stump of his arms, which they had been unable to tie up, in a threatening gesture which was none the less terrible for being partial, howling unknown spells and violently thrusting his torso forwards. The bonds fell off and the body of the Negro rose in the air, flying overhead, until it plunged into the black waves of the sea of slaves. A single cry filled the square: 'Macandal save!' . . . And the noise and screaming and uproar were such that very few saw that Macandal, held by ten soldiers, had been thrust head first into the fire, and that a flame fed by his burning hair had drowned his last cry. When the slaves were restored to order, the fire was burning normally like any fire of good.⁴⁷

This scene, the one most often cited as a perfect narrative performance of the marvellous real, is structured as the irreconcilable opposition of the rational, positivistic point of view of the white colonialists, and the magical conception of the real of the slaves. In the terms first conceptualized by González Echeverría, according to whom magical realist narratives conceived the marvellous either as ontology or an epistemological construction, Carpentier's foundational *The Kingdom of This World* inaugurates the Latin American genre that will be globalized throughout the postcolonial world

presenting the tension between both notions. If in the anthropological discourse of the preface, the marvel is defined as the ontological condition of Latin American culture, in the novel, magic is an effect of a particular, socially determined, worldview. In the scene of Macandal's execution, the narrative voice is identified with the slaves' belief in their priest's power to ridicule the French and escape; accordingly, the narrator describes with ostensible objectivity how he in fact turns into smoke to escape the pyre. Were the chapter to end there, it would have been a literal demonstration of the prefatory idea of *the marvellous found at every turn in Latin America*. But the production of 'the naturalization of the marvellous'⁴⁸ is interrupted when the narrator whispers that the crowd was so busy believing in Macandal's miracle 'that very few saw that Macandal, held by ten soldiers, had been thrust head first into the fire, and that a flame fed by his burning hair had drowned his last cry'.⁴⁹ The novel performs a marvellous real discourse very different from the one conceived and put forth in the preface/manifesto. The marvellous is no longer the constitutive core of Latin American reality, no longer its objective truth, but the predicate of the worldview of Latin American marginalized, subaltern populations. The narrator explains what *really happened*, and thus reterritorializes the marvellous real as the delusion of an oppressed class in need of reassurance in order to survive hardship: 'Macandal had kept his word, remaining in the Kingdom of This World.'⁵⁰ The novel gives the reader a version of the marvellous real as a classical form of ideology, as a veil that deforms a perceived reality: the marvellous real as a sociocultural pathology.

The chapter ends with Monsieur Lenormand de Mezy going to bed thinking about the lack of sensibility of the blackmen, and with Ti Noel going back to work in the barn, suggesting a clear hierarchy between these opposing 'phenomenologies of perception':⁵¹ actuality lies on the side of the French colonizers, while the marvellous is an epistemology of the oppressed, a wilful projection of the subaltern onto the world, motivated by the need to anchor hope in a better future. By discrediting the point of view of the slaves, Carpentier contradicts the proposal of the preface, and reinscribes his conception of the marvellous within the frame of the primitivist mindset of the French avant-garde. But at the same time, he opens up the meaning of magical realism to all kinds of future postcolonial self-conscious appropriations of the genre.

Almost replicating the situation of the early 1930s, when, within a few years, both Carpentier and Asturias published books that would anticipate many of the marvellous and magical lines of what would come to be conceptualized as marvellous real and magical realism, within months of the appearance of *The Kingdom of This World* in 1949 Asturias also published *Men of Maize* (*Hombres de maíz*), a novel

that explores the marvellous cultural practices of Mayan communities and their modern descendants. In 1946 Asturias had published a crucial text in the genealogy of the Latin American novel about the figure of the dictator, *Mr President (El señor presidente)*, but *Men of Maize* reconnected with what Asturias had begun to explore in *Legends of Guatemala*: the aesthetic and political potential of magical and ritualistic legends of wonders which are presented at the same time as the constitutive ground of the community's cultural identity and self-representation, and as an alternative to Western, bourgeois modernism.

The novel's plot deals with the ways in which the process of colonial and neo-colonial modernization between 1899 (the year of Asturias's birth) and the 1940s impacted upon the lives of Mayan Indian characters that are represented through archetypal elements of the culture's mythology. Gaspar Ilóm, for example, the hero of the first part of the novel is imbued with supernatural powers that he uses to defend the hills and forests where his people live against attempts to encroach on them by capitalist planters supported by the modern state. Contrary to what Carpentier's narrator does with Macandal in *The Kingdom of This World*, the narrator of *Men of Maize* does not seem to think that the psychological, mythological or cultural source of these powers requires an explanation external to it; on the contrary, he adopts the cultural point of view of its characters, never breaking with it. In Asturias's novel there is no space of enunciation exterior to the universe of the indigenous characters, which is evidenced even in the narrator's language which reproduces a popular Guatemalan rural dialect, in frank opposition to the erudite, baroque tone of Carpentier's narrator. Asturias shows how the foundational narrative world-view of the Mayas, the *Popol Vuh* sacred text, is at work in the lives of the twentieth-century descendants of the Mayas who ruled over Central America; for instance, the rural mailman Nicho Aquino's fall down a deep well after having lost his wife is represented as an archetypal descent to the underworld during which he becomes a witness to the creation of the first man out of maize in the terms told by the *Popol Vuh* and the *Books of Chilam Balam*. But Asturias's is a magical realism eminently modern: he rewrites these classical Mayan texts with keystone modern theories in mind, from the aforementioned surrealism to Marxism and psychoanalysis.⁵² According to René Prieto, the pivotal elements of the story, such as corn, water and fire, are linked with colours, animals and numbers 'in keeping with their ascribed spheres of action in Mayan cosmogony', and he affirms that these materials are in fact 'the unifying principle of a novel which develops neither chronologically nor through its protagonists but, rather, through a character substitution principle that is based on clusters of elements interlinked amongst themselves'.⁵³ But the

novel's specificity in relation to Asturias's previous versions of that canonical text in *Legends of Guatemala* is the intent to articulate the mythical and the cultural with the challenge posed to them by the loss of the links to the earth that ensures their vitality, and the social disruption of the colonialism of the modern state.⁵⁴

After Carpentier and Asturias set out the terms for theoretical and narrative practices of magical realism as the literary identity politics of Latin America, the Haitian novelist Jacques Stéphen Alexis (1922–61) offered a lecture at the first Congress of Black Writers in 1956 at the Sorbonne, 'On the marvellous realism of the Haitians' ('Du réalisme merveilleux des Haïtiens'), where he proposed an aesthetic capable of representing the social totality of a Caribbean culture that he saw deeply rooted in the living tradition of the mythic, the legendary and the marvellous.⁵⁵ Amaryll Chanady points out that the crucial difference between Carpentier's approach and that of Alexis lies in the latter's emphasis on the *merveilleux* as the language of non-Europeanized Haitians and Latin Americans. While Carpentier had attempted to recreate the worldview of the Other from a position of exteriority, Alexis searches for an expressive form that springs from the local culture.⁵⁶ Drawing from its formation in the French Communist Party, Alexis proposed magical realism as the Caribbean's *Réalisme Social*, a narrative form capable of unveiling for the people their own political struggles.⁵⁷ Alexis's specific contribution to the theorization of *lo real maravilloso Americano* was to wed the aesthetic potential of this literary practice to an explicitly stated revolutionary goal. Magical realism was for Alexis a fully fleshed postcolonial, emancipatory aesthetic form, and not merely a self-affirming discourse aimed at creating a new aesthetic identity.⁵⁸

In or out? The postcolonial limits of magical realism

If the first formulations of magical realism in Europe were marked by its relation to the historical avant-garde of the 1920s,⁵⁹ it was in Latin America, between 1949 and 1970, that the concept became identified as an emancipatory cultural discourse capable of expressing the historical particularity of the region, and the desire of establishing an aesthetic rhetoric independent of European modernism. In many cases these attempts were formulated in rather explicit postcolonial terms; in others, the postcolonial cultural politics was a retrospective theoretical attribution; and in yet a third group, magical realism was described in purely formal terms, without even alluding to its potential relation to the political and cultural projects of an imagined collectivity. It was a scholar, Ángel Flores, who in a famous lecture in 1954 entitled 'Magical

realism in Spanish American fiction' ('El realismo mágico en la narrativa hispanoamericana') that was published a year later, set the clock back to the structuralist definition of magical realism that valued the concept for its 'intrinsically aesthetic merits'⁶⁰ as a formal 'amalgamation of realism and fantasy'.⁶¹ This tendency to define magical realism in strictly formal terms overlooking its historical, cultural and political determinations has led many critics to include within the flexible boundaries of magical realism almost any text presenting a fantastic episode that cannot be explained through the rules of physics, regardless of when or where they may have been produced. Devoid of the specific historical context and cultural politics that differentiates it from the merely fantastic and other forms of narrative that defy the 'rational, linear worldview of Western realist fiction',⁶² magical realism became an empty signifier that fits practically every single text that manifested a critique about the stability of the referential world and the possibility to access it in a transparent and direct manner.

The ahistorical definition of the concept has lead Flores to declare a Latin American genealogy of magical realism composed of authors whose texts could not be further away from Carpentier's proposal or Asturias's practice. Flores's genealogy begins with Jorge Luis Borges's *Universal History of Infamy* (1935) and *The Garden of the Forking Paths* (*El jardín de los senderos que se bifurcan*, 1941), and continues, among others, with María Luisa Bombal's *House of Mists* (1935), Silvina Ocampo's *Forgotten Journey* (1937), Adolfo Bioy Casares's *Morel's Invention* (1942), José Bianco's *Shadow Play* (1944), and other texts that no one would dare read under the rubric of magical realism.⁶³ Flores's missteps open up a critical question about the limits of a magical realism rhetoric that has been tested since the 1950s by liminal texts whose inscription in the genre can be characterized as undecidable. This is the case with Juan Rulfo's *Pedro Páramo* (1955), one of the most influential novels of the twentieth century, and, together with Carpentier's texts, the strongest influence on García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. Rulfo's novel tells the story of Juan Preciado, a rural peasant who is sent by his mother to her old town of Comala in the desert of Jalisco, to claim back 'what's ours'⁶⁴ from his father, the rich landowner and local chieftain, Pedro Páramo. After a while, Preciado realizes that the people who have been relating their stories about the sufferings inflicted by Pedro Páramo are dead. Is a novel written around the idea of a character who talks to the dead without even knowing that their voices are echoes of the past an unmistakable example of magical realism? Some critics seem to think so, and it is difficult to disagree, especially when magical realism is considered as a discourse that emerges from the historical experience of a

collective drama. On the other hand, a narrative so firmly grounded in the Mexican tradition of communing with the dead (the Day of the Dead, or All Saints Day lasts between 31 October and 2 November), whose backdrop is a tapestry of meticulous historical references to the social universe of post-revolutionary Mexico, can legitimately be read as merely allegorical.

In the 1980s the same dehistoricizing move of Flores's took hold of the notion of magical realism in the English-speaking world. After Gabriel García Márquez's Nobel Prize in 1982, David Young and Keith Hollaman edited an anthology, *Magical Realist Fiction*, that immediately became a textbook for classrooms throughout the world, where the concept of magical realism was defined in equally vague terms:

Whatever its limitations – and all such terms have them – we found the term and what it implied extremely useful in defining for ourselves a category of fiction that could be distinguished from traditional realistic and naturalistic fiction, on the one hand, and from recognized categories of the fantastic: ghost story, science fiction, gothic novel, and fairy tale... The recent increase in popularity of the term has made us feel less defensive about our decision to stick with it, but there is also the fact that any other term, such as 'fiction of the marvelous', or 'fiction of conflicting realities', would be both more cumbersome and less expressive.⁶⁵

This way of opening up the scope of magical realism, together with the lack of interest in its cultural, historical and geopolitical determinations, authorizes the inclusion of thirty-five writers (among them, Gogol, Tolstoy, Mann, Kafka, Mandelstam, Nabokov, Faulkner, Borges, Cheever, Reyes, Cortázar, Calvino, Kundera), of whom only Carpentier's and García Márquez's texts could be productively counted as marvellous and magical realist. The affirmation of the difference of magical realism, as opposed to the merely fantastic, that would determine a much more rigorous anthology, is both formal and historical. Ato Quayson provides the most convincing definition of the formal specificity of the rhetoric of magical realism, distinguishing it from the fantastic by describing the differential relation it establishes between the real and the extraordinary in terms of a 'principle of equivalence'.⁶⁶ Quayson explains: 'it is not that magical realism does not share elements of the fantastic with other genres, but that in confounding any simple or clear sense of spatial, ethical, or motivational hierarchies between the real and the fantastic, magical realism generates a scrupulous equivalence between the two domains'.⁶⁷ This principle of equivalence, which alludes to Chiampì's idea of a 'denaturalization of the real and the naturalization of the marvellous'⁶⁸ cited at the beginning of the chapter, is not at work in the fantastic where the abnormal and the

marvellous are never normalized but, on the contrary, in texts like Kafka's *Metamorphosis* and Robert Kroetsch's *What the Crow Said* (and most novels and stories in Young and Hollaman's anthology) the pervasive 'sense of the uncanny' that permeates these narratives where the magical and the fabulous remains strange, forever disrupting the real. However, the main hypothesis of this chapter is that a formal delimitation of magical realism is not enough to understand a genre that results from the complex interaction between aesthetic forms and their historicity because, as Parkinson Zamora has argued, magical realism works 'erasing and redrawing the lines between fiction and history for particular political purposes'.⁶⁹ In other words, magical realism should not be considered solely as an aesthetic form that can be forged anywhere, under any sociocultural conditions, but as a discourse emerging from cultural formations marked by the perception of a lack and the register of emancipatory desires. Indeed, it could be said that the most important contribution of the Latin American writers that reinvented the category and practice of magical realism as a rhetoric that emerged from the peripheral culture of former colonies not completely emancipated from their metropolis was precisely to point towards the critical horizon that enabled a reflection upon the specific historical and aesthetic determinations of magical realist practices that separate it from other neighbouring narrative discourses. As Christopher Warnes affirms in, perhaps, the most rigorous study to date of the relation between magical realism and postcolonialism, it is in postcolonial conditions of enunciation 'that magical realism fulfills its creative and critical potential to the fullest'.⁷⁰ The postcolonial potential described by Warnes can be seen fleshed out in Michael Taussig's conception of the politics of magical realism, which he sees being developed as an interrogation of the 'persistence of earlier forms of production in the development of capitalism' in order to produce a discourse 'that intermingle[s] the old and the new as ideals transfiguring the promise offered yet blocked by the present'.⁷¹ Taussig sees magical realism as the possibility of 'rescuing the "voice" of the Indian from the obscurity of pain and time. From the represented shall come that which overturns the representation'.⁷² Even though Taussig sees in magical realism the subversive potential to lay down the discursive basis for new political and cultural practices, he warns that, at the same time, much too often the aesthetic has become the instrument of a hegemonic reappropriation, 'a neo-colonial reworking of primitivism'.⁷³ This does not annul, for Taussig, the potentiality of magical realism and the latency in it of a cultural and political project that might restore the voice of the popular, the subaltern and the premodern. Taussig coincides with the point of view of those who consider that not only

does it emerge from societies structured through postcolonial imaginaries, but in fact magical realism would produce them: ‘magical realism creates a new and decolonized space for narrative, one not already occupied by the assumptions and techniques of European realism’;⁷⁴ or as Faris puts it elsewhere, a ‘liberating poetics’ whose effectiveness depends on adopting a form of representation antagonistic to a realist narrative seen as a ‘European import’.⁷⁵ On the other hand, many Latin American critics have denounced magical realism as a ‘reification of alterity ...’,⁷⁶ consumed almost exclusively by metropolitan audiences that affirm their superiority in their rejoicing in magical realist gimmicks because ‘it doesn’t happen, couldn’t happen, *here*’.⁷⁷ Conceptualizing magical realism in relation to the extra-aesthetic (political, emancipatory, messianic) imaginaries, be they postcolonial or not, provides a clear criterion to determine with certain rigour the boundaries of the rhetoric of the marvellous.⁷⁸ Taking Carpentier’s lead, magical realism is defined by its organic articulation with a historical situation marked by a desire of cultural and aesthetic autonomy and self-expression. From Isabel Allende’s *The House of Spirits* (1982) and Angela Carter’s *Nights at the Circus* (1984), to Patrick Süskind’s *Perfume* (1985) and Marie Darrieuseucq’s *Pig Tales* (1997), texts written from a hegemonic position of enunciation, or produced in post-postcolonial sociocultural situations, tend to merely reproduce the technical gesture of magical realism while emptying it out of its cultural–political potential. As a consequence, many of these texts fail to achieve the substantial cultural meaning they seem to appeal to, because they cannot ground their formalist magical realist stunts in a material reality marked by the need to overcome a historical lack through an aesthetic practice organically articulated with a political desire.⁷⁹

Gabriel García Márquez and the globalization of magical realism

Neither the so-called *boom* in Latin American literature, nor the novels that gained unprecedented visibility thanks to the synergy of its collective process – chief among them, Gabriel García Márquez’s *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (*Cien años de soledad*, 1967) – nor the second Latin American flowering of magical realism, can be understood outside the political and cultural space created by the Cuban Revolution on January 1959. In a continent where the idea of postcolonialism always has to be qualified and predicated upon, the Cuban Revolution and the continental imaginaries of economic, political and cultural emancipation it triggered can be said to have opened up a postcolonial discursive horizon. During the 1960s, and to a large extent in dialogue with the

anti-imperialist content of the historical process that was taking place in Cuba, the literary field was dominated by discourses expressing the desire to achieve a self-determined Latin American identity, a question about how to engage in a process of modernization while remaining faithful to the cultural particularities of the region. The ‘boom’ in general, and García Márquez’s novel in particular, were immediately received as the most perfect answer to this cultural and political dilemma.⁸⁰ Examining different methodological approaches to the interpretation of the boom, Neil Larsen sees it, precisely, as ‘the literary manifestation of the new political consciousness generated in Latin America by the Cuban revolution’,⁸¹ a translation of the anti-imperialist demand for autonomy into a literary form capable for expressing a desire of modernity in *our own terms*. It was in fact this attempt to negotiate the universality of modern narrative techniques and the particularity of Latin American history that constituted the invisible thread that strings together a literary genealogy, from Carpentier, Asturias and Rulfo to García Márquez, all of them very much committed to the project of a socialist modernization of Latin America, before and after the rise of Fidel Castro in 1959.

García Márquez had been working on ideas, characters and settings for what would become *One Hundred Years* since 1948, under the working title of *La Casa*, which, until the mid 1960s, was barely a handful of family stories and descriptions of the Colombian village where he had grown up with his grandparents; in other words, a fictional concoction of the collective history of his elders. Besides his work as a journalist since 1948, before his magnum opus he had published, three brief novels, *Leaf Storm* (*La hojarasca*, 1955), *No One Writes to the Colonel* (*El coronel no tiene quien le escriba*, 1961), *In the Evil Hour* (*La mala hora*, 1962), a collection of stories, *Big Mama’s Funeral* (*Los funerales de Mamá Grande*, 1962), and several short stories that would be collected after 1967, the most important of which is ‘Monologue of Isabel watching it rain in Macondo’ (‘Monólogo de Isabel viendo llover en Macondo’, 1955). Many critics have read these pre-*Solitude* narratives as proto-magical realist laboratories where García Márquez played with forms of conveying the marvellous, which in turn would be perfected and incorporated into his grand novel. This is clearly an exaggeration. *Leaf Storm* and *No One Writes* experiment with time, stretching the narrative duration of the instant in a way that was clearly inscribed in European modernism (principally, Joyce, but also Virginia Woolf and Faulkner), rather than as a Latin Americanist magical conception of temporality. Read as pre-texts, the most notable elements in these narratives are the presentation of the physical spaces of the saga to come, Macondo and the

house, some of the Buendía family members, and references to traumatic episodes (the arrival of the banana company, one long extended rainstorm) that will be part of the novel. What is still missing, however, is the clear articulation of the rhetoric of magical realism – a naturalization of the magical aspects both of everyday occurrences and sociohistorical events.

‘My problem was that I wanted to destroy the separation between what appeared to be real and what appeared to be fantastic because, in the world I was trying to evoke that barrier did not exist.’⁸² García Márquez’s challenge in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* was to find a rhetoric capable of presenting the stories particular to a specific region of Colombia that he had heard from his grandmother in a narrative capable of representing what he understood to be the historical experience of Latin America as an undifferentiated whole: the productive ambiguity of that ‘world I was trying to evoke’.⁸³ Macondo is the mediation between the idiosyncratic hyper-localism of the Colombian tropical forest and the general situation of the continent. Macondo is the village-signifier that names the difference of Latin America, and later, perhaps of the Third World at large.

One Hundred Years is the story of the mythical foundation of Macondo, and of the ways in which its traumatic social history – the roots of which are found in the postcolonial formation of the Latin American nation state – broke up the Buendía family. The specificity of García Márquez’s magical realism resides, precisely, in the tension of myth and history, or rather, in the tense interrogation that myths, legends, beliefs, that is, culture in its most particularistic meaning, poses modern history and the wounds it has inflicted upon the world’s peripheries. The difference between the fantastic and magical realism becomes transparent in García Márquez’s novel and this newfound clarity becomes a critical tool to reexamine the limits of the genre throughout the world. José Arcadio Buendía finds the skeleton of an old galleon in the middle of the jungle; the dead haunt the living in search of redemption; the whole town suffers, first, from an insomnia plague, and later, from a collective memory loss that José Arcadio fights by trying to invent a memory machine, but only Melquíades will be able to cure Macondo when he returns from the dead out of boredom; when the founder of the family dies, it rains little yellow flowers; Remedios the Beauty ascends to heaven amidst bedsheets; crazily in love with Meme, wherever Mauricio Babilonia goes, a cloud of yellow butterflies follows him. These are not fantastic, magical, marvellous or strange episodes that take place under the eyes of delusional or prophetic individuals (as in the case of D.M. Thomas’s *The White Hotel*, 1981), or in unspecified and undetermined collectivities. On the contrary, their magical nature is a

‘categorical affirmation’⁸⁴ structurally determined: the community where they occur is politically mediated by the historical experience of colonialism and neo-colonialism. The novel foregrounds this fact through its attention to the civil war between factions of a failed state, and to the massacre of workers on strike by a national army acting in defence of the interests of the American banana company. In other words, because the magical occurrences in the novel end up being determined by the wind that wipes out Macondo, as well as the past, present and future of the Buendías, the inexistence of ‘the separation between what appeared to be real and what appeared to be fantastic’ is always coloured by a tragic fate: Latin American history, the novel seems to be saying, inflicts wounds that a hegemonic reason and realist forms of literary representation cannot suture.⁸⁵

To a large extent, the importance of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* in the history of the *postcolonialization* of magical realism that this chapter is tracing has to do precisely with the narrative and interpretative horizon opened up by García Márquez by rendering visible the relation between the universality of (colonial, postcolonial, capitalistic) modern history, and the particularity of local forms of oppression. It would be difficult to read critically the very productive uses of magical realism in Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* (1980) and *Shame* (1983), Latife Tekin’s *Dear Shameless Death* (1983), Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* (1987), Ben Okri’s *The Famished Road* (1991), Mia Couto’s *Sleepwalking Land* (1992), Mo Yan’s *Big Breasts and Wide Hips* (1996) – novels that attest to the global spread of magical realism in general, and of García Márquez’s novel in particular – without an understanding of the mediating nature of his novel in the history of the genre.⁸⁶ The debt of most of these novels to *One Hundred Years*’s practice of ‘magical realism as a means of interrogating ideas about history, culture and identity’⁸⁷ is self-evident in two complementary, indeed, necessary, aspects: one formal, the other cultural-political. Firstly, these novels follow García Márquez’s postulation of a narrative whose objective (or rather, *objectivized*) point of view is identical with a culture that naturalizes the marvellous, and estranged social domination, massacres, wars, and other historical traumas. Secondly, they do so in the way they conceive and articulate the marvellous and the fantastic, not so much as a form of reflecting ‘multiple cultural influences’⁸⁸ and belongings, but in relation to specific subaltern (hybrid or not) cultural experiences resulting from colonialism and other forms of local or global oppression. This criterion to describe the specificity of postcolonial magical realist fictions may result in the exclusion of works usually considered within this tradition. Such is the case with Canadian magical realism. Stephen Slemon admits his

difficulty in finding in Canada the kind of postcolonial cultural situation that had given rise to magical realism in Latin America, and was producing it in Africa and South Asia.⁸⁹ His solution to the problem of reading read novels such as Jack Hodgins's *The Invention of the World* (1977) and Robert Kroetsch's *What the Crow Said* (1978) as magical realist texts consists in generalizing a specific formal feature of these novels to make a general claim about the genre. He argues that 'the language of narration in a magical realist text, a battle between two oppositional systems takes place, each working toward the creation of a different kind of fictional world from the other, since the ground rules of these two worlds are incompatible, neither can fully come into being, and each remains suspended'.⁹⁰ Slemon claims that this sustained contradiction staged by the discourse of the genre resembles the colonial condition: a suspension between two codes, two languages, two cultures, and thus he arrives to the interesting conclusion that the relation between magical realism and postcoloniality is mediated by an allegorical relation. Implicit in Slemon's argument is the radical and apparently irreconcilable gap between the magical realisms of the so-called Third and First World: whereas in the periphery magical realism seems to emerge, at specific historical junctures, from postcolonial sociocultural situations, in the core, it is the appropriation of the formal remains of postcoloniality that produces an effective aesthetic evocation. This would mean that the only way to include these Canadian fictions within the aesthetic genealogy this chapter is trying to trace is by emptying out the traumatic aspect of the postcolonial/periphere experience that magical realism would work through.

But post-García Márquez magical realist postcolonial novels – those that transformed a Latin American aesthetic form into a global cultural formation – are deeply rooted in the postcolonial social reality that constitutes their context of enunciation. Thus, in Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, the task at hand is to contest the colonial historical narrative of India through Saleem Sinai's *counter-realist* (because it is difficult to see it as straightforwardly magical realist) story of the process that goes from transition to Partition in the twentieth century. In this history of the genre, Rushdie's novels represent the textual intersection of postcolonial magical realism and postmodernism: for Saleem (as well as for Rushdie, who will go back to this aesthetic device in *The Satanic Verses*), history is nothing but an aggregate of stories told from particular, historically determined, sociocultural locations. According to Warnes, the specificity of Rushdie's magical realism is that 'the supernatural of this novel seems to arise from Rushdie's own eclectic imagination, nurtured as it has been by wide reading and a productive mixing of cultures. It does not

arise ethnographically, from the world view of any specific culture, but linguistically, from the detail of language.⁹¹ Even though this assessment may open a gap that separates Rushdie from Carpentier and García Márquez because of their differential relation with a generalized cultural condition, *Midnight's Children's* 'estranged' history of India is still told from the perspective of a subject longing for self-determination, self-affirmation and the overcoming of a social condition that he/she feels as a burden, in other words, the postcolonial determinations that define the particular strand of magical realism this chapter is focused on. In a similar vein, Mo Yan's *Big Breasts and Wide Hips* rewrites, with a keen eye for the strange, the eventful history of twentieth-century China – from the end of the Qing dynasty, the Republic and the Japanese invasion, to Mao's Long March, the Cultural Revolution, all the way to the age of capitalist reforms in the 1980s – looking at its impact in a little fictional Chinese Macondo, Northeast Gaomi County. Through the use of folk stories, legends and myths, Mo Yan effectively 'deconstructs the grand historical narrative of China's revolutionary century'.⁹² In the case of Morrison's *Beloved*, the title character haunts her mother and family after having been killed in order to enable the retelling of the unspeakable stories of slavery, and in doing so, her ghostly and marvellous presence (Beloved serves as the signifier of all enslaved women and slavery suffering) facilitates the possibility of healing. Both Tekin's *Dear Shameless Death* and Mia Couto's *Sleepwalking Land* articulate a view of the magical dimensions of the worlds of Anatolia, Turkey and Mozambique from children's perspective on their traumatic historical experience. In the case of Tekin's novel, the rural world where Dirmit lives is inhabited by *Djinn* demons, a witch and 'the donkey boy' (myths drawn from Anatolian folklore), real threats that punctuate the experience of a distressing modernization in the interior of Turkey, and of the internal migrations to urban centres that terrify Dirmit. Couto's story about the fifteen-year-long civil war of Mozambique during the second half of the 1970s until 1992 is presented as seen through the eyes of Muidinga, an orphan boy who is searching for his lost family with the help of an old man who, among other things, creates a river with a stick for the boy to be able to reach the sea, where he thinks he will find his mother. In Couto's novel, published shortly after the end of the civil war in Mozambique, magical realism presents itself as a political intervention in the discursive field of the present. And even in novels whose relation to *One Hundred Years'* magical realism could only be described as negative, as in the case of Okri's *The Famished Road*, the conception of the *unreal* is construed as the result of a causal relation between the internal and the geopolitical situation of historically inflicted wounds. Ato Quayson, Okri's most

lucid interpreter, describes his fiction with a concept borrowed from Harry Garuba, ‘animist realism’,⁹³ and the concept places Okri’s novel closer to Carpentier, Asturias and Rulfo than to García Márquez, but still undoubtedly inscribing its aesthetic rhetoric within the practice of magical realism as it has been outlined in this chapter. Azaro’s wandering in an indeterminate life-space between the dead and the living, which he experiences as ‘problematically equivalent’,⁹⁴ together with the novel’s representation of orality, inscribes it in a Nigerian literary tradition (Amos Tutuola and Wole Soyinka), but also within the traditional Yoruba worldview, trying to recreate its genetical myths. These overlaid layers of high-culture techniques and popular materials bring to the surface the modern historical trauma of Africa and the marvellous dimensions of its traditional cultures that could not conform to a realistic representation of its social existence.

The ways in which these novels present a subaltern inflection of the magical owe more to *One Hundred Years of Solitude* than is usually acknowledged. This allusive debt can be found explicitly spelled out in the novel that has come to be seen as the ultimate embodiment of postcolonial fiction, Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children*. A few pages into the novel, the reader is presented with a meaningful rephrasing of the famous opening sentence of García Márquez’s book. Aadam Aziz, the grandfather of the novel’s narrator (who had migrated to Germany to study medicine), has returned to Kashmir and is seeing his home ‘through travelled eyes’, discovering it as a ‘hostile environment’. And then, evoking the literary source of its magical realist constructive device, ‘Many years later, as he faced the firing squad, Colonel Aureliano Buendía was to remember that distant afternoon when his father took him to discover ice’ (*One Hundred Years of Solitude*),⁹⁵ the narrator inscribes his story and the overlapping history of India in a tradition of magical realist representation: ‘Many years later, when the hole inside him had been clogged up with hate, and he came to sacrifice himself at the shrine of the black stone god in the temple on the hill, he would try and recall his childhood springs in Paradise, the way it was before travel and tussocks and army tanks messed everything up’ (*Midnight’s Children*).⁹⁶ Looking at the dates of the texts analysed above, the local re-elaborations of magical realism in diverse postcolonial sites outside Latin America began during the second half of the 1970s, with particular intensity after 1982. The question is how did this happen? How did magical realism move from Latin America to the postcolonial peripheries in the rest of the world? How did it become the ‘literary language of the postcolonial world’?⁹⁷

One of the most common ways of explaining the global ubiquity of a magical realist rhetoric is by stating its universality as an aesthetic form. Seymour Menton, one of the first critics to historicize and theorize the genre in American academia, has fleshed out the formalist premise that underlies attempts to read the versions of magical realism that have emerged throughout the world: 'I am of the opinion that magical realism is a universal tendency, which has not been engendered in American soil.'⁹⁸ A usual postcolonial answer to the same question often explicates it in terms of the potential of the form 'to resolve the antinomy that underpins imperial romance, thereby destabilising the binaries – coloniser and colonised, knowledge and inscrutability, western and other – upon which the colonial fictions depend'.⁹⁹ But this very convincing argument about the appeal of magical realist forms elucidates *why* they were adopted in marginal locations beyond Latin America since the 1970s, but does not address the question of *how* magical realism became a global narrative matrix, and this points to the difference between its presumed universality and its *universalization* through specific and concrete historical processes.

The question about the universality of magical realism has to be answered by reconstructing the material and concrete history of the globalization of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* that began with the explosive and unprecedented critical and commercial success of García Márquez's novel upon its publication in 1967. The event had been carefully prepared by three people on both sides of the Atlantic: García Márquez's literary agent, Carmen Balcells, in Barcelona; in Buenos Aires, Paco Porrúa, his editor at Sudamericana, the book's publisher, and Tomas Eloy Martínez, director of the news magazine *Primera plana*, one of the most important 'vectors of dissemination'¹⁰⁰ of a new Latin American cultural industry. In the 1960s, Latin America and Spain, as much as the rest of Europe and the US, were experiencing an economic expansion that broadened the middle class, and triggered demands for all sorts of material and cultural goods. The boom in publication, consumption and demand for a literature that claimed to represent local experiences, imaginaries and aspirations has to be understood in terms of this transformation of the region's social structure. The magazine promotion, the investment in advertising and the unprecedented coordination of efforts resulted in immediate success: the novel's first two printings of 8,000 copies sold out in two weeks. Second, third and fourth printings sold out in two months, and the Argentinian publishing house could not print the book fast enough to respond to the demands of booksellers in Mexico, Colombia and Spain who were expecting shippings in the tens of thousands. Balcells took advantage of the novel's success to alter the

balance of power that existed between authors and editors, and negotiated agreements that liberated the foreign rights of the book so that she could deal with European and American publishers independently of Sudamericana. This resulted in the novel being translated and published almost immediately after it was first published in Spanish, into Italian in 1968 by Feltrinelli (translation by Enrico Cicogna as *Cent'anni di solitudine*), into French, also in 1968, by Éditions du Seuil (translation by Claude and Carmen Durand as *Cent ans de solitude*), into German in 1970 by Kiepenheuer und Witsch Verlag (translation by Curt Meyer-Clason as *Hundert Jahre Einsamkeit*), and into English in 1970 by Harper & Row in the US and Jonathan Cape in the UK (translation by Gregory Rabassa).

No Latin American writer before García Márquez had been translated into all the languages upon which international success hinges so soon after its first local edition. Therefore it is not surprising that by the mid 1970s, and even more so after he won the Nobel Prize in 1982, readers in Europe and the US were devouring *One Hundred Years*. For most of these metropolitan audiences the appeal had to do with the interest in Latin America that the Cuban Revolution and the iconography of Che Guevara had triggered throughout the 1960s and 1970s, and the work was received both as a technical prodigy and as an exotic commodity.¹⁰¹ But thanks to the unparalleled wide reach of the novel in translation, English-speaking postcolonial intellectuals were the ones first and most intensely interpellated by magical realism, and saw in the novel a mirror that reflected what they perceived as their own postcolonial reality, and the possibility to use the rhetoric García Márquez was making available as a resource to express their own specific aesthetic, cultural and political anxieties. In an tribute to the Colombian writer organized by International PEN in New York, Salman Rushdie recalled that in 1975 a friend asked him whether he had read *One Hundred Years*. He had never heard of the novel before so his friend sent him a copy to read:

And of course when I did read it, I had the experience that many people had described of being forever lost in that great novel. Unforgettable. I think all of us can remember the day when we first read Gabriel García Márquez; it was a colossal event. One thing that struck me, which was one of the things that first struck me when I went to Latin America, was the incredible similarity between the world he was describing and the world that I knew from South Asia, from India and Pakistan. It was a world in which religion and superstition dominated people's lives; also a world in which there was a powerful and complicated history of colonialism; also a world in which there were colossal differences between the very poor and the very rich, and not much in between;

also a world bedeviled by dictators and corruption. And so to me, what was called ‘fantastic’ seemed completely naturalistic.¹⁰²

At the same meeting of International PEN, the writer Edwidge Danticat expressed a similar sense of familiarity with the marvellous in her Haitian home, where Carpentier had imagined the most perfect example of the Latin American marvellous real: ‘Many of us who come from the Caribbean are astounded when people speak of the “implausibility” of magical realism. For in our worldview, as in our much-loved Gabriel García Márquez’s, a lot of what is considered magically realistic seems to us much more realistic than magical.’¹⁰³

If during the 1970s García Márquez was a *writer’s writer*, after his 1982 Nobel Prize he became the greatest celebrity for lay readers across the world, and magical realism came to be identified as *the* realistic protocol of representation for the underdeveloped world; an aesthetic form easily translatable to the most diverse cultural locations. The overstretched use and abuse of magical realism as pure aesthetic form disengaged from the traumatic historical displacement that constitutes its context of emergence discouraged many critics from interrogating this process of global diffusion and commodification from a historical point of view.¹⁰⁴ But if the time for formalist debates about the definition of magical realism has clearly passed, the critical challenge of historicizing its global *postcolonialization* is still an open invitation to think about the productivity, appeal and potential that magical realism once showed as a discourse of self-affirmation, before becoming stale, another ruin in a collection of torn-down edifices from a period when literary fictions shaped the narratives and imaginaries of the emancipatory political projects that populated the global public sphere.

Notes

1. Homi K. Bhabha, ‘Introduction: narrating the nation’, *Nation and Narration* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 7.
2. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, ‘Post-structuralism, marginality, post-colonality, and value’, *Sociocriticism*, 5.2.10 (1989), 43–81.
3. Towards the end of her book, Chiampi expands this working definition: ‘being a distortion of habitual logic, the ideology of marvelous realism seeks to break the rational-positivist conception of the constitution of reality’. Irleamar Chiampi, *O realismo maravilhoso: forma e ideologia no romance hispano-americano* (Sao Paulo: Editora Perspectiva, 1980), p. 155.
4. In a 1986 essay Fredric Jameson claimed that the primary literary rhetoric of the Third World is the national allegory. Even when the concept of the Third World does not exhaust the cultural and political meaning of the postcolonial social condition, Jameson’s generic assessment does not emphasize narratives that might destabilize

- Western protocols of representation, as in the case of magical realism, but concentrates on the novel's retelling of a nation's own history in its own historical terms. Fredric Jameson, 'Third World Literature in the era of multinational corporations', *Social Text*, 15 (Autumn 1986), 65–88.
5. Franz Roh, 'Magic realism: post-expressionism', in Lois P. Zamora and Wendy B. Faris (eds.), *Magical Realism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995), p. 19.
 6. Ibid.
 7. Ibid.
 8. Irene Guenther, 'Magic realism in the Weimar Republic', in Zamora and Faris (eds.), *Magical Realism*, p. 35.
 9. *Schriften*, III 384, quoted in Christopher Warnes, *Magical Realism and the Postcolonial Novel: Between Faith and Irreverence* (London and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 20.
 10. Ibid., p. 26. On the historical chronology of magical realism and its versions and mix-ups, see Seymour Menton's *Historia verdadera del realismo mágico* (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1998), in particular the appendix, 'Una cronología internacional comentada del término realismo mágico', with special attention to the section '¿1924 o 1925 o 1923 o 1922?', pp. 209–12.
 11. Massimo Bontempelli, *Opere scelte*, ed. Luigi Baldacci (Milan: Mondadori, 1978), p. 750.
 12. Erik Camayd-Freixas, *Realismo mágico y primitivismo: relecturas de Carpentier, Asturias, Rulfo y García Márquez* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1995), p. 34.
 13. Menton, *Historia verdadera*, p. 213.
 14. In 1943, the Dutch-Flemish writer Johan Daisne (the pseudonym of Herman Thiery, 1912–78) adopted the concept *Magische-Realisme* to describe 'a truth behind the reality of life and dream', as quoted in Guenther, 'Magic realism in the Weimar Republic', p. 61.
 15. Arturo Usler Pietri, 'Realismo mágico', in *Godos, insurgentes y visionarios* (Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1986), p. 135.
 16. Interestingly enough to foreground the transcultural nature of Latin American cultural difference as well as of the genealogy of magical realism, Asturias translated the *Popol Vuh* from Etienne Brasseur de Bourbourg's French version of the Mayan sacred text. By the same token, almost immediately after having been published in Spanish in Madrid, *Legends of Guatemala* was translated in Paris by Francis de Miomandre, and published with a preface by Paul Valéry, who writes of Asturias's work: 'I found it brought about a tropical dream, which I experienced with singular delight' (Guillermo Yepes-Boscán, 'Asturias, un pretexto del mito', in Miguel Ángel Asturias, *Hombres de Maíz*, ed. Gerald Martin (Paris: Archivos, 1992), p. 675).
 17. The first critic to think of this short story as a paradigmatic exponent of a new magical realist Latin American narrative is the Argentinian, Enrique Anderson Imbert, who includes it in his *Veinte cuentos hispanoamericanos del siglo XX* (Twenty Hispanic American Short Stories of the Twentieth Century, 1956). Anderson Imbert writes that in 'Rain' we appreciate 'the originality of his "magical realism", to use the term coined by the German critic Franz Roh in his study of one phase of contemporary art. Everyday objects appear enveloped in such a strange atmosphere that, although recognizable they shock us as if they were fantastic', Roh, 'Magic realism: post-expressionism', p. 148.
 18. Mario Roberto Morales, 'Miguel Ángel Asturias: la estética y la política de la interculturalidad', in Miguel Ángel Asturias. *Cuentos y leyendas*, ed. Mario Roberto Morales (San José: Editorial Universidad de Costa Rica, 2000), pp. 570–1.

19. One needs to proceed with caution when writing about postcolonial discourses in Latin America. The exercise can risk losing perspective in terms of the very particular colonial and, eventually, postcolonial nature of Latin American culture, where formal independence from Spain was gained during the first two decades of the nineteenth century. Brazil's case is different since it became the centre of the Portuguese court in 1825, only to become a truly independent republic in 1889. The Caribbean and Central America (with the exception of Mexico) is the Latin American region most in sync with the historical temporality of what is commonly known as the postcolonial world.
20. Roberto González Echevarría analyses Carpentier's first novel as an Afro-Cuban *Bildungsroman* in *Alejo Carpentier: El peregrino en su patria* (Madrid: Gredos, 2004), p. 113. González Echevarría (whose book was first published in 1993) adds an interesting critical layer to the idea of Carpentier's novelistic body by stating that his textuality is structured around the idea that Latin American culture emerges from the antagonism of elite and popular subject positions.
21. Uslar Pietri, 'Realismo mágico', p. 136.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 139.
23. Amy Fass Emery, *The Anthropological Imagination in Latin American Literature* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1996), pp. 24–5.
24. André Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, trans. Richard Seaver and Helen Lane (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1972), p. 26.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 14.
26. Donald L. Shaw, *Alejo Carpentier* (Boston: Twayne, 1985), p. 17.
27. James Clifford has termed this form of primitivism 'the ethnographic surrealism of the Parisian Avant-Garde', in *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth Century Ethnography, Literature and Art* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), p. 118.
28. For an excellent study of the relations between magical realism and primitivist aesthetics and ideologies, see Camayd-Freixas, *Realismo mágico y primitivismo*. He explains that in the 1920s Paris was 'the Mecca of a new international cult of "the primitive", and the centre of an intense traffic of *l'art negre*, with public and private exhibitions, exchanges, auctions and borrowings between artists and collectors', p. 33.
29. Arturo Uslar Pietri, *Letras y hombres de Venezuela* (Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Economica, 1948), p. 162.
30. Uslar Pietri, 'Realismo mágico', p. 140.
31. Echevarría, *Alejo Carpentier: el peregrino en su patria*, p. 109.
32. In those years, in Paris, Uslar Pietri, who took part, with Carpentier, in weekly Surrealist gatherings at the café La Coupole on Boulevard du Montparnasse, became acquainted with Massimo Bontempelli, who had written about *realismo magico* in his journal 900. There is no record of Uslar Pietri having discussed magical realism with the Italian critic, but they were close friends (Camayd-Freixas, *Realismo mágico y primitivismo*, p. 34); it is therefore possible to establish that those conversations, together with his reading of the Spanish translation of Roh's essay, are the sources of that first Latin American appropriation in 1948.
33. Alejo Carpentier, 'The marvelous real in America', in Zamora and Faris (eds.), *Magical Realism*. This crucial article was published on 8 April 1948 in the Caracas newspaper *El Nacional*, shortly after Uslar Pietri had delivered his Columbia University lectures where he referred to magical realism. There is no testimony on whether Carpentier knew of Uslar Pietri's talks or not. Carpentier's seminal essay had several reincarnations between 1948 and 1975: first, as explained, it was

- included as preface to *The Kingdom of This World*; in 1964, he rewrote it as a lecture with the same title that was later published in his book *Tientos y diferencias*; finally, in 1975 he gave another lecture, 'Lo barroco y lo real maravilloso', later included in the collection *Razón de ser: conferencias* (Caracas: Universidad Central de Venezuela, (1976). In each of these three rewritings Carpentier added and substracted examples, cases, arguments, but the core argument around the idea of the marvellous real remained.
34. Salvador Arias (ed.), *Recopilación de textos sobre Alejo Carpentier* (Havana: Casa de las Américas, 1977), p. 63.
 35. Carpentier's fascination with what he finds in Haiti can be easily inscribed in the exoticist roots of the ethnographic dimension of the avant-gardes that he was convinced he had left back in Paris when he returned to Cuba in 1939.
 36. Alejo Carpentier, *The Kingdom of This World*, trans. Harriet de Onís (New York: Penguin, 1980), p. 87.
 37. *Ibid.*, p. 86
 38. Carpentier, 'The marvelous real in America', p. 86.
 39. *Ibid.*, p. 87.
 40. *Ibid.*, pp. 84–5.
 41. *Ibid.*, p. 87.
 42. Even though Carpentier explicitly differentiates his concept from the surrealist *merveilleux*, it bears traces of the influence of Pierre Mabilie, the French physician and friend of Carpentier, whose book *Le Miroir du merveilleux* (based on his research on Cuban *ñañiguismo* and Haitian voodoo). On the relationship, or rather the influence on Carpentier's marvellous real of Mabilie's post-surrealist concept of the *merveilleux Haïtien*, see Irleamar Chiampi, 'El surrealismo, lo real maravilloso y el vodú en la encrucijada del Caribe' in Luisa Campuzano (ed.), *Alejo Carpentier: acá y allá* (Pittsburgh: Institucion Internacional de Literatura Iberoamericana, 2007); Amaryll Chanady, 'The territorialization of the imaginary in Latin America: self-affirmation and resistance to metropolitan paradigms', in Zamora and Faris (eds.), *Magical Realism*; and Tommaso Scarano, 'Notes on Spanish-American magical realism', in Elisa Linguanti, Francesco Casotti and Carmen Concilio (eds.), *Coterminous Worlds: Magical Realism and Contemporary Post-Colonial Literature in English* (Amsterdam and Atlanta, GA: Rodopi, 1999).
 43. Uslar Pietri, 'Realismo mágico', p. 137.
 44. 'They all knew that the green lizard, the night moth, the strange dog, the incredible gannet, were nothing but disguises. As he had the power to take the shape of hoofed animal, bird, fish, or insect, Macandal continually visited the plantations of the Plaine to watch over his faithful and find out if they still had faith in his return' (Carpentier, *The Kingdom of This World*, p. 30).
 45. Uslar Pietri, 'Realismo mágico', p. 137.
 46. Carpentier, *The Kingdom of This World*, p. 31.
 47. *Ibid.*, pp. 31–2.
 48. Chiampi, 'El surrealismo, lo real maravilloso y el vodú en la encrucijada del Caribe', p. 205.
 49. Carpentier, *The Kingdom of This World*, p. 32.
 50. *Ibid.*, p. 32.
 51. Chiampi, 'El surrealismo, lo real maravilloso y el vodú en la encrucijada del Caribe', p. 25.
 52. Camayd-Freixas proposes to read *Men of Maize* as a mixture of Lautréamont and the *Popol Vuh*. Camayd-Freixas, *Realismo mágico y primitivismo*, p. 176; Gerald Martin,

- 'Introduction', in Miguel Ángel Asturias trans., Gerald Martin, *Men of Maize* (London and New York: Verso, 1988), p. xxiv.
53. René Prieto, 'The Literature of Indigenismo', in Roberto González Echevarría and Enrique Pupo-Walker (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Latin American Literature*, vol. 2 (Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 155. Along the same lines, Gerald Martin describes the plot of the novel as divided into three parts, each of which 'expressed schematically as tribal, feudal-colonial and capitalist neo-colonial – an Indian protagonist loses his woman and cut off from the earth and the *milpa* (maizefield), turns to drink and despair. Each is more alienated and distanced than this predecessor. The three phases based on modes of production are aligned, in mythological fashion, to the three-part Mayan cosmic design – underworld, earth, sky (past, present, future) – which is the trajectory of Quetzalcoatl, the plumed serpent and Mesoamerican culture hero for whom, as for Asturias, the irruption from "prehistory" is the model for all cognitive processes' (Martin, 'Introduction', p. xi).
 54. Christopher Warnes makes a very good point when he writes: 'Asturias's capacity to translate the world-view of the indigenous population of Guatemala into fiction should not be overestimated. He spoke no Indian languages, and, as he said to Luis Harss and Barbara Dohmann of his knowledge of the Indian world, "I heard a lot, assumed a bit more, and invented the rest"' (Warnes, *Magical Realism and the Postcolonial Novel*, p. 49).
 55. Jacques Stéphen Alexis, 'Du réalisme merveilleux des Haïtiens', *Presence Africaine*, 8–10 (October 1956), 245–71. Even if Alexis's most important novel is *General Sun, My Brother* (*Compère Général Soleil*, 1955), the one that deals directly with the voodoo rites that constitute the core of his interest in Haitian culture is *The Musician Trees* (*Les Arbres musiciens*, 1957).
 56. Amaryll Chanady, *Entre inclusion et exclusion: La symbolisation de l'autre dans les Amériques* (Paris: Champion, 1999), pp. 109–21.
 57. Alexis, 'Du réalisme merveilleux des Haïtiens', p. 247.
 58. Once again, Alexis is careful to separate his proposal from surrealism, and does so, precisely, by foregrounding the political, indeed the revolutionary potential of the *réalisme merveilleux* he is proposing (Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-colonial Literatures* (London: Routledge, 1989), p. 148). On Alexis's *réalisme merveilleux* as a form of opposition and antagonism to Negritude, see Michael Dash, 'Marvelous realism – the way out of négritude' *Caribbean Studies*, 13 (1974), pp. 57–70.
 59. Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. Michael Shaw (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), p. viii.
 60. Ángel Flores, 'Magical realism in Spanish American fiction', in Zamora and Faris (eds.), *Magical Realism*, p. 109.
 61. *Ibid.*, p. 112.
 62. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *Post-colonial Studies: The Key Concepts* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), p. 133.
 63. The inclusion of Borges in some lists of magical realist writers derives from the previously criticized formalist and broad (un)definition of a magical realist aesthetic that would encompass the fantastic. The first to criticize Ángel Flores's formalist and universalist redefinition of the concept of magical realism was Luis Leal, who in a 1967 essay circumscribed and gave the first working definition of magical realism after Carpentier's concept of *lo real maravilloso*: 'In magical realism key events have no logical or psychological explanation. The magical realist does not try to copy the surrounding reality (as realists did) or to wound it (as the Surrealists did) but to seize

- the mystery that breathes behind things' (Luis Leal, 'Magical realism in Spanish American Literature', trans. Wendy B. Faris in Zamora and Faris (eds.), *Magical Realism*, p. 123). Even though he does not explicitly circumscribe magical realism to Latin American culture, all of his examples are extracted from the literature of the region. Amaryll Chanady has also criticized Flores for conflating magical realism and the fantastic (*Magical Realism and the Fantastic: Resolved versus Unresolved Antinomy* (New York: Garland, 1985)).
64. Juan Rulfo, *Pedro Páramo*, trans. Margaret Sayers Peden (New York: Grover Press, 1994), p. 3.
 65. David Young and Keith Hollaman, *Magical Realist Fiction: An Anthology* (New York: Longman, 1984), p. 1.
 66. Ato Quayson, 'Fecundities of the unexpected: magical realism, narrative, and history', in *The Novel*, vol. 1: *History, Geography, and Culture*, ed. Franco Moretti (Princeton University Press, 2006), p. 728.
 67. *Ibid.*, p. 728.
 68. Chiampi, 'El surrealismo', p. 205.
 69. Lois Parkinson Zamora, 'One Hundred Years of Solitude in comparative literature courses', in Maria Elena Valdés and Mario J. Valdés (eds.), *Approaches to Teaching García Márquez's One Hundred Years of Solitude* (New York: MLA, 1990), p. 31.
 70. Warnes, *Magical Realism and the Postcolonial Novel*, pp. 28–9.
 71. Michael T. Taussig, *Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wild Man: A Study in Terror and Healing* (University of Chicago Press, 1986), p. 167.
 72. *Ibid.*, p. 135.
 73. *Ibid.*, p. 172.
 74. Wendy B. Faris, *Ordinary Enchantments: Magical Realism and the Remystification of Narrative* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2004), p. 135.
 75. Wendy B. Faris, 'The question of the other: cultural critiques of magical realism', *Janus Head*, 5.2 (2002), p. 103.
 76. Alberto Moreiras, *The Exhaustion of Difference: The Politics of Latin American Cultural Studies* (Durham, NC, and London: Duke University Press, 2001), pp. 145–6.
 77. Sylvia Molloy, 'Latin America in the US imaginary: postcolonialism, translation, and the magical realist imperative', in Mabel Moraña (ed.), *Ideologies of Hispanism* (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 2005), p. 195. 'What needs to be questioned', writes Homi Bhabha, 'is the mode of representation of otherness' (*The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 97). Even though this is a rather broad idea about hegemonic representations of the other, Bhabha's proposal has to be read as a criticism of a rhetoric of magical realism that, written by postcolonial or peripheral authors, sometimes produces a self-commodifying and self-exoticizing effect.
 78. Many important critics who have contributed significantly to the formation of the discursive critical field of magical realism, such as Wendy B. Faris, do not agree with this idea, and tend to consider that magical realist texts can be equally productive and interesting regardless of the culture they emerge from: 'That a sense of cultural loss and recovery often generates magical realist fiction, whether or not the social situation is postcolonial, is attested to by Günter Grass's statement in connection with *The Tin Drum*' (Faris, *Ordinary Enchantments*, p. 134). But at the same time, she addresses the unevenness of the global circulation of magical realist discourses, which as they 'move north in the Americas, these voices are demarginalized and as a result their political tone softens' (*ibid.*, p. 147).

79. Isabel Allende's *The House of Spirits*, often hailed and admired as an emblematic example of Latin American, postcolonial magical realism, is in fact a very problematic case. Allende's book is an acritical imitation of *One Hundred Years of Solitude*'s genealogical structure, almost character by character, where the most significant change is the historical context: from Colombian civil wars and social unrest to Pinochet's dictatorship in Chile. Even when read as a Chilean rewriting of García Márquez's novel (the first working title for his novel when he began taking notes for it in the 1950s was *The House (La casa)*), the postcolonial status of Allende's is hard to defend unless the conceptual limits of Latin American postcoloniality are expanded to include the 1970s dictatorships and their genocides – indeed, a position anybody would be at pains to defend with convincing arguments. On the contrary, Allende's *The House of Spirits* seems to fit in with the *out of context*, inorganic (in the Lukacsian sense) attempts to produce magical realist effects as mere aesthetic gimmicks emptied of their historically bound meaningfulness.
80. If, up to this point, magical realism has been analysed as an almost exclusively Latin American aesthetic phenomenon, it is because it did not exist as such until after what could be termed as 'the globalization of *One Hundred Years of Solitude*'. The emergence of a magical realist narrative in other postcolonial locations will be a result of a material and concrete process of global expansion.
81. Neil Larsen, 'The "boom" novel and the cold war in Latin America', *Reading North by South: On Latin American Culture and Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), p. 69.
82. Quoted in Michael Palencia-Roth, *Gabriel García Márquez: la línea, el círculo y las metamorfosis del mito* (Madrid: Gredos, 1983), p. 69.
83. García Márquez fleshes out the content of this differential historical experience of Latin America in his 1982 Nobel Prize lecture. In his speech, he gave a detailed account of the 'outsized reality' of 'that immense territory of delusional men' that is Latin America: 'hogs with navels on their haunches, clawless birds whose hens laid eggs on the backs of their mates, and others still, resembling tongueless pelicans, with beaks like spoons. He wrote of having seen a misbegotten creature with the head and ears of a mule, a camel's body, the legs of a deer and the whinny of a horse. . . Our independence from Spanish domination did not put us beyond the reach of madness. General Antonio López de Santana, three times dictator of Mexico, held a magnificent funeral for the right leg he had lost in the so-called Pastry War. General Gabriel García Moreno ruled Ecuador for sixteen years as an absolute monarch; at his wake, the corpse was seated on the presidential chair, decked out in full-dress uniform and a protective layer of medals. General Maximiliano Hernández Martínez, the theosophical despot of El Salvador who had thirty thousand peasants slaughtered in a savage massacre, invented a pendulum to detect poison in his food, and had streetlamps draped in red paper to defeat an epidemic of scarlet fever.' García Márquez continues his account all the way to the present and affirms that 'we have not had a moment's rest'. Gabriel García Márquez, 'The solitude of Latin America', trans. Marina Castañeda, in Doris Meyer (ed.), *Lives on the Line: The Testimony of Contemporary Latin American Authors* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988). Regarding the continuities and discontinuities between the novels of the 'boom' and the regionalist novels that attempt to assert a Latin American differential identity based on the relation of culture and nature, see Doris Sommer's *Foundational Fictions: The National Romances of Latin America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), especially 'Part I: Irresistible romance'.

84. Angel Rama, *Edificación de un arte nacional y popular: la narrativa de Gabriel García Márquez* (Bogotá: Colcultura, 1991), p. 125.
85. Lois Parkinson Zamora, 'Magical romance/magical realism: ghosts in US And Latin American fiction', in Zamora and Faris (eds.), *Magical Realism*, p. 498. It is obvious that my interpretation of the political nature of magical realism strongly disagrees with Zamora's abstract universalism: 'My argument, then, is that the effectiveness of magical realist political dissent depends upon its prior (unstated, understood) archetypalizing of the subject, and its consequent allegorizing of the human condition' (ibid., p. 504).
86. Gerald Martin makes an interesting point when he argues that 'since the 1960s many of the most important writers – Italo Calvino, Milan Kundera, Salman Rushdie, Umberto Eco – have had to become "Latin American" novelists' (*Journeys Through the Labyrinth: Latin American Fiction in the Twentieth Century* (London and New York: Verso, 1989), p. 7). Being *Latin American*, in Martin's observation, signals a process of becoming minor, subaltern, postcolonial expressed in magical realist fiction.
87. Warnes, *Magical Realism and the Postcolonial Novel*, p. 96.
88. Maggie Ann Bowers, *Magic(al) Realism* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 58.
89. Stephen Slemon, 'Magic realism as postcolonial discourse', in Zamora and Faris (eds.), *Magical Realism*, p. 407.
90. Ibid., p. 409.
91. Christopher Warnes, 'Naturalising the supernatural: faith, irreverence and magical realism', *Literature Compass*, 2 (2005), p. 10.
92. Wei Teng, 'Translating political writing into formal experiment: magical realism and Chinese literature', unpublished MS.
93. Ato Quayson, *Strategic Transformations of Nigerian Writing: Rev. Samuel Johnson, Amos Tutuola, Wole Soyinka, Ben Okri* (Indiana University Press, 1997), p. 148.
94. Ibid., p. 136.
95. Gabriel García Márquez, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, trans. Gregory Rabassa (New York: HarperCollins, 2004), p. 1.
96. Salman Rushdie, *Midnight's Children* (1981; London and New York: Penguin, 1991), p. 5.
97. Bhabha, 'Introduction: narrating the nation', p. 7.
98. Menton, *Historia verdadera*, p. 10.
99. Warnes, *Magical Realism and the Postcolonial Novel*, p. 39.
100. Diana Sorensen *A Turbulent Decade Remembered: Scenes from the Latin American Sixties* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press 2007), pp. 109, 115.
101. William Kennedy, 'Review of *One Hundred Years of Solitude*', *National Review*, 20 April 1970.
102. Salman Rushdie, 'Inverted realism', *PEN America 6: Metamorphoses*, www.pen.org/viewmedia.php/prmID/1153/prmID/1376.
103. Edwidge Danticat, 'The real worlds', *PEN America 6: Metamorphoses*, www.pen.org/viewmedia.php/prmID/1151/prmID/1376.
104. Christopher Warnes, 'The hermeneutic of vagueness', *Journal of Postcolonial Studies*, 41.1 (2005), 4.

Palimpsest and hybridity in postcolonial writing

LENE M. JOHANNESSEN

We leave the prints of our body, the touch of flesh on metal and stone. We constantly wear things out, with our hands, our feet, our backs, our lips. And we leave the traces of singular actions: the unintentional. The random, the intimate, unplanned touch on history's passing: we break twigs, move pebbles, crush ants ... all the signs that trackers learn to read. We leave footprints, as Neil Armstrong did on the Moon.¹

Introduction: ex-cavate [to uncover or lay bare by digging; to unearth]

Like most discussions involving the palimpsest this, too, begins with the concept's common dictionary definition, 'a parchment or other writing surface on which the original text has been effaced or partially erased, and then overwritten by another'.² Palimpsesting originally referred to the technique used by ancient artisans to reuse scarce material for their inscriptions of new ideas and ideals of new, emerging worlds. In the word's extended meaning, a palimpsest is more generally described as 'a thing likened to such a writing surface, esp. in having been reused or altered while still retaining traces of its earlier form; a multilayered record'.³ The term has thus become a powerful metaphor for what Freud described as the 'receptive surface ... legible in suitable lights',⁴ any surface, really, onto which New superimposes itself on Old. Samuel Coleridge is generally credited with introducing the palimpsest as a literary metaphor, but it was Thomas de Quincey who wove it into a treatise on human memory: 'What else than a natural and mighty palimpsest is the human brain?' – anticipating, of course, the idea of the receptive surface.⁵ In a slightly different vein Rudolph Byrd evokes Stuart Hall's notion of metaphors of transformation, suggesting that the palimpsest may indeed function as a *master* metaphor in this respect, challenging us to 'think expansively beyond the boundaries of what is known about the relations between the social and the symbolic'.⁶ As a literary term the palimpsest itself has thus undergone and

continues to undergo a palimpsesting: the original meaning of a parchment scrubbed off and overwritten has accumulated a constantly evolving richness and complexity extending into the abstract of the imaginary.

The underlying principles in its literal as well as figurative applications are, however, stubbornly the same: they engage with intricate practices and attitudes to memory and remembering always activated by human agency. An ambiguous and uncertain relationship between and understanding of bounded and unbounded spatial configurations follows, be it historical, cultural, aesthetic, or, as Sarah Dillon points out in her recent work, disciplinary: 'The palimpsest cannot be the province of any one discipline, since it admits all those terrains that write upon it to its body; nor, indeed, does the palimpsest have a province of its own, since it is anything other than that which offers itself at first sight, the literal meaning of province.'⁷

Before exploring the palimpsest in postcolonial literature, which adds another highly conglomerated term, it may be useful to consider how palimpsested practices of and attitudes to memory play out in more immediate and tangible adaptations. Two fitting examples come to mind, one a museum exhibition and the other an excavation site, both places of memorialization. They can be 'read' as expressions of multilayered recording and the materiality of the trails our presences leave behind, and will serve as a gateway into the multifaceted nature of the palimpsest. 'To the Ends of the World' in Bergen Museum revolves around the nearly 200-year history of Norwegian Lutheran missionaries in Madagascar.⁸ When you enter the light-green, rectangular exhibition room, three photo installations along the left wall stretch out before you. The first is a man-sized black and white photograph on cardboard, featuring an older Norwegian man and two older Norwegian women. They are surrounded by fifteen Malagasies, aged approximately two years and up; the oldest is a greying man who sits next to Mr Borchgrevink. All are dressed in the same formal, severe attire typical of mid nineteenth-century northern Europe. All of the Malagasies except the older man look at the camera, a little uncertainly, absentmindedly.

The second installation is also a large cardboard photo, featuring a group of nameless women from a Norwegian missionary society, all in traditional costumes, all with the same determined and serious gaze. On the wall behind them are round portraits of important male citizens, comfortably looking out. Many of their surnames are still easily recognizable; others have receded into obscurity. The last cardboard photograph is from the 1950s or 1960s and shows seven women. Some of them are still living. Women's first names hover above the image, not decidedly connecting name and face; in front of the photo, at

the women's feet, is a heap of embroidered pillows of a traditional Norwegian design. They evoke TV news images of sandbags used to protect against flood-water, although here they seem to form a categorical wall of domesticity.

The three installations face a long table covered with various artefacts brought back from Madagascar to Norway by missionaries, effectively emphasizing the unidirectional gaze from the other side and staging the distance between a subjectivized presence and objectivized absence. Norwegian missionary history in Madagascar could have been curated differently; this particular exhibition, however, is designed not in the tradition of museal representation of (objective) information, but that of dramaturgy. Stage designer Olav Myrvedt's arrangement of objects and photos stages a history that brings out the epistemological and ideological distance between the perspective on the one side of the wall (protected against the flood of the foreign by a barricade of pillows), and what it seeks to find and domesticate on the other. The exhibition consequently performs in concrete display what Toni Morrison says in *Playing in the Dark*: 'My project is an effort to avert the critical gaze from the racial object to the racial subject; from the described and imagined to the describers and imaginers.'⁹ Similarly, the determined gaze of Norwegian missionaries becomes the main object of scrutiny, forcing the spectator to remember and assess differently.

Excavation sites refract a similar kind of memory staging, albeit not deliberately brought about by scenography. Excavation sites moreover poignantly discourse not only on memory, but also on the relationships between different kinds of memories, an uneasy staging of dead and living memory. The Lisbon Cathedral cloister grounds are criss-crossed with elevated pathways for the viewer, offering various angles from which the sandbox-like area can be studied. Initially it seems to be filled with a heap of uneven structures interlacing into a somewhat chaotic pattern. Aided by patience and signposts identifying the individual structures, however, the arrangement gradually crystallizes into specificities and histories, and stories. The process of looking resembles that of staring at a 3D stereogram, which, depending on what your gaze fastens on to, will offer different images. And so emerge the complexities of hundreds and hundreds of years of lives lived, in different eras but, marvellously, in exactly the same place – immobile witnesses in stone and tile to reflect and reflect on momentous, global movements and moments. Roman cisterns, a few steps left from a staircase, parts of a doorstep (did little children stumble and scrape their knees?) yield to the faint traces of intricate patterns on the remains of mosaic walls that once supported a Moorish mosque, the northwestern outpost of Islam. These in turn must recede before the sturdy Romanesque

floors that hold the fortress-looking cathedral, the manifest signal of the Christian reclamation of the Iberian peninsula.

The layeredness of the palimpsest operates chronologically and vertically, lending itself to the unearthing of meanings and stories, be those of an archaeological, cultural or textual nature. The palimpsest therefore also implicitly speaks to and from the idea and function of hidden traces and meanings that potentially surface amidst myriad memories and stories, it speaks to remembering and forgetting, to the layered-ness of what Doreen Massey calls stories-so-far,¹⁰ what James Clifford refers to as routes (and their roots), and the evidence that these leave behind.¹¹ These elements participate in every conceivable constitution and manifestation of human habitation and its representation, and form the base for this chapter's exploration of the postcolonial palimpsest and hybridity.

One concern runs through the subsequent readings: does palimpsesting equal or lead to hybridization, or is the perseverance of the constituent parts such that the palimpsest only begets more layers? The question relates to a common perception that, 'when the old bleeds through and reasserts itself, or when old and new combine to make a third discourse, then the final result is simultaneously new/old, and not new/not old. The oppositions are deconstructed, and privilege is obliterated.'¹² This proposition may be questionable. The obliteration of oppositions is not a given, as the Madagascar exhibition and the Lisbon excavation both illustrate: they speak to an aspect of our conception of palimpsesting, which, as Dillon notes, is not always taken sufficiently *ad notam*. For while it is true that even the most innocent of palimpsests implies 'privilege, prerogative, and domination',¹³ there is at the same time, and built into the dynamics of this very domination the following: palimpsesting 'paradoxically preserved [ancient texts] for posterity'.¹⁴ In other words, intended absence becomes unintended presence, which, as in the case of perhaps the most famous palimpsest of all, the Archimedes one, turns out to have preserved magnificent cultural treasures. Dillon refers to these hidden, ignored and invisible layers as 'ghostly traces', which transposes appropriately also to the study of literary layers.¹⁵

The idea that processes that set out to destroy and erase actually preserve resonates powerfully with the postcolonial palimpsest. Out from under layers of destructive and violent histories of colonization emerge discourses long silenced and hidden, awaiting their moments of enunciation as cultural sites of memory, echoing Mikhail Bakhtin's poignant observation:

There is neither a first nor a last work and there are no limits to the dialogic context (it extends into the boundless past and the boundless future). Even *past*

meanings, that is, those born in the dialogue of past centuries, can never be stable (finalized, ended once and for all) – they will always change (be renewed) in the process of subsequent, future development of the dialogue.

At any moment in the development there are immense, boundless masses of forgotten contextual meanings, but at certain moments of the dialogue's subsequent development along the way they are recalled and invigorated in renewed form (in a new context). Nothing is absolutely dead: every meaning will have its homecoming festival. The problem of great time.¹⁶

The palimpsest, in a literal as well as a figurative sense, is both constituted by such 'masses of contextual meanings' and constitutive of the resultant dialogue and continuous potential for 'homecoming festivals'. Not surprisingly the postcolonial palimpsest speaks to and from this epistemological position: already in its very caption the word postcolonial carries and records multiple layers – and ghostly traces.

Juxtaposing *post* and *colonial* furthermore gestures towards temporal and spatial fluidity. Colonial designates the routes of 'people who settle in a new locality, forming a community subject to or connected with their parent state',¹⁷ identifying a word and an idea already fraught with the potential for layered-ness, and accentuating the concept of location as what Clifford calls 'an itinerary rather than a bounded site – a series of encounters and translations'.¹⁸ *Post* colonial in this understanding designates not so much what comes after these 'encounters and translations', but rather their continuations and overwritings of and on routes already staked out. The main emphasis in what follows lies with how narrative rehearsals of these routes can be approached as palimpsests; how postcolonial literary representations almost inevitably must negotiate their conception of the culturological self up against and in relation to the paradox of preserved erasures. For we approach the space of a text in a manner not entirely unlike the excavation site, sensing the presences of pasts in both, trying to discern what memories and meanings they carry.

The postcolonial text may however be doubly unmanageable in this respect. In its instance as a palimpsest it is not only a multilayered record, it is also a multiciting record: it illustrates, in other words, not only 'the law of superposition, the basic principle of geology and archaeology . . . the deeper you go, the older it gets – to dig down is to dig into the past'.¹⁹ By insisting on the contextual and multidirectional, postcolonial palimpsests summon from the depths of memory dialogues on routes and stories-so-far in one and the same account. The oscillation between vertically oriented disclosures of pasts on the one hand, and, on the other, a horizontally oriented unveiling of concurrent contexts results in very complex palimpsestings; at times equally complex

hybridizations. I will return to the relationship between these in the course of the subsequent readings, for their profiles are not one, they are not constant, and invariably depend on the particularities of the moments from which they emerge historically, culturally and aesthetically.

We can begin the excursions with trails of absence preserved and ‘coming home’ in the space of Rodolfo ‘Corky’ Gonzales’s epic poem *I Am Joaquín*. Few texts are as exemplary of multilayeredness in relation to history, genre and aesthetics as this foundational Chicano literary work.²⁰ In order to appreciate the persona’s utterance, however, we must also calibrate the stratigraphical characteristics and constellations that brought this particular voice to actualization in Colorado in the 1960s. Consider the following reading, then, a kind of dress rehearsal to the complexities of the unravelling and excavation of routes and forgotten trails, of preserved erasures in palimpsested postcolonial texts.

American imaginaries: Gonzales and Whitman

But is it one story? To be honest, young man, I do not know, for stories are impossible to fence in either time or space, and I was told this story by three different people, from three different perspectives.²¹

When Cortés and his 400 soldiers reached Tenochtitlan in 1519, the city was the spectacular centre of a powerful Aztec Empire. Spain’s overseas colony begins in this moment, originating really in an argument overseas in the old world, between, as Richard Rodriguez sums it up, ‘those great Renaissance rivals’.²² Both actors would come to determine the future of the Americas, albeit in different ways. The Spanish, Catholic conquistadors and colonizers began intermingling with the native population, aided partly by their religion’s adaptability to local religious practices, and when Mexico declared independence in 1821 it was already a *mestizo* nation, home to what José Vasconcelos would call the Cosmic Race.²³ Two decades after independence, however, half of Mexico would be annexed by an ambitious newcomer on the world’s stage, a product of England’s colonization in the New World driven by an unflinching conviction of its manifest destiny to rule from ‘sea to shining sea’. Mexican citizens became American ones overnight, and found themselves ‘an ethnic minority in a conquered land’, or, as has been more frequently suggested, internally colonized.²⁴

Both frameworks highlight the complex gestalt of this particular American minority, and even if Chicano literature does not originate in the same circumstances of colonization/decolonization as say, African, Indian and Australian

literatures do, it has from its very beginning been infused by the representation and negotiation of an intricate maze that characterizes so much of postcolonial literatures. *I Am Joaquín* begins as follows:

I am Joaquín
lost in a world of confusion,
caught up in a whirl of a
gringo society
confused by the rules,
scorned by attitudes,
suppressed by manipulation,
and destroyed by modern society.
My fathers
 have lost the economic battle
And won
The struggle of cultural survival.
And now!
 I must choose
 between
 the paradox of
Victory of the spirit,
despite physical hunger,
or
 to exist in the grasp
of American social neurosis,
sterilization of the soul
and a full stomach.²⁵

These initial lines introduce the persona, and situate him at a preliminary point of departure, a site of enunciation from which the uncovering of routes and roots can proceed. The name Joaquín carries several associations. It evokes the legendary Mexican gold miner Joaquín Murieta, who, according to folklore, was a 'peaceful Mexican miner whose claim was jumped by gold-greedy Anglos, who whipped him, hanged his brother, and raped his wife in his presence'.²⁶ Murieta swore to avenge these heinous acts, and in the narratives and songs that flourished in the mid nineteenth century he rose to a stature similar to that of *The Robin Hood of El Dorado*, as Walter Noble Burns's book from 1932 devoted to his story indeed was titled. Some readers will recall that Joaquín Murieta figures as Zorro's younger brother in *The Mask of Zorro* (1998), a minor character, really, to those who are not clued into the name and figure's semantic depths.

But Joaquín more importantly designates a kind of 'Chicano Everyman', not particularly better or worse than most.²⁷ This is underscored throughout the

poem by the persona's arduous working his way through the strata of history, identifying with high as well as low, poor as well as rich, white as well as brown, concluding in the symphonic:

I am Aztec Prince and Christian Chris
I SHALL ENDURE!
I WILL ENDURE!²⁸

Before this final moment, however, Joaquín traces the histories and trails constituting his realization in the United States of the 1960s, starting with Cuauhtémoc of the Aztecs: 'Proud and Noble / leader of men'; Nezahualcoyotl of the Acolhua: 'Great leader of the Chichimecas'; Cortez: 'the despot' – admitting in the same breath that 'I owned the land as far as the eye / could see under the crown of Spain, / and I gave my Indian sweat and blood / for the Spanish master / ... I was both tyrant and slave'.²⁹ This complex interlacing of heritages is repeated throughout, vacillating between heroes and villains, male and female, young and old:

I have been the Bloody Revolution,
The Victor,
The Vanquished,
I have killed
and been killed.
I am despots Díaz
and Huerta
and the apostle of democracy
Francisco Madero
I am
the black shawled
faithful women
who die with me
or live
depending on the time and place.
I am
faithful,
humble,
Juan Diego
the Virgin de Guadeloupe
Tonantzin, Aztec Goddess too.³⁰

Palimpsesting is at work here in a very concrete and deliberate manner, and Gonzales very self-consciously creates a stratigraphical image that not only commands the reader's attention to an extraordinarily intricate web of stories and routes; indeed, like on the excavation site, or in the exhibition this chapter

began with, palimpsesting forces the gaze to fasten on to the contours of concrete cultural and historical witnesses not previously called upon. The effect of overwriting that these lines produce will depend a little on the reader's familiarity with Mexican and American history, but the very enumeration itself of culturological synecdoches effectuates the same: a relentless unearthing of hidden layers of meaning that in its very scope overawes. Each and every one of these synecdoches epitomizes different cultural itineraries, and composes a narrative and enunciatory space criss-crossed by complex dialogues.

The figure of Joaquín is in other words itself a 'parchment' on which the writing and overwriting of a myriad of stories-so-far are collapsed into the simultaneity of the poetic utterance. They chart trails that speak compellingly to the imagination of space as always under construction by co-constitutive multiplicities, as the product of interrelations in continuous change: 'the spatial is social relations stretched out. The fact is, however, that social relations are never still; they are inherently dynamic.'³¹ For rather than creating a proud lineage of one narrative, which would accomplish what Massey goes on to call the 'attempt to stabilize the meaning of particular envelopes of space-time',³² *I Am Joaquín* admits and presents the full, and at times shameful and painful register of trails:

I look at myself
And see part of me
Who rejects my father and my mother
And dissolves into the melting pot
To disappear in shame . . .³³

This threat of erasure is removed, however, towards the end, and readers familiar with American literature will in the following lines recognize that 'I am Joaquín' not only works as a palimpsest in its own textual right, it also overwrites another American foundational poem:

whatever I call myself,
I look the same
I feel the same
I cry
and
sing the same.³⁴

It is Walt Whitman and his 'Song of Myself' Gonzales here gestures toward:

I celebrate myself, and sing myself,
And what I assume you shall assume,
For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you.³⁵

Gonzales's 'I cry and sing the same' is superimposed onto 'I celebrate myself', but this overlaying of Joaquín's genealogy moves Whitman's 'original' song from unbridled optimism and all-embracing, future-oriented energy to a response that gazes backwards and points toward the future with both reproach and defiance. The dialogue sets up 'Cry' against 'Celebrate', and the singing of a coherent Self as metaphor of nation is countered with a conflicted self constituted into being by plurality. As Herbert Levine has argued, Whitman's poem follows the tripartite 'Union – Disunion – and Reunion', the outcome of which 'was to show that it was possible to unify a highly stressed self, and, by analogy, an increasingly divided country'.³⁶ Levine reads 'Song of Myself' (the 1855 version) against the backdrop of the threat of a Civil War, but the poem is also in its most fundamental gist a representation of the national motto, *e pluribus unum*. Against both contextualizations *I Am Joaquín* sounds a markedly different note, originating as it does in irreconcilable routes. Here it is the *will* to reconcile and persevere with conflict rather than confidence in its resolve (Whitman's reunion) that generates the poem's final line, 'I shall endure! I will endure!'

The overwriting moreover echoes another layer of the same referential palimpsest, namely Langston Hughes's far more explicitly intertextual poem 'I, Too' from 1925. From a perspective constituted by other and different routes in the conglomerate of the United States, Hughes poem begins:

I, too, sing America
I am the darker brother.
They send me to eat in the kitchen
When company comes,
But I laugh,
And eat well,
And grow strong.³⁷

While this is commonly read as a response to Whitman's 'I Hear America Singing' from 1860 rather than to 'Song of Myself', the self that sings is not essentially different: it is an inclusive metaphor of national coherence which Hughes undermines by delineating exclusion and incoherence. As we see in this example, the exact relationship between intertextuality and palimpsesting is far from clear-cut, and a brief consideration is due before we continue.

I will suggest here that a distinction be drawn between palimpsesting's superposition of utterance onto utterance on the one hand, and, on the other, intertextuality's 'intra-position' of utterance in contiguity with utterance, the latter already immersed in the referentiality it rehearses within its

own space. Where intertextuality finds its place among narratives already there, the palimpsest produces its layers as the hitherto unheard of, the forgotten, the unaccounted for: palimpsesting is fraught with the fractures and seams of forced erasure and suppression, and, in a word, comes with jagged edges. It intones at times insufferable discords and differences (as we shall see in *Wide Sargasso Sea* later on), and resists easy dialogue. Listening to the tenor of Hughes's and Gonzales's poems we detect this distinction: where Hughes does not leave the canvas of the Whitmanesque democracy he speaks against, Gonzales forces his way out from underneath the imperial mantle.

Another aspect of *I Am Joaquín* is the overwriting of and on genre. Whitman wrote in a free verse form that would carry the unique American experiment, a democracy of 'counterpart . . . on the same terms'.³⁸ Responding also to Ralph Waldo Emerson's call for an American poet, the bard created a form that could reflect the entire cosmos, the 'Endless unfolding of words of ages! . . . the word En-Masse', and Gonzales's poem follows in this non-metrical and all-inclusive tradition.³⁹ For *I Am Joaquín* is first and foremost an American poem, insisting on a place in the American experience; however, the palimpsest that it constructs also builds on a different genre, equally native to the land and coinciding in time with Whitman's poetry. This is the corrido, related to the originally Spanish romance *corrido*, brought to New Spain, revised into a uniquely Mexican expression and emerging in the latter half of the nineteenth century as a genre proper in the northern border areas. Thematically the (border) corrido 'posits a common, peaceful workingman into an uncommon situation by the power of cultural and historical forces beyond his control . . . In the process of this attempt to win social justice, his concern for his own personal life and his solitary fate must be put aside for the good of the collective life of his social group'.⁴⁰ Joaquín's song consequently builds on two, coterminously emergent genres, and textual palimpsesting of this kind returns us to the function of excavation sites, for literary genres are not entirely different. They, too, are casts in which cultures and epochs shape their stories for the future, and, as Bakhtin puts it, they 'are of a special significance. Genres (of literature and speech) throughout the centuries of their life accumulate ways of seeing and interpreting particular aspects of the world. For the writer-craftsman the genre serves as an external template, but the great artist awakens the semantic possibilities that lie within it'.⁴¹ In *I Am Joaquín* the artist brings to life engravings on the multilayered surfaces of his past by unearthing tiers; the aforementioned Joaquín Murieta can now be revisited, for the figure and his legend underscore the multiple Joaquíns, symbolizing the common, little guy amidst historical and political routes 'beyond his control'. The

co-constituent parts of the form, the Whitmanesque free verse and catalogue technique, emphasize the collective alongside the individual, and a fusion of the ur-American free verse and the traditional border corrido materializes as a wholly new event in order to carry the refraction of *its* uniqueness.

Palimpsest to hybrid

The generic space that opens up above demarcates a narrative site which reverberates with Homi Bhabha's conception of hybridity as "the third space", which enables other positions to emerge'. More specifically,

it bears the traces of those feelings and practises which inform it, just like a translation, so that hybridity puts together the traces of certain other meanings or discourses. It does not give them the authority of being prior in the sense of being original: they are prior only in the sense of being anterior. The process of cultural hybridity gives rise to something different, something new and unrecognisable, a new area of negotiation and representation.⁴²

In this description hybridity constitutes a site of permanent unease and hence of permanently potential creativity, but a qualification must be made right away: the hybrid, in the context of genre or anything else, is an extraordinarily difficult category. It is a term, as Nikos Papastergiadis notes, that has 'been both trapped in the stigmatic associations of biological essentialism and elevated to promote a form of cultural nomadology'.⁴³ Between these two poles there are a number of epistemological nodes and schema depending on the realm we are talking about: the cultural, historical, political, linguistic etc. Susan Friedman suggests that two main positions can nevertheless be located across these spheres: one views hybridity as 'an ordinary, ubiquitous, routine component of any cultural formation', the other as 'transgressive, counter-hegemonic, resistant, interruptive'.⁴⁴ The two are not mutually exclusive, but crucial to any meaningful appraisal is awareness of what kind of temporal or spatial contextualizations underlie and surround any given instance of hybridity.

In a recent work Anjali Prabhu sums up what she sees as the three main outlooks on practices and approaches to hybridity, and these may provide additional clarification. The first sees hybridity as being 'everywhere', in many cases representing 'the triumph of the postcolonial or the subaltern over the hegemonic' where cultural onslaught is modified by the resistant for its own purposes.⁴⁵ This view is closely related to hybridity as a '*counternarrative* that builds community within the margins of culture',⁴⁶ but it threatens to

treat marginality as universal without regard to the specifics of situated-ness. A second stance argues that hybridity is a luxury of the elite, a mostly urban émigré indulgence, which has little or no bearing on the fixity of social realities lived in the ex-colonies or in the expanding diasporas worldwide.⁴⁷ Here hybridity becomes something akin to an intellectual exercise with little bearing on geopolitical underpinnings, and may be taken as an invitation to construct whatever identity one desires at any given moment.⁴⁸

The third position Prabhu outlines, of most relevance to the present discussion, holds that ‘any account of hybridity must contend with this history [of slavery, colonialism, and rape, inherited in terms of race]’.⁴⁹ The crux here echoes Friedman’s call for ‘locational “thick descriptions” of historically and geographically specific situations’.⁵⁰ This stance, Friedman argues, ‘stresses mutual agencies on all sides, though not necessarily equally unencumbered agencies’, and privileges the multitemporal and multispatial complexities of colonial, postcolonial and indeed neo-colonial practices and stories.⁵¹ The quote from Bhabha above, and not least many of its applications, may therefore come to ring hollow unless we rigorously hold before us signs as ‘anterior,’ and their ‘moments of confluence’ as marking new and unrecognizable routes – all the while paying extreme attention to the ‘thickness’ of both the roots and routes of their emergent moments.

Registering historical memory and avoiding the risks that cultural remembering potentially always poses, is, however, a fine balance. We are after all dealing with what Andreas Huyssen calls the ‘turn toward memory’, a turn grounded in human desires to separate out spaces for what we perceive to be prior rather than anterior, originary rather than consecutive.⁵² ‘Traces of feelings and practises’ may also then take on rationale as trails back to safety and, as is often the case, to a sense of purity. The focal point of any incursion into the gestalt of hybridity must in other words be the following: in the constant exchanges of and relations between cultural and political values and histories, ‘what rate of exchange’, to borrow a phrase from a different context, ‘... measures the events and certify their proportionality?’⁵³ For underpinning, prompting and surging through the transformative are parameters that ultimately rely on the privileging of certain ‘currencies’, currencies generally translating as being certain memories and practices of remembering at the expense of other, less privileged ones. This returns us to Prabhu’s ‘material reality’ and Friedman’s ‘thick descriptions’, and will be retained here as the pivotal point for exploring various models of hybridity, as well as their relation to and intersection with the palimpsest. Tentatively we may at this point suggest that excavations and expositions of the sediments that constitute the

palimpsest can serve as tool as well as metaphor for how hybridity in turn can be calibrated according to its various nuances. The more densely sedimented the textual site, the ‘thicker’ the description, and the more accurate our assessment of cultural and political rates of exchange can be.

‘Generic performances’: staging dub

The text lives only by coming into contact with another text (with context). Only at the point of this contact between texts does a light flash, illuminating both the posterior and anterior, joining a given text to dialogue.⁵⁴

Careful observance of the responsibilities outlined above leads to the kind of palimpsest *I Am Joaquín* presents, and provides us with an example of how the chronicling of cultural and historical layers can constitute into being an aesthetic, cultural and social hybrid. As we saw, the poem takes its cue from the bases of two different traditions to accommodate the complex material the persona constructs himself and his world from in order to bring forth an new, unique expression of the American experience. This form of generic hybridization is worth dwelling on. As forms of seeing the world, genres must stay flexible enough to accommodate new, emerging epistemological and aesthetic positions. Jostein Børtnes notes that ‘we can often observe how oral genres penetrate written ones. Such interpenetration may result in a dialogisation of the genres involved, since each genre “remembers” the contexts out of which they have emerged and evolved with other utterances from which they have been adapted’.⁵⁵ Texts inhabit and work from the inside of already existing generic sites, creating in the process new ones. For a slightly different approach to this kind of layeredness, and to grasp the implications of some of its nuances I turn briefly again to staging.

From the performativity represented by the exhibition and the excavation site this chapter began with, we can now make more general observations that connect site, genre and performativity. The aesthetic and ideological link in this respect is located in the oscillatory relation between what Cathy Turner refers to as ‘the ghost and the host’.⁵⁶ To our literary palimpsesting the host is the most useful:

The terms ‘host’ and ‘ghost’ ... distinguish between the site itself and the ephemeral architecture that may be built within it ... the host comprises not only the ordering vocabulary of its former articulations. The ‘host’ is already the layered ‘space’ formed by lived experience, so that the givens of site-specific performance comprise not only the machinery of ‘place’, but also the patina it has acquired with use.⁵⁷

These observations are developed in relation to theatre and performance, but can be transposed onto literary genres. The conventions that determine why a text is a poem, a travelogue, a *Bildungsroman*, or a detective story can be linked to what Turner calls the ‘machinery of place’, certain structural grids that serve to constrain the movements of the particular articulation, or performance of the narrative, offering certain expectations of narrative structure and denouement. Of course the vast register of articulations on the site of generic conventions modify, add to, and/or detract from the original structures (Turner’s ‘patina’), sometimes creating entirely new performances.

Dub poetry as a hybridized form of seeing the world draws on a slew of different sources for its cultural and aesthetic expression, and cannot, as Christian Habekost reminds us at the outset of his comprehensive study, *Verbal Riddim*, be treated as a ‘smooth and homogenous “cocktail mix” of two equally balanced ingredients’, those being African and European elements.⁵⁸ The Jamaican creole of dub poetry ‘is a language created out of hard necessity by African slaves from the 17th century British English and West African, mostly Ashanti, language groups, with a lexical admixture from the Caribe and Arawak natives of the island’.⁵⁹ While it is of course common for post-colonial literatures to make use of native languages interspersed with English (or French, Spanish, Portuguese, as the case may be), dub poetry may be unique also in this respect. Written and spoken in Jamaica patwah (patois), in its totality it filters the English of the colonizer through the various West African and native islander languages and their phonetic systems to form an alternative version of English. Such hybridization of language results in extreme adaptability: without the constraints of the ‘master tongue’, not even its ‘ghosts’, it can express and develop the practices and traditions of new, unique experiential blends that in turn carry forth so far unheard-of experiences.

In the case of dub poetry linguistic hybridization cannot be separated out from the generic. Oku Onuora, generally credited with the coinage of the term, explains dub poetry as ‘not merely putting a piece of poem ‘pon a reggae rhythm; it is a poem that has a *built-in-reggae-rhythm* – hence when the poem is read without any reggae rhythm (so to speak) backing . . . one can distinctly hear the reggae rhythm coming out of the poem’.⁶⁰ Consider briefly the last stanza of dub poet pioneer Linton Kwesi Johnson’s ‘It Dread Inna Innglan’ as illustration:

George Lindo
Him is a working man
George Lindo
Him is a family man

George Lindo
 Him nevah do no wrang
 George Lindo
 Di innocent one
 George Lindo
 Him noh carry no daggah
 George Lindo
 Him is not no rabbah
 George Lindo
 Dem haffi let him go
 George Lindo
 Dem bettah free him now!⁶¹

Dub poetry is meant to be read out aloud, and as the rhythmical beat of the above lines underscores, the poetics of the genre relies on its over-speaking, not only in instrumental reggae songs, but in continuation of oral African traditions (the call-and-response in particular, found for instance in many variants of praise poetry). A basic premise deriving from this African strand is the co-constitution of poet and audience, where the delivery is dependent on the participation of the audience. As Peter Hitchcock observes, this is also one of the aesthetic principles of dub poetry, namely that '[it] is not founded on description but praxis and the "wi" of its community appeal'.⁶² Having moved to London as a young adolescent, Johnson launched the new style with his 1975 *Dread Beat and Blood*, and throughout the 1980s brought it to increasing international attention. Similar developments took place in Jamaica at roughly the same time, first and foremost through the rise of Oku Onuora, who in turn influenced Jamaican-Canadian poet Lillian Allen. Toronto, Jamaica and London were and still are main hubs for dub, and despite numerous mutations of the genre according to shifting inputs and provenances, its overarching appeal remains the refraction of new cultural and political experiences carried by correspondingly new forms.

Johnson's well-known 'Inglan is a Bitch' (1980) demonstrated this well, letting the new mould bear forth an outlook on England that radically departed from that of the generation before him, driving home the disillusion with betrayals of promises made by 'Landan taun'. The adult migrant persona lists the jobs he has had and lost, each and every example an increment of racial discrimination. The poem rehearses 'Inglan is a bitch / dere's no escaping it / Inglan is a bitch' with variations on the fourth and last line, from 'dere's no runin whe fram it' to 'you haffi know how fi survive in it' to 'dere's no runin whe from it' until the last stanza collapses the frustrated hopes as follows:

mi know dem have wok, wok in abundant
yet stil, dem mek mi redundant
now, at fifty-five mi getin quite ole
yet still, dem seen mi fig oh draw dole
Inglan is a bitch
dere's no escaping it
Inglan is a bitch fi true
is whe wi a goh dhu bout it:⁶³

As John McLeod has noted, Johnson's

spelling of the pronoun 'wi' . . . captures both the plural 'we' and the singular 'I' (and also recalls the Rastafarian invocation of 'I and I'). Here the lonely voice of the suffering migrant segues into a youthful narrative 'wi' which is both singular and communal, and which defiantly contests the unacceptable circumstances of the city by adopting a confrontational tone that attempts to rally the community into action.⁶⁴

McLeod goes on to argue that artists such as LKJ have not only uniquely articulated their 'Landan'; in tandem with this they also modify the urban space itself, framing and naming it anew according to other legacies and visions. The emerging forms of seeing the world are thus not merely a response to historical vectors, they also effectuate a reflexive influence on their sites of performance.

The densely sedimented genre/mould of Johnson's dub poetry allows the totality of layers to glow through to form an integrated script which continues its morphing and scripting of a culture born, living in and with change. It amalgamates the multiple trails and routes of origins into a simultaneity so unyielding it is near impossible to deconstruct its constituent parts. Language may account for much of this; as a truly versatile filter it can powerfully circumscribe a new mould for a new vision. This new, generic form comes forth as its own, 'pure impurity', acting anew upon other layers, and creating, perhaps, other palimpsests. Such simultaneity of legacies borne forth, as an aesthetic, social and cultural position, may ultimately respond to what Bhabha in a clarification of the idea of 'thirdness' has described as 'a witness from where the history of justice may proceed – an ethical potentiality'.⁶⁵

Staging the 'non-form': Rhys

The kind of witnessing as the above is, however, not the rule. More often than not, the 'ordering vocabulary' of the generic stage constrains and in the worst

cases cancels or distorts the performances. The *Bildungsroman* has shown itself a particularly resilient host in this respect. It never quite lets the audience (a third party) forget its steadfast insistence on formation as convergence of narrating the self in relation to nation/society, and works as a cast in a double fashion: it shapes from the outside, that is to say, from the perspective of culture as overarching structure into which its members are socialized and acculturated, and it shapes from the inside, as the protagonist aspires towards the realization of her/his self as acculturated member of the community. In its most basic manifestation the *Bildungsroman* traces the journey towards maturation through a tripartite at home – homeless – home again, in which the account of the individual's negotiation of the dichotomy between autonomy and socialization is central. We detect here the main problem in many postcolonial visitations of the particular generic structure: as a site on which overwriting and erasure take place this underlying principle is of great significance, since it presumes a utopian element of unification. Inextricably linked to this is the relationship between external and internal drives toward acculturation: both presuppose that cultural structures convene and oblige the goal of the project. As many scholars have noted, the dilemma is pervasive. José Santiago Vázquez for instance remarks in relation to African *Bildungsromane* and their protagonists that they 'often find themselves incapable of choosing between two sets of values, and internal conflict which remains unresolved at the end of the narrative'.⁶⁶ He moreover argues that in Ben Okri's case, by insisting on including myth as knowledge on a par with other kinds of knowledge, Okri interrogates the 'geopolitical connotations of the Western *Bildungsroman*', with its inherent emphasis on education as the only valid kind of knowledge.⁶⁷

The relationship between genre *cum* site as host and the performance as ghost is thus particularly complicated. Turner observes that

[t]he event of the performance is seen as the rewriting of space through a new occupation of site in tension with what precedes it. The 'host', including its other previous and current occupations, can offer resistance to this rewriting. It remains distinct from the 'ghost' and cannot be ultimately identified with it. Indeed, the 'ghost' is transgressive, defamiliarizing, and incoherent.⁶⁸

This now returns us to the idea of genres as 'forms of seeing and interpreting', as structural moulds or grids, and, as sites for excavation. Genre is never once and for all; rather, as Bakhtin reminds us, it 'lives in the present, but always *remembers* its past, its beginnings'.⁶⁹ Hence, at the same time as the postcolonial text superimposes its own performances of the genre or host it 'visits', the expectations according to the underlying script persevere even under this most

recently added layer. Fissures open up, and details surface, details which, to borrow Ato Quayson's poignant phrase, may 'shimmer with potential', if only revealed, if only noticed.⁷⁰ Such alternative, lesser stories all depend for their disclosures on who is looking, and, as Clifford muses in 'Identity in Mashpee', what vistas we allow into our horizons:

Stories of cultural contact and change have been structured by a pervasive dichotomy: absorption by the other or resistance to the other. A fear of lost identity, a Puritan taboo on mixing beliefs and bodies, hangs over the process. Yet what if identity is conceived not as a boundary to be maintained but as a nexus of relations and transactions actively engaging a subject? The story or stories of interaction must then be more complex, less linear and teleological. What changes when the subject of 'history' is no longer Western?⁷¹

The question receives a powerful response in Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* in the shape of a palimpsesting on genre, on narrative, on history: it posits the madwoman in *Jane Eyre*'s attic as the main character in a layer of scripting that is barely detectable in the 'original' parchment. Rhys's novel takes a detail from the existing, monumental narrative canvas and asks of the detail, what is *its* story? Its shimmering potential is laid out before us, and once and for all reinscribed, superimposed, echoing Morrison's rerouting of the 'described and imagined' into the 'describer and imager': this is the story of Mr Rochester's mad wife.

There were certain limitations to what Rhys could fashion out of her prequel. Most importantly, the narrative already had an end, and the culmination of Bertha's story in insanity and death could not be altered. It was the journey towards that final moment that could be reinstated into the universe of the canonical work, a journey barely hinted at in Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, but hinted at nevertheless. What is brought to light is a subject, formerly the mere shadow of an object, coming into being through, precisely, active engagement by and with a series of 'relations and transactions'. And these are many, as the number of volumes written on the various complexities of *Wide Sargasso Sea* testify. In relation to the palimpsesting the novel partakes in, however, I will stay with its visitation on the site of genre, and explore how this particular performance of *Bildung* steers its protagonist, not towards finding her role in the world, but towards the non-form, the abject.

When Mr Rochester in *Jane Eyre* finally relates to Jane the story of how he met his wife and of the subsequent marriage he also reveals the dynamics of subject formation and erasure. Largely what we know of Mrs Rochester's past is contained in this passage, and I quote it at length:

When I left college, I was sent out to Jamaica, to espouse a bride already courted for me. My father said nothing about her money; but he told me Miss Mason was

the boast of Spanish Town for her beauty: and this was no lie. I found her a fine woman, in the style of Blanche Ingram: tall, dark, and majestic. Her family wished to secure me because I was of a good race; and so did she. They showed her to me in parties, splendidly dressed. I seldom saw her alone, and had very little private conversation with her. She flattered me, and lavishly displayed for my pleasure her charms and accomplishments. All the men in her circle seemed to admire her and envy me. I was dazzled, stimulated: my senses were excited; and being ignorant, raw, and inexperienced, I thought I loved her. There is no folly so besotted that the idiotic rivalries of society, the prurience, the rashness, the blindness of youth, will not hurry a man to its commission. Her relatives encouraged me; competitors piqued me; she allured me: a marriage was achieved almost before I knew where I was.⁷²

When she is mentioned elsewhere in the novel it is as a ‘goblin’, a ‘monster’, a ‘lunatic’, a ‘witch’,⁷³ and several times throughout in terms of a ghostly presence; a mad Creole woman locked up in the attic under the servant Grace Poole’s supervision. Rhys consequently had to reconstruct from very scant material the series of events that would eventually lead her own protagonist to torch Thornfield Hall and throw herself from the roof into certain death. She was very aware of this challenge, and notes in a letter to Selma Vaz Diaz that Brontë’s Mrs Rochester is also fiction, but that ‘*this fiction was founded on fact or rather several facts . . . [a] young man who was not too scrupulous could do very well for himself and very easily. He would marry the girl, grab her money, bring her to England – a faraway place – and in a year she would be invalid. Or mad . . . So the legend of the mad West Indian was established.*’⁷⁴ Rhys’s excavation of Antoinette’s story from underneath Brontë’s master text is consequently also qualified guessing based on certain historically irrefutable facts, as was the layer of the Victorian parchment which she scrapes off.

As a *Bildungsroman*, *Wide Sargasso Sea* displays some of the same irreconcilable conflicts that many other postcolonial novels do.⁷⁵ We are introduced to Antoinette at the age of roughly five or six, very soon after the Emancipation Act (1843) banning slavery was passed, and hence the heroine is steeped in historical events that are reflected and refracted through her. (Already here, however, a crucial reclamation has been made: the re-naming of Eyre’s homely and harsh-sounding Bertha – given to her by Mr Rochester – back to Antoinette, name of queens, is also an immediate retrieval and restoration of original subjectivity from under colonial layers of objectification, one of empire’s most reliable ways of removing from the other her own self, and instead imposing an identity from without.) The first lines in the novel read: ‘They say when trouble comes close ranks, and so the white people did. But we

were not in their ranks.⁷⁶ From the outset the novel signals its subject matter's entanglement with larger historical vectors, notably the Renaissance rivalry between Catholic and Protestant Europe mentioned earlier: Antoinette, her mother Annette and her retarded brother Pierre are not English Creoles, but French ones, having come to Jamaica from Martinique. Their conflicted position in the English colony, lost by Spain in 1655, stems from this, but more seriously from their past as a slave-owning plantation family, which no one is going to let them forget: 'I never looked at any strange negro. They hated us. They called us white cockroaches.'⁷⁷

The tests and trials, and the moments of crisis the protagonist goes through on her journey of formation may be thought of not as isolated incidents, but rather as a prolonged middle period of crisis, metaphorically associated with fire in various modifications. The first in this sequence happens when their estate Coulibri is burnt to the ground by the local black community, and the only friend Antoinette has known, Tia, throws a rock at her: 'We stared at each other, blood on my face, tears on hers. It was as if I saw myself. Like in a looking-glass.'⁷⁸ Space does not allow an exhaustive exposition of the multiple configurations of the fire metaphor, but throughout the narrative the image figures in close association with the red of, for instance, blood or heat. The stone Tia throws recalls the initial description of her: 'Then [she] would light a fire (fires always lit for her, sharp stones did not hurt her feet, I never saw her cry).'79 Stone and fire, and by association blood, have already conglomerated into a representation of Tia, and since it is refracted here as the mirror image of Antoinette herself, it will continue to accumulate shades of signification in her own narrative.

An image that symbolizes the destruction and renewal of the world, fire violently ends this part of Antoinette's childhood, and when she wakes up after six weeks in what seems to be a coma, her years in a convent school begin. She has an interestingly ambivalent relationship to it: 'The convent was my refuge, a place of sunshine and of death . . .'⁸⁰ Her stay with the nuns marks a kind of pause in her journey towards adulthood, a liminal space of repose in the *Bildung* process. Whereas repose does not last, liminality does, and this is perhaps where *Wide Sargasso Sea* as ghost departs most radically from the structural grids of the genre, its host. When we meet Antoinette again in Part II she has become Mrs Rochester, travelling to one of her mother's houses for their honeymoon. Typically marriage marks the *Bildung* protagonist's ultimate contract with society, but here there is no denouement, and Antoinette finds herself instead trapped in the middle phase of crisis and liminality. A major contribution to this condition is of course that she is now deprived of her own

voice and perspective; with the exception of a few pages depicting her meeting with the only person she trusts, Christophine, it is Mr Rochester who narrates the middle and longest part of the novel.

If Antoinette's own historical and cultural background has already framed her in-betweenness, this state is increasingly intensified by her husband's utter incomprehension of who she is, and where and what she comes from. His relationship to her is from the beginning conflicted, torn as he is between attraction and repulsion: 'Long, sad, dark alien eyes. Creole of pure English descent she may be, but they are not English or European either. And when did I begin to notice all this about my wife Antoinette? After we left Spanish Town I suppose. Or did I notice it before and refuse to admit what I saw?'⁸¹ In the contemplation sounds the first note of a sensibility or disposition, which will gradually lead Mr Rochester to torment his wife into the deepest despair. The safety that she needs and asks from him, and which he, realizing this, withholds from her, originates in part from her own personal history of rupture and deprivation, but this cannot be extracted from the profound uncertainty her Creole identity inhabits: 'So between you I often wonder who I am and where is my country and where do I belong and why was I ever born at all.'⁸² The relationship is consequently already fraught with hesitations and doubts that between them configure what is hidden in *Jane Eyre*, but which surfaces powerfully in *Wide Sargasso Sea*: the composition of the subject as the abject.

Abjection, 'the condition or estate of one cast down; abasement, humiliation, degradation; downcastness, abjectness, low estate',⁸³ is in Kristeva's observation more specifically the

massive and sudden emergence of uncanniness, which, familiar as it might have been in an opaque and forgotten life, now harries me as radically separate, loathsome. Not me. Not that. But not nothing, either. A 'something' that I do not recognize as a thing. A weight of meaninglessness, about which there is nothing insignificant, and which crushes me. On the edge of non-existence and hallucination, of a reality that, if I acknowledge it, annihilates me. There, abject and abjection are my safeguards. The primers of my culture.⁸⁴

It is, ultimately, Mr Rochester who creates the madwoman in *Jane Eyre*'s attic, separating Antoinette's self and her psyche from the body, and in so doing analogizing the postcolonial gothic, this enduring trail of the colonizer's gaze framing the subject into what it can no longer recognize, or be recognized, as the foreshadowing of the ending of the novel painfully dramatizes:

I went into the hall again with the tall candle in my hand. It was then that I saw her – the ghost. The woman with streaming hair. She was surrounded by a gilt

frame but I knew her. I dropped the candle I was carrying and it caught the end of a tablecloth and I saw flames shoot up. As I ran or perhaps floated or flew I called help me Christophine help me and looking behind me I saw that I had been helped. There was a wall of fire protecting me but it was too hot, it scorched me and I went away from it.⁸⁵

The mirror image Antoinette sees of herself is not recognizable to her any longer, and the scene recalls the first moment of crisis when she sees herself in Tia, 'as in a looking glass'. Fire now protects rather than destroys, and will end her life in a final mirror image, returning her to Coulibri and Tia.

Rhys's scripting of abjection is complex and in itself a palimpsest. She writes into existence a dynamic that is both constitutive of and constituted by the collapse of meaning: where 'I am not', and where 'if acknowledged it annihilates me'. Read backwards we see how the development of Mr Rochester's feelings towards his wife steadfastly consolidate her as the abject, until on the last pages of the second part, right before they leave for England she is not even human anymore: 'I forced [the hate] out. And with the hate the beauty. She was only a ghost. A ghost in the grey daylight.'⁸⁶ Soon after he reflects that, 'I scarcely recognized her voice. No warmth, no sweetness. The doll had a doll's voice, a breathless but curiously indifferent voice.'⁸⁷ At the same time, however, there is the following impulse: 'Antoinetta – I can be gentle too. Hide your face. Hide yourself but in my arms. You'll soon see how gentle. My lunatic. My mad girl.'⁸⁸ It is precisely this oscillation between desire and repulsion that propels the gaze's fixation of the abject, safeguarding against Kristeva's reality of 'not nothing'.

The staging of the composition of the abject on the site of the *Bildungsroman* genre commands rather dystopic speculations. For it is not just that *Wide Sargasso Sea* superimposes a layer onto the parchment of *Jane Eyre* that allows for a greater and more comprehensive appreciation of this palimpsest as a whole. It also scrapes off the sheen of the cultural primers that has conditioned Western culture in its relation to its Others. Rhys's text lays bare structures of racial thinking complexly originating in the interface between religion and sociocultural politics, a structure without which Brontë's script is not conceivable, and which may be specifically what Rhys referred to when she said *Jane Eyre* was 'founded on several facts'. We should bear in mind here that in Mr Rochester's eyes Antoinette as a Creole resides, not in the clear-cut area of good and bad, white and black, but the undetermined, what is and is not familiar: what 'causes abjection' is that which 'disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite.'⁸⁹

Rather than *bilden*, form, *Wide Sargasso Sea* discloses the processes that un-form, and de-form. Antoinette's initial 'form', if taken on its own premises

would most likely never resolve the conflicted-ness of a consciousness born of contradicting expectations, and she might have ended up having to choose between the relations and transactions available to her. Such outcome is, however, a very far cry from the path towards maturation that turns into the corridor that leads to deformation and disfiguration. Rhys's work as a palimpsesting and palimpsested performance, then, gives the genre in its instance as a culture's way of seeing and interpreting the world a deeply ominous pall: what cannot be formed must be deformed. *Wide Sargasso Sea* exposes on the individual psychological level one of the most disturbing rationales behind the colonizing project: the constitution of the other as non-form, the negation of acculturation, and hence, the impossibility of convergence of individual and nation.

In this example hybridization is non-existent. The constituent parts that make up the universe and roles of Rhys's stage are kept safely apart, form and non-form on two sides of a gap that must be maintained; without it *Jane Eyre* is not possible as historical and cultural 'fact'. The European literary canon crawls with the deformed and disfigured, subjects robbed of their designations, claimed and renamed by colonial master plans, kept safely at a distance. We need only think of Shakespeare's Caliban, half-man, half-monster locked in abjection, or Defoe's Man Friday, one of the earliest Others scripted into European literary history: 'It was when Robinson Crusoe found Man Friday that he realized he was not alone and colonization was born: there was another being present, to subjugate ...'⁹⁰ As multiple reinscriptions and revisions of have shown, however, the encounter marks the beginning of routes that in some instances would steer relentlessly towards the hybrid, and resurface as palimpsested 'homecoming meanings'. In turn and to varying degree they have come to haunt the colonial as well as the postcolonial stage in performances that continue to play out at times devastating interpretations.

Contained: Malouf and Gordimer

So far the readings have mostly concentrated on exploring geneses and gestalts of various manifestations of palimpsests and hybridizations from within performative agency, and implicitly rather than explicitly disclosing the effects on the audience. The next two texts more openly engage with the responses generated, for instance, by the encounter with the uncanny: what is and is not familiar, what leaves the constituent and heterogeneous parts and trails of identity locked in an ambivalently antagonistic embrace that resists collapse or merging into a 'single utterance'. In the following the palimpsest and the

hybrid assume their positions on a sliding scale of dread, with hybridization as the possible outcome of overlaying presenting itself as the very nightmare of the colonial imagination.

Australian writer David Malouf offers a masterful portrayal of this particular trope in *Remembering Babylon*, and more importantly of what it unleashes in its surroundings. The figure that one day enters from the dark forests into a settlement in Queensland in the 1860s is introduced as follows:

The creature, almost upon them now . . . came to a halt, gave a kind of squawk, and leaping up onto the top rail of the fence, hung there, its arms outflung as if preparing for flight. Then the ragged mouth gapped.

‘Do not shoot,’ it shouted. ‘I am a B-b-british object!’⁹¹

The ‘object’ is Gemmy Fairlane, and in retrospective flashes throughout the novel we learn that he grew up an orphan in England, ‘one of an army of little shitty creatures, mere bundles of rag and breath but with little hands that could clasp a broom and strength enough to push it’;⁹² became the rat catcher ‘Willett’s Boy’;⁹³ then after years of abuse kills the man Willett, and finally ends up a sailor for a couple of years until a shipwreck washes him ashore on the Australian coast. Aborigines find him, a ‘sea creature of a kind they had never seen before from the depths beyond the reef’;⁹⁴ and for the next sixteen years he lives among them. Young enough to be imprinted anew, Gemmy’s sense of his past and everything in it gradually recedes, until one day he hears news of ‘white faced spirits’ to the south.⁹⁵ Disturbed and curious, Gemmy makes his way towards the settlement.

The McIvor family take Gemmy in, and he helps as best as he can around the farm. For a short while life seems to go back to normal and the little settlement adjusts to the newcomer’s company. It does not last, though: ‘It was the mixture of monstrous strangeness and unwelcome likeness that made Gemmy Fairly so disturbing to them, since at any moment he could show either one face or the other . . .’.⁹⁶ Same, yet not same. While the McIvors and the minister and eventually the schoolteacher tolerate and even empathize with Gemmy, most of the neighbours do not. The turning point comes when some of them drag him away from his lean-to and beat him severely, an event that will mark the beginning of the end of his visitation. The reason for the violence is at heart quite simple: Gemmy’s undecided identity can, in all its confusion, all too readily be ‘read’ and traced: one layer of identity has been partly scrubbed off and inscribed with another, yet both are perceptible, ‘readable’. In his palimpsested figure the spectators consequently witness the process by which the original imaginary of English identity is being

overwritten by some other imaginary, ‘monstrous’. His very body comes to display the master metaphor of change and transformation: ‘For the fact was, when you looked at him sometimes he was not white. His skin might be but not his features. The whole cast of his face gave him the look of one of Them. How was that, then?’⁹⁷

Gemmy’s figure can be said to illustrate Freud’s idea of the surface that is legible in suitable lights, with the qualification, perhaps, that what is legible continually oscillates between same and not same, defying the ‘right light’ the community try to hold to him. And try they must, for the fears that run through *Remembering Babylon* ultimately revolve around the compulsion Judie Newman coins in relation to the postcolonial gothic, namely ‘the tendency of the West to textualize the colonial, to transform the Other into a set of codes and discourses which can be recuperated into its own system of recognition, as hegemonic discourse accomplishes its project of endlessly repeating itself’.⁹⁸ And in fact, immediately after Gemmy’s arrival the minister, Mr Frazer, and the schoolteacher, Mr Abbot, begin piecing together and writing down his story, most of the time guessing their way to a satisfying chronicle. Accuracy is not essential; it is the scripting of Gemmy’s being into a normal, written discourse to stabilize his unfixed nature that is. The layer of the Other so decipherable on Gemmy’s body must be overwritten again, so that the ‘original’ script is replicated and restored.

Underneath the project of recuperation lurks a question too terrifying for the community even to consider answering: ‘Could you lose it? Not language, but *it*. *It*.’⁹⁹ Malouf’s narrative focuses on this distress, which is the same one that haunts Conrad’s Marlow in his search for and encounter with Kurtz, and that drives the unnamed narrator in his pursuit of the real story of the mysterious Mustafa Sa’eed in Tayeb Salih’s *Season of Migration to the North*. It is a trauma embedded in the colonizing project from its very inception: the fear of becoming like the other. Robert Young describes this dynamics in relation to Englishness specifically, but his observation can be transposed onto other senses of self and identity generally: ‘Perhaps the fixity of identity for which Englishness developed such a reputation arose because it was in fact continually being contested, and was rather designed to mask its uncertainty, its sense of being estranged from itself, sick with desire for the other.’¹⁰⁰ The layered figure of Gemmy is a hint towards that very transgression, and threatens to upset the boundaries of absolutes. The depiction of this intricate fixation thus extends beyond the particularities of Queensland in the 1860s to become a comment on universal terrors not concerned with hybridity as fact, but as idea and possibility.

As mentioned, not all of *Remembering Babylon*'s characters react with fear and violence, and in Mr Frazer's thoughts written down in his private notebook we hear the contours of a different vision, a hope for the future:

I think of our early settlers, starving on these shores in the midst of plenty they did not recognize, in a blessed nature of flesh, fowl, fruit that was all around them and which they could not, with their English eyes, perceive, since the very habit and faculty that makes apprehensible to us what is known and expected dulls our sensitivity to other forms, even the most obvious . . . Our poor friend Gemmy is a forerunner.¹⁰¹

The exact nature of 'It', this something that can be lost, is uncertain. Some deep-rooted perception of cultural being fixed by the safety of borders must be protected against the assault of the Other, more often than not yielding horrible consequences. This dread extends to all sorts of spheres, shared by what Richard Rodriguez in relation to the 'browning' of the United States describes as follows: 'As lives meet, chafe, there will be a tendency to retreat. When the line between us is unenforced or seems to disappear, someone will surely be troubled and nostalgic for straight lines and will demand that the future give him the fundamental assurance of a border.'¹⁰² Two places stand out with respect to the institutionalization of this anxiety, this clamouring for 'straight lines'. One is the US and its history of, initially 'the peculiar institution', then the Jim Crow laws and policies of 'separate but equal', the other is South Africa and its history of a number of practices collapsed into apartheid. The US formally abolished all forms of *de jure* segregation in 1968 (if not *de facto*), and South Africa, whose enforced apartheid policies began in 1948, terminated the system only in 1991. The racial anxiety of blurred lines that fuels both systems, and of course numerous others we can not mention here, can be summed up in Nadine Gordimer's words: 'Men are not born brothers; they have to discover each other, and it is this discovery that apartheid seeks to prevent.'¹⁰³ From this follows the criminalization of mixtures, the outlawing of reinscriptions other than what the white man permits: palimpsesting becomes a process of continuous erasure lest the cultural imagination of the black man seep into that of the white.¹⁰⁴ And thus, across the decades resounds the tortured scream of Faulkner's Quentin Compson when asked why he hates the South: 'I don't. I don't! I don't hate it! I don't hate it!'¹⁰⁵

The literary representation of racial anxiety that I would like to consider here is a very short story. Its brevity notwithstanding, Gordimer's 'The Moment before the Gun Went off' captures the register of practices and feelings produced and perpetuated by South African apartheid on a level that can

be likened to William Faulkner's chronicles of the US South. Differently from, for instance, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, the non-form is brought forth as a *fait accompli* – non-negotiable, non-retrievable, non-existent – reflected in the very first line of Gordimer's story: 'Marais Van der Vyver shot one of his farm labourers, dead.'¹⁰⁶ The narrator proceeds to record the events leading up to Lucas's death, members of the community's as well as Van der Vyver's own thoughts on the happening, and the preparation for and scene of the funeral. The discursive strategy forces the reader to see from within a racist-based cultural and political rationalization, yet sensing the threat of eruptions stemming from the impossible task it is to contain complete separation. What results is an oscillatory movement between unrelenting and assured superiority on the one hand, and, on the other, the shrill tenor of defence against a silent accusation of its possible wrongs. It is a dialectics of incremental schizophrenia, audible throughout in passages such as follows: 'Those city and overseas people don't know [that Lucas was a friend] is true: farmers usually have one particular black boy they like to take along with them in the lands; you could call it a kind of friend, yes, friends are not only your own white people, like yourself, you take into your house, pray with in church and work with on the Party committee. But how can those others know that?',¹⁰⁷ and 'As usual, [Van der Vyver] called at his shed workshop to pick up Lucas . . . He hooted, and Lucas followed the familiar routine, jumping onto the back of the truck. He liked to travel standing up there, spotting game before his employer did',¹⁰⁸ and inevitably to the worst of their terrors: 'Nothing satisfies them, in the cities: blacks can sit and drink in white hotels, now, the Immorality Act has gone, blacks can sleep with whites . . . It's not even a crime anymore.'¹⁰⁹ The descriptions are suffused by a repudiation of the humanity of the Other, presented in such a way as to fold the reader into the layer of this particular imaginary. And only in this way can what happens next be appreciated: in the last two paragraphs the story shifts gear, and we hear Van der Vyver's remembering in words that mediate a closing of the distance between black and white what passed before the gunshot; the excitement the two shared, his conviction that the young man fell off the truck due to fright, preparing to laugh with him about it as he goes out to get him, and his refusal to believe the young one is dead. The very last lines read: 'How could they know that *they do not know*. Anything. The young black man callously shot through the negligence of the white man was not the farmer's boy; he was his son.'¹¹⁰ The revelation yanks the reader out of the perspective focus she has been included in, to hurl her into this, other layer. We confront the impossible juxtaposition of fatherhood and that father's eradication of his child. The postcolonial palimpsest shows perhaps its harshest side in these

examples: not only does colonialism scrub off what it will not see, it leaves crippled, distorted and impotent what is superimposed in its stead. In 'Moment' erasure thus re-doubles: in blotting out the very blood of a human being, it destroys both black and white, it devastates, in a word, the humanity of all.

From the various, preceding readings and incursions into the postcolonial palimpsest and hybridity it is evident that absolute claims can be made neither of their respective geneses and gestalts, nor their inter-relationship. At best some tentative conclusions can be made as to their various manifestations, and to the usability of the terms as tools for calibrating social, political and aesthetic facts and processes. As the examples testify, it is also clear that the two do not automatically follow one from the other: the hybrid is not the logical outcome of palimpsesting, and, conversely, the palimpsest is not by necessity an instance of hybridization.

Preservation of utterances produced through overwritings leads to a system of layered-ness, a stratigraphics of signification contained on the same space, on the same stage. The palimpsest is consequently inherently a space of contention, and like the monologic word, it sets out on the principle of imposition and attempted erasure of the word that precedes it. The hybrid, on the other hand, works according to the principle of dialogue, expressing integration of various parts, or discourses into some sort of whole. Hybridity as process and result thus approximates the dialectic of transculturation, in David Attwell's words, 'processes of cultural destruction followed by reconstruction on entirely new terms',¹¹¹ and ideally represents Bhabha's ethical potential. The difference between the two phenomena can furthermore be suggested as lingering between contention and tension: as utterance the postcolonial palimpsest rehearses more resolutely the always-present potentially violent conflict between erasure and preservation. It lends itself to continued and contested overlayerings, taking various forms depending always on the particularities of temporal and spatial context, as we saw in Rhys, Walcott, Malouf and Gordimer, and partly in Gonzales. Sometimes, however, as witnessed in Gonzales (again), in Linton Kwesi Johnson's dub, and in the ideal expressed in the notes of Malouf's Mr Frazer, new forms, as the very meaning of the word hybridity insists on, *are* indeed born, 'a mixture of two social languages within the limits of a single utterance, an *encounter* ...'.¹¹²

Conclusion: irretrievable

Permit me to send you a bundle of some Malagasy things to the museum. The wickerwork comes from the east coast of Madagascar, and it takes us to the natural state ...¹¹³

Palimpsesting works on themes established by other routes and legacies of the past, and it illustrates the principle of historical, cultural and narrative stratigraphy – layer upon layer of accumulated, remembered, and/or forgotten significations. And yet, we should not make the mistake of believing that everything can be recalled; it is not entirely true that every meaning has its homecoming festival. This chapter began with the exhibition ‘To the Ends of the World’. At the moment of writing, it was about to be taken off, and I went back to look at it again. It struck me that the photo where the older Malagasy averts his gaze eerily illustrates what Bhabha calls the ‘partial presence’ of the colonial subject.¹¹⁴ Dressed in the same costume as the white missionary (already mimicking), he offers himself as a metonymical presence, but at the same time, by not following the direction of Mr Borchgrevink’s gaze, also profoundly upsets the desired staging of that mimicry, of the desired, colonial form. This is the ambivalence Bhabha locates as the kernel of the destabilization of the colonial authority, and may to some degree be what accounts for the potent dynamics of the photo. Added to this is the following additional information: the man was the Borchgrevinks’ foster son. The dimension enhances the element of mimicry, and of metonymical presence: a son who is and is not a son.

But the above only partly accounts for the compelling nature of the image. There is something else here that steers us in a different direction, to where the co-dependency of preservation and erasure contained in the palimpsest has been broken, where hybridity has no venue. For not everything in the postcolonial palimpsest *is* preserved. Sometimes erasures are forever lost, no matter how ‘deep you dig’: we shall never know the story of the averted gaze, what the man in the photo was looking at, or why. We cannot recover from under the scripting of missionary intention and narrative this, other story. The shimmering of this particular detail was never allowed its glow. And more importantly, it allegorizes the fate of a myriad of details, stories and routes, whose promises were never realized, whose potentials were never fulfilled. For this is also the nature of the palimpsest, sometimes and irretrievably narratives stop, worlds end.

Notes

I would like to thank Jostein Bortnes, Kevin Cahill, Ato Quayson, Anne Holden Rønning and Orm Øverland for their helpful comments on various parts of this chapter, and my students for their keen and inspiring interest in the issues involved.

1. Mike Pearson and Michael Shanks, *Theatre/Archaeology* (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 135.
2. *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, 2nd edn 2009.
3. *Ibid.*

4. Darby Lewes, 'Homotextuality: revealed and revealing texts', in Darby Lewes (ed.), *Double Vision: Literary Palimpsests of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries* (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008), p. xiv.
5. Ibid., p. xiii.
6. Rudolph P. Byrd, *Charles Johnson's Novels: Writing the American Palimpsest* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), p. 2.
7. Sarah Dillon, *The Palimpsest. Literature, Criticism, Theory* (London: Continuum, 2007), p. 2.
8. Original title: 'Til Jordens Ender', Bergen, May–October 2008. The exhibition builds on the research project 'Norwegian Missionaries: Practice and Representation of in the Formation of Self and Other'. Project leader: Dr Hilde Nielssen, stage designer: Olav Myrtvedt.
9. Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), p. 90.
10. Doreen Massey, *Space, Place and Gender* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), p. 6.
11. James Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997).
12. Lewes, 'Homotextuality', p. xii.
13. William Wandless, 'Richardson Agonistes: the trial of the author in the contest for authority', in Lewes (ed.), *Double Vision*, p. 3.
14. Dillon, *Palimpsest*, p. 7.
15. Ibid., p. 12.
16. Mikhail Bakhtin, 'Toward a methodology for the human sciences', *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1987), pp. 159–72, p. 170.
17. *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, 2nd edn, 2009.
18. Clifford, *Routes*, p. 11.
19. Pearson and Shanks, *Theatre/Archaeology*, p. 134.
20. Following scholars such as Amy Kaplan, Deborah Madsen and José David Saldívar, I take Chicano literature as exemplifying core movements and issues that replicate those of more 'traditional' postcolonial literatures. The term postcolonial has various understandings and sympathies, but refers here to local, cultural sensibilities emerging from the circumstances of initial colonial encounters and translations, their historical negotiations, the moments of tearing loose, and eventually the continuous efforts from the postcolonies towards reformulating and rehearsing the practices and aesthetics of the everyday of ensuing itineraries. Chicano literature moreover forms a bridge between Spanish and English history of colonization in the 'New World', a witness caught in consecutive waves of imperial ambitions.
21. Tabish Khair, *Filming: A Love Story* (London: Picador, 2007), p. 71.
22. Richard Rodriguez, 'Converging cultures', *Pacific Newshour*, PBS, 29 July 1996.
23. José Vasconcelos, *The Cosmic Race / La Raza Cósmica* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997).
24. Ramón Saldívar, *Chicano Narrative: The Dialectics of Difference* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990), p. 13.
25. Rodolfo Gonzales, *I Am Joaquín* (New York: Bantam Books, 1975), pp. 6–12.
26. Matt Meier and Feliciano Ribeira, *Mexicans Americans/American Mexicans: From Conquistadores to Chicanos* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1995), p. 75.
27. Juan Bruce-Novoa, *Retro-space: Collected Essays on Chicano Literature* (Houston: Arte Publico Press, 1990), p. 103.
28. Gonzales, *I Am Joaquín*, p. 29.

29. Ibid., p. 17.
30. Ibid., pp. 21–2.
31. Massey, *Space, Place and Gender*, p. 2.
32. Ibid., p. 5.
33. Gonzales, *I am Joaquín*, p. 52.
34. Ibid., p. 98.
35. Walt Whitman, 'Song of Myself, 1881', in H. W. Blodgett and S. Bradley (eds.), *Leaves of Grass: The Collected Writings of Walt Whitman* (New York: New York University Press, 1965), p. 28.
36. Herbert J. Levine, 'Union and disunion in "Song of Myself"', *American Literature*, 59.4 (1987), 570–89, at 579.
37. Langston Hughes, 'I, Too', *The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes*, ed. A. Rampersad (New York: Vintage Classics, 1995).
38. Whitman, 'Song of Myself', sec. 24.
39. Ibid., sec. 23.
40. Saldívar, *Chicano Narrative*, p. 35.
41. Bakhtin, 'Question from Novy Mir', p. 5.
42. Homi Bhabha, 'The third space: interview with Homi Bhabha', in J. Rutherford (ed.), *Identity, Community, Culture, Difference* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990), pp. 207–21, at 211.
43. Nikos Papastergiadis, 'Hybridity and ambivalence: places and flows in contemporary art and culture', *Theory Culture Society*, 22.4 (2005), 39–64, at 39.
44. Susan Stanford Friedman, *Mappings: Feminism and the Cultural Geographies of Encounter* (Princeton University Press, 1998), p. 86.
45. Anjali Prabhu, *Hybridity: Limits, Transformations, Prospects* (New York: SUNY Press, 2007), p. 12.
46. Peter McLaren, 'The ethnographer as postmodern flâneur', in W.G. Tierney and Y. S. Lincoln (eds.), *Representation and the Text: Re-Framing the Narrative Voice* (New York: SUNY Press, 1997), pp. 143–78, at 156.
47. Prabhu, *Hybridity*, p. 12.
48. McLaren, 'The ethnographer as postmodern flâneur', p. 158.
49. Prabhu, *Hybridity*, p. 12.
50. Friedman, *Mappings*, p. 90.
51. Ibid.
52. Andreas Huyssen, 'Presents pasts: media, politics, amnesia', in A. Appadurai (ed.), *Globalization* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), pp. 57–77, at 65.
53. Wai-Chee Dimock, 'The economy of pain: capitalism, humanitarianism, and the realistic novel', in Donald E. Pease (ed.), *New Essays on the Rise of Silas Lapham* (Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 67–90, at 80–1.
54. Bakhtin, 'Methodology', p. 162.
55. Jostein Børtnes, 'Seeing the world through genres', *The Poetry of Prose: Readings in Russian Literature*, Slavica Bergensia VIII (University of Bergen, 2007), at pp. 192–207, at 198–9.
56. Cathy Turner, 'Palimpsest or potential space? Finding a vocabulary for site-specific performance', *New Theatre Quarterly*, 20.4 (2004), 373–90, at 373. Turner notes her indebtedness to among others Mike Pearson and Cliff McLucas for the terms ghost and host (p. 373, fn 63).
57. Ibid., pp. 373–4.
58. Christian Habekost, *Verbal Riddim: The Politics and Aesthetics of African-Caribbean Dub Poetry* (Amsterdam/New York: Rodopi, 1993), p. 1.

59. Russell Banks, 'Foreword', in Linton Kwesi Johnson, *Mi Revalueshanary Fren* (New York: Ausable Press, 2006), p. ii.
60. *Ibid.*, p. 3.
61. Linton Kwesi Johnson, 'Dread Inna Ingran (for George Lindo)', *Mi Revalueshanary Fren*, pp. 21–2. Lindo was wrongfully convicted of armed robbery.
62. Peter Hitchcock, "'It Dread Inna Ingran": Linton Kwesi Johnson, dread, and dub identity', *Postmodern Culture*, 4.1 (1993), 17.
63. Johnson, 'England is a Bitch', *Selected Poems* (London: Penguin, 2006), pp. 39–41.
64. John McLeod, *Postcolonial London: Rewriting the Metropolis* (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 133.
65. Bhabha, plenary lecture, 'Unwelcome truths: on recognition and hospitality', The Conditions of Hospitality Symposium, Stavanger, 8 September 2009.
66. José Santiago Fernández Vázquez, 'Recharting the geography of genre: Ben Okri's *The Famished Road* as a postcolonial *Bildungsroman*', *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 37 (2002), pp. 85–106, at 87. See also Wangari wa Nyatetu-Waigwa, *The Liminal Novel: Studies in the Francophone-African Novel as Bildungsroman* (New York: Peter Lang, 1996).
67. *Ibid.*
68. Turner, 'Palimpsest or potential space?', p. 374.
69. Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (Manchester University Press, 1984), p. 106. Bakhtin's words also indicate that there is already an element of the palimpsest embedded in the concept of genre, manifest as constant oscillation between what is remembered and forgotten, dormant and vigorous, subject to excavation at any given time depending on the interaction between host and ghost.
70. Ato Quayson, plenary lecture, 'The usability of postcolonial theory in the trans-cultural aesthetic', Postcolonial Literature and Theory: Challenges to the Specific, International Research Symposium, Bergen, 15–17 September 2005.
71. Clifford, *Routes* p. 344.
72. Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre* (New York: Chelsea House, 1996), p. 301.
73. *Ibid.* pp. 210, 305, 415, 416.
74. Veronica Marie Gregg, *Jean Rhys's Historical Imagination: Reading and Writing the Creole* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), p. 84.
75. This could of course be said of a great many novels writing the modern/postmodern subject into the world. To collapse these into the postcolonial would, however, place us firmly beyond 'thick descriptions'.
76. Jean Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, ed. H. Jenkins (London: Penguin, 2001), p. 3.
77. *Ibid.*, p. 7.
78. *Ibid.*, p. 23.
79. *Ibid.*, p. 7.
80. *Ibid.*, p. 31.
81. *Ibid.*, p. 37.
82. *Ibid.*, p. 63.
83. *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, 2nd edn, 2009.
84. Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), p. 2.
85. Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, p. 122.
86. *Ibid.*, p. 111.
87. *Ibid.*, p. 112.
88. *Ibid.*, p. 198.
89. Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p. 4.

90. Pearson and Shanks, *Theatre/Archaeology*, p. 135.
91. David Malouf, *Remembering Babylon* (New York: Pantheon Press, 1993), p. 3. Malouf notes in the Afterword that the words, 'Do not shoot, ... I am a B-british object?' were in fact spoken roughly at the same time and in the same place by one Gemmy Morrill or Morrell, but in a different context.
92. *Ibid.*, p. 146.
93. *Ibid.*, p. 147.
94. *Ibid.*, p. 22.
95. *Ibid.*, p. 29.
96. *Ibid.*, p. 43.
97. *Ibid.*, p. 40.
98. Judie Newman, 'Postcolonial gothic: Ruth Prawer Jhabvala and the Sobhraj case', in Fred Botting and Dale Townshend (eds.), *Gothic: Critical Concepts in Literary and Cultural Studies* (London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 293–306, at 293–4.
99. Malouf, *Remembering Babylon*, p. 40.
100. Robert Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 2.
101. *Ibid.*, pp. 130–2.
102. Richard Rodriguez, *Brown: The Last Discovery of America* (New York: Viking Press, 2002), p. 227.
103. Nadine Gordimer, '1959: what is apartheid?', *Living in Hope and History: Notes from our Century* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1999), pp. 105–14, at 114.
104. It is of course in part because of the relatively recent abolition of racially based legislations that the 2008 election in the US is so remarkable, and holds out a promise of a different time.
105. William Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!* (New York: Vintage, 1991), p. 301.
106. Nadine Gordimer, 'The Moment before the Gun Went off', *Jump and Other Stories* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1991), pp. 111–17, at 111.
107. *Ibid.*, p. 112.
108. *Ibid.*, p. 113.
109. *Ibid.*, p. 114. The Immorality Act (1950–85) was one of the first apartheid laws introduced, criminalizing adultery, attempted adultery or related 'immoral' acts between white and black people. It enforced the Mixed Marriage Act of 1949, banning marriage between races. In the US corresponding laws had been in existence since early colonial times, and only in 1967 was the Virginia Racial Integrity Act of 1924 overturned by *Loving vs Virginia*.
110. Gordimer, 'Moment', p. 117.
111. David Attwell, *Rewriting Modernity: Studies in Black South African Literary History* (Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2005), p. 2.
112. Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin and London: University of Texas Press, 1981), p. 358.
113. Letter dated 16 August 1906 to Bergen Museum from A. Flygel, mission minister. Exhibition Catalogue, designed by Scandinavian Surface, ed. Ann-Tove Engelsen, Bergen University 2008. Translation mine.
114. Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 86.

The narrative forms of postcolonial fiction

MONIKA FLUDERNIK

Introduction

There was a knock on the door. I haven't done this to you too often, have I, Ganapathi? Stretching the limits of coincidence unacceptably far? I mean, it's not always in this narrative that a character has said, 'It would be really convenient if the sky were to fall on us right now' – and the sky has fallen on the next page. Fair enough? So do you think you can excuse me now if a sweat-stained despatch-rider bursts into the room and announces that Manimir has been invaded by Karnistani troops?¹

Since Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981) South Asian postcolonial literature in English has not merely become a major publishing success, but it has also acquired the hallmark of academic respectability owing to its exuberant intertextual playfulness, self-reflexive toying with the narrator–reader relation, its sheer inventiveness and expansive magic realist fabulation.² Two labels helped to place Rushdie and his followers like Shashi Tharoor, Sunetra Gupta or Arundhati Roy among the literary elite: the affinity to the already canonized magic realism of South American provenance (Vargas Llosa, Gabriel García Márquez, Julio Cortázar, Alejo Carpentier, Carlos Fuentes) and the postmodernist narrative techniques employed by Rushdie and others (self-reflexivity, parody, extensive use of analepsis, metalepsis and paralipsis,³ montage, subversion of ontological distinctions, metafiction). In fact, in hindsight, Rushdie's (and Tharoor's) works can now, more specifically, be categorized as historiographical metafictions, a prominent subcategory of postmodernist writing.⁴ *Midnight's Children* therefore epitomizes a conjunction of key aspects of postcoloniality – self-reflexivity (postmodernism), fabulation (magic realism) and interculturality (hybridity); and these are in fact the topics of the three adjoining chapters in this volume.

This identification of postcolonial literature with the emblematic postmodernist rewriting of the *Mahabharata* is problematic for a number of reasons.

Stylistically, it privileges one type of literary style over a variety of competing models of narration. Much postcolonial fiction, and not merely in the first half of the twentieth century, is modernist rather than postmodernist in outlook and technique, as can be seen in the work of Mulk Raj Anand or V.S. Naipaul, Chinua Achebe or Dambudzo Marechera for instance. Literature concerned with immigration (e.g. Buchi Emecheta's *Second-Class Citizen*, 1974) or political resistance (e.g. Lewis Nkosi's *Mating Birds*, 1986) is also often resolutely anti-postmodernist in style and frequently 'realist' along the lines of the Victorian social novel.⁵ Thematically, the privileging of Rushdie and company is problematic because the sophisticated kind of literary entertainment offered by these writers conveys a comic and hybridized version of India from an educated cosmopolitan perspective that needs to be balanced by more mundane, practical and indigenous viewpoints such as those offered by Kamala Markandaya or Shashi Deshpande, by R. K. Narayan or Harold Sonny Ladoo. Moreover, the postcolonial protest novel (Ngũgĩ's work, the later Chinua Achebe, Ken Saro-Wiwa) needs to be placed on an equal footing with the playful diasporic postmodernist texts. Finally, from a chronological perspective, the canonization of Rushdie *et al.* in literary history tends to wrongly imply that the 1980s can be seen as the culmination of a development from quondam comparative obscurity, marginality and simplicity to an eventual successful breakthrough to international prominence and stylistic as well as literary excellence. It is of course true that the publication of *Midnight's Children* became a watershed with regard to the international visibility of South Asian fiction and, with it, a point after which postcolonial literature became more generally marketable and apt to acquire bestseller status. However, this 'before and after' schema fails to adequately account for the fact that South Asian fiction in English has a large number of masterpieces to offer from the early twentieth century (e.g. Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable*, 1935; Raja Rao's *Kanthapura*, 1938; or G.V. Desani's *All About H. Hatterr*, 1948). Nor does this story adequately deal with the variety of designs and styles observable in literature both before and after this presumed watershed.⁶

To write a history of postcolonial forms of fiction can therefore not be the equivalent of presenting a narrative in the form of a *Bildungsroman* in which the naïve hero, the early postcolonial novel, shyly steps on the stage in the 1920s, survives several adventures in which he gains his maturity (1950s–60s), marries the woman he has been in love with since his childhood (1970s) and moves into the limelight of the audience's ovations in the 1980s, since when he has become canonized as the object of literary analysis. Such a 'from rags to riches' story does not in any way represent a true account of the actual developments. Nor is

it possible to provide a history of individual narrative techniques in the manner of 'technique B follows the use of technique A and is in turn supplanted by technique C'. Although self-referentiality and an emphasis on metafiction could be argued to have proliferated in the late 1970s and the 1980s in response to the popularization of postmodernist writing styles worldwide, some authors (like Desani) anticipated this trend. Allegory and parody, though extensively used in the 1980s and 1990s, nevertheless figure in many earlier texts (e.g. in Saadat Hasan Manto's parable of Partition, in the allegories of Raja Rao's *The Serpent and the Rope* (1960), in Achebe's and Ngũgĩ's work.⁷

An additional factor to be considered at the outset is the *function* of various techniques. There is no *one* 'postcolonial' narrative technique, nor even a specific combination of narratologically definable features that necessarily trigger a 'post-colonial' reading of a text. On the contrary, what one can observe is a deployment of the same strategies for very different purposes. To give an example: in *Mrs Dalloway*, internal focalization has no 'postcolonial' significance – the fact that we experience Clarissa Dalloway's day through the medium of her consciousness gives us a wonderful insight into this character's situation, personality and mind. Additionally, it conveys to us also a woman's view of the world, a specifically female experience which readers did not have access to in earlier literature. Similarly, internal focalization in postcolonial literature, say in Anand's *Untouchable*, can provide an empathetic insight into the experience of the colonized, evoking our compassion for the life of Bakha, the eponymous untouchable. It is the decision to focus on the mind of a woman in one case, and on that of the subaltern in the other, that converts a neutral narrative technique into a significant strategy within a feminist or postcolonial frame. These effects arise by contrast to earlier novelistic representations of women in British literature, in which sympathy for the other sex tended to focus on their moral failings for which the narrator needed to excuse them by the aid of empathetic narrative technique.

Analogously, in postcolonial writing, the use of this technique needs to be contrasted with colonial fiction, in which internal focalization was readily used to characterize the white colonizer as the reader's focus of empathy, while the native was relegated to the margins, depicted stereotypically from the outside and presented as an object of colonial observation, ridicule, suspicion or fear. The decision to provide a colonial subject's own perspective and to do so in the most empathetic manner, previously deployed only for white characters, marks a key moment in the shift from colonial to postcolonial writing since it implicitly valorizes the colonized, asserting that the native has now become a respectable subject of literary treatment. The technique in and by itself is therefore not a marker of postcoloniality; indeed, it could even be used to evoke sympathy for a

murderer or pederast (see Ian McEwan's 'Butterflies'). As a result, one cannot write a history of postcolonial narrative technique focusing on narratologically definable devices as such, since these devices will be used for different functions at different times. Only the deployment of these techniques in specific contexts and in contrast and relation to colonial novels can yield a postcolonial figuration.

How, then, can one write a history or discuss developments of narrative technique? What I will try to do in the remainder of this chapter is to enumerate a number of strategies whose use in postcolonial writing successfully underlines the postcolonial or anti-colonial message. I will especially focus on a few formally innovative texts in order to demonstrate how these innovations succeed in helping to emphasize the postcolonial spirit of the texts in question. I will conclude with a few comments on the chronology of innovations and on the specificity of national or ethnic background. Some techniques only occur in African literature, others arise much later in one area than they do in another.

This chapter needs to be prefaced by the proviso that I am not familiar with all postcolonial traditions; my account will therefore be open to rewriting by colleagues specializing in other backgrounds. In what follows, my main emphasis will be on South Asian literature and its diasporas, since this is an area with which I am most familiar, and I have supplemented this by comments on African and, more rarely, Caribbean writing and by some notes on British and North American immigration literature as well as a few references to Irish and African American writing. This largely excludes East Asia, Australia and New Zealand. I moreover include some *anti-colonial* texts from South Africa by white authors, which I take to perform tasks that are similar in spirit to those of bona fide postcolonial writers. It might be the task of a separate volume to analyse narrative technique in the postcolonial literatures in languages other than English. Such a study would be particularly fascinating since it might uncover a great variety of writing modes, no doubt influenced by native literary traditions, which could achieve some of the same political effects (promoting the native character to centrality, evoking empathy for the subaltern, etc.) by very diverse strategies and formal means. I will also provide some comments on genre which may be useful from a more than narratological perspective.⁸

Narrative strategies, devices and techniques

The following types of techniques and strategies will be discussed below:

- plot strategies
- character constellation and interaction

- framing devices and narratorial role
- we-narratives and the collective
- dialogue and representation of consciousness
- focalization
- memory
- the representation of time
- clichés, stereotypes, Orientalism vs Occidentalism
- intertextuality, myth, the supernatural

Let me begin by listing the typical features of colonial fiction, against which anti-colonial and postcolonial writing tries to position itself. Colonialist literature is pervaded by Orientalist attitudes and plots. Manifest Orientalism prevails in the representation of the native population as inferior to the white colonizer; it emphasizes the external appearance of the indigenous population (skin colour, insufficient clothing, unappetizing and sickly looks often due to poverty, abuse and starvation), their lack of discipline (failure to abide by the Western work ethic – laziness) or of orderliness (unruliness – rioting, rebellion) and cleanliness (dirt, disease), and their ambivalent attitude towards the colonial master (subservience or dangerous resistance to the colonizer, slyness, cunning, treacherousness). Conversely, the colonizer's actions of expropriation, despotism and cruelty are presented as legitimate, even as humane interventions in the colonized populations' interests ('civilizing' mission, white man's burden).

On the background of these aspects of colonialist writing, anti- or postcolonial reactions to the Orientalist attitudes can be sketched as follows.

Plot structure and character constellation

The colonial novel focuses on a white (set of) protagonist(s) and their confrontation with the indigenous population, who therefore provide the backdrop to the foregrounded problems of the colonizers or travellers. Anti- or postcolonial strategies of rewriting either *invert* the relationship between colonizer and native, for instance by placing the centre of attention in the native and removing the whites to the margins. This happens in Anand's *Untouchable*, where the sweeper Bakha is the main protagonist and the British characters occur only rarely at the periphery of the plot. Another good instance of this common strategy is the novel *Mister Pip* by Lloyd Jones (2007), where the one remaining white man is isolated and eventually pushed into the role of victim. A second, alternative solution is to radically eliminate (ex-)colonizers

from the plot: the novel or short story then deals exclusively with Africans (or Indians, or Maoris), and there are no Europeans or Americans in the text at all. Zakes Mda's *The Heart of Redness* (2000) is a good example of this exclusion of Western personnel, though – as with many African novels – it instead foregrounds the tension between the new (neo-colonial) elite and the people.⁹ Besides functioning as a way of writing back to the colonial model, this concentration on indigenous protagonists can moreover also be interpreted as a symbolic access to native independence. African (or Caribbean, etc.) literature comes into its own when it treats those subjects closest to its heart, its own national and cultural problems, its own people, its own indigenous settings.

As Hestermann has illustrated at length, the contrast between rural and urban lifestyles in many novels takes the place of the former central colonial conflict.¹⁰ The rural uneducated Indian (or South African, in Mda's novel) is contrasted positively (Mda) or negatively (Vikram Chandra's 'Shakti') with the sophisticated metropolitan, thereby reintroducing an intracultural 'Orientalism' – the contempt of the westernized upper-class Indian or African for the rural, poor and uneducated compatriot. The contempt of the elite for their lower-class other is particularly pervasive in South Asian literature in English, which tends to focus – with very few exceptions¹¹ – on the experience of the upper-middle class and their concerns. Two of the few exceptions to this thematic restriction are Rohinton Mistry's *A Fine Balance* (1995) and Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997) with their focus on untouchables. More generally, representatives from the poor and deprived social strata figure, if at all, as marginal; they often are represented as lacking agency, are silenced in the plot, victimized and treated as a shameful reminder of India's backwardness.¹² In some instances, they also represent a threat to the social status quo since they seem to be a social sore bound to erupt in violence and rebellion. The native other in postcolonial fiction therefore often takes the place of the Oriental other in colonial fiction, symbolizing the sly and cunning antagonist or the poor, silenced and submissive sufferer of seemingly inevitable social ills. A good example of such a figure is Fokir in Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* (2004); Fokir the fisherman is perfectly acclimatized to the world of nature, but ill-equipped for modern society (represented by his wife).¹³ Though he becomes a signifier of sublime otherness for the heroine Piya (whom he eventually saves at the risk of his own life), he is experienced as a nuisance by both his wife and the city man, Kanai. (Kanai represents the cosmopolitan Indian who has lost touch with indigenous culture.) As noted above, the African novel is much more likely to represent the people as a

repository of traditional values and to denigrate the neo-colonial and westernized upper classes within its community. Two examples of such a positive depiction of ‘our people’ are Ayi Kwei Armah’s *Two Thousand Seasons* (1973) and Ladoo’s *No Pain like This Body* (1972). Both novels portray a strongly knit community fighting for survival.¹⁴

Plot also collocates with genre. For instance, the depiction of the former colonial subject as a traveller (as in Christopher Hope’s *Darkest England*, 1996) inverts the traditional travelogue structure.¹⁵ A similarly charged rewriting is at work when a South Asian woman has love affairs with white men and is presented as choosing them herself, a situation one encounters in the cosmopolitan setting of Sunetra Gupta’s *The Glassblower’s Breath* (1993) or in Bharati Mukherjee’s *Jasmine* (1989).¹⁶ Even more striking because formerly taboo is the marriage between a white woman and a former colonial subject, as in Nayantra Sahgal’s *Rich Like Us* (1983), Nadine Gordimer’s *A Sport of Nature* (1987) or Sunetra Gupta’s *A Sin of Colour* (1999).¹⁷ In South Africa and the USA, this kind of marriage was, of course, criminalized as an infringement of the miscegenation laws (see, for instance, André Brink’s *Looking on Darkness*, 1974; Lewis Nkosi’s *Mating Birds*, 1986; or Alice Walker’s *Meridian*, 1976).¹⁸ Rose in Sahgal’s novel moreover discovers that she is a second wife to her Ram, sees him have an affair with an upper-class British woman, and is eventually killed as a superfluous widow by her stepson Dev. Here the white protagonist is made to taste all the miseries of native women. To present sexual unions like these as a matter of course naturally makes a strong claim for the native’s access to power over her/his former oppressors. The inversion of the power structure represents a symbolic retaliation against the colonizers and their pity and contempt for the supposedly inferior native.

Roles taken by characters in the plot are also important not only in relation to the colonial power structure but also to the gender frames current in colonial and postcolonial contexts. Thus women who go out to work to feed the family are inverting indigenous gender roles, but they may be doing this not to acquire Western liberty but to safeguard the honour of the family, e.g. in order to spare the Sikh husband the humiliation of abandoning his turban, as in Shauna Singh Baldwin’s ‘Montreal 1962’ (in *English Lessons*, 1996). Since servants all used to be natives, to depict a rich indigenous planter with many servants under him is an illustration of achieved independence (see Ghosh’s *The Glass Palace*, 2000).¹⁹ The use of such reversed roles, however, simply re-evaluates the poles of master and servant or rich and poor without trying to deconstruct the power structure underlying the opposition. Hence a novel like Vikram Seth’s *A Suitable Boy* (1993), in which the West figures only marginally

and in which the whole panoply of characters belongs to an indigenous cast, makes a much stronger statement of cultural independence.²⁰

Seth's *An Equal Music* (1999), set in New York, Vienna and Venice, achieves an even more forceful status of equality with the West.²¹ Rather than catering to the Western fascination with oriental settings, it transports its romance into the West, refusing to remind the reader of the author's ethnic origins. Although for some people such a strategy may appear problematic because they wish to see national identity inscribed in literature, this gesture can also be regarded as the ultimate liberation from Western stereotyping. After all, any British or French author has always been free to choose as his/her setting a town in Italy or Poland, and to do so without necessarily importing British or French protagonists into that setting, without in fact discussing the possibly nationalist tensions between his/her home country and the novel's location 'abroad'. By eschewing the 'international theme' (a term familiar from Henry James studies), the inevitable frictions between self and other can be avoided and the common humanity of people all over the world is underlined. Naturally, such a strategy also reaches beyond the limits of the postcolonial; in successfully erasing the after-effects of colonial oppression, it positions such texts outside the continuing repercussions of colonial exploitation and cultural discrimination.

Framing devices and narratorial roles

Frame narratives played an important role in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries in British literature in the process of the novel's emergence as a genre. Frames provided pseudo-authentic asseverations of the truth of the story, claiming veracity for fictional tales and playfully inscribing markers of an early realism on the generic moulds of the fantastic travelogue, the romance and the personal diary. Later, frames developed more sophisticated functions such as the parodic undermining of inset tales (Fielding's *Shamela*), or the Romantic distancing of the uncanny (for instance, in Charles Maturin's *Melmoth the Wanderer* or Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*).²²

Colonial writing deploys framing quite extensively, which may partly be linked to the tradition of the travelogue. In Sir Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516), Hythlodæus's account of the customs of the island of Utopia are put into perspective by their placing inside a narrative of a dinner conversation, in which Utopian mores are criticized and their validity is questioned. This mediated presentation of Utopian society allows the author to present ideas which might have exposed him to censorship had he articulated them in his

own name; they also therefore provide for an implicit dissociation from the Utopian world. Colonial diaries, travelogues and novels frequently insert material told to the traveller by supposedly more competent informants. Thus, just as the British required brahminical instruction by pundits on the laws and customs of the land in order to be able to rule it, the traveller had to rely on his sources, provided by British residents abroad or natives able to communicate in English. Accounts of the East are therefore accounts at second remove, whose reliability may be doubtful. Moreover, the traveller's own views, prejudices and beliefs interfere with a neutral depiction of native customs since they tend to measure the experience in relation to British morality and religion. These narrators are moreover fallible because they see what they want to see, focusing precisely on those aspects of the foreign culture about which they were instructed before going there. As Franz K. Stanzel demonstrates, travellers through the Alps like David Hume expected to see ugly peasants with goitres, but when they arrived in northern Italy (where the lack of iodine was equally prevalent and therefore goitres just as frequent) tended to perceive only handsome Italians, blending out the goitrous population that must have been visible.²³ In the same manner, travellers predisposed to see cruel or lazy natives perceived natives to be lazy and cruel, failing to observe other types of behaviour that might have modified or even disproved their vision.

The traveller is therefore a typically fallible narrator and often a frame narrator of inserted reports and explanations. When we get to Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, the framing device – as in Henry James's 'The Turn of the Screw' – is a highly sophisticated literary strategy that puts Marlow's account of finding Kurtz (who is already framed by the stories Marlow hears about Kurtz during his trip into the centre of Africa) into two ideological frameworks – that of the love romance which the fiancée counts on (and gets because Marlow is swayed by compassion); and that of the colonial romance, the fiction that colonial exploitation brings civilization to the benighted indigenous population. However, the frame story set on a boat on the Thames puts England in a totally different perspective; from the perspective of the conquering Romans, making their way up the Thames, as Marlow made his way up the Congo River, England appears as the dark continent of barbarity and danger. This postcolonial inversion of colonizer and colonized – like the many references to colonial cruelty and exploitation inside the story – radically undermines the legitimacy of the colonial enterprise. The critique of empire in the story is, however, qualified by the pundit-like presentation of Marlow by the first-person narrator of the frame. To him Marlow appears as a

Buddha, an idol. One could read this as a hint that Marlow has become hybridized by his colonial experience – just like Kurtz, only in a different way. A similar case of framing and unreliability occurs in many of Kipling's short stories. Both 'Outside the Pale' and 'Miss Youghal's *Sais*', for instance, have an unreliable frame narrator who presents the respective adventures of Trejago and Strickland from a critical perspective. This narrator figure is a stickler for colonial etiquette and expresses a very hostile view of Trejago's and Strickland's – as he believes – excessive interest in native culture.

In the modernist colonial novel, framing is replaced by the juxtaposition of different perspectives (as in *A Passage to India*), with much the same effect of discrediting the Western colonial worldview. In twentieth-century postcolonial literature, frames are also common narrative strategies, and they often combine with the use of unreliable narrators or fallible peripheral first-person narrators. Coetzee's presentation of Friday's story in *Foe* (1986) is a prominent instance of this technique; the dumb native has his story told from several different viewpoints but resists narrative appropriation, thereby countering the framing through the resistance of inertia.²⁴ Framing is also used for the purpose of *mise en abyme*: the inset tale ironically reflects the surrounding frame story. Thus, in Sahgal's *Rich Like Us*, the inserted document of Sonali's grandfather arriving too late at his mother's forced suttee ceremony introduces the theme of suttee to the novel and anticipates Mona's attempted suicide by immolation and Rose's later assassination (which is comparable to a kind of dowry murder). Postcolonial literature is particularly rich not only in frame narratives that include stories, but also in the story-within-the-story tradition that mirrors the wider concerns of the narrative in its inset. In Sahgal's novel, it could be argued, the inset of the suttee scene emblematically highlights the patriarchal setup of Indian society which will floor Sonali and Rose and it even predicts Dev's treachery in relation to Rose in the figure of the uncle who is responsible for the suttee, in violation of the husband's strictures against it. Likewise, in Salman Rushdie's *Shame* (1983), when doctor Omar Khayyám in that memorable scene examines his patient, and future wife, Sufiya Zinobia, the purity of the white sheet and the violence hidden underneath it point to a reading of Pakistan as figured in the sheet with its hole.²⁵

With the use of the unreliable narrator we have already broached the subject of narrators in postcolonial fiction. Generally speaking, postcolonial texts not only choose their heroes from the group of the (former) colonized, they also award the (post)colonial subject the role of the narrator. The native cannot only *speak*, or be an agent, he/she can also *write* – an activity that traditionally confers cultural and political authority (see Lévi-Strauss's fable in *Tristes*

Tropiques). The assumption of an authoritative narratorial role is foregrounded most clearly in first-person narrative and in omniscient ‘authorial’ fiction.²⁶ Both strategies serve to write back to the empire with a vengeance, either in the authentic utterance of the colonized who has found his voice and is now telling the story in his own words and from his own point of view; or in the style of a trustworthy narrator fully in control of the storyworld. An example of the first mode is Mark Mathabane’s *Kaffir Boy* (1986),²⁷ which transfers the *Bildungsroman* to a colonial context.²⁸ The use of omniscient narrative, with a particular emphasis on myth, is also widespread. Ben Okri’s fiction provides many instances of this mode.

Postcolonial novels also use a variety of postmodernist experimental techniques. Besides the extensive play with metafictional strategies in Rushdie or Tharoor, such techniques include the innovative deployment of multiperspectivism, montage and unusual pronominal choices. For instance, in Nuruddin Farah’s *Maps* (1986) several perspectives are juxtaposed, one of which appears in the shape of second-person fiction.²⁹ Montage plays an important role in Mda’s *The Heart of Redness*, in Ayi Kwei Armah’s *Two Thousand Seasons* (1973) or in Sahgal’s *Rich Like Us*. In Mda’s novel, the juxtaposing of mythical events of the past with the contemporary plot of the novel serves to outline the continuities in traditional belief and cultural practice, while at the same time formally highlighting the threat of their elimination as a consequence of modernization. In Armah’s *Two Thousand Seasons*, the disjunctive scenes from tribal history serve as a metaphor for the people’s loss of a lived continuity of collective being in the world and echo the rifts, dispossessions and uprooting experienced by the community.

Collective narrative

One of the most interesting narrative choices in postcolonial writing is that of using the first-person plural pronoun *we* as the main narrative mode. We-narrative occurs fairly extensively in everyday conversation when couples, siblings, schoolmates, soldiers or members of teams tell about experiences they shared – the vacation in Yosemite when they encountered a bear; the story how they tricked Aunt Judy into giving them ice cream; and so on. In many traditional societies, we-narratives are moreover the reflection of communal values and collective memory, which is tantamount to written history in the West. Although fictional we-narratives are also on the rise in mainstream British and American literature, scholars specializing on this innovative technique in postmodernist fiction have noted that there is a high incidence of we-narratives in

(post)colonial literature.³⁰ To name only a few texts: Joseph Conrad, *The Nigger of the Narcissus* (1897); Richard Wright, *Twelve Million Black Voices* (1941); Padma Perera, 'The Schoolmaster' (1962); Mauro Senesi, 'The Giraffe' (1963); Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, *A Grain of Wheat* (1967); Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* (1970); Ayi Kwei Armah, *Two Thousand Seasons* (1973); Édouard Glissant, *Malemort* (1975), *La Case du commandeur* (1981) and *Mahagony* (1987); Louise Erdrich, *Tracks* (1988); Zakes Mda, *Ways of Dying* (1995).

These examples suggest that postcolonial writing here taps indigenous generic and narrative sources and with them hybridizes the Western genre of the novel.³¹ Rather than merely telling the story of individual achievement or failure, we-narratives broaden out to embrace in their narrative grasp the story of a community. They thereby implicitly continue memory work and indigenous history writing in the fiction mode. Such stories therefore have a clear postcolonial thrust since they re-establish the culture's indigenous roots both formally and thematically against the invasion of colonial expropriation. Similarly to the South Asian preference for fabulation – a predilection inherited from the Indian tradition of storytelling – the use of we-narrative and the adoption of frame narratives on the model of the *Pañcatantra* all betoken a revival of indigenous modes in a new guise. Analogous remarks could be made about Bollywood movies and their intertextual referencing of the Indian epics.

A prominent example of we-narrative is Raja Rao's pseudo-oral narrative *Kanthapura* (1938), which depicts the Indian fight for independence from the standpoint of a small village in the Western Ghats on the Malabar Coast and in the words of an old Brahmin woman, Achakka. Although the novel seems to be a first-person narrative,³² Achakka's story is exclusively about 'us', the village community, and about how the introduction of Gandhian ideals by 'Corner-house Moorthy' gradually changed the spirit of the inhabitants. The narrative is notable also because it gives the women a major role in the independence movement down to the ending when they, too, suffer from the lathies of the policemen. Criticism of the novel has pointed out that Rao's text echoes local purana traditions. Its anti-colonial impact comes from the emotional appeal of Achakka's voice and from her sincerity. Just like Achakka, we as readers are slowly interpellated to assent to Moorthy and to get involved in the struggle:

The next morning Moorthy comes to us and says, 'Aunt, what do you think of having the Rama festival, the Krishna festival, the Ganesh festival? We shall have a month's bhajan every time and we shall keep the party going.'

'Of course, my son,' say we, 'and we shall always manage each to give a banana libation if nothing else.'

‘But,’ says he, ‘to have everything performed regularly we need some money, aunt.’

‘Money!’

It made us think twice before we answered, ‘And how much money would you need, my son? But, if it’s camphor, I’ll give it. If it’s coconut, I’ll give it. If it’s sugar candy . . . ’³³

Note how the *we* alternates with the singular ‘aunt’ as Moorthy addresses one of the women. The plurality of agents hidden under the communal *we* is often outlined in the listings of what some people did, thus creating faces for the anonymity of the crowd:

So, he goes, Moorthy, from house to house, from householder to householder, and – what do you think? – he gathers a hundred and forty-seven rupees. Everybody says, ‘Take it, my son.’ And Rangamma gives him a ten-rupee note and says, ‘Last harvest, when Ramayya’s Chennayya had paid back his mortgage loan, I asked, “What shall I do with this money?” and I sent a hundred rupees to a brahmin orphanage in Karwar. Well, money spent there or here, it is all the same to me.’ And then Agent Nanjundia pays two rupees, his son the teacher pays one, and his sister’s husband pays two, three, or four, I don’t quite remember, and so goes Moorthy gathering money in his ascetic’s bowl. And what a grand festival we had the following *Ganesh-jayanthi*.³⁴

The colloquial tone and simple, earth-bound way of thinking that Achakka’s narrative displays also serve as an index of authenticity far in excess of mere ‘local colour’. *Kanthapura* echoes the voice of the people in Achakka’s discourse but also in racy dialogues, for instance when Moorthy goes to see Rangè Gowda and tells him about a dispute with Bhatta about Gandhi:

‘Yes, learned Moorthappa . . . But I said to him, the Mahatma is a holy man, and I was not with the jackals but with the deer. At which Bhatta grew so furious that he cried out that this holy man was a tiger in a deer’s skin, and said this about pollution and that about corruption, and I said to him, “So it may be, but the Red-man’s Government is no swan in a Himalayan lake.” . . . ’³⁵

Not only is the colloquial image of the swan for innocence quite funny in reference to the British government; the whole narrative is infused with the customs of address and polite interaction that rule the village society. From a postcolonial perspective, the narrative therefore achieves a kind of nobilitation of indigenous ways of life in contrast to westernized Indians and the colonial rulers, who moreover figure only at second remove in the book.

Narratologically, the cited episode is also striking because Achakka is of course not present at this interview between Gowda and Moorthy and, as a

first-person narrator, cannot conceivably know anything about it or only through Moorthy's report. The fact that it is the villagers' communal story that is being told tends to cover up such inconsistencies. From the perspective of we-narration, one could argue that the whole village is speaking through Achakka as their representative; the text can move from one villager to the other, focusing on separate elements within the group. This is a typical strategy in we-narration but also more generally in representations of collectivity. Alan Palmer, for instance, has demonstrated at length that in George Eliot's *Middlemarch* the 'Middlemarch mind' consists of several groups and individuals, all of whom can be named as representatives of the town but can also stand for important subsections of the community.³⁶ In Armah's *Two Thousand Seasons*, another *we*-narrative, the *we* refers to the whole tribe, to those who are deceived by their rulers, to a group of men and women that are sold into slavery, and to a definitely named and therefore individualized collectivity: 'Juma . . . , Kimathi, Soyinka, Dedan, Umeme, Chi, Mpenzi, Inse . . . Akole, Kakra, Nsa, everyone of us in turn'.³⁷

Kanthapura is especially adept at evoking the heady atmosphere of struggle and enthusiasm when the villagers clash with the authorities:

And, our hearts tied up in our sari-fringes, we gaze beyond the dead harvest growth, and the crowd still moves forward toward the gaslights, and by the gaslights the coolies still bend their heads and cut the harvest, and a man is there, crying out, swearing away – their maistri. And the nearer the crowd comes to the coolies the louder is the shout, '*Gandhi Mahatma ki jai! Inquilab Zindabad! Inquilab Zindabad!*' And suddenly we see shadows moving in the Skeffington Coffee Estate, shadows moving like buffaloes on a harvest night, and not a voice comes from them, and we say, 'Surely, they are not our men,' and yet we say, 'The Skeffington coolies will not let us down.' And then, as the pumpkin moon is just rising over the Beda Ghats, there comes a sudden cry from the top of the Bebbur mound, and we jump to our feet and we ask, 'Oh, what can it be, what?' and a flag is seen moving in the hands of a white-clad man, and the police boots are crunching upon the sand, and we say somebody is running toward the barricades – but who?³⁸

This passage illustrates the breathless excitement of the clash and the stages of uncertainty in the crowd, depicting the events from the centre of the action but from the perspective of those lifted up by the waves of the riot and carried beyond their accustomed sedentary and apolitical position into the dangerous arena of the freedom struggle. The passage therefore emblematically sketches the experience of the village women, who will end up uprooted from their native Kanthapura, swept away by the tide of nationalist conflict and the police

action which it provoked. *Kanthapura* deserves its position as a classic of Indian literature since it achieves an idealized rendering of the independence movement as the will of the people in action, as an expression of Indian traditions and customs breaking into the bloom of self-determination and political assertion. It shows how the past of mythic configuration transforms itself into the modernity of Indian independence, creating a condign form for the memories of the struggle that can serve as a modern-day *Mahabharata* or *Ramayana*. Whereas at the beginning, the gods rule supreme, as in the following passage,

... the soft hiss of the Himavathy [river] rises into the air. Sometimes people say to themselves, the Goddess of the river plays through the night with the Goddess of the hill. Kenchamma is the mother of Himavathy. May the goddess bless us!³⁹

By the end of the book it is the Mahatma, and Moorthy to some extent, who have taken their place of worship in the minds of the women. This transition from religion to politics was made possible in the story of the novel by the rhetorical and strategic manipulation of the village folk by Moorthy and other Gandhians. They invoked the people's deepest religious beliefs and memories in order to lead them towards a sanctified involvement in the nation's bid for independence. This common goal is very suitably envisioned as a collective effort narrated in the collective mode of colloquial we-narration.

Speech and thought – dialogue and focalization

A third extremely important area of postcolonial rewriting emerges from the handling of dialogue and the extent and positioning of representations of characters' consciousness in fiction. In the colonial novel, the natives used to be represented either as submissive receivers of their masters' orders or as stupid and inept babblers. One may want to recall that the ancient Greek word *barbarian* means 'babbler' in reference to those that were unable to talk 'properly' in Greek. Examples of the linguistic lampooning of the native by means of dialogue are omnipresent in colonial literature from Mark Twain's depiction of African American discourse in *Huckleberry Finn* (1884) to George Orwell's infamous *Burmese Days* (1934) and Joyce Cary's *Mister Johnson* (1939).

The obvious counterstrategy is to present the former colonial subject as capable of standard speech, sometimes even of more distinguished expression than the native Briton. One could, for instance, argue that a narrator persona of the stamp of Saleem in Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* symbolizes the ultimate rejection of the former colonial model since he represents an indigenous

subject capable of stunning linguistic fireworks. (Indeed, the interpretation of South Asian fiction as the empire writing back with a vengeance turns precisely on the consummate skill and stylistic mastery of authors like V.S. Naipaul, Salman Rushdie or Sunetra Gupta, whose proficiency in English exceeds that of many of their native British or American writer colleagues.⁴⁰)

A particular aspect worth noting here is the use of local colour expressions such as *dhoti* and *jalebis* or *pankawalla* in South Asian texts, or of the equivalent native words in African, Caribbean or other postcolonial texts. In travelogues and documentary fiction such terms helped to endorse the fiction's authenticity and realism. By underlining the strangeness and Orientalist exoticism of the other culture, however, they tended to reinforce the difference between the Western reader and the foreign setting and customs. Similar strategies can be observed in British rural literature (set in Scotland, Ireland or Wales), where the local population is extensively portrayed as speaking broad dialect. This tends to imply a lack of education and the superiority of the English traveller, hinting at the colonial history of conflict that subsisted in these parts. Later romantic re-evaluations of local dialect only invert the hierarchy in a proto-postcolonial move. It should be pointed out that the strategy of using local colour terms was for a long time meant to present a positive picture of foreign parts, but that it inevitably underwrote a decisive polarity between 'us' and 'them', a Manichaean dichotomy⁴¹ which all too easily tended to slide into the disparagement of the native other.

More recent postcolonial fiction has tended to react to the problem of non-English lexical items in one of five ways. Some novels, mostly geared towards a Western audience, abide by the traditional format and even add a vocabulary list at the end of the volume. They remain unabashedly Orientalist in this particular respect, though the texts themselves may of course counter colonial clichés in a variety of other ways. (Also, it is not always clear whether the list was provided by the author or the editor.) Secondly, some texts use a large variety of indigenous expressions, even whole sentences in the native tongue, without providing contexts of interpretation for the Western reader. Here the Western audience is thrown into the cold water and has to learn to swim. Since the intended native audience is familiar with the specific language spoken in the country chosen for the setting, this can become a postcolonial strategy of sorts: the Western reader almost feels he/she is 'trespassing' on the territory of a foreign literature. The third strategy is, of course, to write in Gikuyu or Hindi or Gaelic Irish, a decision that has maximum political impact but brings with it the disadvantage of international marginalization. (This problem is discussed at greater length elsewhere in the present volume.) The fourth option, no

indigenous vocabulary, takes us back to the ambivalence of mimicry observed already in Seth's *An Equal Music* – is this a supreme assertion of equality or a politically incorrect erasure of one's native origins? A fifth way of dealing with the problem of style is to use non-standard English for the narrator's language. This is the strategy utilized by Ken Saro-Wiwa in *Soza Boy: A Novel in Rotten English* (1985)⁴² or, intermittently, by Michelle Cliff in *No Telephone to Heaven* (1987): 'Early death for so many. But no relief. Many of them is sufferah. Many of them live in Passion. Suffering nuh mus' be meant for we.'⁴³ By using non-standard English for the narrator's language, a strong statement is made about confident national assurance in one's own native use of the colonizer's language as an innovative and independent resource.

Besides the representation of speech in the dialogue and in the narrator's language, access to characters' minds or the representation of consciousness is another important issue. In the colonial novel, the colonial subjects sometimes spoke, though rarely; but they never articulated their own views and beliefs. To focus on the mind of the former colonized is therefore a political decision which asserts that one wants to foreground the native point of view. Secondly, expansive depictions of the consciousness of the colonial subject invert the basic structure of the modernist colonial novel, in which the focalizer was a Western character whose impressions of foreign parts determined the argument of the text. Choosing the untouchable Bakha as a focalizer for *Untouchable* was therefore a quite radical move on Anand's part. The strategy is, again, one of inverting the traditional colonial paradigm. A more recent development can be observed in novels like Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* (2000), in which both white and Asian Britons figure prominently in terms of plot, action roles and the representation of their thoughts. Full equality of attention is therefore given to all ethnic groups.

Temporality and spatiality in postcolonial fiction

Time plays an important role in postcolonial fiction. Experiments with temporality are less focused on order or anachronies – the rearrangement of the order of events in the discourse – for instance, by starting at or near the end point of the story and then telling the developments that led to this conclusion by means of flashbacks (as does Michael Ondaatje in *The English Patient*, 1992).⁴⁴ Instead, postcolonial fiction frequently experiments with duration by contrasting or more often expanding narrated time to mythic proportions. This can be observed in detail in Ayi Kwei Armah's *Two Thousand Seasons*, a novel that begins in the immemorial past and only for a third of the book narrates a

sequence of actions within a specific realistic time frame. The two thousand seasons are the time of the story, of an African people who are oppressed first by the Arabs and then by the white colonizers who enslave them. This epic of Africa leaves the actual passing of time undetermined except by counts in seasons, therefore cycles of the people's temporal experience. There is a cyclical aspect to the tale since twice treachery occurs. Whereas only at one point is the group named and seems to reduce to human life time, the medicine man Isanusi seems to live longer than is humanly possible since he (or his successor?) remains hidden until the escaped slaves and rebels begin their war against the colonial regime. The novel also has no specific endpoint, only a utopian horizon:

Against this what a vision of creation yet unknown, higher, much more profound than all erstwhile creation! What a hearing of the confluence of all the waters of life flowing to overwhelm the ashen desert's blight! What an utterance of the coming together of all the people of our way, the coming together of all people of the way.⁴⁵

Armah's strategy echoes that of Chinua Achebe in *Things Fall Apart* (1958), in which the representation of time is also mythic and hazy until the colonizers appear and then becomes more definite.⁴⁶ This combines, as James Snead has so insightfully demonstrated, with a sophisticated balancing of focalization through the Africans' minds and the whites' perspective.⁴⁷ In Armah's *Two Thousand Seasons*, for instance, one moves from sentences like 'A hundred seasons we spent in this slow flowing. In our minds the terrors of the immediate past grew not so pressingly terrible'⁴⁸ to much more definite sequences such as: 'The land the pathfinders had seen, our destination, was real . . . It was a silent journey. No one had anything to say. There was not one left among us that did not have some bodily infirmity to nurse.'⁴⁹ Part of the oddity of these alternations results from the fact that 'we' is usually taken to include a human subject, an 'I', who is of course a specific person in a specific place and cannot live in the same location for one hundred seasons. The use of summary (contracting one hundred years into one sentence) followed by scene is a common narrative strategy in all kinds of fiction, but it is normally applied to concrete actants within a concrete temporal and spatial frame. No doubt its unfamiliar deployment in some postcolonial fiction constitutes a narratological oddity. Interestingly, this strategy of combining, or alternating between, unspecific temporal patches and chronologically quite distinct sequences of events is one which has so far escaped narratological analysis; there does not exist a term or category for such (in)definiteness.

Similar strategies can be observed in the handling of space where village life is being depicted, as in Thomas Mofolo's *Chaka* (1910 in Sotho, 1925 in English) or in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. Such strategies are meant to evoke indigenous perceptions of time and space. They achieve their special effect by defamiliarizing Western readers' conceptualizations of spatiotemporality. Thus a European would see time as divisible and definitely nameable by the clock, as uniformly chronologically sequent; Westerners would also regard space as measurable in miles and as diagrammatically representable in relation to grids of maps and meridians on the globe. In *Two Thousand Seasons* the removal of the people through the bog to their new territory is described as a journey in which pathfinders are central to the journeying, in which man and nature are slowly acclimatizing one to the other. Landmarks like caves and big trees function as signifiers of spatial movement, whereas roads and houses or signposts are signally missing from the story. Rather than representing the native experience of moving in space as deficient because it lacks a reference to Western technology, narratives like *Two Thousand Seasons* actually celebrate nostalgia for the natural way of human being in the world in harmony and co-operation with nature and independent from abstract categories and artificial tools. Through memory and bodily experience orientation in space and time becomes absorbed in culture and tradition and constitutes a philosophy of the concrete.

Clichés and stereotypes: from Orientalism to Occidentalism

Colonial texts teem with epithets and clichéd representations of the native and also of the country. Colonized territories are often described as women to be conquered and overpowered.⁵⁰ Such a metaphor not only converts the colonial subject into a woman, hence the weak sex, it also operates with the rhetorical figure of seduction of the conqueror by the carnal attractions of 'the East', the Orient. This metaphor tends to repress the violence of rape and displaces its agency onto the amatory discourse of sexual allure, aroused desire and a willingness to welcome the conqueror into one's arms. Erotic associations abound in colonial texts, both in reference to the exotic countryside (a cliché still active in present-day tourist brochures of Hawaii or Thailand) and to the beauty and fatal attractiveness of the women. The Orient is depicted either as a kind of paradise of lush vegetation or as an inhospitable desert. Analogously, the women are presented as houris in whose bosom the colonizer will experience the ultimate jouissance or as sirens whose dangerous charms lure the naïve traveller to his

destruction. The harem combines these two visions in one site, foregrounding erotic excess and female duplicity. For the male colonial subject, this ambivalence of manifest and latent Orientalism⁵¹ results in the three familiar stereotypes of the rich, heroic and wise native warrior king, the despotic, cruel and cunning monster of the native ruler, or the lazy, sly servant or subordinate. It is important that the colonizer is always figured as male, thus inevitably resulting in a feminization of the colonized or, if male, their demonization.

The main question in postcolonial studies regarding such stereotypes has been their prevalence in the postcolonial South Asian novel which for some critics smacks of the politically incorrect. As Graham Huggan⁵² and others have argued, some English-language fiction markets itself as a latter-day Orientalist fantasy and therefore revives or reinforces colonial attitudes regarding India and its inhabitants. Although this criticism is apt, one should nevertheless acknowledge that the situation is much more complex. Some authors openly use these stereotypes in order to criticize characters employing them. They also use Occidental clichés for the same purpose. For instance, in Vikram Seth's *A Suitable Boy* (1993), one of the most despicable characters is Arun, who insists on everything British being superior to India, but then turns out never to have been to London at all. In other novels, the clichés of India become a substitute for memories fast fading towards oblivion, as in the following passage from *Bye-Bye Blackbird* (1968) by Anita Desai. Dev enthuses about the restaurant's simulacrum of British India and Sarah sees the design as an enhancement of the real thing. Yet this replica is already doubly hybridized: what it imitates in an overly perfect manner was already the British misconception and appropriation of Indian culture in the British club, later imitated in native Indians' 'district clubs and gymkhanas'.⁵³ The restaurant is therefore a copy of a copy of a fake:

'Here [at Veeraswamy's] you have the real thing – the very essence of the Raj, of the role of the *sahib log* – in its fullest bloom.' ... Here were the tiger skins and the gold leaf elephants, the chandeliers and rainbow-coloured Jaipur furniture, the crimson carpets and the starched turbans of another age, another world – all a bit outsize, more brilliant than they had been in real life, in India, for here there was no clammy tropical heat, no insidious dust, no insecurity, no shadow of history to shake or darken or wilt them. Here was only that essence, that rose bloom, transported to a climate that touched more gently on human dreams; here it could flower and shed its perfume in the safety of mirror-lined, carpet laid hallucination.⁵⁴

Another Orientalist feature is that of the sublime – grand nature but also the incomprehensible, the inaccessibly Other. Traditionally, the sublime featured

in mountainscapes, seascapes, deserts, waterfalls and royal or imperial power. Such grandeur was particularly prominent in depictions of colonial territory whose grand nature awed the colonizer and cowed him into admiration. Yet the colonial pose is transcended in conquest where all fear of the other can be neutralized. *Bye-Bye Blackbird* uses the sublime as a marker of nostalgia, presenting India's immensities as overwhelming in contrast with drab, small-scale England. Adit enthuses about India's 'wild, wide grandeur, its supreme grandeur, its loneliness and black, glittering enchantment'.⁵⁵ He and his wife nostalgically long for their native country, 'feeling Bengal, feeling India sweep into their room like a flooded river, drowning all that had been English in it, all that had been theirs, friendly and private and comfortable, drowning it all and replacing it with the emptiness and sorrow, the despair and rage, the flat grey melancholy and the black glamour of India'.⁵⁶

What is particularly controversial, though, are negative stereotypes about India. Though Dev and Adit hate their London exile, they realize that India is a place of widescale destitution among the lower social classes. And yet it is home, whereas England cannot be home as long as people hate you:

There are days in which the life of an alien appears enthrallingly rich and beautiful to him, and that of a homebody too dull, too stale to return to ever. Then he hears a word in the tube or notices an expression on an English face that overturns his latest decision and, drawing himself together, he feels he can never bear to be the unwanted immigrant but must return to his own land, however abject or dull, where he has, at least, a place in the sun, security, status and freedom.⁵⁷

An emphasis on the poverty and backwardness of India reinscribes Orientalist stereotypes of inferiority on the home country and therefore is often treated as cultural treason. Yet much postcolonial literature fails completely to address the issue of the disparity between rich and poor, locating its protagonists in the comfortable upper-middle classes; it is rarely concerned with the poor and the starving. Even more disconcertingly, as Miriam Nandi has shown, the subaltern becomes a representative of the incomprehensible other, much in the same way as the native had appeared to the Western colonizer.⁵⁸

These clichés can also be inverted and reprojected on the West. Stereotypes about the West have recently been discussed under the heading of Occidentalism. (See the relevant chapter in this volume.) Two types of constellations figure in this context. From a non-Western perspective, the West can acquire a set of stereotypes that are peculiar to industrial nations, to Europe or North America. Such stereotypes – just like former Orientalist clichés – are based on the West's inferiority from the perspective of the former

colonial subject. They include, for instance, redness of skin in the sun (whites are unable to endure long exposure to tropical sunlight); sexual promiscuity; overeating; wastefulness; insensitivity to religious traditions; atheism; ruthless egotism; a disregard for family and community; and an immoral belief in money as the supreme value. This is the kind of Occidentalism rampant in anti-American discourse. In analogy with Said, one might call this *manifest* Occidentalism. On the other hand, Occidentalism may consist in an inversion of exotic Orientalism, in a conversion of the West into a theme park for tourists; such clichés turn into nostalgic emblems of remembered visits to the West. One might call this type of Occidentalism *latent* Occidentalism since it is determined by the secret desires for Western settings or objects. As an example of latent Occidentalism let us look at the description of Oxford in Sunetra Gupta's *The Glassblower's Breath*, where Avishek enthuses about British architecture as a model for his bakery:

Turning for a last farewell glance, he had been hit by the pastry texture of the snow-dusted spires, and this gentle vision had resurrected his desire to craft in cake flesh the spires of Oxford, his first dream, his last dream, his one enduring fantasy, Balliol in bakemeat, a gingerbread Christchurch.⁵⁹

Note the erotic subtext of this passage, in which Oxford has become a romance, a fetish, for Avishek. Whereas Orientalist clichés often focus on sexual allure, as we have seen, latent Occidentalism seems to collocate with ideas of Western freedom, intellectual enquiry or with the picturesque (small-scale and charming in contrast with Indian outsize realities). In retrospect, Dev's and Sarah's views about Veeraswamy's in *Bye-Bye Blackbird* begin to emerge as a curious Occidental Orientalism for emigrants suffering from homesickness. The restaurant depicts a replica of native Indian nostalgia for the Raj, which is Occidental in spirit (a secret desire for the orderliness of the British Empire?), but Sarah fails to note that the referent is not the real India but the copy of British homemaking in the East, which symbolizes British exoticist fantasy at play.

The Wordsworthian picturesque also flourishes as an Occidental cliché in visualizations of the English landscape, for instance in Nirad C. Chaudhuri's *A Passage to England*.⁶⁰ In analogy with Wordsworth's leech gatherer, the depiction of poverty in the following passage is converted into a lesson on aesthetic appreciation: 'There were also a number of gipsy families resting by the way-side, the men and women sitting by the caravan, the children tumbling close by, and the horse grazing at a little distance, looking the most composed of the group.'⁶¹ Such reinterpretation is a major rhetorical feat; after all, the passage

refers to a group of gipsies huddling on the roadside in the pouring rain. The passage seems more poignant than simple inversions of colonial aggression. When Dev declares that he wants ‘to conquer England as they once conquered India’⁶² and fantasizes about South Asians taking over London economically,⁶³ this exuberant gesture of protest and indigenous valour is less powerful than Chaudhuri’s arrogant adoption of a paternalistic tourist attitude towards the West. Dev’s vision of ‘the Sikhs with their turbans and swords and the Sindhis with their gold bars and bangles’ building garrisons along the English coast at ‘Brighton and Bristol and Bath’ and of an army of ‘our Gurkhas and our Rajputs’ importing camels and ‘elephants of Rajasthan’ to British shores⁶⁴ is a fantasy of power. It puts the Indian colonizer into a position of splendour and domination, yet it still dares not take the additional step of degrading the English native to the inferiority of a colonized subject. Chaudhuri’s much more pro-British attitude, by contrast, achieves an echo of such denigration, though it directs it against the gipsies. The depicted situation slyly invokes Gulliver’s treatment of the Yahoos – a repressed recognition of similarity (within the colonial framework) overcompensated for by an excess of disgust for the outsider. This is a typical strategy of the former victim of discrimination – he or she desires to be like the master, like the privileged subject, and inevitably starts to look down on those still in the position of the former self. By then going on to aestheticize such otherness, i.e. the abject,⁶⁵ the postcolonial observer bolsters his or her own feelings of superiority; he or she can now afford to aestheticize, that is, neutralize the scene.

Intertextuality, myth and the supernatural

Whereas (historiographical) metafiction, as a postmodernist technique, has obvious affinities with cosmopolitan postcolonialism, intertextuality – another typical element in postmodernist texts – by contrast allows both postcolonial and ‘Western’ readings. Thus the typical intertextual games in John Barth or Raymond Federman, Thomas Pynchon or Richard Powers do not have any (post)colonial significance; indeed, they seem to be blissfully unaware of colonialism, exploitation of the racial other, or anti-/postcolonial writing back to the metropolitan centre. This is arguably true even of the intertextual strategies of Pynchon’s *Gravity’s Rainbow*, which all allude to American and European literary models. The book as a whole, however, has a clear anti-colonial message in its undermining of fascist masculinities, its treatment of the colonial Herero massacres in Dutch West Africa and its general sympathy for the racial, sexual and social underdog. Intertextuality becomes a powerful

anti- or postcolonial strategy where the texts which are alluded to and resonate within the work are indigenous literary monuments, often from the oral tradition of myth. Thus it could be argued that the Irish Renaissance and its echoes in the work of, say, James Joyce convey a postcolonial nationalist framework that balances or undermines more British associations in the text. (It should be noted, however, that Joyce also ironizes the Irish struggle for independence.)⁶⁶ Moreover, the Gaelic Revival's preference for Greek precedents and even Homeric ancestry for the arts (see, for instance, Buck Mulligan's citing of Homer in the first chapter of *Ulysses*) could be interpreted as an attempt to historically circumvent the positing of British colonial influence as the origin of civilization in Ireland. Such a postcolonial move demolishes the imperial denigration of Irish culture as barbarism mitigated only with the advent of English civilization.⁶⁷

For South Asian and African literatures such an intertextual reliance on myth and indigenous epic is all-pervasive. Narratologically, this is interesting since the reality of myths and the supernatural is asserted, often in uneasy combination with realism. The point, however, is precisely that this is a different and more complex reality than that of the Western world. To provide a few examples: Zakes Mda's *The Heart of Redness* and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *Devil on the Cross* both present native traditions as a potent counterpoint to Western (neo-colonial) influences. These ancient traditions are not always benevolent (in fact, they are responsible for the feud between Bhonco and Zim), but they provide a mental framework for the characters. Political developments which negate these indigenous beliefs are shown to have no legitimacy and to violate the people's traditional way of life. In Ben Okri's *The Famished Road* (1991), on the other hand, the reader is taken into a land of fantasy and myth which revolves around an *abiku* child, Azaro, who is a reincarnated spirit.⁶⁸ Here, the political arena of the Party of the Rich and the Party of the Poor is displaced by the spiritual reality of Azaro, and the real political events, which are allegorically represented in this constellation, become backgrounded. What is real is the mythic world of the novel, and this world repudiates the naturalistic neo-colonial life of Nigerian society in the late twentieth century.

South Asian literature, particularly texts with a Hindu background, is also heavily invested with intertextual references to the myths of the people. As in Ireland, where the Gaelic tradition could proudly look back on Old Irish epics, in India the epic tradition of the *Mahabharata*, the *Ramayana* and the *Puranas*, local folk traditions and the *Pañcatantra* play a huge role in the intertextual allusions of many authors.⁶⁹ Similarly, Muslim authors have also accessed the Qur'an, the ghazal and the poetry of Rumi as sources of native, non-Western

intertextual references. Besides the literary tradition, Indian history moreover plays an important role in hybridizing English-language texts, particularly when it refers to the period of splendid Mughal rule, or emperors like Ashoka, or refers to the Gupta or Maurya dynasties. By parallelizing the telling of the *Mahabharata* with the Indian independence movement and recent Indian history, Shashi Tharoor in *The Great Indian Novel* (1989) magnifies modern India, giving it epic proportions (a postcolonial move). However, at the same time, this parallel smacks of the mock epic, ridiculing the aspirations of grandeur on the part of the Congress Party and the Nehru family. Such a detractory flavour also adheres to Tharoor's punning use of the internal book titles, which ironically echo many novels of colonial, anti-colonial or postcolonial character. For instance, the second book has the title 'The Duel with the Crown' (a pun on Paul Scott's *The Jewel in the Crown* trilogy), or the ninth book is superscribed 'Him – or, The Far Power-Villain', an echo of M.M. Kaye's *The Far Pavilions* (1978).⁷⁰ Tharoor's and Rushdie's work prominently engage in such expansive intertextual referencing both as an assertion of cultural independence and as a parodic, postmodernist gesture of humorous self-reflexivity.

Besides intertextuality per se, the resorting to myth and the supernatural in general could be argued to signal a postcolonial criticism of Western enlightenment notions of rationality, empiricism and novelist realism. Here, too, the empire writes back by reimposing on the novel as a Western colonial genre its indigenous beliefs and values which had been extirpated by the colonizer. Not only do such myths and the fantastic or supernatural offer a way of asserting the native culture's equality with Western myth (Homeric or otherwise); the espousal of the supernatural moreover implies the existence of a powerful realm of fantasy, if not actual political knuckle, which can help to undermine Western discourses of government, rationality and ethics and their colonizing pretensions. Yet, at the same time, like the exoticism in postcolonial literature so often excoriated in postcolonial criticism, such a use of the supernatural also plays into the hands of former colonial prejudices; 'natives' are stereotypically said to suffer from a lack of rationality, being steeped in superstitions and witchcraft. Postcolonial celebrations of the supernatural and of indigenous myth have been successful in as much as magic realism became a mode of postmodernist writing into which postcolonial authors could insert themselves. The very success of this style is, however, often faulted for not being politically correct since it uncritically perpetuates Orientalist, especially exoticist, clichés. This may be true in the case of Tharoor, but is counterpointed in the very balanced and sophisticated deployment of the supernatural and the

exotic in postcolonial writing. As we have seen in Desai's *Bye-Bye Blackbird*, Orientalist cliché can be invoked in scenarios in which their colonial impact is refracted in successive mirrors of hybridization.

The question of genre

For postcolonial writers the choice of genre is a basic indicator of positioning oneself in relation to 'the West'. The novel and the short story are Western forms of narrative, and the adoption of the novel in India already in the nineteenth century was a clear strategy of mimicry or westernization,⁷¹ part and parcel of the Macaulayan educational policy of creating 'a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals and in intellect'.⁷² Interestingly, the first novels and stories were produced in the native languages, for instance in Bengali (Bankimchandra Chattopadhyaya, whose first novel appeared in 1865) or Marathi (Baba Padamji, 1957).⁷³ Rao, Anand and Narayan can therefore be argued to have continued a tradition of Indian novel writing originally inspired by the British model but already flourishing in the vernacular before they started to re-adopt Western literary models.⁷⁴ In Africa, where native literary traditions were frequently oral, the adoption of the novel as a form of literature is more clearly the consequence of colonial education. However, this simple analysis can be complicated by considering the purposes of writing literary works within a counter-colonial or postcolonial perspective. Thus, the adoption of a Western model and the attempt to excel in that format could be considered as an assertion of one's literary status, a way of proving one's equality with the (former) colonial masters. Whereas, in India, the continuation of an already existing native Indian tradition of novel-writing in English in the twentieth century constitutes an internationalization of a generic format that was also flourishing in the vernacular, the African novel in English could be considered to be more pointedly a move of cultural assertion and 'writing back to the empire', but also as an adoption of Western modes of writing which 'betray' the indigenous tradition.

How problematic this deployment of the novel form may become can be illustrated in the case of Naipaul. Producing internationally acclaimed literature is *both* a strategy to express oneself and one's culture from the margins of empire *and* an attempt to overcome one's inferiority complex vis-à-vis the cultural and literary metropolis. Naipaul's views – no doubt often articulated in impolitic explicitness – reflect the situation of an older generation of writers, whose ability to emerge from a neglected outsider position to literary

prominence was made possible by exposure to the British educational system and who profited from the post-World War II independence movements. Where oppression was more recent or the gratitude for education less pronounced, attitudes such as Naipaul's are bound to jar on nationalist susceptibilities. The deployment of the novel as a literary form is therefore not necessarily a sign of a reactionary colonial mindset nor is it always an act of nationalist writing back. One has to discuss this question in the context of a specific writer or specific literature, and the evidence will often be inconclusive, a case of *both-and* rather than *either-or*.

The short story, too, which is flourishing in South Asian and diasporic literature to an extent surpassing its popularity in the UK or North America, could be argued to be a Western genre invented in the early nineteenth century in America. However, the case is even more complex than with the novel. The fact that Washington Irving's *Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent.* (1819) included much local colour and supernatural events ('Rip van Winkle', 'Sleepy Hollow') suggests that there was a popular substrate for the first American short narratives. It is, therefore, possible to argue that the short story possibly represents a new postcolonial genre which arose in the framework of a beginning literary market in the young American republic. This nationalist (and counter-colonial) element is not foregrounded in Poe's tales, but emerges forcefully in Irving and in Hawthorne with his criticism of Puritan society.⁷⁵ The short story thus provides a model of genre innovation under the pressures of constructing 'indigeneity'.⁷⁶ American literature in the nineteenth century is in fact potentially comparable to postcolonial literature since it constitutes an assertion of nationalist independence against one's former colonial masters.

A particular generic emphasis should be given to the short-story cycle as another, in spirit, possibly postcolonial genre. The short-story cycle, also called the composite novel,⁷⁷ began to emerge with Rudyard Kipling's short stories (*Plain Tales from the Hills*, 1888; *Life's Handicap*, 1891). It then launched on a mostly American tradition with Hamlin Garland's *Main-Travelled Roads* (1891), Sarah Orne Jewett's *Country of the Pointed Firs* (1896), Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio* (1919), Ernest Hemingway's *In Our Time* (1925), John Steinbeck's *The Pastures of Heaven* (1932) and *Tortilla Flat* (1935), William Faulkner's *The Unvanquished* (1938) and *Go Down, Moses* (1942), and Eudora Welty's *The Golden Apples* (1949). The genre then spread into the African American tradition, producing works like Ernest Gaines's *A Long Day in November* (1971), John Edgar Wideman's *Damballah* (1981), and Gloria Naylor's *The Women of Brewster Place* (1982) and *Bailey's Café* (1992). It also

entered the feminist tradition with Mary McCarthy's *The Company She Keeps* (1942), Alice Munro's *Lives of Girls and Women* (1971), Joyce Carol Oates's *Crossing the Border* (1976), Lorrie Moore's *Self-Help* (1985), or Tama Janowitz's *Slaves of New York* (1986). More recently it has flourished in the writing of the South Asian diaspora (Rohinton Mistry, *Tales from Firosha Baag*, 1987; Sara Suleri, *Meatless Days*, 1989; M.G. Vassanji, *Uhuru Street*, 1992; Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, *Arranged Marriage*, 1995; Singh Baldwin, *English Lessons*, 1996; Robbie Sethi, *The Bride Wore Red*, 1996). The composite novel or short story cycle is a specific genre because it binds the stories in the book together by a continuous setting, often a rural or urban one, and has at least one character, often the first-person narrator, who appears in more than one story.

This constellation is typically present in James Joyce's *Dubliners* (1916) or in *Winesburg, Ohio*, in which a number of characters reappear throughout the text. Besides the popularity of the short-story cycle in North America (and *not* in Britain) after the modernist 1920s and 1930s,⁷⁸ the genre has also found a number of practitioners in South Asia: Raja Rao's *On the Ganga Ghat* (1989) and Gita Mehta's *A River Sutra* (1993) are prominent examples. One could, therefore, see the composite novel as a separate genre with an often distinct anti- or postcolonial slant. Moreover, its postcolonial associations may be much more extensive than is currently apparent. Too little historical research has been done on the short-story cycle to allow one to pronounce on its prevalence in Irish literature, contemporary South Asian literature (especially outside literature in English) or African, Caribbean, Australian and other postcolonial writing.

The significance of the short story and the short-story cycle within a post-colonial framework emerges also from affinity to native storytelling traditions and their possible influence on Western modes of writing. Thus, in discussions of Rushdie and other South Asian fabulators, it has often been noted that the intertextual references to the Indian tradition resonated with indigenous forms of fabulation in the *Pañcatantra* and other collections of tales and modes of oral storytelling.⁷⁹ Mongia notes the popularity of the story within story structure in traditional South Asian storytelling and their deployment of a comic philosopher as narrator figure (*vidushaka*), and demonstrates their adoption in recent fiction such as Rushdie's and Tharoor's.⁸⁰ Tharoor's *The Great Indian Novel*, for instance, parodies such oral narrative by having the narrator, Ved Vyas, address the entire text to Ganapathi, a reincarnation of Vyasa's Ganesha. From this viewpoint one can more clearly see how the Indian literary traditions could have influenced South Asian authors in their choice of the composite novel, or even just the tale (short story), as a preferred generic option.

Let me move from the novel and the short story to other types of genres. It is often remarked that satire is the weapon of the powerless. Among those stylistic and cross-generic⁸¹ genres that also include allegory, parody or pastoral, it is the genre of satire which features as prominently in anti- or postcolonial fiction as it does in, say, anti-communist writing. Satire is a particularly useful tool of political dissent and for the incrimination of political abuses. Many postcolonial novels are satiric in orientation or include long sections of satire. A good example of this is Ngũgĩ's *The Devil on the Cross* (1982), in which the speeches of the political elite expose their corruption and greed. See also Ken Saro-Wiwa's double *Prisoners of Jebs* (1988) and *Pita Dumbrok's Prison* (1991). In these two texts, the widespread corruption and inefficiency of the Nigerian state and its rampant abuse of minorities are satirically projected on a prison island which mirrors the state of the Nigerian nation at large or, rather, the failings of its neo-colonial regime. Satire is also prominent in works by Naipaul (*A Bend in the River*, 1979) or Achebe (*Anthills of the Savannah*, 1987).

Parody, likewise, is a recurring strategy deployed for slighting the former imperial masters, for writing back to the centre with a critical edge. Parody targets either a specific genre and/or style. Thus, Christopher Hope's *Darkest England* (1996) parodies the colonial travelogue by structurally inverting the role of the explorer as a missionary of political goodwill: here the native becomes the missionary who travels to England and has benevolent ideas. This inverted scenario is satirically inflected: the African protagonist believes that he is treated with dignified respect whereas he is actually dumped in a prison for asylum seekers. His experiences in England expose British civilization as a set of barbarous customs. Similarly, Coetzee's 'Narrative of Jacobus Coetzee' in *Dusklands* (1974) could also be regarded as the parody of a travelogue, although one might alternatively interpret it as a pastiche, an imitation of the original genre but with an exaggerated emphasis on the genre's typical features. Here the colonizer's unfeeling attitude towards the natives is exaggerated to the point of absurdity. Parody also figures prominently in Rushdie's work, where several literary genres (the *Arabian Tales* in *Shame*; the historical novel and the *Bildungsroman* in *Midnight's Children*) and even specific works (the *Mahabharata* and *Tristram Shandy* in *Midnight's Children*) are being parodied.

Concluding remarks

In my long list of strategies that impinge on the postcoloniality of texts written in former colonial territories and by authors having a background in them,

I have gone beyond narratologically defined textual aspects (like focalization), additionally including thematic and structural features of relevance. Most generally, one can note that the techniques themselves rarely carry any specifically colonial or postcolonial connotations and that their deployment can be motivated in a variety of different ways. Postcolonial fiction does not define itself by the use of certain techniques but by the deployment of strategies that allow a critical or ironic perspective on (neo)colonialism and by the assertion of indigenous values, languages, myths, history or traditions. Most importantly, the balance between Western and non-Western attitudes and viewpoints is shifted in the direction of giving postcolonial protagonists, attitudes and interests greater space to the reduction and even elimination of European or North American values and views.

As regards a historical outline, if history is seen as constituting an account of developments A to B to C, such a history cannot be written for postcolonial literature *as a whole*. Too variegated are the developments in different countries and national literatures for this to be a feasible proposition. Moreover, even within, say, South Asian writing, no clear story of simple narrative forms gradually becoming more sophisticated is observable at all. Although satire, parody and metafictional play seem to be a later development, this is not always true (compare Manto's 'Toba Tek Singh', 1955), and in African literature satire certainly does not seem to emerge only in later or more sophisticated stages of literary production as, possibly, does parody. It therefore makes little sense to attempt a chronology; instead it is more productive to discuss the appropriateness of a specific satirical or parodic rendering of the story. To some extent, one can perhaps argue that early texts emphasize the assertion of political and cultural independence, whereas later texts are often more geared towards international consumption. But even this generalization does not really work since in some countries some early texts which initiated, say, Nigerian literature, were published abroad and attracted international readership and international literary attention. In fact, the whole concept of 'Commonwealth literature' and then 'postcolonial literature' and now often 'literatures in English' actually derives from Western departments of English rather than from the nationalist aspirations of individual authors.

Postcolonial literature has tremendously enriched English-language literature since the 1960s in that it excels both in the presentation of individual experience and of collective responses to national crises. Postcolonial novels trace in loving detail how disadvantaged children from the colonial margins of the world have their minds opened by their encounter with learning and literature (Naipaul, Dangarembga), or how they may have to leave their

homes behind to seek more fulfilled lives abroad (Gupta, Emecheta, Vassanji). On the other hand, these emigrants all too often end up as unwanted guests in a foreign country, a predicament depicted in numerous immigration novels such as Sam Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners* (1956) or Kamala Markandaya, *The Nowhere Man* (1972).⁸² Postcolonial writing also gives us an insight into the thrilling adventure of the struggle for freedom. Such texts depict the exhilarating moment of independence, the disappointments of neo-colonial abuse, political corruption and the continuing misery of the population in many countries of the world.

The interest of postcolonial literature is partly collective and partly individual. On the one hand, the fate of the nation, its newly won independence, are at issue, and techniques that foreground collective action, communal values, traditions of memory and native custom and ceremony are foregrounded, as they are in we-narrative and in the evocation of space and time. On the other hand, postcolonial literature also focuses on individual experience, trying to elicit sympathy for the other, using the success of one person as a model for others. This second type of narrative therefore provides insight into the protagonist's mind and arranges for a story of success and overcoming; or it sometimes traces a trajectory of disappointment and despair. But in either case the focus is on techniques that highlight the individual's experience which is valorized. Such stories manage to convey to us that their protagonists, however different from ourselves, are as like us as many of the characters from our own literary traditions, whose company we have kept from our youth. They give us an insight into different worlds that – but for the vagaries of accident – might have been ours.

Notes

1. Shashi Tharoor, *The Great Indian Novel* (New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 1989), p. 249.
2. Salman Rushdie, *Midnight's Children* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1981).
3. This is Genettean terminology for flashbacks (*analepsis*), illogical transgressions of narrative levels (*metalepsis*; e.g. the omniscient narrator shaking the hand of a character) and a first-person narrator's illogical knowledge of things he could not have known (*paralepsis*). See Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, trans. J. E. Lewin (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1980), pp. 40, 234–7, 52.
4. On historiographical metafiction see Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism* (New York: Routledge, 1988), pp. 105–23; and Brenda K. Marshall, *Teaching the Postmodern: Fiction and Theory* (New York: Routledge, 1992), pp. 147–78. Historiographical metafiction typically depicts historical events in a playful, metafictional style and takes inventive liberties with historical facts and contexts for parodic and artistic purposes.

5. Lewis Nkosi, *Mating Birds* (London: Constable, 1986); Buchi Emecheta, *Second Class Citizen* (London: Alison & Busby, 1974).
6. Mulk Raj Anand, *Untouchable* (1935; London: Bodley Head, 1970); Raja Rao, *Kanthapura* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1938; repr. New York: New Directions, 1967); G. V. Desani, *All About H. Hatterr* (1948; London: Penguin, 1972).
7. Saadat Hasan Manto, 'Toba Tek Singh' (1955), trans. Khalid Hasan, *Kingdom's End and Other Stories* (London: Penguin, 1987), pp. 9–17; Raja Rao, *The Serpent and the Rope* (London: John Murray, 1960).
8. Literature on narratological aspects of postcolonial writing is sparse. See Monika Fludernik, 'When the Self is an Other: vergleichende erzähltheoretische und postkoloniale Überlegungen zur Identitäts(de)konstruktion in der (exil)indischen Gegenwartsliteratur', *Anglia*, 117.1 (1999), pp. 71–96; Brian Richardson, 'Narrative poetics and postmodern transgression: theorizing the collapse of time, voice, and frame', *Narrative*, 8 (2000), 23–42, and, 'Voice and narration in postmodern drama', *New Literary History*, 32 (2001), 681–94; Marion Gymnich, 'Linguistics and narratology: the relevance of linguistic criteria to postcolonial narratology', in Marion Gymnich, Ansgar Nünning and Vera Nünning (eds.), *Literature and Linguistics: Approaches, Models, and Applications. Studies in Honour of Jon Erickson* (Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 2002), pp. 61–76; Hanne Birk and Birgit Neumann, 'Go-between: Postkoloniale Erzähltheorie', in Ansgar Nünning and Vera Nünning (eds.), *Neue Ansätze in der Erzähltheorie* (Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 2002), pp. 115–52; Gerald Prince, 'On a postcolonial narratology', in James Phelan and Peter Rabinowitz (eds.), *A Companion to Narrative Theory* (London: Blackwell, 2005), pp. 372–81.
9. Lloyd Jones, *Mister Pip* (New York: Random House, 2007); Zakes Mda, *The Heart of Redness* (London: Picador, 2000).
10. Sandra Hestermann, *Meeting the Other – Encountering Oneself: Paradigmen der Selbst- und Fremddarstellung in ausgewählten anglo-indischen und indisch-englischen Kurzgeschichten* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2003).
11. See Miriam Nandi, *M/other India/s: Zur literarischen Verarbeitung von Armuts- und Kastenproblematik in ausgewählten Texten der indisch-englischen und muttersprachlichen indischen Literatur seit 1935* (Heidelberg: Winter, 2007); Vikram Chandra, 'Shakti', *Love and Longing in Bombay* (London: Faber and Faber, 2007), pp. 33–74.
12. Arundhati Roy, *The God of Small Things*. 1999 (London: Flamingo, 1997); Rohinton Mistry, *A Fine Balance* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1995).
13. Amitav Ghosh, *The Hungry Tide* (London: HarperCollins, 2004).
14. Ayi Kwei Armah, *Two Thousand Seasons* (London: Heinemann, 1973); Harold Sonny Ladoo, *No Pain Like This Body* (Toronto: House of Anansi Press, 1972).
15. Christopher Hope, *Darkest England* (New York: Norton, 1996).
16. Sunetra Gupta, *The Glassblower's Breath* (1993; London: Phoenix House, 1994); Bharati Mukherjee, *Jasmine* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1989).
17. Nayantara Sahgal, *Rich Like Us* (London: Heinemann, 1983), Nadine Gordimer, *A Sport of Nature* (New York: Knopf, 1987); Sunetra Gupta, *A Sin of Colour* (London: Phoenix House, 1999).
18. André Brink, *Looking on Darkness* (1974; London: Vintage, 2000); Alice Walker, *Meridian* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1976).
19. Shauna Singh Baldwin, 'Montreal 1962', *English Lessons and Other Stories* (Fredericton, NB: Goose Lane, 1996), pp. 13–16; Amitav Ghosh, *The Glass Palace* (London: HarperCollins, 2000).
20. Vikram Seth, *A Suitable Boy* (London: Phoenix House, 1993).
21. Vikram Seth, *An Equal Music* (London: Phoenix House, 1999).

22. On the use of framing in fiction see Bernard Duyfhuizen, *Narratives of Transmission* (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1992); William Nelles, *Frameworks: Narrative Levels and Embedded Narrative* (New York: Peter Lang, 1997); or Werner Wolf, 'Framing fiction: reflections on a narratological concept and an example: Bradbury, *Mensonge*', in Walter Grünzweig and Andreas Solbach (eds.), *Grenzüberschreitungen: Narratologie im Kontext / Transcending Boundaries: Narratology in Context* (Tübingen: Gunther Narr, 1999), pp. 97–124. Recently, intermedial framing has moved to the centre of narratological research; see Werner Wolf and Walter Bernhart (eds.), *Framing Borders in Literature and Other Media* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006).
23. Franz K. Stanzel, 'Häßliche und andere Steirer: Ihr Beitrag zur "quiddity" der englischen Literatur', in Wolfgang Riehle and Hugo Keiper (eds.), *Anglistentag 1994 Graz* (Tübingen: Niemeyer 1994), pp. 593–606; reprinted in Franz K. Stanzel, *Telegonie – Fernzeugung: Macht und Magie der Imagination* (Vienna: Böhlau, 2008), pp. 256–76.
24. J. M. Coetzee, *Foe* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986).
25. Salman Rushdie, *Shame* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1983).
26. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes-Tropiques* (1955; New York: Atheneum, 1973). On 'authorial' narrative, see Franz K. Stanzel, *A Theory of Narrative*, trans. C. Goedsche (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).
27. Mark Mathabane, *Kaffir Boy* (New York: Macmillan, 1986).
28. For postcolonial novels using the *Bildungsroman* framework see also Anand's *Untouchable*, Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai's *Scavenger's Son (Tottiyute makan)* (1947), trans. R. E. Asher (Oxford: Heinemann, 1993), George Lamming's *In the Castle of My Skin* (London: Michael Joseph, 1953), R. K. Narayan's *The Guide* (1958; London: Penguin, 1988), Buchi Emecheta's *Second-Class Citizen* (1974) and Michelle Cliff's *No Telephone to Heaven* (1987; New York: Plume, 1996).
29. Nuruddin Farah, *Maps* (New York: Pantheon, 1986).
30. See Uri Margolin, 'Telling in the plural: from grammar to ideology', *Poetics Today*, 21.3 (2000), 591–618, and 'Telling our story: on "we" literary narratives', *Language and Literature*, 5 (2000), 115–33; and Brian Richardson, *Unnatural Voices: Extreme Narration in Modern and Postmodern Contemporary Fiction* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2006).
31. See also Bhabha's 'DissemiNation: time, narrative, and the margins of the modern nation', in Homi K. Bhabha (ed.), *Nation and Narration* (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 291–322.
32. Narratologically speaking, we could say it is a first-person peripheral narrative.
33. Rao, *Kanthapura*, p. 8.
34. *Ibid.*, pp. 9–10, original emphasis.
35. *Ibid.*, p. 68.
36. See Alan Palmer, 'Intermental thought in the novel: the *Middlemarch* mind', *Style*, 39.4 (Winter 2005), 427–39, and 'Large intermental units in *Middlemarch*', in Jan Alber and Monika Fludernik (eds.), *Postclassical Narratology: Approaches and Analyses* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2010), pp. 83–104.
37. Armah, *Two Thousand Seasons*, p. 155.
38. Rao, *Kanthapura*, p. 169.
39. *Ibid.*, pp. 1–2.
40. The same point could be made in reference to Derek Walcott or Wole Soyinka.
41. See Abdul R. JanMohamed, 'The economy of Manichean allegory: the function of racial difference in colonialist literature', in Henry Louis Gates Jr (ed.), *Race, Writing and Difference* (Chicago University Press, 1986), pp. 78–106.

42. Ken Saro-Wiwa, *Sozaboy: A Novel in Rotten English* (London: Port Harcourt: Saros International Publishers, 1985).
43. Cliff, *No Telephone to Heaven*, p. 17.
44. Michael Ondaatje, *The English Patient* (London: Bloomsbury, 1992).
45. Armah, *Two Thousand Seasons*, p. 206.
46. Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart* (London: Heinemann, 1958).
47. James A. Snead, 'European pedigree/African contagions: nationality, narrative, and communality in Tutuola, Achebe, and Reed', in Bhabha (ed.), *Nation and Narration*, pp. 231–49, here 241–4.
48. Armah, *Two Thousand Seasons*, p. 50.
49. Ibid., p. 55.
50. See Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992); and Sabine Schülting, *Wilde Frauen, fremde Welten: Kolonisierungsgeschichten aus Amerika* (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 1997).
51. See Edward W. Said, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient* (1978; London: Penguin, 1995), pp. 201–25.
52. Graham Huggan, *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins* (London: Routledge, 2001).
53. Anita Desai, *Bye-Bye Blackbird* (1968; New Delhi: Orient, 1991), p. 194.
54. Ibid., p. 195.
55. Ibid., p. 180.
56. Ibid., p. 224.
57. Ibid., p. 86.
58. See Nandi, *M/other India/s*, pp. 167–221; Miriam Nandi, 'Longing for the lost m/other – postcolonial ambivalences in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*', *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 46.2 (2010), 175–86.
59. Sunetra Gupta, *The Glassblower's Breath* (1993; London: Phoenix House, 1994), p. 59.
60. Nirad C. Chaudhuri, *A Passage to England* (London: Macmillan, 1959).
61. Ibid., p. 96.
62. Desai, *Bye-Bye Blackbird*, p. 123.
63. Ibid., p. 61.
64. Ibid.
65. See Nandi, *M/other India/s*, pp. 109–42.
66. On Joyce and (post)colonialism see, for instance, the essays in Derek Attridge and Marjorie Howes (eds.), *Semicolonial Joyce* (Cambridge University Press, 2000), as well as David Lloyd, *Anomalous States: Irish Writing and the Post-Colonial Moment* (Dublin: Lilliput, 1993); Vincent J. Cheng, 'Of canons, colonies, and critics: the ethics and politics of postcolonial Joyce studies', *Cultural Critique*, 35 (Winter 1996–7), 81–104; and Andrew Gibson and Len Platt (eds.), *Joyce, Ireland, Britain* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2006).
67. Robert J. C. Young, *White Mythologies* (London: Routledge, 1990).
68. Ben Okri, *The Famished Road* (London: Cape, 1991).
69. See also the examples mentioned in Catherine Lynette Innes, *The Cambridge Introduction to Postcolonial Literatures in English* (Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 127.
70. M. M. Kaye, *The Far Pavilions* (Hammondsworth: Penguin, 1978).
71. Aijaz Ahmad, *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures* (London: Verso, 1992), pp. 268–70.
72. Thomas Babington Macaulay, 'Minute on Indian Education' (2 February 1835), Barbara Harlow and Mia Carter (eds.), *Imperialism and Orientalism: A Documentary Sourcebook* (London: Blackwell, 1999), pp. 56–62, here 61.
73. On the early Indian novel see Meenakshi Mukherjee (ed.), *Early Novels in India* (Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 2002), as well as 'The beginnings of the Indian novel', in

- Arvind Krishna Mehrotra (ed.), *A History of Indian Literature in English* (London: Hurst & Co., 2003), pp. 92–125.
74. But see Ahmad's argument that Western influence only became overwhelming with the model of the Russian realist novel in English translation (*In Theory*, p. 270).
 75. Such a reading of the negative treatment of Puritanism of course neglects the continuities between New England society and its (colonial) Puritan past, and it fails to address the fact that the Puritans themselves were victims of English/British religious oppression and that they became colonizers and oppressors of the Native American population.
 76. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-colonial Literatures* (1989; London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 135–40.
 77. See Forrest L. Ingram, *Representative Short Story Cycles of the Twentieth Century: Studies in a Literary Genre* (The Hague: Mouton, 1971); Dieter Meindl, 'Der Kurzgeschichtenzyklus als modernistisches Genre', *Germanisch-Romanische Monatsschrift*, 33 (1983), 216–27; Edgar Mertner, 'Kipling und die Gattung des Short-Story-Zyklus', in Raimund Borgmeier (ed.), *Gattungsprobleme in der anglo-amerikanischen Literatur: Beiträge für Ulrich Suerbaum zu seinem 60. Geburtstag* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1986), pp. 140–54; Susan Garland Mann, *The Short Story Cycle: A Genre Companion and Reference Guide* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1988); Robert M. Luscher, 'The short story sequence: an open book', in Susan Lohafer and Jo Ellyn Clarey eds., *Short Story Theory at a Crossroads* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989), pp. 148–67; and Margaret Dunn and Ann Morris, *The Composite Novel. The Short Story Cycle in Transition* (New York: Twayne, 1995).
 78. Mertner, 'Kipling und die Gattung des Short-Story-Zyklus'.
 79. See, for example, Wimal Dissanayake, 'Towards a decolonized English: South Asian creativity in fiction', *World Englishes*, 4.2 (1985), 233–42.
 80. Sunanda Mongia, 'Recent Indian fiction in English: an overview', in Charu Sheel Singh (ed.), *Spectrum History of Indian Literature in English* (New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers, 1997), p. 230.
 81. These 'genres', for which no generally valid term exists, occur in poetry, drama or narrative; such genres are characterized by their attitude or style.
 82. Samuel Selvon, *The Lonely Londoners* (1956; London: Penguin, 2006); Kamala Markandaya, *The Nowhere Man* (New York: John Day, 1972).

Poetry and postcolonialism

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What is postcolonial poetry? How is it like or unlike the postcolonial novel, postcolonial theory, and other related genres? What paradigms are most fruitful for interpreting it? To approach these questions, a bald synopsis of models for the analysis of, and recurrent themes within, postcolonial poetry may be a useful place to begin, before embarking on a more extended discussion of postcolonial poetry in the context of other genres with which it fuses, and against which its specificities can be tracked. For the purposes of this chapter, ‘postcolonial poetry’ means poetry written by non-European peoples in the shadow of colonialism, both after independence and in the immediate period leading up to it, particularly works that engage, however obliquely, issues of living in the interstices between Western colonialism and non-European cultures.

Decolonization has been a primary paradigm for conceptualizing postcolonial poetry, as made possible by critical works such as Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (1978) and *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), Chinweizu, Onwuchekwu Jemie and Ihechukwu Madibuike’s *Toward the Decolonization of African Literature* (1980), Kamau Brathwaite’s *History of the Voice* (1984), and Robert Young’s *Postcolonialism* (2001). Decolonization movements swept across much of Asia, Africa, Oceania, the Caribbean and elsewhere, particularly from the time of Indian and Pakistani independence in 1947 through the 1970s, the period when British, French, Belgian, Portuguese, Italian, Spanish and other modern European colonial powers relinquished control over most of the earth’s surface. Since Britain’s was by far the largest of the European empires, much postcolonial poetry has been written in English. Anglophone poetry is the main focus of this chapter, though poetry in other modern European languages also reflected, and participated in, decolonization. One of the most influential mobilizations of poetry in the service of decolonization was the French-language Negritude movement in the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s, led by Aimé Césaire of Martinique and Léopold Senghor of Senegal, and inspired in part

by Langston Hughes, Claude McKay and other poets of the Harlem Renaissance. Negritude poets exemplify the quest to decolonize African and African diaspora sensibility and culture by reclaiming a precolonial blackness that European colonialism had suppressed and degraded. In their work, physical and cultural attributes once seen as negative – blackness, rhythm, instinct – are transvalued. Senghor urges, in his poem ‘Nuit de Sine’ (Night of Sine): ‘listen to the beating of our dark blood, listen / To the beating of the dark pulse of Africa in the mist of lost villages’.¹ Césaire coined the term Negritude in his 1939 magnum opus *Cahier d’un retour au pays natal* (Notebook of a Return to My Native Land), a title suggestive of poetry’s role in returning to and reclaiming the native land from colonial dominance. Similarly, the lusophone poem ‘Manifesto’ by José Craveirinha of Mozambique celebrates attributes once disparaged, such as kinky hair and black eyes, in this case the poet’s own.

Such nativist and nationalist reclamation is a strong impetus as well in much anglophone poetry. To the extent that Ireland, though part of Europe, resembles non-European nations undergoing decolonization (Ireland having once been conceived as England’s racial and religious ‘other’), a poet such as W.B. Yeats is, in Edward Said’s phrase, a ‘poet of decolonization’:² he seeks to construct a national imaginary based in pre-Christian and precolonial myths and to reclaim Ireland for the Irish by renaming and remythologizing it. Mid-twentieth-century postcolonial poets for whom poetry has been a decolonizing tool include the Ugandan Okot p’Bitek, East Africa’s most celebrated poet, who brought into literary verse indigenous Acoli songs, proverbs and metaphors, and the Jamaican Louise Bennett, an enormously popular figure on the stage, radio and TV, and in Jamaica’s national newspaper, whose Creole poetry helped free West Indians from a European-imposed sense of inferiority about oral customs, language and folklore. Following Bennett and Césaire, an influential poet from Barbados, Kamau Brathwaite, emphasized the importance of returning African diasporic cultures to their oral roots and throwing off the ‘tyranny of the pentameter’, of the sonnet, and other European literary forms.³ Just as culture played a significant role in colonization, including the imposition of poems about daffodils or snowfall (alien to the tropics), so too, for many postcolonial poets, the re-establishment of the dignity and worth of native cultural resources and the indigenization of poetic forms were seen as essential to decolonization.

Nativist and nationalist models have proved to be limited, however, in various ways. An obvious danger is the reduction of poetry to platform politics, despite the differences between much poetry and more expository forms. Another risk is underestimating the extent to which even nativist poetry is

implicated in what it resists: as Frantz Fanon observed, Negritude and other nativisms replicate in reverse the European values against which they are pitted.⁴ And even the most nativist poets, such as the Paris-based leaders of Negritude, draw on transnational influences, tropes, forms and resources, paradoxically, in reclaiming indigeneity.

Another key paradigm for the analysis of postcolonial poetry is hybridity. Combining indigenous cultural resources with those of European colonizing powers, postcolonial poetry can be seen as profoundly syncretic and transnational.⁵ Revalorizing Cuba's African roots, Nicolás Guillén combined modernist and surrealist elements, as well as Spanish ballads, with African Cuban musical dance forms such as the *son* and street vernacular to create a poetic *mestizaje* (mixture). Through hybridization, poets create forms that embody their experience of living between the discrepant cultural worlds of global North and South. The Indian poet A. K. Ramanujan synthesized influences from European modernist poets such as Yeats, T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound with ancient and medieval Dravidian poetic techniques and tropes of South India to articulate a South Asian experience under modernity. Creating cross-religious poetic rituals that answered to his interstitial experience, Christopher Okigbo, as we will see, delicately interlaced African praise song, drumming, botanical names and place-names with biblical echoes from his Catholic education, syncretic strategies from Eliot and Pound, and formal lyric devices from Latin verse.

While these and other overtly cosmopolitan poets, including Derek Walcott and Agha Shahid Ali, overtly hybridize discrepant traditions, even strongly nativist poets, such as those already mentioned, yoke together tropes, idioms and ideologies across hemispheres, while working towards decolonization. Césaire is both a Caribbean poet and a French surrealist; Yeats fuses Irish place-names and myths with anglophone orthographies and lyric traditions; Bennett writes Creole poetry in the British ballad stanza; Okot p'Bitek deploys the long Western dramatic monologue as well as Acoli oral traditions; Brathwaite combines West Indian landscapes and tropes with a creolized Caribbean idiom paradoxically made available to him by Eliot's conversational style.⁶

The hybridity model, however, also has drawbacks. The metaphor of hybridity has been criticized for naturalizing aesthetic processes, reinforcing formulaic dualities of Western and non-Western influences, glossing over uneven power relations between colonizer and colonized by its false symmetries, depoliticizing postcolonial studies, recycling a tainted term, and hypostasizing as homogeneous the always already heterogeneous traditions fused in

hybridization.⁷ Given the limitations and capabilities of both the hybridity and decolonization models, my admittedly imperfect solution is to use them in tandem as mutual correctives, without forsaking either the aesthetic traction of ‘hybridity’ or the political thrust of ‘decolonization’.

What is postcolonial poetry about? The thematics are as various as the poets, but three preoccupations recur, as indicated in the ensuing close readings. First, because of the distortion and effacement of local traditions by European colonialism, many postcolonial poets, such as the aforementioned Negritude writers, seek through poetry to nurture collective historical memory. African Caribbean poets such as Guillén, Walcott, Brathwaite and Goodison write with an acute consciousness of the devastations of slavery and colonialism, recuperating African rituals, gods, and names lost in the Middle Passage. African poets sometimes summon the powers of precolonial gods: in Wole Soyinka’s long poem *Ogun Abibiman* (literally, Ogun of the land of the black peoples), the Yoruba god of roads, iron, creativity, and war is extolled in the service of the anti-apartheid struggle. Occasionally recalling the violence of British colonial rule, South Asian writers reach back to earlier literary and cultural traditions. Agha Shahid Ali, whose poem ‘The Dacca Gauzes’ recalls how the British severed Indian weavers’ thumbs to prevent competition with British-manufactured muslins, poetically reinstantiates aspects of Moghul-era Muslim Indian culture. A. K. Ramanujan builds a poetic sequence, as we will see, on the example of a sixth-century Tamil devotional poem.

Second, poets writing in European languages grapple with the alienating effects of a language imposed under colonialism. The Indian poet R. Parthasarathy bemoans his imprisonment in an oppressive language: ‘My tongue in English chains’.⁸ M. NourbeSe Philip bitterly recalls, as we will see, the violent imposition of English on enslaved Africans in the Caribbean. Even so, many poets attempt to remake European languages for their local circumstances. Anglophone poets sometimes stud English with indigenous place-names, words, and names of flora and fauna, and sometimes they write in dialect, despite the stigma of inferiority attached to it especially in the former British colonies. Guyanese poet John Agard half-humorously writes of ‘mugging de Queen’s English’ and ‘slashing suffix in self-defence’.⁹

Third, poetry often serves efforts of self-definition in relation to nation and world, colonizer and colonized, place and displacement. In ‘Ballad of the Two Grandfathers’ (‘Balada de los dos abuelos’), Guillén dramatizes his mixed lineage: he imagines his white and black grandfathers embracing and interfusing in his poem across differences of power. Walcott famously agonizes over his mixed inheritances: ‘I have Dutch, nigger, and English in me, / and either

I'm nobody, or I'm a nation'.¹⁰ With its layers and ambiguities, poetry seems especially well suited, for poets such as Walcott and Guillén, to holding discrepant inheritances in tension with one another – European modernism and African Caribbean orality, Greek archetypes and black fishermen. Sometimes in postcolonial poetry this in-betweenness or interstitiality is a tragic condition, as when Walcott declares himself 'divided to the vein' and 'poisoned with the blood of both' his European and his African ancestors.¹¹ Bleakly self-descriptive, Indian poet Eunice de Souza states, 'my name is Greek / my surname Portuguese / my language alien', and concludes of these disparate 'ways / of belonging': 'I belong with the lame ducks'.¹² But sometimes these disparate inheritances are celebrated for the powerful new possibilities they unleash, despite the lingering wounds: Brathwaite ends his epic trilogy *The Arrivants* announcing his aspiration to make 'some- / thing torn // and new' – presumably, in part, the creolized epic that these very lines complete.¹³

Much of the foregoing analysis of postcolonial memory, language and identity in the contexts of decolonization and hybridity could also be applied to postcolonial fiction, drama and other genres examined elsewhere in these volumes. Cognizant that other chapters in this collection situate postcolonial poetry in nation- and region-based literary histories, I focus most of this chapter on still underexamined questions of genre: why poetry? What difference does *poetry* make to postcolonialism? Because form and content are less separable in poetry than in perhaps any other genre, analysis attentive to its specificities may bring something distinctive to the already sumptuously loaded postcolonial table, since despite its ground-breaking theoretical and political sophistication, postcolonial studies is sometimes formally naïve. Poetic analysis may contribute a heightened alertness to how postcoloniality is reflected and refracted through particular literary genres, styles and resources.

In the remainder of this chapter, I tease out areas of overlap and difference between postcolonial poetry and some of its generic others, asking what distinguishes postcolonial poetry from fiction, theory, law, song and prayer, even as it draws on these kindred discourses. How does NourbeSe Philip's poetry blend poetry with theory, while nevertheless doing something different from it? How do testimonial poems by Philip and Lorna Goodison resemble legal testimony without belonging in a court of law? How do Kofi Awoonor, Okot p'Bitek, Jean 'Binta' Breeze, Patience Agbabi and Lesego Rampolokeng intercut their poems with song lyrics and rhymes without quite writing songs? How do Christopher Okigbo, Kamau Brathwaite, Okot p'Bitek, A.K. Ramanujan and Agha Shahid Ali harness features of prayer without

writing religious texts? What differences emerge among varieties of poetry, as inflected and influenced by such extra-poetic enmeshments? In short, not merely what's different about *postcolonial* poetry? – the main emphasis of earlier work on the subject, including my own¹⁴ – but what's different about postcolonial *poetry*? Not just the *what* or *when* or *where* of postcolonial poetry, but the *why* and *how*.

Poetry and fiction

How does poetry diverge from the novel, the genre that has been the literary centrepiece of postcolonial studies? When you think of the literary representation of the British colonization of Igboland, the most celebrated African novel, Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958), is likely to come to mind. What happens when much the same material – an innocent Igbo society, violent occupation, the destruction of Igbo religion – is projected through the lens of poetry? What distinctions and commonalities emerge? A few years after the publication of Achebe's novel, Christopher Okigbo's sequence 'Fragments out of the Deluge' (1962), first published in the newly created African magazine *Transition* and then reprinted in a short Mbari-published book, *Limits* (1964), evokes the colonization of Igboland. Like Achebe, Okigbo was born and grew up in southeastern Nigeria under British colonial rule. Like Achebe, Okigbo had Christian parents – though Achebe's family was Protestant, Okigbo's Catholic. Both Achebe and Okigbo were sons of teachers, attended Umuahia Government College for secondary school, and proceeded to University College, Ibadan. Some years after Okigbo was killed as a combatant in the Nigerian Civil War, Achebe coedited a literary memorial for his friend and fellow founder of Citadel Press, the anthology of poems *Don't Let Him Die* (1978).

If historical and cultural background and subject matter were the primary drivers of literary composition – as is sometimes assumed in postcolonial studies – we might well expect Achebe's fiction and Okigbo's poetry to mirror one another. But when we set 'Fragments out of the Deluge' and *Things Fall Apart* side by side, the generic frameworks within which these two writers work spawn profound differences. Surely, at the most basic, referential level, there are connections – and, indeed, these invite comparison. The eighth and tenth lyrics in *Limits* tell of the arrival of the colonizers and their destruction of Igbo religion and culture – a historical story that is also central to Achebe's novel. The 'us' in the tenth poem is clearly marked as an indigenous Igbo community ('And to us they came'), in contradistinction to the 'they', who

ominously ‘scanned’ and ‘surveyed’ and ‘entered into the forest’.¹⁵ In the eighth lyric, a sunbird – an Igbo religious symbol – recounts the arrival of a ‘fleet of eagles’ and their holding ‘the square / under curse of their breath’:

Beaks of bronze, wings
of hard-tanned felt,
The eagles flow
over man-mountains,
Steep walls of voices,
horizons;
The eagles furrow
dazzling over the voices
With wings like
combs in the wind’s hair

(p. 47)

Like Achebe’s missionaries Brown and Smith, who personify the gracious and severe faces of religious colonization, these eagles seem, as suggested by Okigbo’s diction and figurative language, potentially inviting (‘felt’, ‘wings like / combs’) and frightfully rigid (‘Beaks of bronze’, ‘hard-tanned’). They threaten dominance and terrifying destruction, but they also allure – ‘dazzling’, ‘Resplendent . . . resplendent’ (p. 47). We may infer that, as in Achebe’s novel, the Igbo are at once attracted and repelled. Okigbo suggests the vulnerability of the indigenous people and of their religious symbols: ‘And small birds sing in shadows, / Wobbling under their bones . . .’ (p. 47).

Like Achebe’s ambivalent characters, Okigbo’s Igbo feel vulnerable for good reason. In the tenth lyric, the sunbird that sang much of the eighth poem is abruptly ‘killed’ (p. 49). The colonizers are said to find and break ‘the twin-gods of the forest’, glossed by Okigbo’s note as the ‘tortoise and the python’ (p. 49). The eaglelike colonizers swoop down and destroy Igbo gods:

And the ornaments of him,
And the beads about his tail;
And the carapace of her,
And her shell, they divided.

(p. 49)

Readers of Achebe’s novel will recognize these religious and folkloric images. In *Things Fall Apart*, a Christian convert kills the sacred python and, seemingly as the result of divine retribution, soon falls ill and dies.¹⁶ In an inset etiological beast fable, after the trickster Tortoise falls from the sky, a medicine man fits the shell fragments back together: ‘That is why Tortoise’s shell is not smooth.’¹⁷ Moreover, the long-drum that resonates through *Things Fall Apart* silently heralds, in Okigbo’s sequence, the death of these and other Igbo gods:

And the gods lie in state
 And the gods lie in state
 Without the long-drum. (p. 50)

A shared Igbo religious imagery, the people's ambivalence toward a Janus-faced colonizer, and a narrative of European colonial destruction of indigenous religion – this much the two prototypically 'postcolonial' works have in common. 'Fragments out of the Deluge', writes Okigbo, renders retrospectively 'the collective rape of innocence and profanation of the mysteries' (p. xxiv). The same could be said of *Things Fall Apart*.

But the divergences between the poetic sequence and novel even on this shared terrain may suggest some specificities of poetry as a medium for post-colonialism. When you first turn from Achebe's novel to Okigbo's 'Fragments out of the Deluge', it is the absences that are the most striking. In the tenth lyric, for example, there are no characters – figures like Okonkwo and Obierika, clearly distinguishable from one another by qualities of personality – but only an implied Igbo community ('us'), the poet or 'protagonist' (p. xxiv), and the birdlike 'They', who figuratively evoke but do not realistically depict the European colonizers. There is no plot, except for the barest implied narrative of colonization and religious destruction. There is no historical framework in which the literary story takes place, except as abstracted and internalized. Indeed, to make sense of Okigbo's poem and extract a narrative from it, you have to know already the history of European colonial destruction of Igbo religion and traditional society. The historical and social fullness of Achebe's novel is likely to be more heuristically effective than is Okigbo's poetry for teaching what it might have been like to live among the Igbo during the initial phase of European colonial settlement.

If poetry as a medium for postcoloniality is *less* in all these respects – condensed, stripped down, abstracted – how could it at the same time still be *more*? Although Okigbo's colonizers are not Achebe's seemingly flesh-and-blood British missionaries or District Commissioner, Okigbo's densely figurative language and allegorical mode of representation evoke the awesome power and violence of the arrival of the colonizers in strikingly few words:

Their talons they drew out of their scabbard,
 Upon the tree trunks, as if on fire-clay,
 Their beaks they sharpened;
 And spread like eagles their felt-wings,
 And descended upon the twin gods of Irkalla (p. 49)

The freedom of poetic syntax and the accentuation by line breaks build up the terror of this arrival. The syntactic inversion in the strophe's first line spotlights at either end the birds' dangerously swordlike talons, and in the ensuing lines ('Upon the tree trunks . . . / . . . they sharpened') the ominous sharpening of their beaks. The middle line ('Upon the tree trunks, as if on fire-clay'), punctuated by two spondees, floats ambiguously between two parallel lines inverting subject and verb, and so seems to connect syntactically with both. The magnificent spreading of wings suggests the horrifying splendour of this exercise of colonial power. The anaphoric, anapaestic, and other kinds of repetition suggest a relentless destructive menace that recurs as if in a dream, over and over, not the once-only chronology of realist fiction.

The alliterations, figurative condensation, and musical cadences suggest the iterative dreamtime of myth, and indeed Okigbo annotates his reference to Irkalla, which recalls 'the twin-gods of the forest' two strophes earlier, as the 'queen of the underworld' in 'Sumerian myth' – most notably in the ancient epic *Gilgamesh*, one of the sequence's persistent intertexts (p. 49). The python and the tortoise thus make their second appearance as Sumerian gods of the underworld, Mesopotamian myth refracting Igbo myth. Despite the Yeatsian title of *Things Fall Apart* and the novel's discretely Christian shaping of some plot elements, Achebe sharply delimits his referential field, never leaving the reader in doubt as to the Igbo village setting. In Okigbo's sequence, obtrusive transnational quotation, allusion and superposition palimpsestically layer other worlds on the Nigerian landscape of oilbean and bombax trees. 'Malisons, malisons, mair than ten – ', intones the tenth lyric (p. 49), the beginning of a Scottish malediction on anyone who hunts the wren ('*That harry the Ladye of Heaven's hen!*'), cited in Frazer's *Golden Bough* as an example of pagan belief in sacred animals that cause suffering and death if killed.¹⁸ The Igbo sunbird is collocated with the Scottish wren, just as Sumerian and Igbo deities are conflated. To a much greater extent than *Things Fall Apart*, Okigbo's sequence – abruptly and mysteriously shifting registers and skidding transcontinentally on its references – intermaps the British assault on Igbo beliefs and lives with violent acts in other times and places, from *Gilgamesh* to Picasso's *Guernica*, the latter named and annotated in the sequence's final lyric and thus paralleling this fragmentary lament over violent destruction with that of a Spanish-born modernist painter. Although poetry is often assumed to be far more locally or nationally rooted than the novel, Okigbo's sequence shows postcolonial poetry to be no less nimbly cosmopolitan than postcolonial fiction.

Do the differences I've been tracing between these twinned examples of novelistic and poetic postcolonialism accord with Bakhtin's influential

distinction between poetry's monologism and the novel's dialogism?¹⁹ Pace Bakhtin, Okigbo's poem is dialogic in its interplay of viewpoints from discrepant times and places, heteroglot in its mixing of different discourses and registers. Other cultural voices abruptly cut across the poet's lyricism – most obviously, the Scottish chant, but also, at the level of style and image, Euroclassical technique and modernist syncretism. Yet neither are Bakhtin's distinctions wholly inapplicable. Okigbo's poems submit scattered references, allusions and discourses to the centripetal pressure of a singular subjectivity. The rich music of his cadences and repetitions, the highbrow references and stylization of the language, the inversions and torsions of the syntax – these and other features of the poems are unavoidably stamped 'Okigbo'. Instead of the author's disappearing, as does Achebe, behind a panoply of characters of different backgrounds and social classes in conversation with one another, Okigbo annotates figures such as Eunice as 'My childhood nurse known for her lyricism' (p. 48), leaving no doubt that the sphere of his experience is the poem's magnetic field. Examples of non-lyric poetry, such as Okot p'Bitek's long dramatic monologue *Song of Lawino*, which is less inwardly focused and more historically mimetic, complicate these generic distinctions. But the post-colonial lyric poem, if Okigbo's sequence is any indication, while hetero- and polyglot, dialogic and cross-cultural, despite Bakhtin, may also draw together its postcolonial fragmentation by its inwardness, compression and stylistic patterning.

Poetry and theory

Along with fiction, theory is the genre that has garnered the most attention in postcolonial literary studies. A comparison of postcolonial poetry and theory may again – by revealing areas of overlap and difference – help us understand better *how* poetic forms imaginatively construct postcoloniality. What distinguishes postcolonial poetry from theory, and what brings them together? Tobago-born, Trinidad-raised, Toronto-based writer NourbeSe Philip's poem 'Discourse on the Logic of Language' has become one of the most celebrated postcolonial poems, in part because, as its abstract title suggests, it shares in the widespread postcolonial theorization of the colonizer's violently imposed language as leaving the (post)colonized subject verbally wounded and struggling to give utterance to a non-European experience. 'It was in language that the slave was perhaps most successfully imprisoned by his master', Brathwaite speculates, 'and it was in his (mis-)use of it that he perhaps most effectively rebelled.'²⁰ Countless essays and books have discoursed upon

such linguistic maiming and revolt. But just as traditional lyrics expounded the paradoxes of death and desire without being reducible to their thematic content, we need to ask, what is distinctively poetic about how Philip's poem gives expression to this familiar theoretical concept? What can it do that theory per se cannot?

Philip's poem begins:

English
is my mother tongue.
A mother tongue is not
not a foreign lan lan lang
language
l/anguish
anguish
– a foreign anguish.²¹

The reliance on the copula 'is' in these first two sentences highlights the poem's intersection with the definitional and analytic discourse on which it draws. But the declarative language quickly devolves into stutters and slips. Instead of merely stating that the foreign language both impedes and enables expression, the poet shows this paradoxically expressive deformation in sentences that fracture grammatically and words that splinter into puns: the phrase 'foreign lan' shows up the alienness of a European language in a colonized land, and the ensuing lines tease the words 'languish' and 'anguish' out of the imposed 'language'. The poet's dissolving of the English language and of the very word 'language' into words expressive of that language's injuries exemplifies postcolonial subversion of the imperial standard. Seemingly impeded from univocal statements by the language through which she seeks expression, Philip uses the resources of poetry to mark formally the postcolonial imprisonment within, and transvaluative '(mis-)use' of, an imposed English.

Exploiting poetry's recursive sounds, enjambments, flexible syntax and relative freedom from grammatical norms, Philip personifies English as a 'father tongue' and evokes postcolonial disinheritance in this alien language:

I have no mother
tongue
no mother to tongue
no tongue to mother
to mother
tongue
me

(p. 56)

Philip's literalization of the dead metaphor 'mother tongue' infuses an abstraction with bodily concreteness, enabling her to begin to repossess the non-mother tongue as her own. The sonic slide in ensuing lines of the poetic text from 'dumb-tongued' to 'dub-tongued' (as in African Caribbean 'dub' or performance poetry) is emblematic of the transformation of silencing into indigenized expressivity (p. 56). Here poetry coincides with theory in conceptualizing the postcolonial subject's relation to language; but instead of merely stating the idea, it invents poetic forms that enact it, dramatizing this verbal suppression and subversion in puns, repetitions, consonances, metaphors and personifications, grafted onto telling line breaks, vivid typographical juxtapositions, and syntactic disruptions and parallels.

Running alongside the poetic text are several other kinds of texts, each with a different font and spatial layout. The juxtaposition of voices in various type-faces makes materially visible the pressure on the poetic text of scientific, legal and naturally descriptive realms. Though such interdiscursive juxtapositions appear in works by Jacques Derrida and other theorists, they arguably have an especially dramatic place in poetry, where every detail, including the typographic and visual appearance of texts on the page, contributes significantly to the signifying processes. Philip's lineated poetic text ('English / is my mother tongue') is flanked, in the left-hand margin, by a vertically printed prose description of a newborn child of indeterminate species whose 'MOTHER'S TONGUE' is said to have 'TONGUED IT CLEAN' of the mother's amniotic sac – a prose text that echoes and reinforces the poetic literalization of 'mother tongue' (p. 56). On the second page, the description further plays on this literalization by inverting it, re-metaphorizing this lingual relation when the mother is said to blow words – 'HER WORDS, HER MOTHER'S WORDS, THOSE OF HER MOTHER'S MOTHER, AND ALL THEIR MOTHERS BEFORE – INTO HER DAUGHTER'S MOUTH' (p. 58). Meanwhile, in the right-hand margins of the first and third pages, Philip prints two edicts, cast in the voice of British colonial authorities before emancipation. The first edict demands that slaves be mixed with other slaves who do not speak their language, thereby preventing their speaking to each other to 'foment rebellion and revolution' (p. 56). 'Every slave caught speaking his native language', according to the second edict, 'shall be severely punished', including 'removal of the tongue' and its monitory display (p. 58). These edicts historically contextualize the significance of the postcolonial speaker's longing for an absented mother tongue, her estrangement from the very language she is using, and her aggressive wringing of unexpected meanings and puns out of words. Also lending resonance to her creative assault on English is a third intertext on the first facing page – a

seemingly scientific, analytic passage about speech-related parts of the brain, named after the nineteenth-century doctors Wernicke and Broca – the latter of whom sought to prove white males ‘superior’ to ‘women, Blacks and other peoples of colour’ (p. 57). On the last page, the discourse of scientific knowledge is cast in the form of multiple choice questions about the tongue, except that unexpected counterdiscourses interrupt, as when a man’s tongue is defined as an organ of (a) taste, (b) speech, (c) ‘oppression and exploitation’, or (d) ‘all of the above’, and spoken words are said to require

- (a) the lip, tongue and jaw all working together.
- (b) a mother tongue.
- (c) the overseer’s whip.
- (d) all of the above or none.

(p. 59)

The imaginative deviations and leaps of poetry have been allowed to disrupt the neutral sheen of scientific language. At the same time, as already observed, Philip incorporates within her lineated, poetic text the analytic discourse of postcolonial theory’s conceptualization of language in relation to oppressed and marginal subjects. Even as the poem sharply separates out the poetic text from its generic others – naturalist prose, edicts, science – it nevertheless also provides evidence of the cross-generic contamination of poetry by its others. Although the ‘poetic’ text that runs down the centre of the page is distinguished from the different kinds of prose that surround it, the entire collection of texts in ‘Discourse on the Logic of Language’, including imperial edicts and multiple choice questions, is subsumed under the poem’s title and is integral to it. Other key postcolonial poems, such as A.K. Ramanujan’s ‘Elements of Composition’ and ‘Drafts’, are animated by theory – in his case, partly poststructuralism, partly ancient Hindu concepts. Except for Language poetry, poetry and theory are often thought of as being irreconcilable opposites – lyric particularity and feeling as against inhuman abstraction. But poets such as Philip and Ramanujan reveal the complex ways in which postcolonial poetry both is and is not its theoretical other.

Poetry and law

Along with its interfusions with theory, Philip’s poetry – perhaps not surprisingly given her formal training and seven-year practice as a lawyer – also sometimes intersects with law. ‘Law and poetry’, she has written, ‘both share an inexorable concern with language – the “right” use of the “right” words, phrases, or even marks of punctuation; precision of expression is the goal

shared by both.²² The language of her book-length poetic sequence *Zong!* (2008) is drawn largely from a 1783 legal decision, *Gregson v. Gilbert*, rendered after the owners of the slave ship *Zong* sued insurers to collect damages for the ‘loss’ of between 130 and 150 slaves. In an atrocity that strengthened the argument in Britain for the abolition of the slave trade, the enslaved Africans had been thrown overboard to die in the sea, because the captain believed that the insurers would be liable for ‘cargo’ unloaded to preserve the remaining crew and slaves, whereas nothing could be collected from the insurers if the slaves died onboard through illness. In the surviving legal decision, which Philip reprints at the end of *Zong!*, the enslaved Africans are assumed to be ‘property’, the captain’s action a mere ‘throwing overboard of goods’, in part ‘to save the residue’ (p. 211). While Philip acknowledges the desire for ‘precision’ in legal language, she also sees ‘the legal report of *Gregson v. Gilbert* masquerading as order, logic, and rationality’, part of a discourse that ‘promulgated the non-being of African peoples’, its order hiding disorder, ‘its logic hiding the illogic’ (p. 197). Although her poems are immersed in the regulative language of the legal decision, her dispersal, fragmentation, and even violent shredding of those words accord with her view of poetry as pushing ‘against the boundary of language by engaging in language that often is neither rational, logical, predictable or ordered’, in the way of the law (p. 197). ‘While a concern with precision and accuracy in language is common to both law and poetry’, she writes, ‘the law uses language as a tool for ordering; in the instant case, however, I want poetry to disassemble the ordered, to create disorder and mayhem so as to release the story that cannot be told, but which, through not-telling, will tell itself’ (p. 199). At the same time that she recognizes the kinship between poetic and legal discourses, Philip intercalates the calm order of legal language with her poetry’s gaps and perturbations, its inverted hierarchies and disruptive energies, to unmake that precise order from within.

Take ‘Zong! #24’, the diction of which is from *Gregson v. Gilbert*:

evidence

is

sustenance

is

support

is

the law

(p. 41)

The diction of legal reasoning (‘evidence’, ‘support’, etc.), the anaphora formed by a neutral-seeming and unvarying copula, ‘is’, the ordering of a stanza-like

unit with a seeming heading ('evidence', later 'the ship', 'the perils', etc.) that subordinates the right-margin substantives, all seem close cousins with the order, hierarchy and rational procedures of legal language. Its alternate lines braced from above and below by 'is', the poem persists with seemingly definitional and evidentiary claims that the ship is the captain and crew, that the perils are the rains and seas and currents, until it ends on an abrupt twist:

the case
is
murder (p. 41)

In the 1783 judicial opinion, the word 'murder' is used, but, astonishingly, not in relation to what happened to the enslaved people, who are mere 'goods', but by way of analogy to prove a legal principle: 'Every particular circumstance of this averment need not be proved. In an indictment for murder it is not necessary to prove each particular circumstance' (p. 211). Another judge quibbles with this analogy, but again, not because the drowning of the enslaved people was murder, but because the 'argument drawn from the law respecting indictments for murder does not apply' (p. 211). The legal text uses the word 'murder' only figuratively. Philip's emphatic ending to her poem reveals this figurative usage, in a bizarre legal quarrel over niceties of argumentation, as a kind of Freudian slip: through it, the slave killings well up in the judicial text that tries legally to rationalize them into the loss of cargo. The legal text speaks 'murder', but only in a seemingly unconscious acknowledgment. Philip's poem recognizes its family resemblance to the law, but by energetically rearranging and deranging law's ostensibly rational language, it reveals the ordered madness sometimes concealed by law's seemingly authoritative logic.

The poems in *Zong!*, as Philip insists, are 'antinarrative' (p. 204), disrupting narrative order and fluency by their spacing and stuttering, and yet they also participate in a collective postcolonial narrative, or more accurately, counter-narrative – a historical story of colonial massacre, dehumanization and enslavement that, because of its sheer enormity and lack of adequate documentation, 'cannot be told yet must be told, but only through its un-telling' (p. 207). Whether postcolonial poems are more lyrical or narrative in technique, whether anti-lyrical, anti-narrative, or both, insofar as they seek to tell stories occluded by colonialism, they feed into a series of grand narratives of recovery and anti-colonial contestation, postcolonial *grands récits* offered in place of colonial ones. The law is also often seen as a tissue of narratives, though these are ultimately intended not to renarrate the past for purposes of enlightenment, but, as Paul Gewirtz puts it, 'to invoke the coercive force of the state

on one's behalf'.²³ Even those marginalized persons and groups seeking to challenge the legal status quo do so through stories that function as arguments meant to mobilize powers of government. In the contest of narratives, postcolonialism proffers tales that untell colonialism's master narratives while telling untold stories of injuries and injustices suffered under colonization.

Another postcolonial poem that retells without telling the history of slavery in the Caribbean, Jamaican poet Lorna Goodison's 'Annie Pengelly' closely intertwines law and poetry. Although Goodison's style looks nothing like Philip's experimentalism, her poem is also permeated by legal discourse, even as it, too, defines its difference from the law:

I come to represent the case
of one Annie Pengelly,
maidservant, late of the San Fleming Estate
situated in the westerly parish of Hanover.²⁴

At the start, the speaker's formal and authoritative voice seems very much like that of a lawyer. To 'represent' her subject in a poem, the poet suggests, is akin to representing her in a court of law: in both realms, a surrogate speaks for a silent plaintiff and tells her untold story. Annie Pengelly is defined formally and factually by her name, work and place of work (San Fleming Estate fictionalizing San Flebyn Estate²⁵), though the adjective 'late' starts to hint at difference: this plaintiff is long dead. In poetry, unlike law, there are no statutes of limitation. Annie Pengelly, we learn from an account that reaches back to before the 1838 abolition of slavery in the West Indies, is the pseudonym of an enslaved girl forced by her unhappy, lovelorn mistress to 'lie draped, / heaped across her feet / a human blanket' (p. 29), and keep her warm in the cold of winter. When the insomniac mistress sang and danced, she commanded Annie to applaud. She kept Annie awake by sticking her with a pin, slapping her, or, worst of all, making her '*cut-up / to throw-away*' piles of old newspaper – dubbed by the poet 'the paper torture' (p. 30).

Setting the scene in terms of both place (northwestern Jamaica, where the mountains rear up in 'the shape of a Dolphin's head', p. 27) and time (the Middle Passage 'journey in long, mawed ships, / to drogue millions of souls', p. 27), the poem at first plays along with conventions of trial law, while nevertheless code-switching into non-standard diction ('this need ... that cause', p. 27) and long-historied scene-setting, and so running counter to law's formality, anti-digressive narrative methods, and foreshortened time horizons:

So now you are telling me to proceed
and proceed swiftly.
Why have I come here representing Annie? (p. 27)

The judge's voice echoes in the poet-lawyer's repetition and address, but the poem, while evoking through dramatic monologue the oral give-and-take of a trial, refuses the judge's demand for narrative linearity, for what have been called law's 'institutional requirements' of 'brevity and relevance' – and the law's customary injunction to tell nothing but the truth.²⁶ The speaker, it turns out, has been telling and yet slyly refusing to tell the plaintiff's story:

Well this is the first thing she asked me to say,
that Annie is not even her real name.
A name is the first thing we own in this world.

We lay claim to a group of sounds
which rise up and down and mark out our space
in the air around us.
We become owners of a harmony of vowels and consonants
singing a specific meaning. (pp. 27–8)

So much for legal efficiency and representation: this lawyer-poet refuses to disclose even the plaintiff's real name. Remarkably, in the plantation context, Goodison presents naming not as someone else's forcible imposition (a parent's, a slavemaster's, a state's), but as self-possession, in her self-reflexively 'poetic' description of a name as a unique musical signature, a verbal fingerprint that no one can erase. Annie's 'real name was given to her / at the pastoral ceremony of her outdoorings' (p. 28), a Ghanaian naming ritual that provides communal grounding for her self-identity, as reenacted in turn by the poet's incantatory verses.

Appropriately in a tale of colonial servitude, the words 'own' and 'owners', in this poem's 'harmony of vowels and consonants', will echo to the very ending. Goodison richly mines poetry's phonemic recursiveness and semantic ambiguity. Several words beginning with *O* repeat and interact in the poem's vowel-enwound tissue of sounds: *own*, *owe*, *O*, *Oh*, and *one*. *Own*: in retelling her story, the speaker would restore a kind of self-ownership to a girl once owned by a cruel slave mistress; the verbal self-possession of poetry supplants the dispossession of slavery. Though having been deprived of the ownership of her body, the girl can, at least in this civil-trial-by-verse, own a name as a locus of identity. The word *own* thus points in two contrastive directions, as a signifier of both European legal rights to owning black bodies under colonialism and poetic rights to nominal self-ownership in the naming ritual of verse. So too, the word 'one' ripples through the poem in two opposite senses. It is a marker

of Annie's subjugation to the status of property, as when the speaker grimly lists 'one small African girl' (p. 29) after an anaphoric list of objects owned by the slave mistress that begins, 'One pair of tortoiseshell combs, / one scrolled silver backed mirror' (p. 28). 'One' thus recurs in the sense of what the *Oxford English Dictionary* calls an 'Emphatic numeral' to mean 'one only',²⁷ suggestive here of the evidentiary particularity of the courtroom – a listing bleakly resumed in the phrase 'One pile of newspapers' (p. 30). But at the poem's trial-like beginning, 'one' appears in another sense familiar from the courtroom, as an indefinite pronoun in apposition with the plaintiff's name, here meaning 'some one, a certain one, an individual, a person':²⁸ 'I come to represent the case / of one Annie Pengelly' (p. 27). In contrast to her being legally a *no one* under colonialism, mere property, 'one small African girl', the lawyer-poet emphatically redefines her in her singularity, as a *someone*. Retrospectively restoring to Annie a human self-sameness negated by slavery, the poem clangs these two legal meanings of 'one' against each other to acknowledge Annie's degradation and yet replace one kind of oneness (property), protected by colonial law, with another (human uniqueness), protected in this instance by the law-like postcolonial poem.

Recounting Annie's abuse, the speaker makes an appeal to collect symbolic damages, transmuting an unjust history of *owning* into the nearly homophonic poetic-legal demand for *owing*:

So I come to say that History owes Annie
the brightest woolen blanket.
She is owed too, at least twelve years of sleep . . . (p. 29)

At the poem's end, the speaker insists again that 'history owes Annie' (p. 31), lists the damages sought and concludes:

Annie Pengelly O.
I say, History owe you. (p. 31)

The poem's climactic juncture between two *o* sounds, achieved in part through creolization of the verb (used in its uninflected West Indian form), encapsulates the relation this work has been developing between legal and poetic discourses. The final lines suddenly shift the speaker's addressee from the imaginary judge, who has by this point disappeared entirely, to the dead plaintiff. Poetry's vocative O is directed to the dead Annie Pengelly, who can only hear this address by the poetic fiction of apostrophe. Goodison has been trying to rhyme poetry with justice, the imaginative O with the legal *owe*. Like a lawyer, she has been seeking redress for injustices to Annie in part by telling her story before the court of contemporary postcolonial opinion. But while

hitching its apostrophic *O* to the judicial *owe*, the poem also points up the difference between the coercive capacity of the law, which by virtue of being vested with the authority of the state could bring about material and social reparation for past injustices ('It is so ordered'), and the imaginative and rhetorical authority of poetry: long-dead Annie can benefit only in the sense of latter-day recognition of her abuse. There is no governmental power vested in poetry, as in law, for the redress of grievances, for defining rules and realities of *ownership*, for compelling the injuring party to repay anything to the *one* who may be morally *owed*. Yet by its own procedures of *re*-presentation, which include magical sonic junctures between antitheses and imaginative reparation for irreversible losses, poetry can aspire to address (*O*) – maybe even figuratively redress (*owe*) – past injustices and grievances (*Oh*) that sometimes lie beyond the reach of the law.

This poem's postcolonial counternarrative of victimization is part of an oral family tradition, one of the poet's mother's stories. Goodison directly places her white great grandfather in the poem, George O'Brian Wilson, 'Shoemaker and Sadler', formerly 'bruk Sailor' (p. 28) – the same sailor who mated with Goodison's African great grandmother in the poem 'Guinea Woman', both of whose stories are told in Goodison's memoir *From Harvey River* (2008). By the poem's mention of the historical figure of Lady Nugent, this living African Caribbean oral tradition is implicitly set against the written European tradition. In her published journal, Lady Nugent takes her cultural bearings from Britain and Europe, vividly documenting Jamaican society from the perspective of a colonial administrator's spouse resident on the island from 1801 to 1805. At the time of her wedding, for example, she assembles all the 'black servants' dressed in white muslin: 'Their wish was, that General N. and I might live happy together, till our hair was as white as their gowns. They don't know what snow is, or I suppose they would have said snow, rather than gowns.'²⁹ Goodison inverts Lady Nugent's assumption that European experience and language are normative: in 'Annie Pengelly', she recounts how, during the season when the slave mistress made Annie lie across her feet because cold winter winds blew, the 'transplanted' planters were confused by the weather,

Causing them to remember words like 'hoarfrost' and 'moors'
from a frozen vocabulary they no longer
had use for. (p. 29)

During her first fall in Jamaica, Lady Nugent complains of feeling 'the cold quite uncomfortable'; 'the squalls of wind are so powerful, that they pervade everything' (p. 46).

Whether Lady Nugent knew that the slave mistress at a Hanover estate used an African girl as a human water bottle, she does not say, but she did witness and deplore the abuse of other enslaved people. Despite her participation in the colonial enterprise, her narrative – though eurocentric – is sympathetic with the fate of the often physically and sexually abused ‘blackies’ and thus gives limited voice, perhaps surprisingly, to an anti-colonial counternarrative. In Lady Nugent’s journal, sugar production is at first described as ‘very curious and entertaining’ (p. 85), but the Englishwoman does not suppress her horror at learning, when first touring a Jamaican sugar mill, that ‘negroes’ were forced to work monotonous and arduous twelve-hour shifts over boiling cauldrons. The overseer, she says, ‘owned to me that sometimes they did fall asleep, and get their poor fingers into the mill; and he shewed me a hatchet, that was always ready to sever the whole limb, as the only means of saving the poor sufferer’s life! I would not have a sugar estate for the world!’ (p. 86). Partly by virtue of her gendered position as both colonial participant and subject of a patriarchal colonial system, Lady Nugent recognizes that the enslaved Africans are cruelly abused, physically and sexually. To the extent that her colonial narrative and others embed within themselves an anticipatory counternarrative, they differ from legal narratives that function as argument subordinated to the necessity of winning a case.³⁰

So too Goodison’s poem, despite its primary drive to ‘represent’ the plight of the colonized, also gives voice to suffering on the other side of the colonial divide. Amid its many internal echoes, the poem lexically links the gender-based ‘servitude’ (p. 31) of the slave mistress to the race-based oppression of her ‘maidservant’ (p. 27). The poem’s split sympathy separates it, too, from one-sided legal argument, since the poet-lawyer’s concession could undo the case against the accused slave mistress in a court of law:

and poor Missus enslaved by love
fighting her servitude with spite. (p. 31)

Annie’s tormenter is herself tormented, we learn, despite the speaker’s disavowal of salacious gossip about the colonial planting class:

With all that birthday show of affection
Massa never sleep with missus.
But I am not here to talk about that,
that is backra business. (p. 29)

When she acknowledges that Missus is ‘enslaved’ by patriarchy, just as Annie Pengelly is enslaved by colonialism, the speaker risks giving ammunition to the other side and seeming to explain or even justify the slave mistress’s abhorrent

abuse of the claimant. Indeed, the word ‘slave’ or ‘enslaved’ does not appear in the poem, ironically, except in reference to the slave mistress’s bereft subjugation to her loveless master. This vernacular perspective on ‘backra business’ cannot be straitjacketed within what Philip calls the ‘order, logic, and rationality’ of the law. Goodison borrows rhetorical manoeuvres from the law, but her cross-cutting narratives, her echoic binding together of antitheses, forsake the discipline and one-dimensionality of legal argument for the polyphony of poetry’s multiperspectivism. She acknowledges that law and poetry share a great deal, even as she, like Philip, uses a legal language that ultimately turns the law on its head.

Ramanujan’s short ‘On the Death of a Poem’, built around the relations between the poetic sentence and the judicial sentence, plays on the family resemblances between poetry and law.

Images consult
one
another,

begins the poem. The second stanza shifts from tenor (the images in a poem) to vehicle (the jury), personifying images as

a conscience-
stricken
jury,

before the final stanza represents the convergence of the twain:

and come
slowly
to a sentence.³¹

Both the poetic and the judicial sentence involve a dialogic process of deliberation, except that in a poem, various possibilities internalized within a poet’s mind commingle, while members of a jury give and take views amongst themselves. Both poetic and judicial sentences involve a certain finality – a permanent decision after a process of debate and consolidation. Yet the ending of the idiosyncratic act of poetic creation, like the ending of the sentence in a poem, has an aesthetic finality, while a death sentence handed down by a jury has the force of the state behind it and results in an execution. The inner deliberation of the poet, the aesthetic collision of different images in a poem – Ramanujan reminds us of a poetic polysemy that persists, despite being aesthetically rounded out by a poem’s ending, long after a poem’s paradoxically deathlike birth into publication. By contrast, the law attempts to shut down tensions and deliberations, the multiple contending views that meet in the

arena of the courtroom, once judge or jury has made the decision to execute and the state steps forward to carry out the verdict. Poetry – suggest Ramanujan, Goodison and Philip – resembles the law in its precision, narratives and rhetoric, but its extravagant openendedness, even in its aesthetically finished state, encompasses narratives and counternarratives, logic and illogic, history and imaginative flight, the quest for redemption and the acknowledgment of irredeemable loss. The postcolonial poem – so called in part because of its coming after the colonization it often seeks to address ('O') and perhaps even redress ('owe') – sometimes returns to histories of unimaginable death and cruelty, making use of poetry's elasticity and multifariousness to reopen what may often have seemed a shut case. None of its sentences will be final verdicts that have the force of law; but if postcolonial poets ever approximate 'unacknowledged legislators of the world', in Shelley's famous phrase, it may be by virtue of their ability to unlock silences and disclose what has been suppressed; to retell narratives that include their own counternarratives; to restore a multidimensionality to the past, even while arguing, with an almost legal purposiveness, for the dignity and worth of lives lost to the systemic atrocities of colonialism.

Poetry and song

For all the interconnections between poetry and law, or between poetry and theory, poetry and song have long had a closer partnership, as well as subtler differences. In the postcolonial world, the vigour of oral traditions including song forms has shaped a great deal of poetry, perhaps most notably in Africa and the African diaspora in the Caribbean, Great Britain and elsewhere. The word 'song' can mean a poem (lineated verse) that is especially well suited to musical performance, and it can also mean poetry and music combined. Like other poets, the Ghanaian Kofi Awoonor transcribes musically accompanied song lyrics into written verse forms; his 'Songs of Sorrow' sequence recasts Ewe dirges as literary verse, including lines that lament estrangement and loss:

My people, I have been somewhere
If I turn here, the rain beats me
If I turn there, the sun burns me³²

The semantic contrasts yoked to syntactic parallelism between and across such lines suggest in part Awoonor's effort to mimic something of the rhythmic patterning of Ewe lyrics sung to drumming; but, as Robert Fraser notes, the poet working in a strictly literary medium is bereft of the resources of communal responses and musical accompaniment.³³ In transmogrifying American

blues songs into blues poems, African American poets such as Langston Hughes and Sterling Brown met with similar challenges – the difficulties of removing song from its communal, performative and musical contexts to the isolation of the printed page. Even song and poetry have their differences.

As in West Africa at the time of Awoonor's efforts, East African poets were also trying to capture aspects of song in literary verse. In *Song of Lawino*, Okot p'Bitek registers in the very title of his work its intimate relation to Acoli song, and within the work, the Ugandan village woman Lawino names

Provocative songs,
Insulting and abusive songs
Songs of praise
Sad songs of broken loves
Songs about shortage of cattle.³⁴

She also refers along the way to satirical beer-party songs, dance songs, war songs and funeral dirges. Upbraiding her West-intoxicated husband Ocol, Lawino recalls songs in her heavy reliance on second-person address ('Listen Ocol, you are the son of a Chief'), verbal and syntactic repetition and parallelism ('Stop despising . . . / Stop treating') and Acoli proverbs ('Who has ever uprooted the Pumpkin?').³⁵ But as Okot remarked, his 'long, long, long songs' were generically 'a new thing altogether' in their difference from the 'tradition I grew up in' – 'love songs, funeral songs and so on and so forth to be danced, to celebrate particular important occasions, birth and circumcision and so on and so forth'.³⁶ He was forcefully alerted to the difference between his songlike literary poem and indigenous song when he tried to read the first draft of *Song of Lawino* to his mother, herself a composer of songs:

. . . I took it to her with great pride and said, 'I've got a song for you.' And she completely surprised me by asking me to sing it! Of course, I couldn't, and my balloon just collapsed. She went on and asked, 'Is it a love song?' I couldn't answer that. 'Is it a war song? Is it . . . What kind of song is it?' So I said, 'You shut up. Let me read it to you'. She shut up and I read it aloud. She was very pleased but kept on saying, 'I wish there was some tune to it.' You see, it was not really like an Acholi song.³⁷

Okot had transformed Acoli songs by tying them together and encompassing them in a meta-song, writing them down and so abstracting them from specific occasions, and fusing them with Western models, such as Longfellow's long poem *Song of Hiawatha*, Victorian dramatic monologue, and anthropological discourse.³⁸ Postcolonial African poetry is, in short, sometimes inspired by song but should not be confused with it.

That said, there is a spectrum between such poems, songlike by virtue of their strong rhythmic or syntactic or sonic patterning, and more strictly textual poems. Some postcolonial poems are even more obviously meant to be read as written artefacts with little relation to song. Wole Soyinka's knotty, dense, elliptical early verse scarcely suggests a script for musical performance. Take this lugubrious prison meditation by a postcolonial Hamlet:

Hanging day. A hollow earth
Echoes footsteps of the grave procession
Walls in sunspots
Lean to shadows of the shortening morn³⁹

Like Okot and Awoonor, later Nigerian poets such as Niyi Osundare hew more closely to song, orality and performativity than does Soyinka in his early high literary verse.

Although I have been focusing on 'songs' in the sense of poems suited to musical performance, postcolonial songs in the other sense of the word, namely poems set to music, should not be overlooked, especially those that convey some of their 'poetic' artistry – verbal, formal, imaginative – on the page. Not all song forms survive being anaesthetized as text. But among the deftest postcolonial poems set to music were the songs rooted in slavery in Trinidad, witty and topical verses set to a musical duple metre, known as calypso. Walcott has said that 'the Caribbean's poetry, talent, and genius is in its music', and Brathwaite has argued that calypso marked 'the first major change in consciousness' for Caribbean artists, as a 'folk' poetry that rejected British colonial norms.⁴⁰ At the time of calypso's efflorescence in the 1940s and 1950s, the African presence in Caribbean culture, Stuart Hall indicates, still remained largely unacknowledged in day-to-day discourse;⁴¹ musically and verbally, calypso tells a different story, in advance of the revolutionary embrace of blackness and Africanness during the 1970s.

Among calypsos that poke fun at the pretensions and delusions of an internalized colonial mentality is Lord Kitchener's 'If You're Not White You're Black', written by Lord Kitchener after his migration to Britain aboard the *Empire Windrush*. It was recorded a year after the 1952 publication in French of Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks*, a poetry-drenched treatise that cites long passages revaluing Africanness by Aimé Césaire, Léopold Senghor, David Diop, Jacques Roumain and other poets of Negritude. Kitchener's song is a mock-serious address to a mimic who thinks he can hide his blackness, his relation to

Africa,
The land of your great grandfather,
The country where you can't be wrong,
The home where you really belong.⁴²

But this wannabe wishes to have nothing to do with his African cultural heritage. 'After having been the slave of the white man', says Fanon of this kind of self-alienation, 'he enslaves himself.'⁴³ The unknowing victim of the sense of racial inferiority foisted on him by colonialism, the mimic is constantly trying to 'run away' from and 'annihilate his own presence':⁴⁴ 'Subjectively, intellectually, the Antillean conducts himself like a white man. But he is a Negro.'⁴⁵

Your skin may be a little pink,
And that's the reason why you think
That the complexion of your face
Can hide you from the Negro race.

No, you can never get away from the fact:
If you not white, you consider black.

The refrain's use of 'consider' marks a subtle difference from racial essentialism, acknowledging that British society constructs such a person's racial identity as ineluctably 'black', despite more complex affiliations. Indeed, the song represents this man as a racial hybrid ('Your father is an African; / Your mother may be Norwegian'), though instead of either feeling tensely divided between his European and African inheritances, like the speaker of Walcott's nearly contemporaneous 'A Far Cry from Africa', or representing himself as an intercultural fusion shaped especially by his African inheritances, like the speaker of Goodison's later 'Guinea Woman', he is trying to suppress all African traces from his identity. Wishing he were 'really white', he shakes 'his waist like Fred Astaire', and indeed the song's suave musical orchestration is ironically suggestive of Astaire-like movie music, though transformed by distinctly West Indian syncopations that enunciate calypso's characteristically African and Latin roots.

A tool of cross-cultural memory, the song reminds the would-be Brit of his African cultural and racial origins, which he ignores at his peril. But the mimic, refusing to acknowledge the black speaker-singer, passes him by at a distance and puts on 'superior' airs, all to no avail, given the hard-and-fast dividing line between black and white in 1950s Britain:

Your negro hair is obvious;
You make it more conspicuous:
You use all sorts of Vaseline
To make out you a European.

You speak with exaggeration
To make the greatest impression
That you were taught apparently
At Cambridge University.

No you can never get away from the fact
If you not white, you consider black.

In Lord Kitchener's comic portrait, as in Fanon's more sombre analysis, the postcolonial subject's desire to show 'mastery' of the standard European language is unmasked as the desire to become 'whiter' and so 'closer to being a real human being'.⁴⁶ The song's linguistic creolization, merging Standard English with West Indian verb forms ('you consider black'), syncopations ('No, you can never get away from the fact'), and pronunciations ('European' as three syllables), shows a mastery of both the standard and vernacular, and in so doing it takes apart notions of European linguistic superiority by playing supply with and between these registers. The wickedly funny rhyme of 'Vaseline' with 'European', though riffing on signifiers of whiteness, itself demonstrates – as does the syncopated Astaire-like music – the very creolization denied by the white-masked black man, a creolization that also, it should be said, exceeds the bounds of the singer's monoracial insistences. The song explodes the wannabe's euro-pretensions by its inventive use of a black-entwined language and music that display a dazzling intercultural dexterity, a dexterity that can be contained neither within afrocentric nor eurocentric discourse.

Reggae found poetic expression in the work of dub poets such as Jamaican-born black British poet Linton Kwesi Johnson, who has often performed his lyrics backed by a reggae band, and Jean 'Binta' Breeze, another poet of Jamaican origins, who has lived mostly in Britain since 1985. Whereas Johnson's often songlike and strongly rhymed poetry corresponds to reggae lyrics and heavy four-beat rhythms, Breeze sometimes intercuts her free verse with sharply differentiated song lyrics. In readings, she sings these verses, noticeably shifting from 'poem' to rhythm- and rhyme-rich 'song' and back again. The poetry's performative dimensions – since 'song' is typically even more of a performance art than 'poetry' – are elaborated and emphasized by these effusions of song.

In Breeze's best-known poem, 'riddym ravings (the mad woman's poem)', the speaker, displaced by poverty from the countryside to a degrading and alienating Kingston, believes a radio inserted in her head plays the song that functions as her monologue's refrain:

*Eh, Eh,
no feel no way
town is a place dat ah really kean stay
dem kudda – ribbit mi han
eh – ribbit mi toes
mi waan go a country go look mango⁴⁷*

Within the poem's first-person narrative, Breeze marks off the song lyrics typographically by italics, sonically by paired rhymes (*way/stay*, *toe/mango*), and rhythmically by four-stress measures. Although Breeze chops up the lines to look like ragged free verse, they are aurally structured like a tightly metred and rhymed quatrain. Repeated four times in the poem, the song-as-refrain plays against the forward momentum of a story-in-verse of a countrywoman's abject decline in the city. The insertion of the song in the body of the poem corresponds with the insertion of the radio in the madwoman's body. Forced by poverty and dislocation to scavenge for food in back lots, to eat banana peels, to wear coarse scraps for clothing ('crocus bag'), to wash herself by a standpipe drain, she nearly loses her one source of emotional sustenance in an operation:

well dis time de dactar an de lanlord operate
an dem tek de whole radio fram outa mi head
but wen dem tink seh mi unda chloroform
dem put i dung careless
an wen dem gawn
mi tek de radio
an mi push i up eena mi belly
fi keep de baby company
fah even if mi nuh mek i
me waan my baby know dis yah riddym yah
fram before she bawn (p. 60)

A trickster who, like the female speakers of Louise Bennett's poems, confronts and cunningly subverts the powerful, this madwoman clings to her song-encoded memories of an alternative life, as distinct from the horrors of the alienating city street and madhouse (Bellevue). Whereas the early twentieth-century Jamaican poet Claude McKay is overwhelmed by nostalgia when he gazes on tropical fruits – 'tangerines and mangoes and grape fruit' – in a New York City shop window,⁴⁸ Breeze's madwoman is transported into the countryside not by visual images but by the mnemonic properties of rhythm, rhyme and song. When she pushes the radio up inside her belly, she specifically wants the baby to feel 'dis yah riddym yah / fram before she bawn'. Song's rhythmic

pulse reconnects the displaced urban mother and child with an otherwise inaccessible past.

In a poem Breeze wrote to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the arrival of the *Empire Windrush*, 'The Arrival of Brighteye', one of the songs intercut with the prose poetry is explicitly linked to the preservation of memory. In this case, a young girl whose mother has had to go to England for financial reasons –

My mommy gone over de ocean
My mommy gone over de sea
she gawn dere to work for some money
an den she gawn sen back for me

– sings in hopes of remembering her mother after more than five years of separation:

granny seh it don't matter
but supposin I forget her
Blinky Blinky, one two tree
Blinky Blinky, remember me⁴⁹

When the daughter arrives in the mother country, she at first mistakes for her natal mother a 'white white woman . . . wid white white hair', though 'is nat mi madda at all' (just as this turns out not to be a welcoming mother country) – a mistake so upsetting that she urinates on herself, liquid that she hopes might rejoin her with her grandmother across the seas in Jamaica (p. 55). Hers is again a crisis in part of memory amid dislocation: 'An me, what ah going to do, ah don't belong here, but ah don't belong dere eider, ah don't remember nobody, an all who would remember me, dead or gawn' (p. 56). By intermixing the recursive structures of song with often unrhymed and unmetred poetry, Breeze both acknowledges the longing for return and suggests its impossibility – the strandedness of the postcolonial subject in language that cannot fully rhyme the present with the pre-postcolonial, pre-urban, pre-globalized past. Even this song-incorporating poetry both blends with and yet diverges from 'song'.

Patience Agbabi, a black British poet influenced by Breeze and Johnson and other 'dub' poets but London-born of Nigerian parentage, writes and performs poems inspired by yet another African diasporic musical genre, as she puts it in 'R.A.W.':

rap is my delivery raw
more bitter than sweet

more twisted than bitter
 no throw away words
 cos I never drop litter⁵⁰

Rap's insistent and rapid-fire end and internal rhymes are the most obvious techniques Agbabi lifts ('Poetry is theft'), as well as quick syncopated rhythms and self-reflexive wordplay (p. 49). But whereas in Tim Brennan's words 'the central aesthetic of rap is excess',⁵¹ Agbabi merges rap techniques with the modernist insistence on poetic economy, her humorous rhyme on 'bitter' and 'litter' updating Pound's dictum, 'To use absolutely no word that does not contribute to the presentation'.⁵² Like many rappers, she credits other African diasporic musics, such as gospel, blues, soul and 'belowthebeltjellyrocknroll-jazzfunk', believing that they all help to 'articulate the pain / of our ancestors' ball 'n' chain', with rap as the quintessence of 'taking our languages back / using our own black words' (p. 50). As Brennan puts it, 'rap tries to be (in an Afro-conscious gesture peculiar to the present conjuncture) both the encyclopedia and the built-in commentary on all the African cultural production that existed before it'.⁵³ As poetry, Agbabi's verse harnesses the energies of the retrospective drive, although, as in the case of Breeze's intercutting of songs with poetry, it also maintains a reflective aesthetic distance from the musical form it draws on, tethering it to the page, separating it from techno-musical accompaniment, and fusing it with high literary aesthetics.

Agbabi's manifesto poem, titled initially 'Word' and then 'Prologue', is a rap-poetic tour de force. Agbabi draws on both the rapper's boastful account of authorial prowess and the high literary *ars poetica*, seamlessly melding the two. 'Give me a word', begins the poem, enjoining attention to her oral poetics:

Open your lips
 say it loud
 let each syllable vibrate
 like a transistor.
 Say it again again again again
 till it's a tongue twister
 till its meaning is in tatters
 till its meaning equals sound⁵⁴

As Roman Jakobson observes, the 'reiterative "figure of sound"', which Hopkins saw as the constitutive principle of verse', and which is even more pronounced in song, results from the emphasis on the medium as message,⁵⁵ until sometimes the meaning is nearly eclipsed by sound ('its meaning is in tatters'). A cross between Horatian instruction manual and rap boast, Agbabi's

poem indicates how poetic self-reflexivity can highlight not only the oral but also the graphic dimension of language – something that her literary rap can trade in but rap per se cannot:

now write it down,
letter by letter
loop the loops
till you form a structure.
Do it again again again again again
till it's a word picture.
Does this inspire?
Is your consciousness on fire?
Then let me take you higher. (p. 9)

Riffing on the lyrics of a 1969 song by Sly & the Family Stone ('I Want to Take You Higher'), Agbabi represents her address as inspired by poetry's embrace of the materiality of language, foregrounded by phonetic and graphic repetitions that refuse subordination to the referential function. Rap is shown to retrieve childhood play with words as if material objects: 'let me take you back / to when you learnt to walk, talk', words such as 'mama / dada', the second word the name of an artistic movement that foregrounded an artist's materials.

If you rub two words together you get friction
cut them in half, you get a fraction.
If you join two words you get multiplication. (p. 9)

Near rhyme is a frequent feature of rap, and Agbabi's deft use of Wilfred Owen-like par rhyme, or double consonance in end rhyme (*friction/fraction*, or earlier, *motion/mission*), instances the rubbing together of word sounds that she commends to her audience as generative.

Rhyme, onomatopoeia, syntax, metaphor – Agbabi not only uses the resources of poetry, she also plays on this classical vocabulary of poetic form:

I got more skills than I got melanin
I'm fired by adrenaline
if you wanna know what rhyme it is
it's feminine. (p. 10)

She humorously calibrates poetics in relation to race. Drawing on rap's savvy interpolation of contemporary technological references, as well as its wordplay and boastful self-descriptions, Agbabi wittily fuses rap with Christian myth, ars poetica, and soul lyric:

Cos I'm Eve on an Apple Mac
 this is a rap attack
 so rich in onomatopoeia
 I'll take you higher than the ozone layer. (p. 10)

Not to show favouritism towards one computer platform over another, she playfully continues:

So give me Word for Windows
 give me 'W' times three (p. 10)

Wordplay proliferates as Agbabi punningly shows how words can spawn other words: 'I'm living in syntax', she says (emphasized in performance by her pausing between the syllables in 'syn-tax'), only to tumble into another pun, on 'iamb':

You only need two words to form a sentence.
 I am I am I am I am I am
 bicultural and sometimes clinical,
 my mother fed me rhymes through the umbilical,
 I was born waxing lyrical.
 I was raised on Watch with Mother
 The Rime of the Ancient Mariner
 and Fight the Power. (p. 10)

Her iambs / I ams not accidentally multiplied by five, Agbabi repossesses the basic metrical unit of English verse to sound out a cross-cultural declaration of identity. BBC children's television, Romantic verse, and Public Enemy's political rap are all cited as wellsprings of the very poem we are reading, which has indeed fused rap with childlike verbal playfulness and high-art poetic self-nomination.

Rap has many different roots, among them spoken-word poetry of the 1960s and 1970s, and so for a spoken-word poet to turn to rap as a poetic resource is in some sense to return the form to one of its sources. Early in his career, the Soweto-born poet Lesego Rampolokeng also took cues from rap artists, as well as from the African American Last Poets and Gil Scott-Heron, and from reggae poets of Jamaican origin, Linton Kwesi Johnson and Mutabaruka. He has entitled many of his poems 'raps', including a fifty-rap sequence in *Horns for Hondo*, and has recorded raps backed by music. His apartheid-era poetry furiously denounces racial killings and economic inequities, and his post-apartheid poetry is no less sceptical about the new South Africa: 'nation-birth tumult amber survivals born crippled amid fires / rooted in dread the race-thread holds

in jesus bread moulds'.⁵⁶ His poetry of blood, faeces, semen and vomit trades in rap's insistent rhymes, vertiginous wordplay and political rage. As he puts it in 'rap 31' in *Horns for Hondo*:

... I'm a rap-surgeon come to operate
my tongue has no speed limit
in the intensive care unit⁵⁷

Although rap lyrics are less melodically performed than are other song forms, rap's intensely rhymed and rhythmically uttered lines – often dense with wit, wordplay, syllabic echoes – make insistent use of formal resources that are the poet's stock in trade. Rap is an oral poetry, formally patterned with mnemonic devices and heavily borrowing from the past, and postcolonial poetry has frequently attempted, as we've seen, to bend European literary traditions in the direction of a precolonial orality. Still, like such postcolonial poets as Okot p'Bitek and Jean 'Binta' Breeze in relation to other song forms, Agbabi and Rampolokeng concede by their formal hybridization of rap's orality with literary verse that such postcolonial poetry in English is far from being some preliterate African oral essence. It is a diasporic form shaped by African American and African Caribbean sources, and available for transnational refashioning by poets and artists from around the world.

Poetry and prayer

Like poetry and song, poetry and prayer have long nourished one another in many cultures. The close interrelations among hymns, psalms and odes, for example, indicate the enmeshment between the liturgical and the literary. When postcolonial poets draw on prayer, or address to the divine, they bring the energies of oral performance and sacral engagement into literary works, even as they often hold religion's truth claims at a measured distance. Because missionary Christianity marched across the world frequently hand in glove with the economic and military forces of European colonialism, postcolonial poets sometimes betray a vexed if intimate relation to Christian prayer. Many of them more openly embrace non-Western devotional forms, though even the religiously inspired works they write – belief as mediated through the distancing medium of poetic self-reflexivity and artifice – are typically as-if prayers, pseudo-prayers, or meta-prayers.

Christopher Okigbo, as the grandson of the priest of the river goddess Idoto, invokes this ancestral Igbo god in his most famous lyric and leans on her

totemic tree, but at the same time, as the son of Catholics, he echoes Christian parables and Catholic prayers to the Virgin Mary:

Before you, mother Idoto
naked I stand;
before your watery presence,
a prodigal

leaning on an oilbean,
lost in your legend.⁵⁸

By virtue of his language's inextricability from Catholic prayer and the Psalms, the poet acknowledges that his nativist return to precolonial religious sources cannot escape cultural syncretism. Layered with lyric self-consciousness, the poem's liturgical hybridity calls into question the truth claims of the discrepant religious systems it mobilizes and melds in an improvised literary rite.

The Barbadian poet Kamau Brathwaite also invokes the language and rhythms of Christian prayer, such as the thirteenth-century hymn 'Dies Irae' or days of wrath, paradoxically appropriating them to indict European peoples for atrocities at Mi Lai, Sharpeville, Wounded Knee and elsewhere, despite Christianity's long complicity in colonization. His poem 'Irae' ends with this prayer:

mighty & majestic god
head savior of the broken herd
heal me nanny cuffee cudjoe
grant me mercy at thy word

day of fire dreadful day
day for which all sufferers pray
grant me patience with thy plenty
grant me vengeance with thy sword⁵⁹

The poet summons leaders of the Maroons, ex-slave rebel warriors, as prototypes for the kind of fierce resistance he attempts to re-enact in language; a syntactical ambiguity seems to put them in a relation of apposition to the apostrophized deity. The emphatic twinning of 'word' and 'sword' at the end of the last two stanzas enlists them both in the destruction of colonialism, Brathwaite switching the placement of these key words in a later version of the poem.⁶⁰ The God in whose name Europeans subjugated and killed various Caribbean and other non-European peoples is invoked here as the agent for unleashing the 'righteous rage' of the oppressed.

Whereas poets such as Okigbo and Brathwaite repossess Christian prayer for native returns or anticolonial judgments, other postcolonial poets reject it altogether, fiercely satirizing it as a tool of colonialism. Okot p'Bitek's *Song of Lawino* often quotes Christian prayers, but his defamiliarizing translations make these prayers seem ridiculous. Deploing her cravenly westernized husband's zealous Christianization, Lawino exclaims:

Ocol laughs at me
Because I cannot
Cross myself properly

*In the name of the Father
And of the Son
And the Clean Ghost*

(p. 74)

But Okot's estrangely explains translation of Holy Ghost as 'Clean Ghost' makes the prayer momentarily seem absurd to readers versed in Christianity, as it initially does to this African village woman. Similarly, when she attends a Catholic class, everyone seems to her to be

shouting
Meaninglessly in the evenings
Like parrots
Like the crow birds

*Maria the Clean Woman
Mother of the Hunchback
Pray for us
Who spoil things
Full of graciya.*

(p. 75)

Elsewhere, Okot p'Bitek explains the miscommunication with Italian missionaries that led to the mistranslation of the Christian God and Jesus as 'Hunchback' in Acoli (*Rubanga*), the Acoli having assimilated God/Jesus to the spirit who moulds people – namely, by causing the tuberculosis of the spine.⁶¹ But 'Hunchback' and 'Clean Woman' have the effect of making these Christian prayers seem nonsensical.

By contrast, when Okot imports indigenous prayers into his long poem, they are made to seem entirely comprehensible. If there are troubles such as infertility and famine, Lawino explains, it is because the 'ancestors are angry, / Because they are hungry, / Thirsty, / Neglected' (p. 101). So the elders gather at the clan shrine, make offerings to the ancestors, and then lead prayers to the dead to cleanse the homestead:

*The troubles in the homestead
Let the setting sun
Go down with them!*

(p. 101)

The assembled villagers repeat these prayers. The metaphoric coupling of the setting sun with the departure of the homestead's troubles has the effect of naturalizing the prayer, in contrast to the abstract and gratingly unfamiliar Christian prayers.

Non-Christian prayer plays an important role in the work of other post-colonial poets, such as two writers of South Asian origin, A. K. Ramanujan and Agha Shahid Ali. A Kashmiri Shia Muslim by origin, Ali laces much of his poetry with prayers and references to calls to prayer. According to an Islamic proverb, to pray and to be Muslim are synonymous, and the Qur'an is sometimes regarded as a book of prayers. In everyday Urdu speech, prayers of Arabic and Persian origin are part of the fabric of greetings, partings, thanks and other such speech acts. When the Arabic phrase *ar-Rahim* from the beginning of the Qur'an finds its way into one of Ali's many ghazals, it is explained in a footnote: "The Merciful" – one of God's ninety-nine names in Arabic. The traditional Muslim prayer begins: "Begin in the Name of God, the Beneficent, the Merciful" (*Bismillah al-rahmaan al-raheem*), a prayer that performatively prefaces many daily tasks.⁶² To bring Muslim prayer into English-language poetry is to attune a literary language long saturated with Christianity to the discursive experience of the Islamic world.

Even so, Ali could hardly be said to be an orthodox Muslim, and neither are his poems orthodox prayers. He sees prayer not as a means to connect with the one and all-merciful God, but as a performative rite that survives nonbelief, a vivid husk that outlives what it once contained. He asks in one ghazal, 'When even God is dead, what is life but prayer?' ('In', p. 66), and asserts in another:

I believe in prayer and the need to believe –
even the great Nothing signifying God. ('God', p. 75)

The title poem of *The Rooms Are Never Finished* asks, 'Now that God / is news, what's left but prayer?', belief voided in part by violent conflict on behalf of a Muslim God in Chechnya, Kashmir and elsewhere.⁶³ In these and other instances, the rituals and language of prayer are emptied out of the divine but retain the aesthetic patterning and distancing of poetry.

Prayer and disbelief tumultuously intertwine in Ali's elegy for his mother, 'Lenox Hill', in which the poet, frantic for connection, vertiginously addresses

his dead mother, a personified Kashmir, elephants, saints and a negative deity. He recounts his mother's dream:

She was, with diamonds, being stoned to death. I prayed: If she must die, let it only be some dream. But there were times, Mother, while you slept, that I prayed, 'Saints, let her die.'⁶⁴

By dint of sonic and imagistic repetition, death is changed into diamonds and vice-versa, in part by word-splitting enjambment; so too, fate is transformed into an object of longing, the poet praying for the death he cannot prevent. Contemplating the return of his mother's body to Kashmir, he beseeches an inversely defined deity: 'O Destroyer, let her return there, if just to die' (p. 18). Recalling his earlier play on 'die' and 'diamonds', he prays, near the poem's end, not for his mother's but for her destroyer's death:

Mother,
I see a hand. *Tell me it's not God's*. Let it die.
I see it. It's filling with diamonds. Please let it die. (pp. 18–19)

To stay the divine hand that will record a death, the poet paradoxically turns intercessory prayer inside out as prayer against the divine – here, a nightmarish figure who would stone (or diamond) his mother to death, though the poet, too, seeks by wordplay to find the radiant permanence of diamonding even within his abject and irreparable loss.

Despite Ali's resistances to Islamic orthodoxy, Shia prayers and rituals resonate through a long elegiac sequence he also wrote for his mother, 'From Amherst to Kashmir'. The first section of the sequence, 'Karbala: A History of the "House of Sorrow"', narrates in prose the defining trauma of Shia Islam, the martyrdom of Hussain, grandson of the prophet Mohammad, whose memorialization on 'the tenth of Muharram (*Ashura*) is the rite of Shi'a Islam – so central that at funerals those events are woven into elegies, every death framed by that "Calvary"'.⁶⁵ The same could be said of Ali's elegiac sequence for his mother, which interweaves the lamentations of Zainab, Hussain's sister, with Agha Shahid Ali's mourning for his mother. The identification is curiously doubled, since Ali writes that his mother, ever since girlhood, 'had felt Zainab's grief as her own' (p. 26): both Ali and his mother are martyred Hussain and mourning Zainab. In a dramatic monologue, Zainab cries out, praying to multiple addressees to join her in mourning: 'Paradise, hear me – ', 'Let the rooms of Heaven be deafened, Angels, / with my unheard cry', 'Syria hear me', 'World, weep for Hussain' ('Zainab's Lament in Damascus', p. 28).

The sequence of poems, enacting geographic movement from Amherst to Delhi to Srinagar, recalls the Ashura processions in which Ali had witnessed mourners crying, praying, even wounding themselves in grief.

But just when the reader might begin to think Ali has rejoined his Shia Muslim roots, the sequence repeats a prayer to a very different deity: ‘(*Dark blue god don’t cast me into oblivion, // in the temples, all your worshippers are asleep*)’ (‘Summers of Translation’, p. 29). Ali is recalling a *bhajan*, or Hindu devotional song, and even as he quotes prayers from the Qur’an, such as ‘*There is no god but God*’ (*la ilaha illallah*, the *Shahadah*, or Islamic creed) (‘Srinagar Airport’, p. 42), he also makes room in his elegiac sequence for prayers to Krishna, including an entire poem that re-creates a ‘Film *Bhajan* Found on a 78 RPM’, melding *bhajan* with the blues.

Dark god shine on me you’re all I have left
nothing else blue god you are all I have
I won’t let go I’ll cling on to your robe

(p. 40)

While cross-gendering himself as Zainab, wailing for her beheaded brother in the central Shia story, Ali also adopts the voice of Radha, Krishna’s primary consort, swearing her devotion and beseeching the blue god Krishna not to abandon her. The poem’s interweaving of Shi’ism with Hinduism allows Ali to place his grief within meaning-giving narratives that nevertheless, in combination, undo the absolute priority of any religion. In a syncretic strategy he derived in part from T. S. Eliot, about whom he wrote his dissertation, Ali’s modernist juxtaposition of prayers turns them into the poetic after-images of prayers. “‘In the Name of the Merciful’” begins a poem titled simply ‘God’, translating part of a basic Muslim prayer; but by poem’s end, the mourner meditating on his mother’s death turns this prayer on its head: ‘In no one’s name but hers I let night begin’ (p. 44). Ali draws on Shia Muslim prayer, but his humanistic insistence on his mother’s priority in the naming ritual of verse also subtly distinguishes his transreligious poetics from monotheistic prayer.

Another Indian poet, A. K. Ramanujan, activates a different set of religious contexts in prayer-studded poems. His eleven-part sequence ‘Prayers to Lord Murugan’ was inspired by a sixth-century Tamil poem, ‘the first long devotional or *bhakti* poem to appear in any Indian language, the first religious text to appear in any native tongue’ other than Sanskrit, ‘Guide to Lord Murugan’.⁶⁶ A major god of the ancient Tamils, whose worship continues in South India, Murugan probably originated as a fertility god and has six faces, twelve eyes and twelve hands.⁶⁷ According to Ramanujan, his sixth-century predecessor spiritualized an older secular tradition of poems about the relation between poet and patron as the relation between devotee and god (p. 190). If so, Ramanujan’s poem inverts

this literary historical process with his re-secularization, inserting twinges of self-reflexive irony in his ‘antiprayers’ (p. 192). The sixth-century precursor poem was, he said, ‘a poem of faith and strength; mine is one of lack and self-doubt’ (p. 192). Ramanujan Indianizes the modernist dicta that the poet should ‘make it new’ (Pound) and that the ‘past [is] altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past’ (Eliot).⁶⁸ Ramanujan’s meta-prayers ‘use an old poem in a well-known genre to make a new poem to say new things. The past works through the present as the present reworks the past’ (p. 192).

In his prayers to the six-faced god, Ramanujan honours Murugan and yet mildly ironizes the deity for his defining peculiarities, the poet himself for his doubts, and the contemporary world for its fallenness into abstraction. An initial hint of the poetic sequence’s distance from devotional mimeticism and its inability to close the gap with the object of its attention is its length: Murugan has twelve eyes and twelve hands, but the sequence has only eleven parts. Indeed, the sequence interrupts itself, after praying to end prayers ‘at once’, its abrupt end highlighting the difference between the sequence’s eleven limbs and the god’s twelve:

Lord of lost travellers,
find us. Hunt us
down.

Lord of answers,
cure us at once
of prayers.⁶⁹

The prayer begins seemingly in earnest, the hunt metaphor recalling Murugan’s iconography with an arrow in one hand and bow in another. But the paradoxes of being found by the lord of the lost, of a ‘Lord of answers’ addressed by a poet of questions, lead into the more sharply ironic suggestion that prayers are like an illness or disease in need of a ‘cure’. In a final irony, this is the one prayer that definitely seems to achieve its aim, since the moment it is pronounced, the sequence of prayers shuts down ‘at once’, a circuit between the human and the divine that short-circuits in its final plea.

Like the ending of the sequence, line endings throughout serve an ironic purpose by virtue of their abruptness. In the third poem, for example, strong poetic enjambments humorously multiply meanings:

Lord of green
growing things, give us
a hand

in our fight
with the fruit fly.

(p. 114)

The image of a twelve-handed god swatting fruit flies and the supplication of a god for such banal purposes seem overtly comic, but ironic twinges are also embedded in the line turnings: is he a 'Lord of green' or a 'Lord of green / growing things'? And is that to be understood as 'Lord of green-growing things' or as 'Lord of green, growing things'? The enjambment of 'give us' suggests a weighty supplication for something momentous, but Ramanujan completes this predicate with a cliché, 'give us / a hand', which jangles when applied to a god with twelve hands. Sonically amplifying these ironies are the triple alliterations of 'green', 'growing', and 'give', followed by 'fight', 'fruit', and 'fly'.

Some of the sequence's other ironies cluster around the god's multiple hands and faces. Murugan is said to have 'six unforeseen / faces', a phrase that 'bristles with paradox' since a god is expected to be 'prescient', as R. Parthasarathy remarks in an essay that observes how Ramanujan's 'clinical' and 'cold, glass-like' English seems to 'turn language into an artifact'.⁷⁰ The same could be said of his clinically ironic inspection of prayer in these embalmed prayers, or what Bruce King calls 'these imitation-antique poems'.⁷¹ The suppliant's meta-devotional tone keeps expressing itself in humorously colloquial phrases split up by enjambments, such as 'found work / for' and 'made // eyes at':

Unlike other gods
you found work
for every face,
and made
eyes at only one
woman. (pp. 113–14)

'Unlike other gods' seems ready to open out into fulsome praise for the god's distinctiveness, but shrinks in the next line to a compliment for not being on the dole, 'you found work', and for being monogamous.

But Ramanujan's hand-and-face irony is directed not only at the god but also at himself and his contemporaries:

Lord of the twelve right hands
why are we your mirror men
with the two left hands

capable only of casting
reflections? Lord
of faces,

find us the face
we lost early
this morning. (p. 116)

Ramanujan and other moderns are but diminished reflections of the god's magnificent multiplicity. With his many faces and hands, Murugan seems like someone seen in mirrors reflecting on other mirrors, but it is the modern humans who, though praying to him, are inverted and empty images of his multitudinous fullness. And indeed these poems instance the mirroring of mirrors, since they show the speaker to be capable of prayers that are but reflections of and on prayers. If Murugan seems a diminished thing for the postcolonial poet under modernity, he is a marker at the same time of human diminishment. Even with his many faces, this god is unlikely to help the poet who 'prays' to him to recover lost face (another dead metaphor humorously revived), since his poem also evidences a loss of faith.

Postcolonial poetry is, in short, interlaced with prayer, both Christian and indigenous, but irreducible to it. Even poems that seem close to prayer in their intensity and address nevertheless put devotional speech acts under inspection, interrupt them with poetic devices such as enjambment, or dialogically juxtapose discrepant religious systems. Still, postcolonial lyric poetry – by virtue of its apostrophic stance, figurative richness, and use of personal address – is well suited to incorporating, pluralizing, playing on, re-examining, and mimicking prayer. Similarly, despite the novel's many other advantages, postcolonial poetry is often especially saturated with, even as it marks some distance from, the rhythms, rhymes and oral exuberance of song. Song forms such as rap, calypso and reggae help energize postcolonial poetry, although Okot's 'songs' are really meta-songs, Breeze's poems poetically frame and incorporate song, and Agbabi's high/low mix and insistence on language's visual materiality on the page all separate these 'poems' from songs. Verbal precision, testimony, long-remembered awareness of precedent – these and other commonalities sometimes make law a shadow discourse in relation to which postcolonial poetry defines its imperative to remember, reconfigure, possibly even repair the past. Poets such as Goodison and Philip piggyback on the law, while exploiting poetry's non-legalistic polyphony, incantatory recursiveness, self-reflexivity and graphic arrangements on the page, to tell and yet untell, enunciate and yet interrogate stories about slavery and colonialism. Postcolonial poetry shares with postcolonial theory a preoccupation with linguistic alienation and collective memory, but poetry such as Philip's, more than theory and perhaps even fiction, formally enacts these concerns in the visualization of intertextuality and interdiscursivity on the page and in aggressive verbal

punning and fracturing that demonstrate both the postcolonial subject's losses and capacities. Although the historical and political stuff of postcolonial poetry and fiction is often shared, Okigbo's and Achebe's discrepant ways of performing and engaging this common material evidences the consequences of generic difference.

Many other examples of postcolonial poetry's interdiscursive dialogism deserve exploration – how the Jamaican Creole poet, Louise Bennett, for example, publishing much of her poetry initially in newspapers, is in vexed conversation with news discourse, wittily re-embodying it in women's life narratives and gossip, satirizing its standardized English, reinfusing it with a proverbial orality, and extending the foreshortened time horizons of the commodified information called 'the news'. This is not to hypostasize some pure generic essence named 'poetry', in contradistinction to the news or fiction, theory or law, song or religious chant. Indeed, the parsing of postcolonial poems into almost-theoretical poems, quasi-legal poems, semi-song-like poems, meta-prayerful poems, anti-news news poems, and so forth helps disaggregate 'poetry' into subgenres defined by their intersections with extra-literary discourses. W. B. Yeats famously began his 1936 edition of the *Oxford Book of Modern Verse* with a prose passage from Walter Pater, lineating the description of Leonardo's *Mona Lisa* as poetry. While highlighting in Pater's prose features that Yeats and other poets have often associated with poetry – intensity of verbal patterning and density of figurative language, compression and allusiveness, musicality and self-referentiality – Yeats's transgression of generic boundaries also revealed the artificiality and permeability of generic lines between 'poetry' and its prose others. Despite Bakhtin's privileging of the novel as the ultimate cross-generic genre, postcolonial poetry – while perhaps neither as rich in sociohistorical mimesis as the postcolonial novel nor as analytically astute as postcolonial theory, neither as enforceable as law, nor as musically and orally resonant as song, nor as devotionally pitched as liturgy – borrows from its generic others to create fresh formal amalgamations that make it new. By means of strategies transnationally absorbed into poetry and adapted from non-poetry, poets help fashion powerful new ways to trace and reshape the contours of postcolonial memory, language, and identity. Although postcolonial poetry has often been defined by its content, its distinctiveness is also to be located in its aesthetic specificity, even if this specificity is always bleeding and blurring into other forms. Postcolonial poets take from, and then send their works back into, the larger universe of colliding and ever-mutating genres and discourses.

Notes

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 68. T. S. Eliot, 'Tradition and the individual talent', *Selected Prose*, ed. Frank Kermode (New York, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1975), p. 39.
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Primitivism and postcolonial literature

VICTOR LI

The one who made too much of an effort to understand, the one who underwent the agonies of a conversion, the one whose idea was that of renunciation when he embraced the customs of those who forged their destinies in this primeval slime in a hand-to-hand struggle with the mountains and the trees, was vulnerable because certain forces of the world he had left behind continued to operate in him.¹

Titles are never simple or innocent especially when they appear to be so. This holds true for the seemingly innocuous title of this chapter. For what should give us pause in the title is the innocent, commonplace conjunction. Why is 'primitivism' – a term that summons up colonial projects and projections and enables the West to assert its modernity and maturity – linked through the conjunction 'and' to 'postcolonial literature' which, one can justifiably assume, would reject the scandalous problems associated with the term 'primitivism'? If, as literary and art historians have informed us repeatedly, modernist art and literature relied heavily on the resources provided by so-called primitive cultures, then surely postcolonial writers and artists would be critical of any form of primitivism that energized Western modernism? What, then, is the status of the conjunction in our title? Does it imply some kind of relation between primitivism and postcolonial literature? What sort of relation do we have here? Is it an antagonistic relation in which postcolonialism is opposed to primitivism? Or a complementary relation in which postcolonial literature finds primitivism useful as a strategic partner? Does the conjunction in relating the two terms also unsettle both, thus signalling a problem for any progressive literary history of postcolonial literature that would see primitivism as an idea of the past no longer relevant to our postcolonial present or future? If we see the conjunction as implying a complex relation between primitivism and postcolonial literature, can it be argued then that primitivism is not a historical anachronism and that postcolonial literature has not completely severed its

link to modernist primitivism? It seems that the commonplace conjunction linking the two halves of this chapter's title may enable us to see the history of postcolonial literature not as a linear historicist narrative but as an open-ended one in which a putatively superseded idea like primitivism can stage its many different returns.

But in examining the many different returns of primitivism in postcolonial literature, it is necessary to stress a crucial difference between modern Western uses and postcolonial redeployments of primitivism. While the former consolidates its modern self by projecting its fears and desires onto the figure of the so-called primitive, the latter sees in the primitive a strategic opportunity for establishing the difference of its indigenous identity in resistance to the universalizing assimilative mission of the West. In drawing on the primitivist paradigm created by modern Western interests, postcolonial literature undertakes a revisionary task in the service of what I would like to call 'strategic primitivism', a primitivism deliberately employed not only to question and challenge Western epistemic regimes and their project of 'othering', but to reformulate primitivism as the effort to recover an indigenous or autochthonous identity that has been outlawed or suppressed by colonial modernity.

In describing the different forms strategic primitivism has assumed in postcolonial literature, this chapter will also attend to the problems they raise. At the heart of these problems, it will be argued, is the difficulty of jettisoning the primitivism that has been strategically reappropriated and reconfigured to achieve the aim of affirming an autonomous postcolonial identity. At issue is strategic primitivism's use of what Naoki Sakai has called 'a schema of cfiguration': an attempt to formulate a resistant identity against the modern West that is in fact ironically implicated in mutual mimetic figuration between the premodern and the modern, the non-West and the West, a cfiguration that works at once against and with the West. Though Sakai's account of cfiguration refers to the context in which 'Japanese thought' is cfigured with 'Western thought', it can equally illustrate the complicit cfiguration that obtains between postcolonial and Western primitivism: "'Japanese thought'" and Japan are ideas whose ideality must be sustained symmetrically by the ideas of "Western thought" and of the putative West. Thus an epistemic arrangement has come into being, according to which to insist on the particularity and autonomy of Japan is paradoxically to worship the putative ubiquity of the idealized West.²² Just as 'Japanese thought' in maintaining its difference and autonomy from 'Western thought' paradoxically reinforces its reliance on its antinomy, so too the postcolonial reformulation of the primitive as the resistant Other of colonial modernity and neo-liberal globalization paradoxically

depends on its reinscription of the primitivist images and tropes that come with being Western modernity's Other.

Colonial modernity and primitivism

In discourses of colonial modernity, the 'native' or indigenous colonial subject was not just positioned geopolitically as non-Western but also defined chronopolitically as premodern or primitive, anthropology's not yet fully evolved Other from an earlier time as Johannes Fabian has observed cogently in his book, *Time and the Other*. Such a primitive Other, whose characteristics have been copiously noted in the work of pioneering anthropologists like E.B. Tylor, James Frazer and Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, served as the constitutive outside of the modern subject, enabling both the construction of modern identity as well as the securing and policing of that identity's border. There are two points of interest in this configuring or co-creation of the modern and the primitive. First, a rhetoric of contrast is utilized so that the primitive Other is seen as an inversion of its modern Western counterpart; the modern is whatever the primitive is not and vice versa. This rhetoric of contrast ensures that the alterity or otherness of the primitive is kept in the foreground. Second, the concept of the primitive is a necessary invention of the ideology of progress since the primitive's putative historical or temporal backwardness allows the modern West to measure its own advance and to legitimize its colonial 'civilizing mission'. As Bernard McGrane astutely remarks:

The resource of 'progress' authorized the transformation of the 'different' into the 'primitive' . . . The 'factual' existence of 'primitive peoples' – primitive peoples' are not a fact, but an interpretation – did not slowly, gradually, yet inevitably reveal to the European the reality of progress; rather the invention and institutionalization of progress in the mode of anthropological discourse created 'primitive peoples'. Progress produces primitives; primitives do not prove progress.³

The belief in progress is most evident in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century colonial discourses that relied on evolutionary arguments to justify and legitimize European modernity and superiority. Such triumphalist accounts encouraged a dangerous racial taxonomy and hierarchy in which primitive Others were not only denigrated but seen as obstacles in the path of progress. In a chilling but representative passage in Karl Pearson's influential *The Grammar of Science* (1900), the primitive Other's 'replacement' is urged in the interest of civilization's progress:

It is a false view of human solidarity, a weak humanitarianism, not a true humanism, which regrets that a capable and stalwart race of white men should replace a dark-skinned tribe which can neither utilize its land for the full benefit of mankind, nor contribute its quota to the common stock of human knowledge . . . [T]here is cause for human satisfaction in the replacement of the aborigines throughout America and Australia by white races of far higher civilization.⁴

Such a negative and derogatory primitivism based on nineteenth-century concepts of social evolution generally gave way to more affirmative descriptions of primitive life and society in the twentieth century. While in earlier accounts the primitive was regarded in deprivative terms as inferior and justifiably superseded by modern civilization, in most twentieth-century primitivist writings the primitive is seen as a corrective to the malaise of Western modernity, a redemptive alternative that supplies what is missing in modernity. Made aware of the horrors of industrial, mechanized slaughter in World War I, many intellectuals, George Stocking Jr notes, started to question their belief in progress and improvement and began to seek a 'regenerative relativity', an alternative to what Ezra Pound called 'a botched civilization'.⁵ Henrika Kuklick similarly observes that 'postwar anthropology became a vehicle for liberal criticism of Western society in general and colonialism in particular' and that anthropologists like Meyer Fortes and A.M. Hocart 'stressed the negative features of high civilization', no longer assuming 'that the most technologically advanced and politically organized societies would adhere to the highest moral standards'.⁶ The influential French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss seeks to instruct us in the wisdom of primitive societies by warning us not to disparage the 'savage' mind. 'Enthusiastic partisans of the idea of progress', he cautions, 'are in danger of failing to recognize – because they set so little store by them – the immense riches accumulated by the human race on either side of the narrow furrow on which they keep their eyes fixed; by underrating the achievements of the past, they devalue all those which still remain to be accomplished.'⁷ In his book, *In Search of the Primitive: A Critique of Civilization*, Stanley Diamond sums up the role of modern anthropology as that of championing a primitivism at once critical and redemptive of the ills of modern capitalist society:

If the fulfillment and delineation of the human person within a social, natural and supernatural (transcendent) setting is a universally valid measure for the evaluation of culture, primitive societies are our primitive superiors . . . What I mean is that in the basic and essential respects . . . primitive societies illuminate, by contrast, the dark side of a world civilization which is in chronic crisis.⁸

In the work of an early modernist writer like Joseph Conrad, we will find both the derogatory evolutionary primitivism of nineteenth-century anthropology *and* the redemptive, arcadian version of primitivism that was to become more popular in twentieth-century thought and literature. In *Heart of Darkness* (1899), we are presented with descriptions of Africans who have not progressed from the primitive past that their European peers have long since left behind.⁹ They represent to Marlow, Conrad's narrator, the instinctive, libidinal aspect of humanity that he finds threatening and that he wants restrained lest it erupt into monstrous savagery. But even as Marlow upholds the modern virtues of instrumental rationality and moral restraint, he also affords us glimpses of a primitive life world more attuned to the vitality of nature, a life world more authentic and less repressed and enervated than that found in the sepulchral European city to which he returns after his sojourn in the Congo. Arcadian primitivism is more fully depicted in *Lord Jim's* (1900) Patusan, a society removed spatially and temporally from the grey utilitarian world of modernity and one in which Jim's romantic imagination finds room for manoeuvre. The premodern arcadia of Patusan, though inevitably and tragically ruined by the forces of history and modernity, nonetheless continues to exert a utopian function by reminding disenchanted moderns like Marlow of a disappearing romantic world: 'But do you notice how, three hundred miles beyond the end of telegraph cables and mail-boat lines, the haggard utilitarian lies of our civilization wither and die, to be replaced by pure exercises of imagination, that have the futility, often the charm, and sometimes the deep hidden truthfulness, of works of art?'¹⁰

Lord Jim's arcadian primitivism with its sad knowledge that remote worlds cannot escape from modernity's invasive reach is the model most twentieth-century Western writers have adopted. The novel's elegiac farewell to the romantic world of Patusan, its melancholic '*et in Arcadia ego*' tone is echoed in works such as Claude Lévi-Strauss's *Tristes Tropiques* (1955), Peter Matthiessen's *At Play in the Fields of the Lord* (1965) and Bruce Chatwin's *The Songlines* (1987), in all of which we can detect both the excitement of discovering alternative ways of life to modernity *and* the sad realization that these alternatives are doomed to disappear even as they are discovered. Matthiessen's hero Moon, for example, realizes that it is his own consciousness that divides him from the Niaruna Indians he admires and that causes him to lose the 'enviable simplicity which in those bright green early days he had thought within his grasp'.¹¹ Chatwin's book ends with three Aboriginal elders, examples of the primitive authenticity the book seeks, stoically welcoming their own death and disappearance,¹² while in *Tristes Tropiques*, Lévi-Strauss

describes anthropology as an ‘entropology’, a discipline that studies ‘the disintegration of the original order of things’.¹³

But even in these affirmative if somewhat melancholic versions of primitivism, the primitive is conceived and valued solely as the antithesis of the modern West which continues to be not only the central point of reference but also the source from which the idea of the salvific or redemptive primitive originated. After all, it is the West, not primitive peoples, who seek salvation in alterity. The primitive does not exist in itself but only in relation to the needs of the West. As Michel-Rolph Trouillot has astutely noted, ‘the savage is only evidence within a debate the importance of which surpasses not only his understanding but his very existence’.¹⁴ The primitive in modern culture and literature remains, according to Marianna Torgovnick, ‘our ventriloquist’s dummy . . . The real secret of the primitive in this century has often been the same secret as always: the primitive can be . . . whatever Euro-Americans want it to be. It tells us what we want it to tell us.’¹⁵

Postcolonial neo-primitivism and its strategies

But what if the postcolonial heirs of the ‘primitives’ were to speak in their own voices? What can we expect to hear then? It is my contention that the primitivist paradigm has not disappeared; instead, it has undergone a significant ideological and formal reconfiguration resulting in what one can call a ‘postcolonial neo-primitivism’. As we have seen, in either its derogatory or laudatory form, Western primitivism has focused on the Western self’s fears or desires. When we shift to a postcolonial perspective, however, primitivism begins to look quite different, for the centre of interest is no longer the Western self or its primitivist fantasies and projections but the erstwhile object of those fantasies and projections, the postcolonial heir (or proxy) of the so-called primitive. What may have been fearful and threatening or marvellous and redemptive for the Euro-American primitivist is for the postcolonial subject the difference that in part constitutes its own indigenous identity. What modern Western primitivism sees as a search for redemption in alterity is from the postcolonial perspective the rediscovery of its own authentic indigenous heritage. Thus as Erik Camayd-Freixas has noted in the Latin American context, the exotic primitivism promoted by the European avant-garde was rediscovered and reappropriated by postcolonial artists as their own native reality:

Encouraged by European primitivism, they [young Latin American artists] soon turned their gazes home, seeking a more authentic primitive in their

own countries' indigenous traditions. Thus, the same primitivism that in the West remained a countercultural movement soon became, for Latin American artists, a form of cultural affirmation and a reformulation of identity starting from non-Western autochthony.¹⁶

I will argue, however, that while the appropriation and resignification of the Western primitivist paradigm by postcolonial artists and writers can be seen as a direct criticism of Western primitivism, such a postcolonial strategy of questioning primitivism while also appropriating it to affirm indigenous authenticity is not without its problems.

To be sure, there are postcolonial writings that have directly addressed Western primitivism in order to dismiss it completely. An early African novel like Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958) disputed colonial ethnographic descriptions such as those expressed in the District Commissioner's *Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger* or projections of Western anxieties onto the blank screen of a primordial Africa such as those found in *Heart of Darkness*.¹⁷ To the egregious misrepresentations of Africa by European primitivists, Achebe opposed representations more faithful to the native way of life. In doing so, he adopted a kind of ethnographic realism. Where colonial primitivist discourses like the District Commissioner's or Kurtz's described and sought to suppress what they regarded as savage customs, Achebe turned the very same customs portrayed in colonial ethnographies as threatening, irrational and bizarre into the familiar, the everyday, the understandably human. Achebe has said that he wants the West 'to look at Africa not through a haze of distortions and cheap mystifications but quite simply as a continent of people – not angels, but not rudimentary souls either – just people'.¹⁸ The problem, however, with Achebe's counter-discourse is that its assertion that Africans are 'just people' may lead not only to a generalized, perhaps even empty, universalism (important though such a universalism may be in redressing evolutionary primitivism's racism) but also finds itself relying on the same realist and empiricist regime of representational conventions employed by the colonial ethnographies it seeks to question. Ato Quayson has perceptively noted that in his attempt to render traditional Igbo culture 'knowable', Achebe employs the 'scientific realist modalities that govern ethnographic writing'. Quayson goes on to say that in Achebe's writing, 'the radical alterity of the depicted Igbo culture, irrespective of its seeming difference, is still amenable to a scientific epistemological paradigm of categorization and interpretation'.¹⁹ The task of rendering Africa more knowable thus seems to involve ironically a reduction of the differences, the radical alterity that the Western

representatives of a generalized humanity had sought to reduce, suppress or eliminate in the first place. In a postcolonial age suspicious of universalizing Western metanarratives and sympathetic to arguments for difference as a guarantee of cultural autonomy, Achebe's humanism appears less attractive than a neo-primitivism that no longer accepts the Western derogation of the colonized native but seeks instead to find, in Andrew Lattas's words, an uncolonized 'alternative space from which to reflect upon the terms of present existence'.²⁰

Postcolonial neo-primitivism can thus be regarded as a kind of anti-primitivist primitivism in which modern Western primitivism is challenged by a more authentic, indigenous set of beliefs.²¹ Postcolonial primitivism posits an uncolonized space from which Western primitivism can be reconceived and reformulated *otherwise*, the other created by the West now reconfigured into the 'otherness' that truly defines native identity. It can be described, along the lines of Gayatri Spivak's 'strategic essentialism', as a 'strategic primitivism' in which primitivism is employed 'in a scrupulously visible political interest'.²² When self-primitivizing occurs in postcolonial writing it occurs for the following reasons: (1) to invert modern Western ideas, resignifying what they value as deficits and what they abject as salvific alternatives; (2) to produce a primitive or aboriginal space, fictive or utopian, that is 'free to counterpose, often in a redemptive way, aspects of European society, epistemology, and ontology';²³ (3) to employ magic or ways of being and acting in the world that do not accord with 'the laws of the universe as they have been formulated by modern, post-Enlightenment empiricism, with its heavy reliance on sensory data, together with a preponderance of realistic event, character, and description that conform to the conventions of literary realism';²⁴ and finally, (4) to approach parodically the descriptive protocols and tropes of Western primitivism in order to reveal the ideological artifice or fantasy structure behind them. We may label these postcolonial neo-primitivist strategies respectively as inversion, utopianism, magical realism and parody.

Neo-primitivist strategy 1: inversion

The strategy of neo-primitivist inversion is most apparent in the works of the so-called Negritude writers like Léopold Sédar Senghor and Aimé Césaire, the latter's *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* (1939) being the most interesting and complex example of this inversion. The inversion strategy adopted by Césaire and Senghor was an attempt at revaluing an injurious term like *nègre* which

A. James Arnold notes was ‘a noun that in the French West Indies had had the intentionally offensive connotation of “nigger”’.²⁵ Such a strategy was designed not only to turn a derogatory term into one that is laudatory, it was also an attempt to reconceptualize and revalorize a whole set of attributes linked to the devalued, negated term. ‘Negritude’ was thus no less than a form of radical renomination. Its strategy resembles the critical act Judith Butler calls ‘resignification’. Butler argues that no appellation or name can ever control all its contexts or impose total semantic closure because the open-ended nature of language, of the signifying chain will always exceed it. Thus interpellation, the naming of a subject, ‘is an address that regularly misses its mark’.²⁶ This ever present possibility of the name’s failure to live up to itself allows for a kind of agency, allows us, for example, to see ‘how the repetition of an originary subordination [can sum up] . . . another purpose, one whose future is partially open’.²⁷ Derogatory names, Butler argues, can be reappropriated and redirected from their original use and context and resignified differently. In her words, ‘Such reappropriations illustrate the vulnerability of these sullied terms to an unexpected innocence.’²⁸

Césaire’s neologism *négritude*, which appears in his *Cahier*, is a good example of resignification as the sullied term *nègre* finds not so much an unexpected innocence as a rediscovered power to reclaim and redefine as positive human values the ‘savage’ traits the West had attributed to Africans. Césaire’s act of resignification begins by listing the common racist accusations directed against the so-called ‘black race’. Irrationality, animist worship and primitive superstition are among the characteristics attributed to Africans:

That 2 and 2 are 5
that the forest miaows
that the tree plucks the maroons from the fire
that the sky strokes its beard
etc. etc . . .²⁹

Condemned as a primitive being, the narrator of Césaire’s poem must also confront the accusation that his people have not contributed to the progress of human civilization:

those who have invented neither powder nor compass
those who could harness neither steam nor electricity
those who explored neither the seas nor the sky³⁰

At this point in the poem, however, a turn occurs as the narrator resignifies the derogation of the *nègre* for its deficiencies into the celebration of a Negritude

whose values are not only antithetical to those of its detractors but prove to be salvific for them as well:

Hear the white world
horribly weary from its immense efforts
its stiff joints crack under the hard stars
hear its blue steel rigidity pierce the mystic flesh
its deceptive victories tout its defeats
hear the grandiose alibis of its pitiful stumbling

Pity for our omniscient and naïve conquerors!³¹

The inversion is effected by Césaire's double act of resignification: the technological progress of Western civilization is shown to have landed it in crisis, while Africa's connection to the world's primordial being has energized it with the life force sorely missing in the former. What the West has scorned as Africa's primitive nature is precisely what the West needs to save itself.

A similar strategy of neo-primitivist inversion is also present in Senghor's celebration of Negritude. Praising the work of the Jamaican American poet, Claude McKay, for promoting the values of Negritude, he remarks: 'Far from seeing in one's blackness an inferiority, one accepts it, one lays claim to it with pride, one cultivates it lovingly.'³² Like Césaire, Senghor resignifies the black African culture the West has abjected by contrasting its values of emotion, intuition, spontaneity and mastery of rhythm to the cold, rigid rationality of Western civilization. As he famously declared: 'Emotion is completely Negro as reason is Greek.'³³ Senghor argued that it is Negritude with its intuitive understanding of the universe's telluric rhythm and primordial life force that will revitalize the West whose technological achievements have come at the cost of alienation, a destructive sterility, and a profound enervation of the spirit:

Let us answer 'present' at the rebirth of the World
As white flour cannot rise without the leaven
Who else will teach rhythm to the world
Deadened by machines and cannons?
Who will sound the shout of joy at daybreak to wake
orphans and the dead?³⁴

Opposing Western reason's objectification and instrumentalization of the world, Senghor and other Negritude writers celebrate what Frantz Fanon has described as 'Black Magic, primitive mentality, animism, animal eroticism'.³⁵ But though these writers have managed to rescue 'blackness' from Western abjection, one must, nevertheless, Fanon argues, 'distrust rhythm,

earth-mother love, this mystic, carnal marriage of the group and the cosmos'.³⁶ For while the pre-logical, emotional and instinctual characteristics attributed to Africans by the West are inverted and resignified so that their deficits become desirable forms of vitality, the inversion does nothing to erase, and may even work further to confirm, the binary opposition of the modern West and primitive Africa. Moreover, Fanon notes, the West may be able to absorb an antithetical Negritude, accepting and resignifying it in turn as a pleasurable primitive *divertissement* for jaded moderns:

I will be told, now and then when we are worn out by our lives in big buildings, we will turn to you as we do to our children – to the innocent, the ingenuous, the spontaneous. We will turn to you as to the childhood of the world . . . Let us run away for a little while from our ritualized, polite civilization and let us relax, bend to those heads, those adorably expressive faces. In a way, you reconcile us with ourselves.³⁷

The strategy of neo-primitivist inversion has not changed the configuration in which Western reason requires primitive irrationality and vice versa. There is in fact a curious dependence on the part of Césaire and Senghor on racist and primitivist Western thinkers like Gobineau, Frobenius and Lévy-Bruhl. As F. Abiola Irele has remarked: 'Senghor's thinking is generally a tributary of the antirationalist current of modern European thought: thus, along with the "paideuma" of Frobenius, negritude incorporates the vitalist estheticism of Nietzsche and owes much to the vatic conception of philosophy associated with Heidegger, with its privileging of the "preconceptual" as the ultimate basis for our discovery of the world.'³⁸ Thus, even as Senghor's vision of Negritude challenges the derogatory Western representations of the primitive, it still remains indebted to the antirationalist tradition of Western thought that is essentially primitivist. Anti-primitivism at one level is closely linked to primitivism at another.

To Césaire's credit, he shows an awareness of the seductiveness of neo-primitivism as well as of its problematic reinstatement of the unchanged binary of the primitive and the modern. Like Fanon who understood that the essentialization and racialization of Negritude could only lead to a 'blind alley',³⁹ Césaire in his later pronouncements distinguished his more historical and dialectical version of Negritude from the biological and racial form advocated by Senghor: 'I do not in the slightest believe in biological permanence, but I believe in culture. My negritude has a ground. It is a fact that there is a black culture: it is historical, there is nothing biological about it.'⁴⁰ The danger posed by Senghor's acceptance of a racialized or essentialized primitivism, resignified

or revalued though it may be, is that it takes a retrograde step that immerses the people, as Fanon astutely notes, 'in that past out of which they have already emerged'. '[R]ather,' Fanon continues, 'we must join them in that fluctuating movement which they are just giving a shape to, and which, as soon as it has started, will be the signal for everything to be called in question.'⁴¹ This is why both Fanon and Césaire long not for the primordality of race but for a new world and a new future where 'there is room for everyone': 'make me into a man for the beginning . . . but also make me into a man of germination'.⁴²

Neo-primitivist strategy 2: utopianism

The utopian strategy of postcolonial neo-primitivism is discernible in such novels as Alejo Carpentier's *Los pasos perdidos* (*The Lost Steps*, 1953), Wilson Harris's *Palace of the Peacock* (1960), Mario Vargas Llosa's *El Hablador* (*The Storyteller*, 1987), David Malouf's *Remembering Babylon* (1993), and Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* (2004). In most of these novels, there is an interesting and tense vacillation between the possibility of attaining a kind of primitive utopia far from the ills of modernity and the ironic realization that the primitive utopia recedes or disappears the closer one comes to attaining it. In Carpentier's *Los pasos perdidos*, for example, the protagonist finds his primitive utopia only to lose it again. Roberto González Echevarría argues that 'the novel ends with the protagonist's realization that only the present-in-history is given to him, that he must assume historicity and temporality as the conditions of his existence'.⁴³ The protagonist's self-denying realization of his lost paradise may, in one sense, be interpreted as the novel's puncturing of the primitivist myth of a land time has forgotten; but, in another sense, the protagonist's self-denying realization can also be interpreted as a safeguarding of the primitive paradise from the depredations of time and history. Primitivist utopianism involves a form of idealization in which the very loss or disappearance of the primitive referent ensures its living on as an idea. Thus the inability of Carpentier's protagonist to find the river channel that will lead him back to his primitive paradise also ensures that the lost paradise will continue to serve as an irreducible idea and alternative to existing modern conditions. As Michel de Certeau has observed, 'A loss of existence is the condition for immortality in poetry'.⁴⁴

De Certeau's statement applies as much to the loss of paradise in *Los pasos perdidos* as to the death of Fokir the fisherman in Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*. Even as Ghosh's novel exalts Fokir as some kind of noble primitive who is 'utterly unformed',⁴⁵ it is also aware that he is a man of the past,

‘a man . . . [who] could never be anything other than a figure glimpsed through a rear-view mirror, a rapidly diminishing presence, a ghost from the perpetual past’.⁴⁶ Fokir is an anomaly and an anachronism in modern India and his death is as inevitable as it is idealized. By idealized, I mean that the novel adopts a ‘last of the Mohicans’ narrative line in which Fokir dies so that his indigenous knowledge and being can live on in the modern scientist, the non-resident Indian cetologist, Piya. ‘A ghost from the perpetual past’, Fokir will forever haunt Piya’s imagination, a form of necro-idealism D.H. Lawrence had already anticipated in 1924 when he declared that though the ‘Red Indian’ will have disappeared from America never again to possess the continent ‘his ghost will’.⁴⁷ The power of utopian neo-primitivism lies therefore in its paradoxical anti-primitivist primitivism: the acknowledgment of the impossibility or end of primitive existence in our time (the anti-primitivist turn) makes possible the more enduring idea of the primitive (the reinvigoration of primitivism).

The utopian strategy adopted by postcolonial neo-primitivism is thus not about imagining utopia as a place elsewhere so much as a place that no longer exists, a place that has vanished or disappeared. The neo-primitive utopia becomes a dead space or ‘necrotopia’, but the vanished primitive returns to haunt the present even more powerfully than it did before it disappeared. In Wilson Harris’s *The Palace of the Peacock*, the narrative voice notes the appearance of an old Amerindian woman and describes her Arawak race as ‘a vanishing one overpowered by the fantasy of a Catholic as well as a Protestant invasion’.⁴⁸ He immediately recognizes, however, her power to negate ‘every threat of conquest and of fear’ and her ability to overcome the intrusion of Western modernity by dialectically subsuming it into a more universal form: ‘It was a vanishing and yet a starting race in which long eternal malice and wrinkled self-defence and the cruel pursuit of the folk were turning into universal protection and intuition and that harmonious rounded miracle of spirit which the world of appearances had never truly known’.⁴⁹ Her vanishing race is, therefore, also a nascent one; the primitive who is dying off is also the primitive who will usher in the ‘harmonious rounded miracle of spirit which the world of appearances had never truly known’.

Similarly, in David Malouf’s *Remembering Babylon*, the destruction of Aborigines and their way of life does not mean their disappearance from the memory of white Australians like Lachlan Beattie and Janet McIvor, both of whom, at the end of the novel, still remember their encounter with Aboriginal otherness (through their friendship with Gemmy Fairley, the white English boy turned Aboriginal). Both Lachlan and Janet, even in old age, remain haunted by the ‘other life’ of their continent: ‘All that, fifty years ago. An

age... He [Lachlan] could afford to admit now that it had not ended. Something Gemmy had touched off in them was what they were still living, both, in their different ways. It would end only when they were ended, and maybe not even then.⁵⁰

The same sense of being haunted by the primitive can be detected in Mario Vargas Llosa's *El hablador* (*The Storyteller*). Llosa's narrator, trying to forget his native Peru and his countrymen, visits Florence planning 'to read Dante and Machiavelli and look at Renaissance paintings'.⁵¹ But while visiting a photography exhibition on 'Natives of the Amazon Forest', he comes across a photograph showing a group of Machiguenga Indians listening to a Machiguenga storyteller who he suspects is really his old friend, Saúl Zuratas, a Peruvian anthropologist of Jewish origin. Partly through recollection and partly through speculation, the narrator guesses that Saúl's sudden disappearance from Lima can be attributed to his decision to reject modern civilization and live the life of a Machiguenga storyteller deep in the Amazon. The photograph of Saúl as primitive storyteller disturbs the narrator's European idyll and makes him realize that even more than Florence's impressive cultural heritage or its vibrant contemporary cosmopolitanism what truly moves him is the memory of his vanished friend and the primitive life he has chosen:

That my friend Saúl gave up being all that he was and might have become so as to roam the Amazonian jungle, for more than twenty years now, perpetuating against wind and tide – and, above all, against the very concepts of modernity and progress – the tradition of the invisible line of wandering storytellers, is something that memory now and again brings back to me, and . . . it opens my heart more forcefully than fear or love has ever done.⁵²

The primitive is never more powerful in these novels by Carpentier, Ghosh, Harris, Malouf and Llosa than when it has disappeared or died or is no longer accessible. As Jean Baudrillard has reminded us, the dead or vanished primitive returns even more powerfully as a 'phantom presence', a 'viral, spectral presence in the synapses of our brains'.⁵³

Neo-primitivist strategy 3: magical realism

The third strategy adopted by postcolonial neo-primitivism attempts through the employment of magic to create a mode of being and acting that will serve as a critical alternative to the constraints of Western empiricism and realist representational conventions. Magic is of course written off by modern thought as belonging to a premodern or primitive phase of humanity when

we still believed in supernatural forces or in an animist world pervaded by malevolent or beneficent spirits. But in their employment of magic or magical realism, Fredric Jameson argues, writers and filmmakers acknowledge the uneven development of modernity by revealing ‘the overlap or the coexistence of precapitalist with nascent capitalist or technological features’.⁵⁴ Magical realism thus derives its inspiration, as Brenda Cooper notes, from ‘the world-views of indigenous people – of those deemed to live within a pre-industrial, and hence pre-colonial, way of life’.⁵⁵ As such, the use of magic by postcolonial magical realists can be seen as a deliberate strategy aimed at revalorizing a primitivist worldview in order to question the costs exacted by modern disenchantment. In the words of Wendy Faris, ‘Magical realism would then represent a moment of cultural retrospection that is a reverse image of the “moment of desacralization” that Fredric Jameson investigates in drawing his “realist floor-plan” as part of the “bourgeois cultural revolution”.’ In short, according to Faris, magical realism is an attempt at the remystification or re-enchantment of narrative.⁵⁶

But it seems to me that along with the remystification of realism may also come a defamiliarization of what Carpentier has called ‘*lo real maravilloso*’ (the marvellous real). In a subtle reading of Ben Okri’s *The Famished Road* (1991), Ato Quayson argues that its mode of animist magical realism, which involves the mixing and making equivalent of different ontological domains, results in a text which renders problematic all the domains by making indeterminate the question concerning reality’s location. In Quayson’s words:

The animist ebullience that is a studied part of [Okri’s] narrative makes strange (in the Russian Formalist sense) both the realist protocols of representation as well as indigenous folk beliefs in spirits. This *en-strangement* derives from the relentless saturation of the mundane with esoteric potential . . . This excess of the esoteric is carefully constructed as a serial equivalent of the real such that it is undecidable which of them is either preferable or dominant. In this, Okri establishes equivalence between radically different domains such as to render problematic the very process of grasping the ontology of the worlds inhabited.⁵⁷

While I agree with Quayson’s argument that magical realism, in observing the principle of ontological equivalence, defamiliarizes and problematizes *both* the world of realism *and* the world of indigenous animist beliefs, I think the logic of his argument which valorizes *en-strangement* and the undecidable nudges him more in the direction of the modern or postmodern than the premodern. His point about *en-strangement* helps us to see how the success of magical realism

as a literary practice depends ironically on maintaining a sceptical distance from the very magic it employs to question the hegemony of Western realism and reason. For in defamiliarizing or questioning Western realism, magical realism brings in its wake a general scepticism of any fixed ontological world. There is no reason why its questioning of the status of the real in the world of Western modernity may not spread into the world of indigenous or primitive beliefs, a world of animist vitality which magical realism must abstain from questioning seriously if it is to succeed in subverting Western reality. There is no reason why the scepticism present in magical realism's questioning of the empirical cannot turn virulent and contaminate the world of magic which by definition cannot include doubt or accommodate demystification.

Thus in Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (*Cien años de soledad*, 1967), perhaps the best-known literary example of magical realism, there is a scene in which the magic of the novel is questioned by a character who is himself a firm believer in magic. The voice of doubt belongs to José Arcadio Buendía who is described on the first page of the novel as the least sceptical of Macondo's inhabitants, a man possessed of an 'unbridled imagination [that] always went beyond the genius of nature and even beyond miracles and magic'.⁵⁸ Yet this man who believes in the gypsy Melquíades's magnetic 'magical irons' is the one person who is sceptically indifferent to Father Nicanor's hot-chocolate-induced levitation: 'No one doubted the divine origin of the demonstration except José Arcadio Buendía, who without changing expression watched the troop of people who gathered around the chestnut tree one morning to witness the revelation once more.'⁵⁹ Resisting Father Nicanor's attempts to make him believe, Buendía dismisses the priest's 'rhetorical tricks and the transmutation of chocolate' and demands 'the daguerreotype of God as the only proof'. When the priest shows him religious medals and pictures, Buendía rejects them 'as artistic objects without any scientific basis'. Taking his scepticism even further, Buendía attempts 'to break down the priest's faith with rationalist tricks'.⁶⁰ Though the whole episode is treated with good humour, we can sense in it a certain ironic reflexivity on the part of the novelist who wants us to believe in premodern magic even as he trains a sceptical modern gaze on it.

Similarly, in Ben Okri's *The Famished Road*, the magical transformations that question empirical or material reality are, in turn, subjected to reality's harsh interruption. In Okri's novel, described by Quayson as setting 'the benchmark for African magical realism',⁶¹ the ontological stability of the indigenous animist world, necessary in the first place if there is to be any ontological parity or equivalence with modern reality, is as questionable as the ontological

stability of the realism it challenges and problematizes. Thus Azaro's excursions into magical realms are often followed by reminders of his impoverished reality. In one episode, for example, Azaro suddenly notices his material world dissolving as he follows 'a beautiful woman with a blue head' into a 'secret homeland, a world of holidays' in which he can hear 'sunflower cantatas' and witness 'delicious girls dancing tarantellas in fields of comets'⁶² but this beautiful magical moment is interrupted by his mother who takes him home 'over the mud and wreckage of the street'. The fantastic description of the blue-haired woman and the paradisaal landscape is replaced by a brutally naturalistic observation: 'I smelt the gutters and the rude plaster of the corroded houses. Then all I was left with was a world drowning in poverty, a mother-of-pearl moon, and the long darkness before dawn.'⁶³ A similar flight into the gravity-free realm of magic followed by an abrupt descent into the brutal reality of contemporary life is present in another episode in the novel. Azaro manages one night to levitate himself out through the roof of his house. Of this experience he remarks: 'I soared blissfully and I understood something of the inhuman exultation of flight.' But this blissful experience is interrupted and Azaro is brought back down to a reality of 'rats chewing, [his] parents snoring, and someone banging relentlessly on the door'.⁶⁴ The person banging on the door turns out to be the photographer with blood dripping down his forehead from a beating he has just received at the hands of thugs who belong to a political party whose wrongdoings his photographs had exposed. If Azaro's experience of the lightness of being reveals the ontological possibility of a magical world, then the bloodied photographer is a reminder of another ontological domain burdened by oppressive poverty and political terror.

What we learn from both Marquez's and Okri's novels is that the ontological stability of the magical world is as threatened by reality as reality is by magic. In works of magical realism an ontological equivalence may obtain between the magical and the real as Quayson has argued. At the same time, however, the principle of ontological equivalence may not be able to avoid completely the ironic awareness that equivalence still retains disjunction and dissymmetry and that it is invoked in order to hold at bay a virulent scepticism that questions and destabilizes all ontological worlds, magical or real. The magic in magical realism may thus be more self-conscious and ironic, that is to say, more modern or postmodern, than the magic which is assumed to be a normal or normative part of premodern belief. Premoderns who inhabit an enchanted world do not need magical realism; moderns who live in a disenchanted world do. That is why many critics have noted with suspicion the magical realist writer's relationship to his or her material. Michael Taussig, for example, has argued that

the magic used in magical realist novels 'is represented in accord with a long-standing tradition of folklore, the exotic, and *indigenismo* that in oscillating between the cute and the romantic is little more than the standard ruling class appropriation of what is held to be the sensual vitality of the common people and their fantasy life'.⁶⁵ More temperately, Brenda Cooper warns that 'Western educated and well traveled writers of magical realism are not themselves inserted within these indigenous, pre-technological cultures that provide their inspiration.'⁶⁶ Consequently, Cooper argues, 'it is precisely the mix of authorial reticence with authorial irony that is a defining feature of the magical realist text'. The mix, however, is anything but 'a smooth, untroubled merging between irony and faith. There is a tension between the skepticism of Western educated writers who assume an ironic distance from the lack of a "scientific" understanding on the part of the "uneducated" and their simultaneous celebration of the so-called authenticity of superstition, a celebration that is vulnerable to degeneration into the exotic.'⁶⁷ It is precisely this fear of the esoteric becoming the primitive exotic that Quayson seeks to allay when he argues persuasively that *The Famished Road* is successfully able to retain a hold on contemporary reality by distancing itself from 'a total location in mythopoeia'.⁶⁸ Magical realism can therefore be regarded as a somewhat ambivalent and contradictory neo-primitivist strategy: its effectiveness in questioning modern Western rationality also requires it to keep at an ironic distance the primitivist belief in animism or magic that is used in the first place to question both Western ontology and epistemology.

Neo-primitivist strategy 4: parody

Finally, the fourth neo-primitivist strategy employs parody to challenge Western primitivist representations. Unlike the strategy of inversion which revalues what Western primitivism has devalued, parodic postcolonial primitivism turns Western primitivist tropes and conventions into exaggerated and grotesque versions of themselves thereby revealing their fantasy structure or ideological artifice and enabling the postcolonial subject to mock and resist their power. Thus in Yambo Ouologuem's *Le Devoir de violence* (1968; translated as *Bound to Violence*, 1971) we are presented with a parody of Leo Frobenius's anthropological work in the description of the German anthropologist Fritz Shrobenius, whose theories of the African mind and world are derived from his own fantasies and from the invented stories and fraudulent art works supplied to him by native informants only too willing to please for profit or praise.

Western primitivism is dismissed, for example, through parodic exaggeration or caricature in the following passage:

Thus drooling, Shrobenius derived a twofold benefit on his return home: on the one hand, he mystified the people of his own country who in their enthusiasm raised him to a lofty Sorbonnical chair, while on the other hand he exploited the sentimentality of the coons, only too pleased to hear from the mouth of a white man that Africa was ‘the womb of the world and the cradle of civilization’.⁶⁹

In Mudrooroo Narogin’s novel (written when Mudrooroo was still called Colin Johnson) *Doctor Wooreddy’s Prescription for Enduring the Ending of the World* (1983), the Aboriginal protagonist, Wooreddy, is called Doctor by the narrator because he seeks knowledge of both his culture and that of *num* culture (*num* being an Aboriginal term for ‘ghost’, an appellation conferred on white people). Wooreddy’s attempt to understand the social structure and psychology of white people parodically parallels the missionary G.A. Robinson’s (‘Fader’ in the novel) interest in ethnography and ethnobotany. What the parodic doubling reveals is that neither of the men really gets the other culture quite right because otherness is translated by both men to fit the categories of their own culture. Mudrooroo’s parody of the inadequacies and inaccuracies of ethnographic knowledge is thus a critique of Western primitivist accounts of Tasmanian Aborigines.

In an illuminating discussion of the politics of parody, Linda Hutcheon notes: ‘As a form of ironic representation, parody is doubly coded in political terms: it both legitimizes and subverts that which it parodies.’ She describes how parody is both ‘inescapably bound to its aesthetic and even social past’ even as its ‘ironic reprise [of that past] . . . offers an internalized sign of a certain self-consciousness about our culture’s means of ideological legitimization’.⁷⁰ Parody is thus double-edged in that it inscribes even as it undercuts that which it parodies. As the audience of parody, we have to hold on to *both* the meaning of the original text and its subversive, ironic replication. Mudrooroo’s parodic novel clearly exposes Western ethnography’s ideological and racialized investments; at the same time, however, in its reliance on an ethnographic archive that includes the journals of the historical G.A. Robinson, it textually reinscribes the primitivism it wants to question.

Similarly, Ouologuem’s novel relies on the work of the anthropologists and historians he parodies. Critics like Christine Chaulet-Achour and Christopher L. Miller have regarded Ouologuem’s novel as conducting an assault on Europe’s discursive invention and domination of Africa. Hence their use of

terms and phrases like ‘dismemberment’ and ‘writing as exploratory surgery’ in describing the rhetorical violence of Ouologuem’s novel.⁷¹ Parody is seen by these critics as a destructive weapon aimed at European culture and European texts that have enacted epistemic violence against Africans. But parody is double-edged. Thus Ouologuem’s novel not only ends up undercutting European texts but also reinscribing them, bringing their textuality to visibility even in the process of dismembering them. It is parody’s duplicitous nature that helps explain why Ouologuem’s use of the sources he parodies landed him with the charge of plagiarism. The proximity of parody to plagiarism suggests that parody courts the charge of becoming con-fused, or better, in-fused, with the object or text it parodies. There is something cannibalistic about parody for it ends up incorporating the very text it also destroys. In parodying Western primitivism, therefore, both Ouologuem and Mudrooroo run the risk of copying or taking on some of its characteristics. The postcolonial literary text in attempting to subvert primitivism by parodically appropriating it may find that its own identity can no longer be uncoupled from the object of its parody or, even worse, may discover that its identity has become dependent on that which it seeks to parody.

Conclusion: the limits of postcolonial neo-primitivism

The effectiveness of postcolonial neo-primitivism’s questioning of Western primitivism must be measured, as I have argued, against the problems that their strategic deployment of the ‘primitive’ raises. Gayatri Spivak has warned, with regard to ‘strategic essentialism’, that ‘a strategy suits a situation; a strategy is not a theory’.⁷² Similarly, while postcolonial strategic primitivism as inversion, utopianism, magical realism and parody may be effective in some situations, it also runs the risk, especially when it is continually deployed, of reaffirming the Enlightenment metanarrative of a developed or developing modernity set against the primitive or archaic; strategic primitivism’s questioning of the colonial modern smuggles in the very opposition of primitive to modern it had sought to cross out in the first place. Moreover, since ‘primitive’ as a category of the past depends for its definition on the modern present, any recourse to the ‘primitive’ as a form of resistance to the modern merely consolidates the latter as the hegemonic norm against which the former sets itself off as resistant or anomalous. Consequently, modern Western primitivism, despite its negation or resignification by postcolonial neo-primitivism, remains the *a priori* frame without which postcolonial neo-primitivism cannot

affirm its difference or its identity. Postcolonial neo-primitivism for all its subversive strategies remains beholden to what Sakai calls 'a schema of cofiguration'; it continues to require that which it seeks to resist and dispel.

Postcolonial strategic primitivism also cannot escape from another serious problem that troubles strategic essentialism. Amanda Anderson has pointed out that to embrace the paradox of strategic essentialism is to end up inevitably privileging one of the elements, namely, the 'strategic' with its post-structuralist stance: 'By associating essentialism with practice and anti-essentialism with an ultimate theoretical truth, the articulation of strategic essentialism generates a theory/practice split.'⁷³ Strategic essentialism, in short, suffers from a kind of *mauvaise foi* or bad faith. Similarly, we can say that in the strategic primitivism employed in postcolonial writings, the strategic aspect, which must include at least some degree of anti-essentialist scepticism, still retains control even as it engages primitive alterity with its essentialist magical ontology to question the hegemony of Western epistemic regimes. In addition, there is also the danger that postcolonial neo-primitivist writings, despite their strategic use of the 'primitive', may serve the urban bourgeoisie's romantic and nostalgic hankering for the vitality of premodern life worlds, pander to metropolitan desires for what Graham Huggan calls 'the postcolonial exotic',⁷⁴ and aid the nation state in its use of primordial images of unity to suppress threats of differences within its own borders.

Finally, it can be argued that postcolonial neo-primitivist works are compensatory fictions that express a disappointment with the effectiveness of contemporary social and political struggles. They therefore forward what Erik Camayd-Freixas has described as 'a vision that replaces the unattainable social utopia with an aesthetic utopia', a 'primitive' textual space 'where it is still possible to sublimate . . . all the social desires that history had frustrated'.⁷⁵ But Camayd-Freixas's critique of the aesthetic utopianism of postcolonial neo-primitivist works can be recast dialectically to yield a more positive interpretation. Utopia, Theodor Adorno once remarked in a conversation with Ernst Bloch, is not compensatory but critical for 'utopia is essentially in the determined negation . . . of that which merely is'.⁷⁶ Thus while the 'aesthetic utopia' or 'primitive textual space' can be read, from one point of view, as a form of nostalgic, compensatory longing, from another perspective, its looking back can be interpreted as a critical way forward, its nostalgia seen as a proleptic search for alternatives to the inadequacies and immiserations of the present. Thus, though we should be critically aware of the vicissitudes and problems confronting postcolonial neo-primitivist works, we can also, at the very least, appreciate their opposition to colonial and postcolonial domination as a

‘determined negation’ motivated by a desire for something better than what both the past and the present can offer.

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Popular culture and postcolonial literary production in Africa and India

31(a) Popular writing in Africa

STEPHANIE NEWELL

The emergence of popular literature

In 1915, the *Gold Coast Nation* in colonial Ghana offered the following advice to local readers who wished to see their writing published in the newspaper: ‘A small item about a small man in a small village is *not* of general interest, whilst scandal, even if it be about the highest in the land, serves no useful purpose and so should not be considered fit for publication.’¹ The *Nation* clearly wished to keep its columns free from the textual clutter produced by and about the ‘small man’. Nevertheless, this type of material continued to arrive on the editor’s desk, signalling the existence of ambitious amateur writers and a thriving popular discourse about ordinary people, morals, manners and scandals. For more than a century since then, local authors have produced similar stories, almost always with a problem-solving approach. In much of this literature, writers aim to teach readers – through story, anecdote, advice and confessional – how to interpret other people’s intentions and how to imagine new futures for themselves.

Not all journalists in the early twentieth century were as censorious or prescriptive as the staff of the *Gold Coast Nation*. In 1903, the editor of the *Gold Coast Leader* – a newspaper aimed specifically at ‘youth’ in colonial Ghana – tried to stimulate the production of new writing by reassuring shy authors who felt like literary ‘nobodies’. Addressing the very ‘small man’ rejected by the *Nation*, the editor wrote, sensitively: ‘You will say, this is rubbish, who am I, if I say or suggest anything it will not be taken up, I am nobody. Then, for ever hold your peace: nobody is anybody until he tries to do in his own way and in his own sphere what little he can do.’² Public invitations to write such as this were issued regularly in the African press, and many new authors found their first outlets in African-owned newspapers and magazines.

This inclusive, encouraging attitude characterizes popular literary production in Africa. Almost always written by dilettante authors, African popular literature represents and reflects upon the ‘small’ person’s intimate encounters with others, from strangers in the city to new romantic partners and colleagues in the workplace. In the pages of the continent’s abundant novels, spiritual autobiographies, magazines and self-help pamphlets, one can find detailed, historically specific and often strongly moralistic debates about marriage, gender roles, sexuality, relationships, religious devotion, self-improvement, unemployment, poverty, wealth, justice, corruption, urbanization and violence. This literature demands that readers engage with it at the ‘private and personal’ level, often hailing them directly as ‘you’.³ As O. Ajewole writes in the preface to the Nigerian pamphlet, *Never Pity Ladies* (c.1989), ‘this book will help you deal with the chronic societal ill of female waywardness and the love for transient values’.⁴

In the colonial period, African newspapers provided a seedbed for new local writers. Editors actively courted potential contributors, inviting readers to send in letters on particular topics, to write stories, to make suggestions for future articles, and to take sides in ethical debates and political controversies. As early as 1886, T.J. Sawyerr, editor of *Sawyerr’s Bookselling, Printing and Stationery Trade Circular* in Freetown, Sierra Leone, declared, ‘We shall at all times be pleased to receive suggestions which may tend both to improve this publication and increase its utility.’⁵ Alongside the inclusive attitude towards readers demonstrated here, Sawyerr’s sense of the ‘utility’ of literacy is a hallmark of popular literary production in Africa. Thus, nearly a century later, J. Abiakam, author of the Nigerian pamphlet, *How to Make Friends* ([1971] 1995), explained how ‘[t]his work is done in order to solve the problems of many people who have been asking me to tell them how to make friends. It will serve as your dictionary whenever there is difficulty between you and your friends and will teach you what to do or the correct way to follow.’⁶ The pamphlet contains numerous ‘question and answer’ passages alongside advice to young people and a short play in which a boy asks a girl to be his ‘good girl and lover’.⁷

While African newspaper editors generally welcomed contributions from amateur writers in the early twentieth century, they did not wish to see on their pages one of the other key features of popular literature on the continent: scandalous items relating to the realm of the ‘personal’. In the face of increasing numbers of African popular texts in precisely these areas, editors frequently condemned, and tried to rein-in, ‘sensationalism and the use of violent and unmeasured language’.⁸ Contemporary newspapers, by contrast, are not

ashamed to carry news articles with titles such as ‘I Ran Away from Baganda’s Hot Pussy’ and ‘Sex Starved Girl Fucks Two Bodyguards’.⁹

For more than a century, African popular literature has provided a platform for local readers to encounter the sexual scandals and moral dilemmas surrounding ‘small’ people’s lives, from the tragedy of Segilola, the Lagos prostitute created by I.B. Thomas in the pages of the Yoruba-language newspaper *Akede Eko* in the 1920s, through to contemporary Pentecostal ‘how-to’ pamphlets and popular novels about the transmission and prevention of HIV/AIDS in East Africa.¹⁰ In East Africa in the 1970s, magazines such as *Joe* (1973–9) and, in the 1980s and 1990s, columns such as Wahomi Mutahi’s ‘Whispers’ provided opportunities for new work by popular authors,¹¹ and in recent Kenyan popular fiction, the spread of HIV/AIDS is used as a metaphor by authors such as Meja Mwangi and Oludhe Macgoye to interrogate a host of social, political and economic issues, including, ‘gendered power inequalities, poverty, general promiscuity, lack of proper government policy on containing STDs [and] cultural attitudes to STDs’.¹² Simultaneously shaping and shaped by existing popular discourses about sexuality and the transmission of disease, these novels help readers to interpret scientific opinion and to imagine alternative sexual behaviours.¹³ Such understandings often take place in moral and symbolic rather than in practical and realistic terms.

This emphasis on ordinary people’s morality and how to improve readers’ personal lives does not exclude African popular literature from the public or political sphere typically associated with ‘elite’ African literature. Since the first appearance of mass-produced chapbooks in Onitsha, Eastern Nigeria, in the 1950s, locally produced texts engage with political critique through the ordinary and the everyday. The preoccupation with the realm of the intimate is central to the emergence and definition of African popular literature, but the ways in which authors present ‘small’ characters and scandalous plots may be of immense public interest. Particularly at times of political crisis, as George Ogola points out in his work on the Kenyan popular press, popular literature provides ‘moments of freedom’ for readers, helping to ‘galvanise support for social and political reform’.¹⁴ The blurb on the back cover of Charles K. Githae’s *A Worm in the Head* (1987) gives a sense of the ‘mischief’ made possible by print: ‘if we reduced our times to a hole, the author would appear as a rabbit winking mischievously at us out of that hole!’¹⁵

In the colonial period, African-owned newspapers paved the way for the emergence of popular literature by making space available for contributions by new local writers. As the profile of readers and writers shifted from university-educated ‘gentlemen’ born into established elite families in the late nineteenth

century to the newly literate clerks who emerged into Africa's public spaces between the 1920s and 1950s, the content of local newspapers also changed to reflect the opinions and ambitions of social groups who had benefited from colonial mass education policies, and who sought reading matter relevant to their own lives and hopes. Between the 1920s and the 1950s, the expanding colonial education system produced increasing numbers of ambitious, energetic young men and women keen to put their reading skills to further use and to participate in public acts of reading and writing such as correspondence with the newspapers and membership of local literary and debating societies. In increasing numbers, they also produced their own texts for public consumption.

From the earliest days of popular writing, stories which start off as 'news' items are often, without apparent contradiction, converted into fiction in order for a moral lesson to be drawn from the material. As the blurb on the back cover of Charles Mangua's *Son of Woman* (1971) states, this is the realm of 'autobiographical morality'.¹⁶ The preface to James Kofi Annan's *Campus Relationships: The Untold Story* (c. 2008) explains the process thus: 'All that is written in this book are true stories, except that, great pain has been taken to re-engineer their chronology, setting, characters and subjects. In most cases, the writer has assumed ownership of some stories to better carry the intended message.'¹⁷

One such 're-engineered' text, written in 1931 by the pseudonymous 'Marjorie Mensah' in the *Times of West Africa*, begins, 'The girl whose love had suffered very badly from the hasty interference of a good-meaning family was one Aba Lovey, a beautiful slip of a girl, tall, slim with a beautiful figure, a superb neck and head.'¹⁸ In spite of the writer's claim that 'I knew her quite well', a process of romantic fictionalization commences immediately. The dashing hero of the piece is introduced as 'our Romeo' and said to be from 'one of the great ruling houses' in the region.¹⁹ Unlike his tragic Shakespearean archetype, however, this African Romeo dashes off after his first appearance in the article because the tale revolves around a different narrative pivot: the question of Aba's 'quick descent', in the manner of an eighteenth-century popular heroine, into 'the bottom-most depths of degradation and shame' after being tempted by an older man into 'the deep crimson of the most crimson romance'.²⁰ By the end of the article, the attractive 'real' girl of the opening sentence has passed through a verbose and stylized 'romantic' language register and, as a result, has found herself labelled 'our study', removed to a distance from the reader for purposes of contemplation and moral assessment. Via the purple prose of the Western popular romance, the ordinary

girl-about-town of the opening has been reconstituted as a moral vessel, *sentenced*, filled with warnings against female sexual promiscuity and punished for her sins. At the end of the article, Aba is described as ‘penniless, homeless, friendless and without even hope’.²¹ Her destitution is absolute and final. For readers, the news item has become a fable, mediated by or filtered through the Western popular romance, and the lesson is stark.

Summing up, ‘Marjorie’ remarks that this story is offered as ‘only one of the many cases of similar instances that one could relate that occur here almost daily’ as a result of women’s ‘ignorance about the terrible consequences of a life of infamy and shame’.²² In constructing a scaffold of fiction around local women’s daily lives and revelling in what language and genre make possible, ‘Marjorie’ can dramatize the ‘terrible’ public consequences of their private, intimate activities in a vivid and didactic manner, publicized through the newspaper as a lesson to readers. Through the medium of print, women’s intimate lives are rendered public property, and through print, the division between private life and the reading public is erased.

This process typifies African popular literature. Authors instil the ‘private’ subject with ‘universal’ moral relevance, rendering the ‘small man’ public property and inviting readers to engage in moral commentary and debate. African popular narratives – printed and oral – offer insights and guidance on ethical behaviour: readers know that a story is neither original nor real, but it is nevertheless regarded as a ‘factual fiction’ if it contains a core of moral knowledge that can be extracted and applied to the outside world.²³ Often such ‘truths’ are set into contemporary references and allusions, which strengthen the reader’s reality-experience of an extreme or fantastic tale.²⁴

The print-mediated space of African popular literature bears striking similarities to African folktale genres, in which storytellers produce entertaining and didactic narratives with a view to provoking debates among the audience. History is not segregated from fiction as a category in this local literature: instead, the two genres envelop one another without contradiction. The sheer numbers of African popular pamphlets, newspaper articles and paperbacks filled with commentaries on personal morality need not therefore be regarded as nervous, or apolitical, acts of self-assertion by alienated urban authors, but as instances of narratives which break down the boundaries between personal and political, or public and private.²⁵

When African newspaper editors serialize new fiction, and when local authors experiment with popular genres in ways that generate innovative narrative forms, they continue a literary tradition that dates back more than a century on the continent. Until the 1960s in East and West Africa – less so

during the apartheid era in South Africa – newspapers and magazines provided one of the few relatively unconstrained spaces for local literary expression and experimentation.

Colonial and postcolonial press laws differ in severity from country to country, and the rigid surveillance of authors under the system of apartheid set South Africa outside the broad historical currents described above. Whilst Wilbur Smith and a host of Afrikaaner authors have produced bestselling popular fiction for decades in South Africa, apartheid censorship arguably inhibited the development of an indigenous popular publishing industry in the country until recently, particularly for black authors. Thus when Gomolemo Mokae's detective story, *The Secret in My Bosom*, appeared in 1996, critics hailed it as 'introducing a new genre in black South African literature';²⁶ since then, new black South African authors have emerged in increasing numbers, publishing spicy novels about 'black yuppiedom' and the quest for success.²⁷ Even in South Africa in the 1950s, however, popular magazines such as *Drum* provided township authors with opportunities to write articles and stories, often featuring urban gangster heroes with Americanized names.²⁸

Decolonization and the reception of popular literature

In the decades after decolonization, many writers broke away from the forum provided by newspapers to produce their own novels, examination primers, self-help books and, more recently, pamphlets containing images and lyrics downloaded from the internet.²⁹ This abundance of locally published literature in Africa has, until recently, attracted considerable hostile commentary from literary scholars. Particularly in Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania and South Africa, with their distinctive intellectual traditions combining Marxist literary criticism on the one hand with the production of conscientization literature, protest poetry and theatre-for-development on the other hand, literary critics have often been politically hard-pressed to accept the racy urban slang, aggressive individualism and apparent mimicry of American popular culture to be found in locally published popular literature.

'The tendency of the writer of popular literature is to enjoy himself immensely, painting sex scenes, and forgetting his responsibility to criticise life that is sickly and alienating', Chris Wanjala complained in his seminal commentary of 1980.³⁰ Similarly, South African activists and literary critics were confounded when, at the height of the Black Consciousness movement in

the 1970s, township audiences flocked to watch Gibson Kente's glamorous musicals with their apolitical and sentimental plots, and revelled in 'the most ephemeral trash imaginable' in *Drum* magazine.³¹ Numerous other critics have labelled popular literature 'un-African' or overly imitative.³² These sentiments echo early twentieth-century condemnations of popular writers by colonial and African elites. Such writers 'made themselves objectionable, pandered to public prejudice and rendered themselves ready and willing tools of a loud and empty headed section of the community insistent on the sensational and the vulgar'.³³

In an effort to protect readers from exposure to the 'corrupting' material circulating outside official control, postcolonial governments have occasionally taken action to suppress African popular literatures. In the 1970s – but not before the offending novels had sold in the tens of thousands – the Tanzanian government banned David Maillu's novel *After 4.30* (1974). Also banned were Charles Mangua's two novels *Son of Woman* (1971) and *A Tail in the Mouth* (1972), Euphrase Kezilahabi's *Rosa Mistika* (1971) and Osija Mwambungu's *Veneer of Love* (1975), all for their supposedly 'pornographic' and thus 'corrupting' content.³⁴

Literary critics continue to express ambivalence about the category of 'popular' literature. In a lengthy recent essay which seeks to revise his previous outright condemnation of East African popular literature, for example, Wanjala again laments the poor quality of popular literature and criticizes the 'lack of subtlety' of writers such as Meja Mwangi.³⁵ In particular, he describes popular literature as 'irrelevant' to society and 'imitative' of Western genres.³⁶ He seems to admit, however, that the irrelevant figures are in fact positioned on the other side of the literary fence, for he complains that professors of literature in East African universities are ignored when they attempt to recommend Ngũgĩ, Thomas Aluko and Chinua Achebe to readers who insist upon reading Mangua, Maillu and Mutahi.³⁷ These sentiments demarcate a significant and persistent boundary in African literary studies. Echoing century-old ideas about what constitutes 'useful' reading matter, critics such as Wanjala equate popular literature with useless, even morally harmful, reading practices. Such responses demonstrate a tension between postcolonial intellectuals' ideas about national progress, or political self-betterment, and the irrepressible literary tastes of Africa's 'small' readers, many of whom regard popular texts as providing the very 'useful' material denied by intellectuals.

Recent studies of African popular art forms reveal that the cultural flows between the West and Africa are more complex than allowed for by neo-colonial mimicry or dependency models. Influenced by Karin Barber's

ground-breaking article, 'The popular arts in Africa' (1987),³⁸ scholars of African popular cultures have started to recognize the possibilities presented by the intensely polygeneric format of popular texts which are unconstrained by publishers' style-sheets and rules.³⁹ Barber shows how African popular art forms rework and transform the genres they encounter, whether these genres appear to be 'traditional' and local, or imported and 'foreign'. Printed texts may be loaded with international references and discourses, but they may also, on reception in Africa, become plural and heterogeneous; they may flow 'to' as well as 'fro' in global locations; and they may be disconnected by their new users from the operation of power at an official level, fitted into new local and unofficial circuits of power.

Local popular genres and performances might contain elements which originated in Europe and America – such as the romantic novel or the crime thriller – but they are not necessarily transmitted in European languages or even via the printed page. African performers and creative writers make use of the networks inherited from Europe at independence, but they also extend those networks far beyond their official limits, working within and also beyond postcolonial regimes. If African popular literature reflects relationships of economic and neo-colonial dependence, as Wanjala and others argue, it also reflects the ways in which local populations, especially at the grassroots level, have developed techniques of cultural regeneration and survival.

Defining 'popular literature' in postcolonial Africa

'Popular' literature is notoriously difficult to define in African contexts: the category is not inherent in the material, and texts are not necessarily written to be 'popular'. Writers who might be dismissively labelled 'popular' in academic circles are rarely labelled as such by their readers. The conventional European divisions of literature into poetry, prose and drama, and further subdivisions into popular and elite genres, are insufficiently flexible to encompass the sheer diversity and liveliness of literary practices in Africa, and critical categories which divide 'highbrow' from 'lowbrow' literature – such as 'elite versus popular' or 'serious versus trivial' – are not helpful to our understanding of the history of African popular literature.

The consideration of readers is essential to the understanding of African popular literature. Whether their favourite author is regarded as 'highbrow' or 'lowbrow', African readers generally bring similar interpretive rules and conventions to bear on the text in their hands, insisting that they wish to learn lessons from literature, to draw moral conclusions from the fictional characters

they encounter, and to apply the lessons to their own lives in order to improve their own worlds.⁴⁰ This utilitarian attitude towards reading does not operate outside the realm of aesthetic appreciation: as one Ghanaian author commented in a recent interview, ‘the reading public is also becoming discerning’, for people will reject a text ‘if you create something shoddy’.⁴¹

In contrast to popular publishing in Europe and North America, African popular print cultures can be characterized as inclusive towards readers, promoting a participatory attitude towards reading and authorship. When popular pamphlets started to appear in large quantities in the form of ‘Onitsha market literature’ in Eastern Nigeria in the 1950s, with titles such as *How to Avoid Mistakes and Live a Good Life* (Eze, c. 1966) and *The Sorrows of Love* (Iguh, c. 1961), their young male authors drew inspiration and purpose from the range of aesthetic values, long established in the local media, about the role of authors and the uses of literacy.⁴² The purpose of much of this literature is, in the words of the Onitsha classic *Money Hard to Get But Easy to Spend*, for consumers to ‘read and become wise’ (Olisah, n.pag.).

A second reason for the inapplicability of ‘popular versus elite’ categories to African literary production is that whereas popular literature in Europe and North America is distinguished from literary fiction by genre – thus romantic fiction follows particular formulae set by multinational publishers – in Africa popular genres such as the romance are reworked by local writers, used for surprising, ‘uprising’ ends. As the back cover of Violet Barungi’s *Cassandra* promises, this ‘is the story of an independent-minded, self-confident and ambitious girl who is determined to reach the top without using men’s coat tails to do so . . . But what happens when she is way laid by love, with all its power to subdue and overwhelm [?]’ (back cover). Making use of popular romantic conventions, *Cassandra* explores how the heroine tries to accommodate her politics with her passion and preserve her ideals for gender equality while, simultaneously, ‘falling into [the . . .] inviting arms’ of her lover (p. 256). Authors such as Barungi mobilize the romance for feminist polemics, or they caution against the very ‘happy ever after’ solutions that characterize their Western counterparts.⁴³

Third, while some texts are mass produced and mass marketed in Africa, the majority of local authors employ private printing firms to produce their texts, often in small print-runs, and they maximize profits by hawking their own texts around schools, markets and transport depots. A side-effect of this unmediated author–printer relationship is that familiar ‘popular’ genres such as the crime thriller and the self-help book are cut free from the editorial control exercised over popular genres by multinational publishers in the West.

Novels are expensive commodities for most people in Africa and sales figures remain low for the majority of supposedly ‘popular’ texts. Nevertheless, in a number of cases, particular publications achieve dramatically high sales. Famously, Ogalì A. Ogalì’s *Veronica My Daughter* (1956) sold 60,000 copies within a few years of its publication in Onitsha. In the pamphlet, Ogalì makes a clear argument for letting young, educated women choose their own marriage partners over and against the dictates of their parents, especially their ‘illiterate’ fathers. The readership for this pamphlet comprised young, unmarried men, school-leavers who had no real savings to pay the high bride prices demanded by Igbo parents in the 1950s. Understanding the bestselling status of particular publications therefore requires one to ask what social, economic and emotional questions they address.

Popular literature offers a rapid response to social and economic conditions in African towns and cities, as well as to news events further afield. In 2001, after the bombing of the Twin Towers on September 11th, the Ghanaian pamphleteer Ebou Koomson (2007) felt that ‘the information we were getting from the news wasn’t enough . . . [so] I went on the internet, downloaded some information’, and created a forty-page pamphlet. This publication ‘was selling about 2000, 3000 a day’ and enabled Koomson to embark on other publication projects.⁴⁴ Throughout the continent, authors frequently tout their own publications around town, selling their textual commodities in the manner of other itinerant hawkers of fancy goods and sundries. Anticipating popular taste and catering for a discerning public, popular authors ‘correspond with the city’ directly, speaking to urban preoccupations and helping readers to reimagine themselves as successful urban subjects.⁴⁵

Alongside the private presses described above, there are many successful large-scale popular publishers in Africa, including Spear Books (Nairobi), publisher of bestsellers by Mangua (*Son of Woman*, 1971), Magaga Alot (*A Girl Cannot Go on Laughing all the Time*, 1975), Aubrey Kalitera (*A Taste of Business*, 1976) and David Maillu (*Benni Kamba oog in Operation DXT*, 1986). In the 1980s Macmillan published popular novels aimed at young adults in the ‘Pacesetters’ series, and Heinemann published popular romances by African authors in the ‘Heartbeats’ series. In the latter series, chapter headings and section breaks were marked with large black hearts, loudly declaring the ‘popular’ status of the text.⁴⁶ In Nigeria, Fourth Dimension Publishers and Fagbamigbe published popular fiction in the 1970s and 1980s, the latter producing imprints of Victorian popular novels by Bertha M. Clay and Ethel M. Dell. The covers of these texts generally featured Nigerian models, visually marking the protagonists as African in spite of opening paragraphs which trumpeted their

Englishness: 'Elinor, Lady Rydal, rose from the piano . . . [and perceived] the perfume of the rose, the odour of the newly mown hay; the rush of the river, and, in the far distance, the blue line of water, the English Channel'.⁴⁷

Given the problems of definition, and the conditions in which texts are produced and distributed in Africa, the literature hitherto labelled popular might be more accurately described as locally published. 'Local' is not intended here to suggest African authenticity or the existence of a closed cultural space separate from international media flows. Many 'locally published' texts, particularly spiritual autobiographies and religious testimonials, find readerships in countries thousands of miles from the authors' homelands. The authors of locally published charismatic religious testimonials are anything but isolated from the rest of the world. *Delivered from the Powers of Darkness* by Emmanuel Eni (1987) of Nigeria was for many years a bestseller as far afield as Malawi, both as a pamphlet and a video film. Its author, like other Pentecostal and born-again authors in Africa, declare their worldliness on back covers and flyleaves, gaining authority by positioning themselves as part of a global Christian community engaged in an international fight with evil forces.⁴⁸

There is considerable overlap between the 'internationally available' and the 'locally published': Meja Mwanji's *Kill Me Quick*, published in 1973 by Heinemann in London, shows the 'daily fight of his heroes and heroines for plain survival' in the manner of a locally produced 'popular' novel.⁴⁹ Similarly, Ngũgĩ's fascination for the figure of the prostitute in his fiction of the 1980s closely resembles the popular gender stereotype of unmarried women in post-colonial cities. Characters such as the 'good-time girl', the prostitute and the barren woman surface again and again in locally published fiction throughout the continent. These heavily stereotyped characters have attracted considerable critical attention from feminist intellectuals.⁵⁰ Such extreme characters are not necessarily meant to be mirrors to reality, however: while African popular texts and performances are often marked by gender conservatism, they may also be used as a vehicle for audiences to engage in debates which do not necessarily support the gender ideology embedded in plots. Thus, in his study of Ghanaian popular theatre, Kwabena Bame notices divisions among the audience along gender lines in response to songs on stage in which particular male or female character traits are criticized: women tend to side with female characters, whilst men tend to side with male characters.⁵¹

As an alternative to 'locally produced', the term 'public' might be used in place of 'popular'. Arjun Appadurai and Carol Breckenridge argue that 'public' is 'less embedded in Western dichotomies and debates about high versus low culture; mass versus elite culture; and popular or folk versus classical culture';⁵² they

retrieve the term ‘public’ to define ‘a zone of debate’ where cosmopolitan cultural forms encounter and interrogate one another in unexpected new ways.⁵³

Karin Barber’s recent work on publics adds to this framework by emphasizing the intense specificity of the term public in different regions of Africa at different moments in history. The African audiences Barber studies make up ‘reading publics’ whose sense of the text is simultaneously personal and social (or private and public), and whose use of the text breaks down any simple image of the solitary private reader. African readers are not caught in an either-or dichotomy between the public and private or the popular and elite. Rather, as Barber and other recent critics have found, African readers regard ‘popular’ texts as relevant both in their personal, domestic lives and also as instruments to excite public debates about individual morality in the public sphere.⁵⁴ The popular text is thus a meeting point between readers and contexts, where topical issues and moral dilemmas can be examined in the public space opened up by the book.

In spite of the difficulties in defining popular literature in relation to other types of African literature, locally published literature can be distinguished from internationally available ‘postcolonial’ literature by the fact that it is designed for local consumption and printed on local presses. It focuses on the lives and emotions of ordinary urban Africans rather than on overtly national, anti-colonial, postcolonial or global themes. As the blurb for Colin John Warren’s novel, *When the Going Gets Tough* (1993) boasts, this novel represents everything ‘postcolonial’ literature is not, for it contains ‘not even a hint of cultural clash; of the evils of colonialism; of politics . . . But yet – and perhaps because of this – the interest holds right through.’⁵⁵

African popular literature and the postcolonial canon

Since the 1980s several nationalist and Marxist literary critics have argued that African authors are kept in a state of cultural mimicry and subservience by their dependence upon Western companies for publication.⁵⁶ From this standpoint, real economic imbalances have led African authors towards European publishing houses and away from their own local publishers. For the critics, such imbalances serve at all levels – including the level of textual themes and imagery – to keep in place century-old imperialist discourses which objectify and racialize African cultures for the consumption of Europeans.

Graham Huggan’s influential and challenging book, *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins* exemplifies this school of criticism.⁵⁷ Huggan argues that

metropolitan readers continue to entertain deep cultural fantasies of African otherness, which are subtly reinforced by European publishers. The very ‘authenticity’ which is attributed to African literature in the West – the ‘traditional’ village setting, the portrayal of African customs, the religious ceremonies – is part of an exoticist discourse. In consequence, Huggan argues, any subversive or potentially radical material in African literature is carefully managed and neutralized by publishers. Postcolonial writers are tied to the colonial past and African authors can never break free from the genres they are forced to write for Western consumption. These anti-colonial critics insist that global power inequalities cannot be excluded from our consideration of African literature, and we are implicated in these issues by our status as consumers of texts.

The critique of neo-colonial power relations in publishing is persuasive and compelling, and it prevents us from indulging in premature celebrations of the ‘post-ness’ of postcolonial literatures. Two central problems emerge, however, when these theories are applied to African literature. First, when economic and political theories of dependency are used for the analysis of culture and literature, the result is the assumption that all African literature written in English and published in the West is produced for consumers in Europe and America. A negative view of cultural exchange stems from this essentially conflictual model, for ‘the West’ is positioned by critics against the rest of the world. Thus, dedicated publishers of African literature such as Heinemann, whose products helped to transform the mainstream English literature syllabus in Africa and the West, come in for very harsh treatment from radical critics, who tend to see imperialist conspiracies where the publisher’s motives may be a great deal more benign. The critics of neo-colonialism also tend to assume that English-language African authors write only for foreign, Western markets, with no consideration for their readerships at home. In assuming this, the critics ironically replicate the very power relations that are being criticized, for they cut local readers out of the picture and suppose that African audiences play no part in the reception of African (and European) texts, or in the generation of literary interpretations and debates about genre.

A second, closely related problem is that critics such as Huggan and Chinweizu presume that the African literature published in the West is the only African literature. Such a bias ignores the immense literary output of authors and printing presses on the continent itself – the literature that is often labelled ‘popular’ – where all genres of printed literature are produced for sale to local readers in English and French and, occasionally, in Arabic and African languages.

Part of the explanation for these lacunae is that the debate about African literature takes place at the level of elite culture, between highly educated intellectuals whose critical work is composed in French or English and is, as a result, more likely to circulate in international literary circles than material produced on local presses or in African languages.⁵⁸ Anti-colonial criticism reflects the political commitment of these elites, as well as their bias against popular literature.

The literature that has found its way onto the mainstream 'postcolonial literature' syllabus provides a clear illustration of intellectuals' preoccupations: until recently, Achebe's nationalist *Things Fall Apart* has been placed above Amos Tutuola's epic fantasy, *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*, as the foundational text on postcolonial literature courses; Cyprian Ekwensi's prolific output, which forms part of a body of bestselling popular literature in West Africa, is generally excluded in favour of more 'literary' writers from the 1950s and 1960s such as Mongo Beti and Cheikh Hamidou Kane. It is essential to recognize that outside these limits a vast array of additional local literatures, languages and readers can be found.

In the mid 1990s Biodun Jeyifo argued that 'a great silence' surrounds African intellectual output in mainstream anthologies of literary theory and criticism.⁵⁹ Today, an even greater silence might be said to surround African popular literature, especially if 'postcolonial' literatures are defined by particular thematic preoccupations or are seen to 'correspond to stages both of national or regional consciousness and of the project of asserting difference from the imperial centre'.⁶⁰ The inclusion of locally published literature in the consideration of African literary output might transform the category of 'postcolonial' in new directions: in other words, the absence of popular literature from discussions of postcolonial African literature reveals the silences within postcolonial discourse.

Simon Gikandi offers a convincing explanation for the situation: 'The institutions of interpretation that now operate under the orbit of poststructural or postcolonial theory have proven incapable, or ill-prepared, for the conjunction between a *particular politics and morality*', he writes: yet politics and morality are 'very powerful ... categories, in the making and unmaking of African worlds'.⁶¹ This lack of recognition for particular political and moral concerns is, at least in part, a consequence of the poststructuralist orientation of so much postcolonial theorization. Unfortunately, it also brings about the silencing of those ordinary, local 'African worlds' created and communicated in popular literature.

Urban Africa boasts a lively, well-established local publishing scene; diverse literary genres can be characterized as 'popular', ranging from novels and

self-help books to evangelical and Pentecostal testimonials as well as increasing quantities of pornographic and homosexual (generally homophobic) material.⁶² Responding rapidly to local conditions as well as to global cultural flows, this popular literature is ‘a significant site capable of engaging with the complex contradictions and ambiguities of the African postcolony’.⁶³ Some authors may have progressive ideals, while others may have a conservative orientation. What African ‘popular’ literature shares is its dynamic capacity to absorb local and global influences. In the field of literary production, this capacity is likely to expand in new directions in the future as authors gain increasing access to internet technologies and perhaps lose the need for the book as a textual commodity.

Notes

1. The Man in the Street (pseud.), ‘Home chat’, *Gold Coast Nation*, 11 March 1915, p. 861; emphasis retained.
2. ‘Editorial: The interviews’, *Gold Coast Leader*, 4 April 1903, p. 2. In newspapers such as the *Gold Coast Nation* and the *Gold Coast Leader*, where several editors, managers and proprietors were involved in the production of material for publication, information about the identities of the editors of particular issues is notoriously difficult to retrieve; individual authors of editorials cannot therefore be named with certainty.
3. Tom Odhiambo, ‘Alternative moral economies, crime and violence in Kenyan popular fiction’, in James Ogude and Joyce Nyairo (eds.), *Urban Legends, Colonial Myths: Popular Culture and Literature in East Africa* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2007), pp. 243–5.
4. O. Ajewole, *Never Pity Ladies* (Ibadan: Daily Hope Productions, 1989), n.p.
5. T. J. Sawyerr, ‘Occasional notes: our first volume’, *Sawyerr’s Bookselling, Printing and Stationery Trade Circular and General Advertising Medium*, 29 April 1886, n.p.
6. J. Abiakam (pseud. J. C. Anorue), *How to Make Friends* (1971; Onitsha: J. C. Brothers Bookshop, 1995), n.p.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 17.
8. *Lagos Standard*, 22 November 1916; cited in *Gold Coast Nation*, 30 November–7 December 1916, p. 1560.
9. Chris Wanjala, ‘Popular culture in East African literature’, in Ogude and Nyairo (eds.), *Urban Legends, Colonial Myths*, p. 222.
10. Karin Barber, ‘Translation, publics and the vernacular press in 1920s Lagos’, in Toyin Falola (ed.), *Christianity and Social Change in Africa: Essays in Honour of J. D. Y. Peel* (Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press, 2005), pp. 187–208.
11. George Ogola, ‘“Christening fiction”: sermonising “The popular” in *Whispers*’, in Ogude and Nyairo (eds.), *Urban Legends, Colonial Myths*, pp. 79–96.
12. Agnes Muriungi, ‘“Chira” and HIV/AIDS: the (re)construction of sexual moralities in popular fiction’, in Ogude and Nyairo (eds.), *Urban Legends, Colonial Myths*, p. 284.
13. *Ibid.*, pp. 286, 301.
14. George Ogola, ‘Confronting and performing power: memory, popular imagination and a “popular” Kenyan newspaper serial’, *African Studies*, 64.1 (2005), 83.

15. Charles K. Giathe, *A Worm in the Head* (Nairobi: Spear Books, 1987), back cover.
16. Charles Mangua, *Son of Woman* (1971; Nairobi: Spear Books, 1988).
17. James Kofi Annan, *Campus Relationships: The Untold Story* (Accra: James Kofi Annan, 2003), p. 9.
18. Marjorie Mensah (pseud.), 'Ladies Corner', *The Times of West Africa*, 16 June 1931, p. 2.
19. Ibid.
20. Ibid.
21. Ibid.
22. Marjorie Mensah (pseud.), 'Ladies Corner', *Times of West Africa*, 26–27 May 1932, p. 2.
23. Lennard J. Davis, *Factual Fictions: The Origins of the English Novel* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983).
24. Ibid.
25. Ibid., pp. 7–24.
26. Gomolemo Mokae, *The Secret in My Bosom* (Johannesburg: Vivlia, 1996), back cover.
27. Mehlaleng Mosotho, *The Tikieline Yuppie* (Johannesburg: Vivlia, 1998), n.p.
28. Paul Gready, 'The Sophiatown writers of the fifties: the unreal reality of their world', in Stephanie Newell (ed.), *Readings in African Popular Fiction* (Bloomington and Oxford: Indiana University Press and James Currey, 2002); see Christopher Warnes in Vol. 1, Chapter 11.
29. Esther de Bruijn, "'What's love?'" in an interconnected world? Ghanaian market literature for youth responds', *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 43.3 (2008), pp. 3–24.
30. Chris L. Wanjala, 'Imaginative writing since independence: the East African experience', in Ulla Schild (ed.), *The East African Experience: Essays on English and Swahili Literature* (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer Verlag, 1980), p. 24.
31. Ian Steadman, 'Towards popular theatre in South Africa', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 16.2 (1990), 224; Gready, 'The Sophiatown writers of the fifties', p. 144.
32. See e.g. Taban lo Liyong *Another Last Word* (Nairobi: Heinemann Kenya, 1990); Ulla Schild, 'Words of deception: popular literature in Kenya', in Schild (ed.), *The East African Experience*, pp. 25–33.
33. *Lagos Standard*, 22 November 1916; cited in *Gold Coast Nation*, 30 November–7 December 1916, p. 1560.
34. Wanjala, 'Popular culture in East African literature'.
35. Ibid., p. 214.
36. Ibid., pp. 209, 214.
37. Ibid., p. 204.
38. Karin Barber, 'Popular arts in Africa', *African Studies Review*, 30.3 (1987), 1–78.
39. Ogola, 'Confronting and performing power'; Stephanie Newell, *Ghanaian Popular Fiction: 'Thrilling Discoveries in Conjugal Life' and Other Tales* (Oxford: James Currey, 2000).
40. See Newell, *Ghanaian Popular Fiction*.
41. Ebow Koomson, Interviewed by Esther De Bruijn, New Town, Accra, 8 December 2007.
42. See Emmanuel Obiechina, *An African Popular Literature: A Study of Onitsha Market Pamphlets* (Cambridge University Press, 1973).
43. Sophie Macharia, 'Romance, (in)visibility and agency in Grace Ogot's *The Strange Bride* and "The White Veil"', in Ogude and Nyairo (eds.), *Urban Legends, Colonial Myths*, pp. 261–80.
44. Koomson, Interviewed by Esther De Bruijn.
45. See Newell, 'Corresponding with the city'.
46. Jane Bryce, 'Women and modern African popular fiction', in Karin Barber (ed.), *Readings in African Popular Culture* (Bloomington and Oxford: Indiana University Press and James Currey, 1997), pp. 118–25.

47. Bertha M. Clay, *Beyond Pardon* (Akure: Fagbamigbe, 1977), p. 5.
48. Birgit Meyer, "'Delivered from the powers of darkness': confessions of Satanic riches in Christian Ghana", *Africa*, 65.2 (1995), pp. 236–55.
49. Eleonore Schmitt and Werner Graebner, 'Sukuma Wiki: food and drink in the Nairobi novels of Meja Mwangi', in Werner Graebner (ed.), *Sokomoto: Popular Culture in East Africa* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1992), p. 134.
50. See Adeleye-Fayemi, 'Either one or the other'; De Bruijn, 'What's love?'
51. Kwabena Bame, *Come to Laugh: African Traditional Theater in Ghana* (New York: Lillian Barber Press, 1985).
52. Arjun Appadurai and Carol Breckenridge, 'Why public culture?' *Public Culture*, 1.1 (1988), 5–9.
53. Ibid.
54. See Newell, *Ghanaian Popular Fiction*.
55. Colin John Warren, *When the Going Gets Tough* (Limbe: Malawi Writers Series, Popular Publications, 1993).
56. See Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (London: Heinemann, 1986); Chinweizu, Onwuchekwa Jemie and Ihechukwu Madubuike, *Toward a Decolonization of African Literature*, vol. 1: *African Fiction and Poetry and Their Critics* (Washington, DC: Howard University Press, 1983).
57. Graham Huggan, *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins* (London: Routledge, 2001).
58. Graham Furniss, *Poetry, Prose and Popular Culture in Hausa* (Edinburgh and London: Edinburgh University Press and the International African Institute, 1996).
59. Biodun Jeyifo, 'Literary theory and theories of decolonization', in Josef Gugler, Hans-Jürgen Lüsebrink and Jürgen Martini (eds.), *Literary Theory and African Literature* (Münster and Hamburg: Lit Verlag, 1994), pp. 18–23.
60. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-colonial Literatures* (London: Routledge, 1989).
61. Simon Gikandi, 'Theory, literature, and moral considerations', *Research in African Literatures*, 32. 4 (2001), 3; emphasis added.
62. De Bruijn, 'What's love?'; Wanjala, 'Popular culture in East African literature'.
63. Ogola, 'Christening fiction', p. 80.

31(b) Popular writing in India

ABHIJIT GUPTA

The popular, in almost any field of cultural production, is constructed as both health and disease. A full-fledged popular is usually realized in an advanced state of the life-cycle of a form, and is testament to its survival and health. At the same time, it often arises by making concessions to a genuine or manufactured threshold of taste. Historically, this has led to anxieties about the 'high culture' being overwhelmed by a tidal wave of the popular, and the proposition of a bulwark between the two, which despite the rise of cultural studies has proved to be curiously durable. Mainstream literary studies have been ponderous in applying the full range of critical tools to the popular, preferring instead to view it through the lens of straightforward literary history. This approach seemed to hold good while there was critical consensus about the definitions of the literary and the popular. But in recent years, the border separating the two has proved to be a porous one, with frequent crossings in both directions. This in turn has weakened the established dichotomy between the popular and the literary, and has called into question our practice of applying different critical tools to the works so classified.

Nevertheless, it will not be out of place to recapitulate some of the distinguishing features of such critical practices. In much of mainstream literary criticism, it is the work that is first constructed, and then its *auteur*. But studies of the popular have had to pay more attention to readers as interpretive communities and acknowledge their role in shaping generic boundaries and expectations.¹ The genre – and its associated protocols – rather than the individual work or the *auteur*, has been a key feature of such studies. It is not hard to see how such an approach forces us to substantially shift our focus from purely textual hermeneutics to considerations of the marketplace of books, and

the organizational aspects of what has been called the culture industry. Such approaches became particularly relevant in the latter half of the twentieth century, when the culture industry achieved a never-before state of vigour following successive regimes of increasingly sophisticated information technologies. But this is not to suggest that studies of popular literary modes can afford to ignore questions of writing and authorship, as well as strategies of individual and collective readings. All too often, such studies tend to regard the writer and the reader as either passive dupes or willing accomplices of the culture industry, without any agency of their own.

It is well known that genre fiction in English arose in the latter half of the nineteenth century, primarily in response to the unprecedented boom in the periodicals market and a sharp rise in literacy following legislation which made primary education compulsory in the British Isles. The expanded market also meant that the reading public would become less and less homogeneous, with writers and critics periodically invoking an entity called the 'unknown public' living in urban working-class areas and comprising a vast new army of readers, hungry for reading matter which was cheap and easily accessible. Such reading matter was branded and marketed in a way unprecedented in the history of the book, in which the series, rather than the individual work, became the chief marker of identification. Thus we have the dime novels in America and the penny dreadfuls in England and the *feuilleton* in France, each representing an early example of Western mass media. Not surprisingly, mainstream critical opinion was openly contemptuous of such writing and its consumers, with the *Quarterly Review* leading the chorus: 'A commercial atmosphere floats around works of this class, redolent of the manufactory and the shop. The public wants novels, and novels must be made – so many yards of printed stuff, sensation-pattern, to be ready by the beginning of the season.'² A century later, Q. D. Leavis would quote this extract with approval in her influential and controversial *Fiction and the Reading Public*.³

By the beginning of the twentieth century, popular fiction in English was no longer restricted to periodicals, but had also extended to mainstream book publishing. The organizational and technological changes undergone by the book trade during the *fin de siècle* meant that the industry was more prepared to accommodate the demands of the popular. These were faster and cheaper printing methods, increased print runs and an effective distributive network. The looser and the more accommodating idea of the series in the previous century had hardened into that of genres – some like crime, romance or the school story already well entrenched, while others like science fiction or fantasy still in the process of defining themselves. There were crossovers

from other media too, such as cinema and the comic book. Reading patterns were changing as well, with the creation of distinctive communities of readers who were united in a freemasonry of taste, and who helped shape the early contours of genres such as science fiction and comic books.

So far I have tried to outline a very rough-and-ready roadmap for the rise of the popular in the anglophone West. But does this map serve its purpose when it comes to anglophone writing in the postcolonial world? What, for instance, is the life-cycle of the anglophone popular in a region like South Asia which has had a history of reading and writing in English for over two centuries? Are there similarities between the rise of the popular in other Indian languages and in English? What are the roles played by phenomena such as colonization, diaspora, globalization and neo-colonization in the formation of readerships of the popular? What are the various modes of production which succeed each other after the coming of print? These are some of the questions which I wish to raise in the course of this chapter.

The early years: changing modes of production

Though printing came to India as early as the mid sixteenth century, it would take almost two and a half centuries for the printed book to infiltrate the noetic world configured by the manuscript book. There are many reasons for this but the chief one seems to be that while the manuscript book was the product of a local economy, the printed book was the result of a far-flung and incredibly fragile supply chain. The implements which went into the making of a manuscript book – ink, stylus, palm-leaf, cord, boards – had been readily and cheaply available for nearly two millennia. On the other hand, press, type, paper, ink and sometimes even the printer all had to be sourced from overseas, and had to overcome every possible maritime hazard. Not surprisingly, printing in the subcontinent did not really take off before all or most of these requisites could be locally supplied, and it was not until the end of the eighteenth century that the rudiments of such an economy were in place.

There were four distinct, but not discrete, phases in the early history of print in the region. The first phase was missionary-sponsored: for over two centuries, missionaries were the sole players till the baton was taken over in the second relay by the British following the Battle of Plassey in 1757 and the beginning of the Raj in South Asia. The third phase saw the coming of the private entrepreneur, who was European to begin with, but it was only in the fourth phase that the indigenous take-up of printing began in earnest. It is also from this point that the search for a popular may be said to begin. Both

government and missionary printing was carried out through subventions but private initiatives were entirely market-driven. It is not surprising therefore that thriving local markets of cheap books sprang up in the presidency cities of Calcutta and Madras, the most famous being the so-called Battala trade in Calcutta. In 1857, the bibliographer and ethnographer Rev. James Long listed forty-six presses in the area, along Garanahata, Ahiritola, Chitpur and Barabazar, which printed a wide range of genres such as almanacs, mythological literature, farces, songs, medicinal texts and the typographically distinct Muslim-Bengali works. Battala had little to do with the moralizing and reformist agenda of print, and dealt unabashedly in demotic genres such as erotica, scandals, current events, doggerels and songs, much to the chagrin of the reformist and missionary lobbies which vigorously moved government to legislate against what they considered obscenity.

The example of Battala is central to any understanding of the rise of the popular in nineteenth-century India. For one, it anticipates the classic divide between the popular and the literary which was to become well-entrenched in the West by the end of the nineteenth century. But its own role in promoting such a divide was minimal: from the beginning it was itself completely unself-conscious in its energy and robust vulgarity, and made absolutely no concessions to the more polite constituencies of the Bengali world of letters. Retribution was not slow in coming: first, in the form of an Act in 1856 to prevent the public sale and exposure of obscene books and pictures, then in the setting up of the Society for the Suppression of Obscenity in India in 1873, and finally in the passage of the Dramatic Performances Act of 1876. These measures drove the Battala popular to a literary underworld where it remains to this day.

In marked contrast to other Indian languages, anglophone writing in India was slow to get off the blocks. Though early printing in India was almost entirely controlled by Europeans, printing in English was restricted to government circulars, law books and the like, and most of its energies channelled towards developing a corpus of works in Indian languages. As Rosinka Chaudhuri points out: 'British government policies at the start of the nineteenth century were tilted in favour of the classical languages of India and against the study of English.'²⁴ Rather, the first impulse towards English education in India came from the Indians themselves, almost two decades before Macaulay's 'Minute on Indian Education' of 1835. During this lead-up period, the acts of reading and writing in English were mediated by such interventions as translation, imitation, parody and adaptation, examples of which may be seen in the early effusions of the Young Bengal school led by

the mercurial Henry Derozio. Most of their work was published in periodicals – Derozio’s first poems, for instance, came out in the *India Gazette*, of which he was later to become assistant editor. Derozio also edited the *Calcutta Literary Gazette* and contributed his work to a host of similar magazines. One of Derozio’s most intimate friends, Captain D. L. Richardson, the principal of the Hindu College, edited a yearly collection of poetry and prose called the *Bengal Annual* from 1830 to 1836. Following in Derozio’s footsteps was Kasiprasad Ghosh, who became one of the most influential figures of what Chaudhuri has called the ‘literary Orientalist network in Calcutta that had surrounded Derozio in the first quarter of the nineteenth century’.⁵

But while Derozio and his ilk published from Calcutta, they sought critical approval from periodicals in London, such as the *Athenaeum*, *Fraser’s Magazine*, *The Oriental Herald and Colonial Review*, *The New Monthly Magazine* and so on. This is a pattern which recurs in the nineteenth century, notably with the poet Michael Madhusudan Dutt, whose desire to be ranked with the likes of Byron and Shelley was reflected in such early works as the poem *The Captive Ladie* and the play *Rizia: The Empress of Inde*, both of which came out in Madras-based periodicals. But though his poem received a favourable notice in the *Athenaeum*, Dutt was disheartened first by an adverse review in *The Bengal Hurkaru*, and then by a letter from J. E. D. Bethune who urged him to devote his talents to Bengali literature. The Dutt family (no relation to Michael) had rather more success with their work in English: Shoshee Chunder Dutt published several volumes of poetry in Calcutta, while brother Ishan Chunder also had a volume of essays and poems to his credit. Their first cousin Hur Chunder likewise published two volumes of poetry in Calcutta, while his brother Greece Chunder’s second volume of poems *Cherry Blossoms* came out simultaneously in Calcutta and London in 1881. A selection of the works of the four cousins came out in the form of the *Dutt Family Album* in 1870.⁶ They were followed by a second, and more skilled, generation of poets and novelists, the most celebrated of them being Govin Chunder’s daughter Toru Dutt, who wrote poetry and fiction in both English and French with equal facility. Her work was published by Kegan Paul in London and Didier in France. Early novels, too, appeared in periodicals: such as Bankimchandra Chatterjee’s *Rajmohan’s Wife* in the *Indian Field*, and Krupabai Sathianadhan’s novels in the *Madras Christian College Magazine* in the 1890s. It is noteworthy that none of these works of prose fiction made the transition to book form, proof that there was still no appreciable interpretive community for such work in the nineteenth century.

The beginning of the twentieth century saw the rise of print nationalism and the indigenization of Western genres in Indian languages. The potentially

large Indian market now began to attract overseas publishers, such as Macmillan (1903), Longman (1906) and the Oxford University Press (1912), with Macmillan testing the waters with Lal Behari Day's two-volume novel *Gobinda Samanta* (later retitled *Bengal Peasant Life*) as early as 1874. This appears to be the first instance of an English novel by an Indian published in *book form*, and is therefore an interesting case study. The book did not do well commercially – only 400–500 copies were sold – and Alexander Macmillan had to abandon plans of producing a cheap single-volume edition for America and India. Again, this seems to be the first – though abortive – attempt to place Indian literature in the international market.⁷

The marketability of Indian writing in English did not rise significantly in the early decades of the twentieth century, despite such a publishing oddity as Tagore's *Gitanjali*,⁸ on the strength of which he was awarded a Nobel Prize in 1913. But even in the case of *Gitanjali*, there was special pleading involved by the likes of W.B. Yeats and William Rothenstein. In fact, if there is a common feature to postcolonial writing of the pre-independence period, it is the extreme difficulty faced by authors in finding publishers. Mulk Raj Anand went through seventeen London publishers before his *Untouchable*⁹ was finally accepted by John Wishart on the advice of Edgell Rickward. When the book appeared, it carried the imprimatur of E. M. Forster in the form of a preface; similarly R. K. Narayan had to depend on the good offices of Graham Greene for his first novel *Swami and Friends*,¹⁰ as well as his second and third. The only author who bucks this trend is Dhan Gopal Mookerjee (who was resident in the US unlike the others), who published half a dozen highly acclaimed children's books with E. P. Dutton of New York in the 1920s and 1930s, one of which, *Gay-Neck*,¹¹ won the Newbery Medal in 1927, fifty-four years before Rushdie won the Booker.

The middle years: the effects of independence

The years after 1947 saw several important changes on the Indian publishing scene which were to have a tonic effect on anglophone Indian writing. A number of new young firms – many of which had been loosely associated with the freedom movement – began to make their presence felt. Some of them were booksellers and distributors, some publishers and some wore both hats. Together, they built up an extensive network of publishing and distributing which was to be the backbone of Indian writing in English for the next half-century.

A brief roll-call of some of these firms would not be out of place. Jaico was founded in 1946 by Jaman Shah as a book distribution company, but diversified

into book publishing after independence, and published the early fiction of Kamala Markandaya. Rupa, founded in 1936, was a wholesaler, distributor and exporter to start with but began book publishing soon after independence. Both were able to reach a wide range of buyers, in the case of Rupa penetrating deep into rural India. This in turn enabled them to keep the price of their books low – for example, one of Rupa's recent bestsellers, Chetan Bhagat's *Five-Point Someone*, is priced at Rs 95, which is about one-third the price of a book of the same length by a publisher such as Penguin India or HarperCollins. But the key player was the Asia Publishing House of Bombay, founded in 1943 by Peter Jayasinghe, and widely regarded as the first Indian publishing house to be organized along truly professional lines. Over a period of four decades it published nearly 4,300 titles, had an annual turnover of Rs 6,400,000 and was able to maintain branch offices in London and New York.¹² Though most of its titles were in the humanities and the social sciences, it also published fiction writers such as Manohar Malgaonkar. Hind Pocket Book, founded in 1958 by Dinanath Malhotra and descended from Rajpal and Sons (est. 1891), spearheaded the paperback revolution in India with ten Hindi titles in 1959. S. Chand and Co. was a prolific publisher and also acquired the rights to publish Blackie's of Glasgow in India. Another important firm was Vikas, which specialized in cheap paperback reprints of fiction and non-fiction in English.

What this first clutch of publishers achieved was twofold: first, they gave a visibility and presence to Indian writing in English which was comparable to other Indian languages; second, they created the paperback market in South Asia, and made books available cheaply. If we look at the careers of post-independence anglophone writers, we will see that they typically began their writing careers with one of these firms before moving on to British or American publishers. Manohar Malgaonkar's publishing career is a classic example of this trajectory, and recapitulates almost every key phase of anglophone Indian writing till the 1990s: he began his career with Asia Publishing House in 1959, then published a couple of novels with Viking Press in the USA. Then the paperback revolution happened and we find Malgaonkar publishing his next few novels with Orient Paperbacks and Hind Pocket Books, interspersed with the occasional Viking and Ind-US imprint. Then came Penguin in the late 1980s and we find Malgaonkar appearing in its lists as well. Likewise Bhabani Bhattacharya's landmark 1947 novel *So Many Hungers*¹³ was published by Hind Kitab, but his 1952 novel *Music for Mohini*¹⁴ was issued by Crown of New York. *He Who Rides the Tiger* (1954)¹⁵ again travelled overseas to Crown, while *A Goddess Named Gold* (1960)¹⁶ went first to Crown and then to Hind Pocket Books. These examples, from a period largely forgotten in the excitement of the post-Rushdie years, alert

us to the dangers of a history where the popular and the literary are kept strictly in segregation. Most of the above-mentioned writers and publishers were part of a publishing ethos which sought to make serious work available in a popular format. The relative cheapness of these books meant that their production values were not of the highest standards, but nevertheless there were attempts to reach a nationwide readership. As we will see later, this constitutes a significant point of departure from the largely urban thrust of the postcolonial popular under construction in the current century.

The post-independence period also saw the coming of an entirely different mode of production: the small printing press, choosing to stay small either out of necessity or for ideological reasons. The chief exemplar of this mode is Writers' Workshop of Calcutta. Founded in 1958 by the translator and poet Purushottam Lal, Writers' Workshop published 3,000 titles during its first fifty years, but with a business model probably unique in publishing. In poetry, for example, the print run is always 350, 10 per cent of which is given in lieu of royalty, but the writer is also expected to make an advance purchase of 100 copies for sale or distribution. Since Writers' Workshop was intended to be a forum for first-time authors, many important names in the Indo-Anglian canon first appeared under its imprint, such as Nissim Ezekiel, A. K. Ramanujam, Kamala Das, Vikram Seth, Jayant Mahapatra, Ruskin Bond and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni. As the names indicate, it is in poetry that the house has been most active. Mention must be made of its single-volume collection *Modern Indian Poetry in English*,¹⁷ which came out in 1969 and reads practically like a Who's Who of Indian writing in English; it also stirred a considerable hornet's nest by taking issue with the Bengali poet Buddhadeva Bose's dismissive *obiter dicta* on Indian writing in English.

Liberalization and after

After having expanded in the 1950s and 1960s, Indian publishing stagnated in the 1970s and 1980s due to restrictions on imports and heavy regulation. But then three significant events occurred which gave a new lease of life to Indian writing in English. The first was the award of the Booker Prize in 1981 to Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, but no less significant was the setting up of Penguin India which began publishing in 1987 with seven titles. The third, and, to my mind, the most important event was the economic liberalization of the early 1990s, and the consequent loosening of import and equity restrictions. This in turn led to the entry of transnational corporations like HarperCollins, Random House and the Pearson Group into the Indian market.

Despite not being a TNC itself, Penguin India¹⁸ framed many of the ground rules which the conglomerates would later follow, and set the stage for Indian writing in English to graduate from a cottage industry to a medium-sized one. But in the context of this chapter, what is significant is Penguin's role in promoting a wholly new idea of the popular. Penguin configured the popular not merely in terms of content and genre, but also in terms of authorship, packaging, advertising and marketing. Many eyebrows were raised when Penguin commissioned the celebrity and film journalist Shobha Dé to write what is arguably the first Indian 'sex and society' novel *Socialite Evenings* in 1989, but the book turned out to be a huge commercial success. (Namita Gokhale's *Paro: Dreams of Passion*¹⁹ is an earlier candidate.) Dé followed up with a number of similarly titled novels on the same broad theme: *Strange Obsessions* (1992), *Sultry Days* (1994), *Small Betrayals* (1995) and *Second Thoughts* (1996).²⁰ Though there are no sales figures available for these titles, a CEO of Penguin told a newspaper that the average print run of a Dé title has swelled from 20,000–25,000 in paperback in the 1990s to 60,000 in hardback in 2007.²¹ There is no doubt that these novels by Dé constitute the first-ever example of a full-fledged popular genre in anglophone writing in India.

The reasons for Dé's success are not far to seek. Even before Dé, there had been a large readership in India for romances of the Mills & Boon and Silhouette variety, largely among women. But there was a gap in the market insofar as romances with Indian characters and settings were concerned. Dé filled this gap and gave it a distinctly Indian flavour with a dash of Bollywood *masala*. But a more important factor was the rapidly changing demographics in suburban and small-town India. With rising incomes, changing lifestyles and increased consumption among middle-class Indians in the post-liberalization era, there was room for new reading practices and narrative pleasures which had little in common with the more earnest and self-denying narrative practices of the 1950s and the 1960s. It is possible to argue that both writing and reading protocols in the decades immediately following India's independence reflected the spirit of austerity and nation building that marked that period. The novel – in English as well as other Indian languages – saw itself as part of this building process, and did not allow itself the luxury of proliferating into popular genres. There were exceptions, such as Sasthi Brata's steamy potboilers *Confessions of an Indian Woman Eater* (1971) and *She and He* (1973),²² both written at the height of the 'licence raj' era. But by and large, anglophone fiction in the 1970s entered a cul-de-sac from which little seemed to emerge.

All this did not change overnight in the 1980s, but there were powerful agents of change which did not leave publishing untouched. One was the rise of

national television, followed by the coming of satellite television in the early 1990s. The other was the rapidly changing face of English-language newspapers and magazines, and the coming of weekend and special supplements. Just as the periodicals in late nineteenth century England had imposed their values upon the English novel, so the new Indian journalism generated a set of new narrative protocols which found their way into fiction. As the Soviet-style economic management of India began to be relaxed, the country's print and electronic media became its most vocal proponents of an aesthetics of fulfilment. Breaking consciously from the post-independence zeitgeist of social realism, the new journalism helped create what Michael Denning has called 'myths of a supposed necessity' and allegories of utopian longing, in which the novel also became a collaborator.²³

The coming of the TNCs in the late 1990s was therefore an inevitable result of the momentum generated by the intersection of the publishing industry and the larger culture industry. The effects of this were most visible in the ways in which new markets and readerships were almost conjured into existence overnight. In her work on postcolonial publishing in the global marketplace, Sarah Brouillette writes: 'The basic structure of the publishing industry (in this period) is a complicated one, involving interchanges between local, international, and global fields ... Attention to the material organisation of the current literary marketplace does not reveal a single market, but rather a fragmenting and proliferating set of niche audiences, which are admittedly united by a set of general rules dictated by the major transnational corporations.'²⁴ This model of not one but a number of modes of production, carefully calibrated to cater to specific segments of the market, is one which largely holds good for post-liberalization India. While earlier modes such as the national or regional publishing house or the small press continued to exist, their market share began to be increasingly appropriated by the TNCs.

At the time of writing, the market in India seems divided more or less equally between the two sectors: in the Indian corner one might find one or two of the older houses like Rupa, which has adjusted well to the changing dispensation despite its rather shoddy production values. But others like Vikas, Jaico or Allied have more or less moved away from fiction publishing, and only do so by licence if at all, preferring to concentrate on textbooks and spiritual books. There are some who have set up shop more recently, such as Shrishti and East-West, and also niche houses such as Tara in Madras, Stree in Calcutta, and Yoda, Kali and Zubaan in Delhi. But the textbook case from among these has to be Chetan Bhagat's runaway bestseller *Five Point Someone*,²⁵ published by Rupa in 2004. Industry gossip has it that Bhagat insisted that his book be priced at

less than Rs 100 (for comparison, a book of similar length by Penguin would cost about Rs 300). Rupa blanched at this but Bhagat held firm, and even offered to amortize losses. Thanks to Rupa's nationwide distribution, the book became an instant bestseller and has become a landmark in Indian publishing, staying in the *India Today* bestsellers' list for over 200 weeks, and selling over 30,000 copies in its Hindi translation within the first month. Subsequently, all of Rupa's fiction issues have been pegged at the magic price of Rs 95. But instances like *Five Point Someone* are exceptions rather than the rule in the new regime of English-language publishing in India.

What are the hallmarks of this new regime? To begin with, most TNCs tried to graft Western business practices more or less unchanged on the Indian market. Some of these are in an advanced stage of application, while others have yet to prove their utility and remain experiments. They may be listed as follows:

- Market segmentation
- Improved distribution system and effective stock control (not very effective despite computerization)
- New retail and e-marketing (at an early stage)
- Acquiring credit from banks to fund acquisitions, bidding for manuscripts, buying display place in big bookstores, buying advertising and media visibility
- Media synergies and tie-ups with new media such as the internet, blogs (at an early stage)
- Merchandizing (not tried out adequately as yet)

Of the above, it is in the creation of new markets that the TNCs have had most success. Following the international commercial and critical success of *Midnight's Children*, Indian writing in English suddenly found itself a marketable commodity overseas and calibrated its sights accordingly. This has been both a blessing and a bane, for while one rejoiced at the wider readership that became available as a result, one was also dismayed at the privileging of one segment of the readership above others. This segment is defined by its centralized and metropolitan location, and is configured as the most favoured consumer in the literary food chain. Its recognition and rewards are eagerly sought after, and much of current writing is consciously crafted to appeal to its tastes. It is not hard to see how this can – and has – led to a narrative practice rendered featureless and uniform by the demands of what has been called a postnational mode of textual consumption. In such a regime, the local is tolerated as long as it does not stray too far from the metropolitan centre, and answers to the

demands made of it by the highly corporatized business practices of TNC publishing. This, however, does not mean that the TNC is only interested in catering to the lowest common denominator. In many cases, the TNC also publishes for a niche market, going by the philosophy that no market is too small to ignore. Thanks to the rise of new retail and print-on-demand, such micro-operations need no longer be hamstrung by economies of scale. The hardest hit in the new dispensation have been small and independent publishers, who are finding it virtually impossible to survive without subventions.

Another noticeable feature of the TNC business model is the use of other media, especially the internet. The Oxford Bookstore chain has been running an e-author contest since 2001, and claims on its website that the 'last three e-Authors have initiated a new and a very significant trend to Indian writing in English'.²⁶ Such claims are of course to be taken with the requisite pinch of salt but the latest competition announcement offers a book contract with HarperCollins as first prize, subject to editorial approval. The list of partners in this joint venture is an example to the kind of media convergences which are being created around fiction: other than the bookstore chain and HarperCollins, there are Sulekha.com (an online professional-social network) Reader's Digest, IBNLive.com (a news portal affiliated with CNN), Rediff Books (one of India's leading online bookstores) and New Writing Partnership, a Norwich-based initiative. With the phenomenal rise in blogging in India over the last few years, new synergies have been established between the blogosphere and the fiction market. The most well-known recent case is that of Meenakshi Madhavan Reddy's much-hyped novel *You Are Here*,²⁷ published by Penguin in 2008. Reddy shot to fame for her blog 'The Compulsive Confessor' on the basis of which she was awarded a book contract with much fanfare. The novel itself falls into the 'sex-and-eating disorders' subgenre popularized by Helen Fielding with her Bridget Jones series from 1996 onwards. However, it is too early to say whether Indian bloggers will be able to make their presence felt in print fiction; early samplings indicate that the relative brevity of a blogpost is a major stumbling block faced by writers when confronted with the necessity of writing a full-length chapter.

From the examples so far, it is clear that there is an appreciable market in India for what is known as chick lit in the West. Publishers have been able to successfully retool this genre for the Indian market, so much so that there is a hardly a publisher who does not have at least half a dozen of such works on their lists. To take random examples from some of the big players: Penguin came to the party early with *Piece of Cake*²⁸ by Swati Kaushal in 2004 and *Girl*

*Alone*²⁹ by Rupa Gulab in 2005. Rupa, buoyed by the success of *Five Point Someone* scrambled on to the bandwagon with *Trust Me*³⁰ by filmmaker Rajashree in 2006 and more recently *Chip of the Old Blockhead* by Rupa Gulab,³¹ *One Afternoon*³² by Roma Bansal and *Indian Memsaheb*³³ by Suchita Malik. Late arrivals HarperCollins seem to have got the mix just right with Advaita Kala's bestselling *Almost Single*³⁴ in 2007, which sold 10,000 copies in its first four months, and the cricket-themed *The Zoya Factor*³⁵ by Anuja Chauhan in 2008.³⁶ Then there is the numerology-inspired *Kkrishnaa's Confessions*³⁷ by Smriti Jain, published by new entrants Westland in 2008. But perhaps the most emphatic indication of the coming of chick lit is the launch of Harlequin Mills & Boon in India in 2008, and the publication of Poonam Sharma's *All Eyes on Her*³⁸ under the firm's Red Dress Ink imprint.

One must be cautious not to read too much into these trends. Though chick lit has become an increasingly visible presence in recent Indian writing in English, it is too early to tell whether it will have staying power. With one or two exceptions, most of the titles listed above are mediocre examples of the genre, and unlikely to have an extended shelf-life. But this may not necessarily be a deterrent, as long as there is a steady supply of new titles to replace the old. For the purpose of this chapter, it is more important to examine how the modes of production consolidated by such a publishing regime will influence the so-called 'literary' novel. Already, there are clear indications that the business model of the popular is being grafted unchanged onto the mainstream novel, much to the detriment of the latter. Publishing houses like Penguin apply an arithmetical rule-of-thumb for first-time novelists in which a first edition of 1,000 or 1,500 is priced according to the following rough formula: number of pages + Rs 100. This ensures that the firm recoups its investment from the first edition, and is therefore not committed to reprints. This model of publishing is remarkably similar to that of the three-volume novel in Victorian England, in which the novelist would have to produce a minimum of 150,000 words in editions rarely exceeding a print run of 1,000. Just as the Victorian novel was kept at an artificially high price of 31s 6d, the high page-price ratio of the average Penguin offering ensures that the modest print run is just adequate to supply the market. What this ensures is that as soon as a newcomer achieves sufficient escape velocity, she takes her work to an overseas or transnational publisher, who can make her work available to a much wider readership. This has been the life-cycle of most of the canonical postcolonial writers, who have carried out a species of literary emigration, not to small independent presses but to one of the half-a-dozen odd conglomerates who control much of the printed word in the West. In this context, it is useful to

note Sarah Brouillette's contention that 'expanding markets for literatures in English have depended on the incorporation of a plurality of identities for global export'.³⁹ Such pluralities are brought into play as a result of a movement from the local to the global and from the postcolonial to the postnational. The resulting incorporation of the works into a primarily Anglo-American marketplace of books marks a transition from a postcolonial mode of production to a full-fledged globalized mode of production, facilitated by the unfettered flow of capital and the managerial practices of the conglomerates. At the same time, it is also clear that the globalized mode of production is rapidly replacing more local modes of production even *within* postcolonial societies, as our survey of the TNCs in India seems to suggest. The importance of the postcolonial popular, therefore, rests in the way in which it is a symptom and forerunner of the globalized mode, and its appropriation of a considerable share of the market. This is, however, not to argue that the popular cannot be produced in any mode other than the globalized. It is possible to show, in the case of the other Indian languages, that a popular may be produced and consumed within a highly localized marketplace, as is the case with the Gujilee publishing house in Madras (Chennai) and Battala in Calcutta.

What about genres other than chick lit? Curiously, this is an area which has not seen much growth in Indian publishing, more so as Indian readers constitute a fairly sizeable readership for genres such as crime, fantasy, the thriller, the spy story and humour. This is a trend which goes back to the nineteenth century, when some of the largest readerships for such bestselling English authors as G. M. W. Reynolds and Marie Corelli were located not in England but in erstwhile British colonies, particularly India and Australia. Priya Joshi relates the highbrow horror with which Leonard Woolf reacted when told by a callow Mulk Raj Anand that his favourite light reading was G. M. W. Reynolds.⁴⁰ Likewise in the present century, the Indian audience for authors such as Arthur Conan Doyle, P. G. Wodehouse, Alistair MacLean, and more recently Terry Pratchett, has continued to swell. But attempts by Indian publishers to cater to this market have been sporadic at best. Penguin published the first Indian graphic novel in English by Sarnath Banerjee⁴¹ (*Corridors*, 2004) and a fantasy trilogy by Samit Basu (*The GameWorld Trilogy*, 2004–7),⁴² but has not shown any signs of starting a series in either category. Of late, HarperCollins has entered the graphic novels sector with Amruta Patil's remarkable and assured debut novel, *Kari* (2008),⁴³ with others in the pipeline. It is, however, too early to say whether these examples portend the beginning of a new phase in the postcolonial popular.

Notes

1. See, for example, Michael Denning, *Mechanic Accents: Dime Novels and Working-Class Culture in America* (London and New York: Verso, 1987).
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3. Q. D. Leavis, *Fiction and the Reading Public* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1965).
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Film and postcolonial writing

LINDIWE DOVEY

Introduction

A reader turning to this chapter might ask what part film plays in a history of postcolonial literature, and so it is perhaps necessary to begin by explaining that the focus here is not on postcolonial film per se, but on the relationship between film and writing in postcolonial contexts. A topic as expansive as this makes it impossible to adequately historicize each context; however, the term ‘postcolonial film’, in contrast to the more widely used ‘world cinema’, does provide a sense of historical and thematic scope in that it refers to a form of filmmaking that has been impacted by, or that responds to, colonialism and imperialism. Building on Ato Quayson’s definition of the postcolonial in the introduction to these volumes, this chapter works with the claim that ‘If the wide variety of writing that critics and readers group under the label “post-colonial” has anything in common, it is an awkward reliance on imperial remainders.’¹ Although film has been introduced in very different ways in different colonial and postcolonial contexts, similarities in motivations and effects may be found. In West Africa in the early 1900s, the French used film as a form of cultural colonization, as a tool within their general policy of assimilation of local people to French ways of life; in India the British exploited the economic potential of film, attempting to inculcate British taste so as to bring large financial returns to the empire; in Mexico, film arrived almost a century after political independence from Spain, when the country was under the dictatorial control of Porfirio Díaz, who did not hesitate to exploit the medium to build his own reputation and enforce his policies and ideologies.

A large degree of generalization is inevitable in a chapter of this nature, and certain choices have had to be made. There are, for example, several ways in which one could approach the relationship between postcolonial writing and film. One could, for example, explore the ways in which postcolonial literature and film respectively engage modes such as realism and magic realism; or one

could examine what have been called ‘cinemorphic’ novels² (novels based on cinematic modes of discourse), as well as ‘literary films’ (films that are inflected with literature). For the purposes of this volume I have attempted to explore several of the relationships between postcolonial writing and film, but with an emphasis on film adaptations of literature in postcolonial contexts, since this is the most direct way in which postcolonial film and literature interact and interface. Apart from the general difficulties associated with defining the postcolonial (see Quayson’s Introduction), the practice of adaptation raises specific issues to do with the fact that one is dealing with (at least) two works – the film and the literary text – the provenance of which may be quite different in historical, geographical and/or ideological terms. Before engaging with these specific issues in the section ‘Postcolonial film adaptation of literature’, I provide a brief overview of the role of film in colonial contexts, and I explore the relationship between writing and filmmaking in postcolonial contexts. In the final section, ‘Film and neo-colonialism’, I emphasize the need for ongoing analysis of the directions that postcolonial filmmaking is taking, given the ways in which the hegemony of the USA over global audiovisual production, distribution and exhibition is being challenged.

Film and literature played a similar role under colonialism, when, through their appeal to the imagination, both mediums were able to contribute to what Quayson calls ‘colonial space-making’ with its multifaceted relations of inequality (Vol. 1, p. 16). Film is, however, different from literature in an essential way: as a medium that is primarily visual and aural rather than textual in nature, film has been a means of reaching people who are textually non-literate. Furthermore, as a medium that is iconic and spatial, film has the ability to reflect back to people the actual spaces that they inhabit, something that has led many film critics and filmmakers to refer to film both as a form of architecture, and as a mirror of sorts. Film is also able to bring about a particular form of engaged, collective spectatorship because of its embodied and haptic qualities – its resemblance to the world, and the fact that film can be appreciated by many people at one time, unlike the reading of literature which, unless recited, is a private activity. Film therefore potentially has a broad reach denied to literature, and scholarship in this field is able to avoid the charge levelled against postcolonial literary studies, which is that it has focused on highbrow intellectual activity in both colonial and postcolonial contexts. Crucially for this chapter, film has been the means of introducing postcolonial and locally produced literature to what Quayson calls the ‘popular imagination’ (Vol. 1, p. 3), through the adaptation of novels, plays and narrative poems. It has to be said, however, that postcolonial film cannot solely be assigned to the domain of

the 'popular': many of the adaptations that will be discussed in this chapter engage in intellectual work, and many of them have not been widely seen in postcolonial contexts.

The cost of making films has meant that colonized people were largely precluded from participation in filmmaking until after independence (although there are notable exceptions, as in India and Egypt); it has been easier for the colonized to pick up the pen rather than the camera to contest the imposed colonial space. The cost of distributing and exhibiting non-commercial films has also meant that many people have not had access to viewing postcolonial films. Nevertheless, many postcolonial writers have recognized the particular power of the film medium and have turned to film as a way of encouraging political and social transformation, informing and educating textually non-literate citizens, and making the experience of literature possible through film. In the Portuguese ex-colonies in Africa, film was also actively used in wars of liberation. Foreign filmmakers were invited to Mozambique, Angola and Guinea-Bissau to make films about the various liberation movements, and these films were shown in cine-clubs throughout these countries to raise revolutionary awareness. After independence, however, many filmmakers have found themselves in repressive nationalist or neo-colonial relationships in terms of the production, distribution and exhibition of their works owing to lack of funds. However, in those cases where post-colonial governments have taken account of the power of audiovisual media for nation building and have implemented strategic national film policies and subsidies, there has been significant growth in the number of films produced. In Africa, the governments of post-independence Burkina Faso and post-apartheid South Africa have been exemplary in this respect, revealing the possibility of building a national film culture in the face of poverty (Burkina Faso is the fourth poorest country in the world) and fifty years of apartheid respectively. In South Africa, the National Film and Video Foundation (NFVF) was created in 1996 with the express goal of contributing to nation building through cinema in the wake of the demise of apartheid.

Film as a medium has its own particular imperial history and itinerary, one that has occasionally worked at cross-purposes to normative colonial relationships. As a capital-intensive medium, in colonial contexts filmmaking was the preserve of the colonizers, and was used for nation and empire building. The link between film and nationalism has continued into the postcolonial era and it has now been noted that, 'Cinema in most countries is closely allied to the nation-state due to considerations of economics – production, distribution, and exhibition – and content control.'³ Thus, as the

Indian film scholar Priya Jaikumar argues, the ‘framework of national cinemas has become a dominant analytic trope in Film Studies because of the nation’s function as a central axis along which films are regulated, produced, consumed, and canonized’.⁴ Whereas in postcolonial studies more generally the focus has shifted away from the nation to the local, diasporic, global and transcultural, the category of the nation is still a valuable one in relation to the medium of film, if conceived traditionally in terms of celluloid filmmaking (new rules are beginning to apply in relation to digital filmmaking). And, since all once-colonized nations are epiphenomena of colonialism, any study of a national cinema is simultaneously one of postcolonial cinema. The concept of ‘world cinema’ does not acknowledge the intense historical and political imbrication of film and nationalism, and thus neutralizes the history and political impact of colonial and postcolonial cinema.

Film under colonialism

The invention of film in the early 1900s coincided with the height of European colonialism. As Robert Stam has pointed out, this coincidence may have been a historical accident, but the uses to which cinema was put by British, French, Belgian and German colonizers were hardly incidental.⁵ Film has been described as ‘the most dangerous form of colonialism’ by the former president of the Carthage film festival, Tahar Guiga.⁶ In addition to its potentially broad reach, film as a technological medium was able to occasion and capitalize on an effect of wonder and surprise far greater than that of English literary texts – referred to by Homi Bhabha as ‘signs taken for wonders’.⁷ And, somewhat paradoxically, the iconic nature of cinema, which makes race and gender immediately apparent, means that the way in which filmmakers construct race and gender may be hidden – latent rather than obvious. The reliance of literature on words renders race and gender invisible, and these means of differentiating between people thus have to be explicitly articulated, making manifest the authors’s attitudes and motivations. With film it is easier to maintain the illusion of transparency, of the lack of mediation, and so racism and sexism may do their work undetected and unchallenged. Thus, Paul Landau has argued that, ‘Icons are polysemic: their resembling aspect is itself what allows interpretations to differ from one another, and sometimes to oppose one another.’⁸

The particular power of film was recognized and harnessed in the service of colonialism and imperialism. In Africa, for example, Colonial Film Units were set up from the 1920s onwards to produce films for colonial African subjects. The work of these films was instruction and moral improvement – in short, the domestication of local populations, making them more suitable for

employment. Having concluded that the 'native mind' was simple, imitative and drawn to violence, it was decided that films made for Africans should be slow in pace, devoid of trick photography, leave nothing to the imagination, and pay attention to continuity.⁹ The impact of these films was not always what was intended, however, and scholars have pointed out that 'When missionaries used pictures or slides [in southern Africa], they received unpredictable responses. Iconic images sometimes became focuses of different interpretations and revealed important epistemological conflicts beneath the surface of colonial contact.'¹⁰

Further evidence of the potential power of film is apparent in censorship laws that prevented local peoples from watching the same films as the colonizers. An examination of censorship documents reveals that oppressive colonial governments were particularly concerned with the effects of film because of the collective and embodied viewing experience. Those who have attended film screenings in many contemporary African contexts can attest to the fact that these screenings may be very different from those in the Western world; screenings are often accompanied by continuous discussion of the film on the part of audiences, and reactions to powerful scenes often include clapping, laughing, or shouting. In colonial India, the government articulated the perceived threat in terms of the overlapping of physical and moral safety in cinema spaces.¹¹ Despite the fear of the assumed mimetic effects of screen violence and sex on colonized spectators, however, colonial governments throughout the world were profoundly invested in standardizing cinematic taste in order to produce economies of desire: the more assimilated the colonized became, it was believed, the greater their hunger would be for colonial products, and in particular, films, which brought high capital returns.

Films were also made about colonial conquests and colonized peoples, largely for metropolitan colonial audiences. These films, whether made under the generic banner of documentary or fiction, tended to combine 'narrative and spectacle to tell the story of colonialism from the colonizer's perspective'.¹² Before fiction filmmaking became the dominant mode with the rise of the Hollywood studio system in the 1930s, cinema was preoccupied with images of colonized peoples. Early documentary films about people and places in, for example, India, Senegal and Brazil intrigued metropolitan audiences in Europe and the United States and provided incubation for colonial assumptions. However, an examination of these documentary films, and specifically ethnographic films made from the 1920s to the 1950s, reveals that, far from accurately representing the realities of colonized peoples, these films drew on fictional devices such as narrative, performance and spectacle to

suggest the 'primitive' nature of these peoples. In such a way, these documentary films provided justification of colonialism for spectators 'back home', just as a fiction film such as D.W. Griffiths's *Birth of a Nation* (1915) attempted to justify the *internal* domination of black Americans by white Americans through its racist representation of black people as primitive, violent and libidinous.

Many ethnographic films give fictional rather than documentary accounts of colonized peoples. American filmmaker and explorer Robert Flaherty's film *Nanook of the North* (1922), recognised as the first ethnographic film, shows the Inuit people of Canada hunting walruses and building igloos. Research has revealed that much of the film was staged, however, and that Flaherty purposefully omitted from the film any signs of modernity: for example, the cans of tinned food that the Inuit ate, as well as their hunting guns. Similarly, in the American ethnographic filmmaker John Marshall's *The Hunters* (1957), made about the San people of South Africa, Marshall constructs a narrative around the 'starving' San people who go on a giraffe hunt in order to survive. The film presents itself as a real-time representation of the three-week hunt; in fact, the film's footage was shot over many months and was edited so as to create narrative suspense. One striking image in the film reveals the lie behind Marshall's representation of the San as untouched by outside influence: towards the end of the film there is a close-up on a woman's face in which we see that she is wearing a safety-pin as an earring.

Colonial films often took their cue from colonial literature; *Birth of a Nation* was, in fact, an adaptation of Thomas Dixon's racist novel *The Clansman* (1905). The choice of literary texts of course reveals a great deal and, as Jaikumar points out in relation to the preferences of film adapters during the colonial era, 'Best-selling English novels by Edgar Wallace, A. E. W. Mason, Rumer Godden, Rider Haggard, and Rudyard Kipling were adapted for the screen, while the more ambivalent, modernist, critically acclaimed counternarratives of empire – including works by Joseph Conrad, E. M. Forster, Somerset Maugham, George Orwell, Graham Greene, Joyce Cary, and Evelyn Waugh – were mostly overlooked by filmmakers and screenwriters.'¹³ The 'anxious repetition' in colonial discourse¹⁴ of stock images of forest, sand and 'savage' has also manifested itself in the frequent adaptation over time of the same colonial literary text, and with it the reproduction of that text's imperial, and frequently patriarchal, preoccupations. The best examples of such films in the anglophone colonial world are the many adaptations of H. Rider Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines* (1885), which has been transformed to film by, among others, Robert Stevenson (1937) and Compton Bennett (1950), as well as the many adaptations spawned by Edgar Rice Burroughs's *Tarzan* series. In the francophone colonial world, the

celebrated colonial French writer Pierre Benoît's novel *L'Atlantide* (1919) has perhaps given rise to film adaptation more than any other text, having been adapted to feature film no fewer than seven times. This kind of film adaptation was a colonialist and capitalist enterprise at this time, then, exploiting the symbolic and narrative power of best-selling novels to ensure the success of the films in the same way that mainstream film industries do today. It played a role not only in allowing for the play of racist and sexist fantasy, but also in nation building.

Nation building was also, notably, the primary concern of the first postcolonial filmmakers. In Latin America in the early 1900s, one finds that cinema was, 'from its earliest moments, closely aligned with those in power, be they wealthy and socially prominent or simply in government, and this alignment was a first step toward nationalist projects'.¹⁵ The imbrication of film and nationalism is evident in the role played by film in Argentina, Mexico and Chile's centenaries of independence in 1910.¹⁶ Film was a particularly charged medium in Mexico of the early 1900s due to its 'purported objectivity', which 'first endeared it to the highly positivist intelligentsia of the Porfiriato'.¹⁷ However, while valorizing the power of film over that of literature, Latin American governments often sanctioned the inscription of national literature in early postcolonial cinema. For example, the popular Argentine film *Nobleza gaucha* (1915) drew on a revered Argentine epic poem called *Martín Fierro*.¹⁸ This film heralded a long tradition of postcolonial filmmaking that drew on national and other forms of literature, transforming this literature as a means of reconstructing postcolonial identities and spaces.

*Negotiating the relationship between writing and filmmaking
in postcolonial contexts*

The work of artists and intellectuals in postcolonial societies is often multifaceted, and it is important to recognize that postcolonial writers and filmmakers have tended to work in concert rather than at odds. Those Latin American filmmakers who participated in the Third Cinema Movement that arose in the 1960s consistently shared ideas with Latin American writers, and were committed to similar political ideals. In India, Heidi Pauwels argues, it does not make sense to see literature and film as oppositional fields, and 'in the Indian popular film industry, authors collaborate closely with filmmakers or have turned to film making themselves'.¹⁹ Malian filmmaker Cheick Oumar Sissoko makes the point that African writers and filmmakers, rather than engaging in a power struggle for prominence, try to draw on one another's expertise and on the particular aesthetic opportunities offered by film and

literature respectively. He praises film's ability to bring knowledge of written texts to non-literate African audiences, as well as its ability to expose African literature to the rest of the world. Yet he is attentive, too, to the strengths that may be drawn from literature's ability to convey the complexity of African societies and problems, going so far as to argue that 'the novel determines the evolution of our societies'.²⁰ The Cameroonian filmmaker, Jean-Marie Teno, in making a film about the importance of African literature – *Afrique, je te plumerai* (1992) – also conveys a sense of the relationship of reciprocity between literature and cinema when he suggests that African filmmakers might help African writers in furthering their own beleaguered project.

In spite of this reciprocity, postcolonial artists often move *from* writing to filmmaking in order to have a broader impact. The late Senegalese writer and director Ousmane Sembene initially achieved recognition through writing novels, the first of which was *Le Docker noir* (1956), but later became known as the 'Father of African Cinema', being one of the first sub-Saharan African filmmakers to make a film – *Borom Sarret* (1963) – on African territory. Explaining this shift, Sembene says, 'When I realized that my books could not reach my people because of illiteracy, I decided to address issues they face in my films. My aim is to use film as a means of political action, without it becoming a sloganising cinema. Contrary to those who want to make commercial films, my cinema will always be partisan and militant.'²¹ The main ends for which Sembene earmarked his cinema were critique and education; according to him, 'This medium would allow me to teach the masses. As far as I am concerned, cinema is the best evening school.'²²

Zimbabwean novelist and filmmaker Tsitsi Dangarembga, after confirming her place in the canon of postcolonial literature with her novel *Nervous Conditions* (1988), put aside writing to attend film school in Germany for seven years, during which she founded her own film production company, Nyerai Films. In 2000, Dangarembga returned to Zimbabwe with her German husband and film editor Olaf Kosche, and they have since been making films. While Dangarembga has continued to write novels in English (*The Book of Not*, the sequel to *Nervous Conditions*, was published in 2006), she has also made a variety of fiction and documentary films in English and Shona, most of them addressing questions of social justice.²³ The cases of Sembene and Dangarembga raise the issue of the way in which postcolonial novels and films are intended for different audiences.²⁴ Sembene's novels both cater to, and are more critical of, Western (mostly French) society; his films largely address Senegalese audiences, and are critical of powerful Senegalese elites, including the government. Dangarembga's novels explore the contradictory

and often incommensurate claims of gender, race and class in postcolonial societies; in her films, she seeks foremost to address local Zimbabwean audiences, and to raise awareness around urgent social and political issues such as HIV/AIDS, the environment and the current political situation in Zimbabwe.

Other postcolonial artists have alternately turned to literature or film for very different reasons. Making films allows Algerian writer and filmmaker Assia Djebar to offer a more subtle political statement, and to engage in a different kind of postcolonial space-making, one that is not available to her through literature. Whereas literature speaks to the reader's imagination in conjuring space, scholars have pointed to the ways in which film works as a form of architecture in its literal construction of space through the recording of people and landscapes in shots, and the assembling of these shots through montage, adding another spatial dimension in this way to two-dimensional images. Thus it has been argued that, for Djebar, cinema is a 'more complete mode of representation, offering the integration of inside and outside spaces, the voices of women, their songs, the habitual sounds of children, the sea, mountains'.²⁵ The cinema offers similar spatial significance to the Vietnamese-American writer, filmmaker, music composer and theorist Trinh T. Minh-ha. Minh-ha's first, and best-known, film was *Reassemblage* (1982), which was filmed in Senegal with Senegalese women as its subjects. Refusing to reproduce the colonial and sexist gaze of ethnographic films, *Reassemblage* is, in formal terms, a critique of ethnographic filmmaking in general, in that it allows spectators only partial views of its African 'subjects', and – through quite rapid montage – prevents spectators from gazing at these women in a way that would fix them within an exotic spatial frame. It is precisely, then, cinema's special relationship to space, and to the construction and reconstruction of space, that has offered ways of conjuring specifically postcolonial sites to artists such as Djebar and Minh-ha.

Artists and intellectuals in postcolonial contexts are not always free to choose between literature and film, and are, at times, constrained in their choice by institutional and political factors. Urdu writer and journalist Saadat Hasan Manto, in spite of enjoying increasing success as a screenplay writer of Hindi films in Bombay in the 1930s and 1940s, felt compelled to move to Lahore after the Partition of India and Pakistan in 1948, a move which essentially cut him out of the film industry. In Senegal in the early 1970s, before the Senegalese government had created the Société Nationale du Cinéma (SNC) in 1972 to support local films, Sembene found himself struggling to raise funding to make his film *Xala*. He decided to turn the screenplay into a novella and managed to raise the money from the SNC to make the film version

a year later. The film, *Xala*, must, therefore, be seen as a simultaneous rendering of an idea rather than a conventional adaptation.²⁶ Owing to the lack of institutional support for the arts in many postcolonial contexts, intellectuals and artists have often suspended their creative endeavours for periods of time to take up administrative positions in government. Egyptian Nobel Prize winner Naguib Mahfouz interrupted his writing career several times in order to take on various civil service portfolios, including Director of the Foundation for the Support of Cinema. Korean writer and filmmaker Lee Chang-Dong, after gaining recognition through the success of his novel *Green Fish* (1997) and his award-winning film *Oasis* (2002), went on to become Korea's Minister of Culture and Tourism (2003–4). And Malian filmmaker Cheick Oumar Sissoko set aside his filmmaking to help in the creation of the political party SADI (African Solidarity for Democracy and Independence) and to assume the role of Malian Minister of Culture from 2004 to 2007.

Film adaptation and the postcolonial world

As Dudley Andrew has noted, 'The making of film out of an earlier text is virtually as old as the machinery of cinema itself.'²⁷ In Hollywood, literary texts with strong plots have been exploited since the early 1900s;²⁸ in the 1960s, Hollywood was already spending \$5,000,000 annually on optioning literary works – works which came to be known, reductively, as literary 'properties';²⁹ and today at least half of commercial film productions are literary adaptations.³⁰ The practice of adaptation has, however, been a global phenomenon. The first Indian feature film, *Raja Harishchandra* (1913), was adapted from a national cultural treasure – the Indian literary epic *The Mahabharata* – and in India 'the connection between film and literary classics/scripture was evident from the start and has endured till the present time'.³¹ One of the earliest Egyptian silent films, *Zeinab* (1930), adapted by Mohamed Karim from Mohamed Hussein Heykal's novel of the same name, inspired a national adaptation movement in Egyptian cinema that continued up until the early 1990s.³² And in Brazil, the recent wave of film adaptations of literary texts is built on a tradition of adaptation, one of the earliest being the 1916 adaptation, *O Guarani*, of Carlos Gomes's opera, itself adapted from José de Alencar's well-known novel about indigenous Brazilians (1857).³³

In spite of this wealth of examples of film adaptation globally, the field of film adaptation studies has remained profoundly eurocentric. The focus of much film adaptation theory has, until recently, been on the degree of fidelity shown by a filmmaker to a literary text, a focus grounded in the origins of the

study of film adaptation as a practice that mediates canonical Western literary texts. Although contemporary film adaptation scholars claim to be moving away from questions of fidelity, and the attendant hegemony of an approach based on great authors (for example, adaptations of Shakespeare) or great *auteurs* (for example, Stanley Kubrick's adaptations), many continue to consolidate and reify this very approach through screening out questions of postcolonial cultures and geographies.³⁴ As a result, the political motivations underlying much postcolonial film adaptation have largely been overlooked.

Ella Shohat has made the point that film adaptations 'do not escape the gravitational pull of geography and history; they are shaped and produced within specific cultural contexts that imply a "take" on the very act of translation'.³⁵ The practice of translation from one medium to another inevitably involves an act of interpretation, and studies of this kind of intellectual work provide the means for tracking the ways in which cultures redefine or reconstruct themselves as material conditions change over time. There has been a long tradition of scholarly work on postcolonial *literary* rewriting,³⁶ possibly because it is primarily canonical texts that have been appropriated and transformed, but cinematic 'rewritings' of literature have not received the same kind of attention. Studies of 'world cinema' or 'postcolonial film' often do not indicate when a film is an adaptation of a literary text, as though the practice of adaptation itself were inconsequential to the film's meaning.³⁷ No dedicated study of postcolonial film adaptation has been undertaken, although one finds books on African film adaptation practices,³⁸ and Indian film adaptation.³⁹ Film seasons and conferences have, however, recently spurred interest in Brazilian film adaptation⁴⁰ and what has been called 'international adaptation'.⁴¹

The scholarly activity of undertaking comparative analysis of source and secondary text/film allows for the exploration of the *process* of postcolonial space-making and the reconstruction of identities after the demise of formal colonialism. It therefore seems important to address the ways in which postcolonial filmmakers have engaged, on a profoundly intellectual level, with postcolonial and other forms of literature. These films do not stand alone, but recuperate, revise, and/or critique colonial and postcolonial literary texts, as well as their contexts. Film adaptation has been a political and cultural tool in postcolonial hands, a means to right historical wrongs, establish local versions of facts, validate local literature, critique the trajectories of the nation, and reconstruct physical spaces and human identities. Exploring the *functions* of postcolonial film adaptation allows me to stress the political and intellectual nature of film adaptation, as well as to suggest the ways in which a study of

postcolonial film adaptation raises important questions around the changing politics of language, class, race and gender in postcolonial societies.

Preservation through postcolonial film adaptation

Film adaptation often presents ‘a way of preserving a rich heritage in an aural and visual mode’⁴² and many postcolonial film adaptations are therefore ‘driven by the impulse to repeat in order to preserve’.⁴³ In identifying a preservational trend, the question arises, however, as to exactly what is being preserved through film adaptation. In surveying postcolonial adaptations that function in this way (and most, to some extent, do), it becomes clear that ‘imagined communities’⁴⁴ of the precolonial past and of the postcolonial present are alternately, or simultaneously, valorized, providing a sense of continuity between historical and contemporary life. Film is a particularly powerful medium for representing these imagined communities, since audio-visual media have largely overtaken print media to become the ‘dominant mode of communication’ and the most successful way of ‘conjuring up the imagined community among both the literate and illiterate segments of the community’.⁴⁵

In their desire to recuperate precolonial traditions that were denigrated or interrupted during the colonial era, postcolonial filmmakers have turned not only to postcolonial literature as a source, but also to myths, epics, and oral tales that pre-date the colonial period and that are often written in local languages. Language is of course of major importance to the continuity and coherence of any culture, and it is notable, in this respect, that postcolonial film adapters often use local languages in their film adaptations of postcolonial novels written in europhone languages. The shift from literature to film allows for the possibility of using vernacular languages and still reaching wide audiences, and Sembene, for example, fully availed himself of this opportunity: although he wrote his novels in French, when he adapted these novels into film, he featured African languages such as Wolof and Diola.

Preservational postcolonial film adaptation works on two levels, involving both the need to valorize precolonial traditions and cultures within postcolonial films, and the need to build and educate national audiences. In the case of tales that have been passed down generations only in oral and not in written form (by, for example, griots (storytellers) in West Africa), the film medium also provides *literal* preservation of stories that might otherwise be permanently lost. Film, as a medium, thus articulates and shares many similarities with oral/aural traditions, which is why certain African filmmakers have called

themselves ‘screen griots’. Many African film adaptations are ‘thrice-told tales’ that simultaneously adapt an oral story and a novel.⁴⁶ Postcolonial critic Gina Wisker thus argues that ‘For many [postcolonial] writers and storytellers, recuperating and rewriting myths have helped put indigenous people in touch with their heritage and share with those who colonised, ruled and settled some of the hitherto hidden histories and imaginative, mythic, differently informed interpretations of the world held by indigenous peoples.’⁴⁷ Many filmmakers update the settings of such myths and epics so that they take place within contemporary culture and address postcolonial issues.

The power of postcolonial film adaptation to attract local audiences and educate them about their past is evident in the popularity of Indian director Ramanand Sagar’s 1987–8 televised serial version of the *Ramayan*, watched by more than 100 million viewers worldwide. The televised *Ramayan* resulted in the promotion of national unity, in spite of the religious and economic disruptions it caused; the timing of Hindu and non-Hindu services were altered so as to accommodate the series, and people took any opportunity to stop working to watch the film.⁴⁸ In this case, a precolonial and prenatal story was adapted into film and resulted in the creation of a national consciousness that cut across other affiliations. In the case of Sagar’s *Ramayan*, then, the act of preservation is also one of inauguration, where a nation literally comes together to view, and be reminded of, its past.⁴⁹

Another example of the building of national audiences through preservational film adaptation is to be found within an exceptional moment in the history of Sri Lanka. The adaptation of Martin Wickremasinghe’s foundational Sri Lankan novel *The Changing Countryside* (1945) into a film of the same name by Lester James Peries (1965) allowed audiences access to their own postcolonial national literature. Wickremasinghe’s novel, a national and international success, and a ‘landmark in Sinhalese fiction’,⁵⁰ allowed ‘Hundreds of thousands of readers who had over the past two decades read Wickremasinghe’s novel’ to witness the birth of an authentic and serious Sinhalese cinema,⁵¹ establishing a specifically postcolonial identity as well as a shift away from the colonization that North American and South Indian popular film had effected in Sri Lanka. A similar kind of postcolonial identity is, notably, celebrated in the themes of both book and film, which are sympathetic to the eclipse of the earlier ‘feudal’ structuring of society by a new, independent middle class.⁵²

Something very similar happened in Martinique in the 1980s when Euzhan Palcy’s screen adaptation (1983) of Joseph Zobel’s novel *Rue Cases-Nègres* (1950) appeared. The first film to focus on the Martiniquan experience, *Rue Cases-Nègres* enjoyed a success never before witnessed in the country, playing

to capacity audiences in the Fort-de-France cinema for many months.⁵³ Set in the sugarcane plantations of Martinique in the 1930s, the story of both novel and film focuses on the harsh conditions in which sugarcane workers laboured, and both novel and film are fundamentally anti-colonial in tone. The novel was banned for twenty years in Martinique.⁵⁴ Given the censorship of Zobel's work, and the fact that reading tends to be a pastime only of an intellectual elite in Martinique, Palcy's film brought to people a consciousness and excitement about their own national literature and their writers.⁵⁵ Palcy's film was produced in a particular cultural climate – a time in which Antillian intellectuals were 'trying to valorize their own culture' as an antidote to their mounting feelings of alienation.⁵⁶ Palcy's adaptation was a contribution to this movement of valorization and preservation, but the film's French *and* Creole soundtrack is also a subtle critique of Martinique's ongoing exclusion of Creole as a national language of education. Even today, Martinique, as an overseas region and overseas department of France is, in many ways, more accurately classified as a colonial rather than postcolonial nation.

Central to any evaluation of a postcolonial film adaptation is the question of 'whether an adaptation pushes the novel to the "right", by naturalizing and justifying social hierarchies based on class, race, sexuality, gender, religion, and national belonging, or to the "left" by interrogating or leveling hierarchies in an egalitarian manner'.⁵⁷ Most postcolonial film adaptations, as a result of their political orientation, push their source texts to the 'left'. Some, however, broadly preserve the novel's ideology while pushing the novel to the 'right' on certain issues, and to the 'left' on other issues. One such complicated example is the 1931 film adaptation of the novel *Santa* (1903) by the Mexican writer and diplomat Federico Gamboa. The preservation of this novel through the years seems to be conditional on the narrative sacrifice of a dark female Other who threatens the purity of the nation. The five film adaptations, countless theatrical adaptations, and composer Agustín Lara's song version have served to preserve and consecrate Gamboa's text and its eponymous heroine in twentieth-century postcolonial Mexican cultural history. The story, in naturalist style, plots the decline of Santa, a *mestizo* woman, tracing her youth and innocence in the countryside, her corruption at the hands of the soldier Marcelino, her immersion in the sordid world of prostitution in Mexico City, her death by cancer, and her final return to the countryside in a coffin. Although Mexico has been independent of Spain since 1821, in the late nineteenth century during which the story is set, the country was still struggling to ward off the advances of the more powerful nations of France and the United States. A need to preserve Mexico in the face of such advances may have been

Gamboa's motivation for collaborating with and supporting dictator Porfirio Díaz's conservative and exploitative regime (from 1876 to 1880, and then again from 1884 to 1911). As Javier Ordiz has pointed out, however, Gamboa's work was not altogether devoid of critique of the regime. Gamboa's Catholic convictions made him deeply suspicious of Díaz's support for the positivist philosophical movement that had gained currency in Mexico at this time, and in which Darwin's theory of natural selection was applied to human culture.⁵⁸ While Gamboa *does* place the blame for Santa's downfall on the woman herself, he nevertheless treats her character with some compassion, a compassion that suggests a critique of Porfirian positivism.⁵⁹

Antonio Moreno's post-Mexican Revolution film adaptation of *Santa* (1931), the second film adaptation of the novel and the first with synchronized sound, initially seems to preserve the concerns of the source text. For, in both Gamboa's novel and Moreno's film adaptation, Santa is assigned a role that allows her to be assimilated by a dominant masculinist ideology and that requires, in narrative terms, that she be sacrificed to maintain the harmony of 'proper' society. In both texts she is initially the victim of the soldier Marcelino, who, at the beginning of the novel and film, strips her of her virginity and thus decency, forcing her to seek work in the city. Where the novel and film differ, however, is that, in the novel, Santa's 'promiscuity' is shown to be irredeemable; in the film, on the other hand, she 'reforms' and is on the cusp of a marriage to the venerated Spanish bullfighter Jaramero when Marcelino attacks her in her newly established home and destroys any possible future happiness, for Jaramero banishes Santa when he finds Marcelino in her presence. While this alteration would seem to push the novel to the 'left' as a feminist revisioning of it (through rousing the viewer's sympathy for Santa, who is shown to be a victim of circumstance rather than her own 'libidinous' nature), it could also be seen to push the novel to the 'right' in that, in narrative terms, the union of the (Mexican) Santa and the (Spanish) Jaramero is obstructed, perhaps to prevent the 'sully' of the sanctity of the new Mexican nation through a hybrid Mexican-Spanish marriage. Thus, on Santa's female body are played out the fears and anxieties of the sanctity, or lack of sanctity, of Mexico-as-nation itself. This presents not a case of the woman being written out of the Mexican nationalist frame in the novel or film, but rather, in the film in particular, the woman's body becomes the passive ground of contestation for the new (patriarchal) nation. As Paula Beegan argues, Santa is 'cast in a heroic light, as a martyr who is forced to give up her life for the sake of moral justice and the cleansing of society'.⁶⁰ In Moreno's version, Santa's *mestizo* race (to which Porfirio Díaz notably also

belonged) is elided through the casting of the well-known Mexican actress Lupita Tovar, with her very pale skin. Furthermore, Spanish–Mexican, rural–urban, and Catholic–positivist tensions, although subconsciously inscribed in the film, are not dealt with explicitly. The film was, however, a major success when it was released in Mexico, ensuring *Santa*’s status as a national myth. The attempt to preserve a national myth, text and tradition thus devolves, in this case, into adaptation predicated on an anxiety around the inability to resolve competing and repressed colonial, gender, ethnic and religious tensions housed within the nation.

Even today, many filmmakers complain that the acknowledgment of difference is often inhibited by national and global funding bodies that enforce their own agendas and priorities, and thereby their own versions of national culture. Many Brazilian filmmakers, for example, are critical of the power that Embrafilme, the national film-funding body, wields in shaping the image of the Brazilian nation.⁶¹ We confront here a double-edged sword for, as Johnson and Stam point out, ‘without Embrafilme foreign films would immediately reoccupy Brazilian screens and that would be a tragedy’.⁶² Literature, relying not on national funding but rather on the support of individual literary agencies and publishers for its existence, is more likely to escape the control exercised by statutory bodies, and is therefore likely to be more engaged not with the nation state, but rather with the local, transcultural, transnational and global, an engagement that has only recently begun in film through the increasing migration to digital formats.

Critique through postcolonial film adaptation

As Leo Braudy has commented in relation to cinematic remakes of earlier films, a remake is ‘a meditation on the continuing historical relevance (economic, cultural, psychological) of a particular narrative’ and is ‘always concerned with what its makers and (they hope) its audiences consider to be unfinished cultural business, unrefinable and perhaps finally unassimilable material that remains part of the cultural dialogue’.⁶³ In postcolonial contexts, film adaptation has played a similar role, as a vehicle for ongoing cultural dialogue. Very few, if any, postcolonial adaptations work solely as memorializations of an earlier text; rather, these adaptations are ‘reworkings’, ‘radically modern recasting[s]’, and ‘provocative . . . postcolonial reenactments’ of the texts.⁶⁴ They may offer a new incarnation of indigenous traditions such as oral storytelling, but they are also often enablers of sociocultural and political critique. Both the preservational and critical trends thus constitute a profoundly political practice.

As one would expect, critiques of colonialism are everywhere evident in critical postcolonial film adaptations, and these critiques notably emerge in films drawing on a range of different sources, including both canonical colonial literature and postcolonial literature. As in the case of rewritings of canonical texts, film adaptations frequently challenge the grounds on which identities (of colonizers and colonized) have been constructed, and may go beyond this to challenge colonial epistemologies, affirming, in their place, local ways of knowing. In a film such as French-Cameroonian director Claire Denis's *Beau Travail* (1999), a postcolonial adaptation of Herman Melville's canonical colonial novella *Billy Budd* (1924), critique of colonialism is enacted through the conversion of the criminal from an individual to an institution: whereas in Melville's tale the hero Billy Budd is simply at the mercy of the individual sailor John Claggart, in Denis's version (set in Djibouti) it is not only Galoup (the Claggart equivalent) who is to blame for the abuse of Gilles Sentain (the Billy Budd equivalent), but the entire crumbling edifice of French colonialism represented through the impotent French foreign legion. Scenes of the repetitive, purposeless training exercises of the foreign legion are juxtaposed with scenes representing the fluid, complex, rich and colourful local cultures of Djibouti. Linda Hutcheon calls such adaptation 'Transcultural Adaptation' and she stresses its political nature: 'Often, a change of language is involved; almost always, there is a change of place or time period . . . Almost always, there is an accompanying shift in the political valence from the adapted text to the "transculturated" adaptation. Context conditions meaning, in short.'⁶⁵

The validation of local knowledge in opposition to the imposition of foreign or outsider knowledge is also represented in Senegalese director Joseph Gai Ramaka's film *So Be It* (2001), an adaptation of Wole Soyinka's Yoruba tragic play *The Strong Breed*. In the film, neo-colonial European conceptions of knowledge are pitted against and challenged by local African epistemologies through the relationship between the foreign doctor Michael (the film's Eman equivalent) and the local teacher Sunma (who is Senegalese in the film version). In changing the protagonist's name from the Yoruba 'Eman' to the French 'Michael', as well as casting in this role the Martiniquan actor Alex Descas, Gai Ramaka opens out Soyinka's African work into the realm of the diasporic. He turns Soyinka's study of a ritual conflict into a study of epistemological conflicts between Africans and the African diaspora. For while the threat of ritual conflict occupies the margins of the film (with the disabled boy, Ifada, present outside Michael and Sunma's house for much of the film), the focus is not on the ritual itself, but rather on the ideological battle between Sunma and Michael – their different ways of knowing and interpreting the ritual. Rather

than warn Michael/Eman, as Sunma in the play does, Sunma in the film taunts and mocks Michael due to his lack of understanding of her local culture. The tension is thus shifted away from that between father and son (Eman's breaking of his traditional role as one of the 'strong breed') to that between the African and the diasporic African community. The suggestion is that Michael, in spite of his black skin and desire to help Sunma's community through his work as a doctor, is out of touch with its reality. At the end of the film, Michael – having refused to leave – is cursed and the film closes on a horrifying shot of his being possessed.

What is perhaps even more interesting than the critique of colonialism or foreign epistemology is the *self*-critique promoted through adaptation – usually of local or regional texts from earlier or recent times. Either past or present society – or both – may be the focus of such critiques. Burkinabé director Dani Kouyaté's film *Sia, le rêve du python* (2001) repeats the critique of a precolonial West African myth offered in its source text, the play *La Légende du Wagadu vue par Sia Yatabéré* (first published in 1994) by the Mauritanian playwright Moussa Diagana. Both play and film are based on the foundational myth of the Soninke or Ghana empire (not to be confused with the modern-day nation of Ghana), the myth of Wagadu, which suggests that the decline of the Ghana empire came about through a failure of the annual sacrifice of a female virgin, which brought yearly showers of gold. Following Diagana, Kouyaté engages in a strong feminist critique of this ancient sacrificial culture and the myth woven around it, and exposes it as one that was clothed in falsehood: the powerful elites did not only sacrifice the female virgins, Diagana and Kouyaté claim, but in fact raped them before killing them.

In post-apartheid South Africa, the National Film and Video Foundation has allocated funds specifically for the practice of film adaptation of important local literary texts, seeing in such a practice the possibility of reinforcing, reviewing and critiquing national priorities and cultures. Bhekizizwe Peterson and Ramadan Suleman's *Fools* (1997) updates the setting of Njabulo Ndebele's novella of the same name (1983) so as to offer a critique of gender inequalities in post-apartheid South African society. Mickey Madoda Dube's *A Walk in the Night* (1998) transposes Alex La Guma's novella of the same name (1962) from 1950s District Six to 1990s Hillbrow in Johannesburg, and offers a specific critique of xenophobic attitudes in the 'new' South Africa. Darrell James Roodt's 1995 film version of *Cry, the Beloved Country*, an adaptation of Alan Paton's well-known novel (1948), critiques both the novel's suggestion that the justice system under apartheid was free of prejudice and the continuing privilege of the white South African community in the post-apartheid

era.⁶⁶ Adaptations of canonical Western texts play a similar role. Tim Greene's *Boy Called Twist* (2005) transforms Charles Dickens's *Oliver Twist* into a story set in contemporary Cape Town, with a focus on the plight of street children in post-1994 South Africa and a critique of the causes of such homelessness. Dimpho Di Kopane's *U-Carmen eKhayelitsha* (2005), a contemporary retelling of Prosper Mérimée's and Georges Bizet's *Carmen*, critiques sexual practices that lead to the spread of HIV/AIDS while at the same time critiquing the widespread abuse of women in the township of Khayelitsha. All of these South African adaptations thus participate in the 'rewriting' of texts from the past so as to address and critique contemporary South African society.

The critical trend of adaptation can be found occurring in multiple post-colonial contexts. Mauritanian filmmaker Med Hondo's *Sarraounia* (1986), adapted from a novel by the Nigerien writer Abdoulaye Mamani, goes 'beyond the historical context of the turn of the nineteenth century to comment on contemporary challenges in Africa'.⁶⁷ Cuban director Tomás Gutiérrez Alea's film *Una pelea cubana contra los demonios* (1972), an adaptation of an anthropological novel set in the seventeenth century by the Cuban writer and anthropologist Fernando Ortiz, is 'not a corrective reading of Cuban history, but an allegory on contemporary [1970s] Cuba, and a critique of its fanaticism and isolationism'.⁶⁸ And Brazilian director Joaquim Pedro de Andrade's film adaptation *Macunaíma* (1969) 'is not merely an attempt at expressing the ideas of the 1928 work in a different medium. Rather, it is a critical reinterpretation and an ideological radicalization of [Brazilian writer] Mário de Andrade's rhapsody cast in terms of the social, economic, and political realities of the late sixties'.⁶⁹

Similarly to preservational film adaptations, while most adaptations that engage in critique push the source novel to the left, in some cases there may be a move 'to the left on some issues (e.g. class) but to the right on others (e.g. gender or race)'.⁷⁰ An example of this is Hindi director Govind Nihalani's film adaptation (1998) of the Bengali novel *Mother of 1084* (1974) by Mahasweta Devi. The story of both the novel and film centre on the relationship between a middle-class Bengali mother, Sujata Chatterji, and her son, Brati, who joins the Naxalite movement in the 1970s and is killed as a result. While the novel focuses on the mother-son relationship at the expense of a broader contextualization and commentary on the Naxalite movement, it subtly introduces the possibility of the contradictions of the movement, which was spearheaded by youths and which was abandoned by many mid-way through the struggle. In the adaptation of the text to film, Sujata's fears about Brati are removed and she seems wholeheartedly supportive of his status as a Naxalite. Whereas the novel closes on an ambiguous note – literally, a cry from the depths of Sujata as her

appendix bursts during her daughter's engagement party (a symbol of the rupture of middle-class society and its values) – in the film an unrealistic 'happy ending' is tacked on. The film takes us ten years forward, to a time when Sujata has become politicized herself, fulfilling a promise to her son. While this may appear to be a move to the 'left' of the novel, it is likely to have a cathartic effect that reduces the political impact of the film. None of the complexity of the Naxalite movement nor its relationship to contemporary politics in India is touched on. In fact, all of the political and social texture of the novel is removed from the film in that it was shot in film studios rather than in real, inhabited places (as a result, it has an artificial look), and in that the Hindi director chose to film it in Hindi instead of the Bengali that is the language of the original novel and which is so central to Mahasweta Devi, the characters and the story itself. Ultimately, then, the film adaptation of *Mother of 1084* shifts the story to the 'right' of the novel or, at the very least, compromises the novel's specific politics. In this case, then, it is possible to use the novel to critique the film, rather than vice-versa. Other postcolonial novels which may be used in this way – as offering the means to critique the film adaptations – include Brazilian writer Jorge Amado's *Dona Flor and Her Two Husbands* (adapted to film by Brazilian director Bruno Barreto), and Mexican writer Laura Esquivel's *Like Water for Chocolate* (adapted to film by Mexican director Alfonso Arau).

Whereas the example of *Santa* reveals the need for film adaptation scholars to remain alert to the possibility of patriarchal cinematic 'rewritings' of postcolonial novels, the example of *Mother of 1084* reminds scholars to remain attentive not only to global forms of cultural imperialism (through the neutralization of specific political, historical and geographical differences), but also to local forms of cultural imperialism. In spite of its rich literary history and the fact that it has almost 230 million speakers, Bengali's official status has consistently been threatened by neighbouring languages, such as Hindi and Urdu, and the alteration of Devi's Bengali novel to Nihalani's Hindi film is yet another example of this local imperialism. The next, and final section, of this chapter will consider the issue of global cultural imperialism, and its specific threat to the development of postcolonial filmmaking and postcolonial film adaptation.

Film and neo-imperialism

Postcolonial theorists have long stressed the fact that the 'post' in 'postcolonial' does not necessarily imply that colonial and imperial activities and

ideologies are no longer operative. Postcolonial studies has set as its task the observation of global systems and the critique of ongoing imperialism, exploitative regimes and abuses of and inequalities in power, whether the target of this critique is corrupt postcolonial governments or the consolidation of US political hegemony from 1945 until recently. My interest, in this final section of the chapter, is not with US political hegemony but rather with US cultural hegemony – a particular form of neo-imperialism that has involved the United States' integration of global film production, distribution and exhibition structures, as well as its domination of the aesthetic and thematic content of cinema and television, from the early 1900s until very recently. This will take the discussion away from the focus on film and literature, but, given the nature of film as an industry, involving enormously powerful networks of national and private organizations, it is necessary to take into account the material conditions which impact upon the work of individual filmmakers and which shape the viewing opportunities of populations worldwide.

In the early 1900s the USA, concerned with the increasing prominence and appeal of French cinema, ratified a law, known as the Dingley Bill, which prevented any French films from being screened in the USA. This nascent protectionism led later to the Blum–Byrnes accords, the French–American trade agreement of 1945 (and part of the Marshall Plan), which stipulated that, in return for receiving food aid from the USA, the French were legally bound to screen only four weeks of French films in every thirteen weeks. When 10,000 people protested on the streets of Paris, the USA conceded only one additional annual week of French film screenings.⁷¹ Many of the European film industries, dominated during the colonial period by the USA, intensified their own domination of their colonies' film production, distribution and exhibition sectors in reaction. One might argue that the USA's audiovisual imperialism resulted, in this way, in a snowballing of cinematic inequality. In the 1993 GATT (General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade) conference, US domination was still pervasive. The fact that in the 1990s cinema was accruing for the USA in excess of \$1 billion annually as surplus trade was evidenced by the USA's attempt, at the conference, to prevent European governments from subsidizing their own national film industries by arguing that such subsidization was contrary to market principles. The complaints of European film directors during the conference consistently invoked – if not directly referenced – colonization: 'We were to become colonized countries' (Bertrand Tavernier); 'All of Europe is threatened by the American superpower, by its colonization' (Ettore Scola); 'We're like resistance fighters in enemy-occupied territory' (Alain Tanner).⁷²

American economic and cultural imperialism has impacted not only on Europe but on the entire globe. According to Latin American film scholar, Ana M. López, 'The cinema experienced by Latin Americans was – and still is – predominantly foreign. This is a factor of tremendous significance in the complex development of indigenous forms, always caught in a hybrid dialectics of invention and imitation.'⁷³ As Johnson and Stam point out, Hollywood films and American television series inundate screens in Brazil, while the Brazilians are barred from accessing an audience for their own films in the United States.⁷⁴ African cinema screens have also consistently featured Hollywood films, which, having garnered large profits in rich countries, can be sold off to exhibitors in poor countries at very reduced rates. The American rise to power in the twentieth century has gone hand in hand with the increasing 'dumping' of its audiovisual productions on other nations, and its refusal to allow more than 13 per cent of foreign films to penetrate its own market.⁷⁵

The impact of contemporary American audiovisual imperialism is to be seen not only at the level of the economic and structural, but also at the level of the symbolic. Adaptations of the most important postcolonial novels – films such as Argentinian director Luis Puenzo's adaptation (1989) of Mexican writer Carlos Fuentes's *The Old Gringo* (1985); British-Australian director John Duigan's adaptation (1993) of Dominica-born writer Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966); and British director Mike Newell's adaptation (2007) of Colombian writer and Nobel laureate Gabriel García Márquez's *Love in the Time of Cholera* (1985) – ignore the racial, ethnic, religious, diasporic and linguistic tensions evident in the novels. The political content of the novels is neutralized, and these filmmakers – not working out of Hollywood – seem to have succumbed to the pressure to compete for audiences schooled on films that have as their themes nothing more disturbing than sex and violence. (It is interesting that the film of *Wide Sargasso Sea* was dubbed 'White Sargasso Sea' by local Dominicans.)⁷⁶ This shift in thematic focus is frequently accompanied by what Robert Stam calls 'aesthetic mainstreaming', where the filmmaker reveals a 'radical aversion to all forms of experimentation and modernism',⁷⁷ and simply reproduces a Hollywood cinematic aesthetic, involving continuity editing, the use of 'star' performers, and dramatic extra-diegetic music for crass emotional effect.

The challenge to the economic dominance of the American film industry has come, significantly, from two of the most populous countries in the world: India and Nigeria. Controversially dubbed 'Bollywood' and 'Nollywood', the film industries of these two nations have, to a large extent, reproduced Hollywood's modes

of production, distribution and exhibition. 'Bollywood' makes Hindi song-and-dance films and, with a history stretching back to the 1930s, has secured an enthusiastic audience within South Asia, among the South Asian diaspora, as well as in Russia, the Central Asian republics, Africa and Europe.⁷⁸ 'Nollywood' has made cheaply produced video films since the 1980s, which are now watched throughout Africa, and also in the United States, Britain, Europe and the Caribbean. The video films are so popular that many television channels (for example, MNET's 'Africa Magic' channel and Sky Channel 331) are devoted to screening them up to twenty-four hours a day, and they are also represented by dedicated online DVD-rental companies, such as Klub Afrik in the United Kingdom and Europe.

Through intense efforts to produce films and videos independently and to circulate them locally and globally, 'Bollywood' and 'Nollywood' filmmakers have managed to transcend the neo-colonial relationships that tend to predominate between many postcolonial artists and their Western or governmental patrons. And, at the same time, these filmmakers can be said to be actively contributing to postcolonial development in that they have managed to subvert Hollywood's control over local distribution and exhibition channels in the postcolonial world, and have thereby created wide-scale employment – in the 1990s, the Nigerian video film industry became the second-largest employer in Nigeria.⁷⁹ Both industries would seem to imitate Hollywood in that they secure local rather than foreign funding, engage in the division of labour and the development of expertise on film sets, revolve around and produce star performers, and have sophisticated distribution systems which allow the films to be widely circulated. These elements could be used to explain the box office success of 'Bollywood' and 'Nollywood', but it is worth paying attention to how these films work in symbolic terms in order to understand their commercial success, and to look at whether they are, in fact, simply imitative of Hollywood films or whether they offer an alternative to Hollywood.

Until recently, 'Bollywood' and 'Nollywood' films have not been taken seriously by academics because of their seemingly overt function as commercial entertainment. The point needs to be made that *all* films – including those that wish to inform, instruct, or politicize their audiences – rely on providing entertainment. There is a large body of complex theoretical work that analyses the sources and effects of cinematic pleasure. There is not space to engage in that discussion here, but it should be said that the entertainment value of film can be harnessed for pro-active or retro-active purposes, and that film relies to a large extent for its power precisely on the experience of pleasure. Third World film scholar Roy Armes argues that, 'Created for a mass audience and

apparently fulfilling no more than an entertainment function, these films are the cause of great unease on the part of Third World critics and film makers, even – and perhaps especially – those concerned to define and promote a “national” cinema.⁸⁰ Rather than ghettoizing these films through assigning them to the domain of the ‘popular’, we might – as Stephanie Newell argues in this volume – rethink the importance of such postcolonial cultural production under the label of ‘locally produced literature/film’.

Not only are ‘Bollywood’ and ‘Nollywood’ films locally produced, however; they are also frequently local in their outlook and aesthetics, through their choice of sources and cinematic material. They bring to the screen local images, sounds and writing; as Heidi Pauwels argues in a book that focuses on Hindi-language cinema, ‘We counter the stereotype that this cinema, recently (and controversially) labeled “Bollywood”, is a rip-off from Hollywood, by foregrounding its extensive engagement with Indian literary traditions.’⁸¹ Similarly, scholars of the Nigerian video film movements have sought to assert the importance of these films through emphasizing that the Northern Nigerian Hausa films are adaptations of Hausa romance novels,⁸² and that the Southern Nigerian Yoruba films are adaptations of travelling Yoruba plays.⁸³ These scholars have also pointed to the links between the Nigerian video film industry and Onitsha market literature. ‘Bollywood’ and ‘Nollywood’ draw on a repository of cultural forms, including music, dance and oral storytelling, which are, notably, often translated simultaneously to literature in the adaptation process in postcolonial contexts.

It is interesting that it is music and song, for example, that are the constant factors in the transcultural adaptation of Hindi films into Hausa novels and then into Hausa films in Nigeria.⁸⁴ And it is partly the popularity of the musical film genre in India that has resulted in the repeated film adaptation of Bengali novelist Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay’s *Devdas* (1917).⁸⁵ In fact, Indian film scholar Priya Jaikumar points out that ‘Historians Eric Barnouw and S. Krishnaswamy attribute [“Bollywood’s” success] to the invention of sound, arguing that the Indian filmmaker “now had markets which foreign competitors would find difficult to penetrate . . .”’⁸⁶ Sound has allowed previously colonized peoples to more successfully negotiate their own representation and markets, as they are able to indigenize their films through the use of local languages, music, oral cultures and accents. The popularity of postcolonial films may also be attributed to other forms of local culture, such as theatre and performance. In relation to the Latin American context, López argues that spectators have been ‘influenced less by the chase films and Westerns arriving from the United States’ than by theatrical adaptations, since ‘theatre was

already an art form with an extensive history and of great elite and popular appeal throughout Latin America'.⁸⁷

These films do not, however, draw on local culture to the exclusion of national, regional and global cultures. Rather, as Pauwels argues, studying 'Bollywood' film adaptations of locally produced literature 'betrays much about the postcolonial project of coming to terms with *modernity*'.⁸⁸ In many African video films, the ritual sacrifice of 'evil' elements by means of magic and/or Christian spiritualism is often the centrepiece. According to Birgit Meyer, 'these films are charged with representing Africans in inferior terms ... Private video producers are accused of turning a medium meant to serve "development", "enlightenment", and "unity" of the nation into a vehicle for the expression of ugly matters that should have no place in modern, national culture'.⁸⁹ However, Meyer argues, African video films are representations of alternative African modernities that constantly compete with official, elite versions of modernity, though they also, problematically, overlap with the Western capitalist conceptualization of a global modernity predicated on individualist material accumulation. 'Nollywood' films figure the desire for wealth and luxury products as part of their postcolonial space-making, and 'Bollywood' films such as Gurinder Chadha's *Bride and Prejudice* (2004), an adaptation of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, express many of the contradictions symptomatic of the globalization process itself, contradictions that are frequently reproduced also in Hollywood films. 'Bollywood' and 'Nollywood' films thus occupy an uneasy place in the continuum between the local and global, the national and regional, the 'left' and 'right', and the political and purely pleasurable.

In the realm of film, then, even though the global power balances are shifting, American neo-imperialism still threatens, on the one hand, to increasingly integrate diverse, local perspectives into one vortex – the cinematic projection of capitalist, consumerist fantasy. On the other hand, it presents the risk of a regression to conventional colonial perspectives – the legacy of historical colonialism – in which the important postcolonial content and formal properties of postcolonial narratives are neutralized and hindered from further contributing to constructive postcolonial space-making. While the popularity of postcolonial writing among contemporary film adapters may signal a positive shift towards the increasing global recognition of the value of these texts, postcolonial writing is also constantly at risk of being 'colonized', compromised and trivialized by film adapters. At a time in which the USA's 'War on Terror' is being waged on various fronts in the Muslim world, and in which the ability to analyse such wars and conflicts has never been more

urgent, Simon During's take on Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* (1979), adapted from Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, has a renewed pertinence: During calls the film 'war within the frame of neo-imperialism',⁹⁰ referring to the way in which Coppola, while ostensibly making a film about the Vietnam War, writes out the Vietnamese and their story from the film. Postcolonial scholars, by raising awareness of the forms and functions of postcolonial film generally, and postcolonial film adaptation in particular, may be able to play a role in countering this trend in which local peoples are elided from their own postcolonial spaces and space-making.

Notes

1. John Marx, 'Postcolonial literature and the Western literary canon', in Neil Lazarus (ed.), *Cambridge Companion to Postcolonial Literary Studies* (Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 87.
2. Millicent Marcus, *Filmmaking by the Book: Italian Cinema and Literary Adaptation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993).
3. Wimal Dissanayake, 'Introduction: nationhood, history, and cinema: reflections on the Asian scene', in Wimal Dissanayake (ed.), *Colonialism and Nationalism in Asian Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), p. xiv.
4. Priya Jaikumar, *Cinema at the End of Empire: A Politics of Transition in Britain and India* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), p. 3.
5. Robert Stam, *Film Theory: An Introduction* (Malden, MA, and Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), p. 19.
6. Quoted in Afolabi Adesanya, 'From film to video', in Jonathan Haynes (ed.), *Nigerian Video Films* (Jos: Nigerian Film Corporation, 1997), p. 13.
7. Homi Bhabha, 'Signs taken for wonders: questions of ambivalence and authority under a tree outside Delhi, May 1817', in *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), pp. 145–74.
8. Paul S. Landau, 'Introduction: an amazing distance: pictures and people in Africa', in Paul S. Landau and Deborah D. Kaspin (eds.), *Images & Empires: Visuality in Colonial and Postcolonial Africa* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002), p. 18.
9. J. M. Burns, *Flickering Shadows: Cinema and Identity in Colonial Zimbabwe* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2002), p. 52.
10. Paul S. Landau and Deborah D. Kaspin, 'Preface', in Landau and Kaspin (eds.), *Images & Empires*, p. xi.
11. Stephen P. Hughes, 'Policing silent film exhibition in colonial south India', in Ravi S. Vasudevan (ed.), *Making Meaning in Indian Cinema* (Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 51.
12. Stam, *Film Theory*, p. 19.
13. Jaikumar, *Cinema*, p. 22.
14. Homi K. Bhabha, 'The Other Question: stereotype, discrimination, and the discourse of colonialism', *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), pp. 94–120.
15. Ana M. López, '"Trains of shadows": early cinema and modernity in Latin America', in Ella Shohat and Robert Stam (eds.), *Multiculturalism, Postcoloniality and Transnational Media* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2003), p. 113.

16. Ibid., p. 114.
17. Ibid., p. 109.
18. Ibid., p. 116.
19. Heidi Pauwels, 'Introduction', in Heidi Pauwels (ed.), *Indian Literature and Popular Cinema: Recasting Classics* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2007), p. 5.
20. Cheick Oumar Sissoko, filmed interview with author, 8 December 2003.
21. Quoted in Guy Hennebelle (ed.), *Les Cinémas Africains en 1972* (Paris: Société Africaine d'Éditions, 1972), p. 202.
22. Quoted in David Murphy, *Sembene: Imagining Alternatives in Film and Fiction* (Oxford and Trenton, NJ: James Currey and Africa World Press, 2000), p. 68.
23. See www.nyerafilms.com/filmsKKZ.html for Dangarembga's filmography.
24. See Josef Gugler and Oumar Cherif Diop, 'Ousmane Sembene's *Xala*: the novel, the film, and their audiences', *Research in African Literatures*, 29.2 (Summer 1998), 147–58.
25. Sada Niang, 'Introduction', in Sada Niang (ed.), *Littérature et cinéma en Afrique francophone: Ousmane Sembene et Assia Djebar* (Paris and Montreal: L'Harmattan, 1996), pp. 11–12, my translation from the French.
26. Gugler and Diop, 'Ousmane Sembene's *Xala*', pp. 147–58.
27. Dudley Andrew, *Concepts in Film Theory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), p. 98.
28. Brian McFarlane, *Novel to Film: An Introduction to the Theory of Adaptation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 6–7.
29. Kenneth Macgowan, *Behind the Screen: The History and Techniques of the Motion Picture* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1965), p. 334.
30. Andrew, *Concepts*, p. 98.
31. Pauwels, 'Introduction', p. 4.
32. Kamal Ramzi, 'Les sources littéraires', in Magda Wassef (ed.), *Égypte 100 ans de cinéma* (Paris: Éditions Plume, 1995), pp. 226–37.
33. Randal Johnson and Robert Stam, 'The shape of Brazilian film history', in Randal Johnson and Robert Stam (eds.), *Brazilian Cinema* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), p. 21.
34. Recent books on film adaptation include Robert Stam and Alessandra Raengo (eds.), *Literature and Film: A Guide to the Theory and Practice of Film Adaptation* (Malden, MA, and Oxford: Blackwell, 2004); Julie Sanders, *Adaptation and Appropriation* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005); Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006); Thomas Leitch, *Film Adaptation and its Discontents: From Gone with the Wind to The Passion of the Christ* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007); Deborah Cartmell and Imelda Whelehan (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Literature on Screen* (Cambridge University Press, 2007); and Phil Powrie, Bruce Babington, Ann Davies and Chris Perriam, *Carmen on Film: A Cultural History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007). In these books, certain postcolonial adaptations are constantly evoked, such as Anthony Minghella's *The English Patient* (1996), Patricia Rozema's *Mansfield Park* (1999), Mira Nair's *Vanity Fair* (2004), Gurinder Chadha's *Bride and Prejudice* (2004), and Merchant-Ivory's many adaptations; however, the broader range of postcolonial film adaptations are given no sustained attention.
35. Ella Shohat, "'Sacred word, profane image": theologies of adaptation', *Taboo Memories, Diasporic Voices* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), p. 70.
36. See John Thieme, *Postcolonial Con-texts: Writing Back to the Canon* (London and New York: Continuum, 2001).

37. For example, in his introduction to *Colonialism and Nationalism in Asian Cinema*, Wimal Dissanayake does not mention that *The Home and the World* (1984), *MacArthur's Children* (1984), *The Sea and Poison* (1986) and *King of the Children* (1987) are film adaptations of important postcolonial novels.
38. See Alexie Tcheuyap, *De l'écrit à l'écran: les réécritures filmiques du roman africain francophone* (Ottawa University Press, 2005); and Lindiwe Dovey, *African Film and Literature: Adapting Violence to the Screen* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009).
39. Pauwels (ed.), *Indian Literature and Popular Cinema*.
40. The Barbican, London, held a film season 'Cinema of Brazil – Literature into Film', 4–11 October 2007. I wish to extend my gratitude to Robert Rider, Head of Cinema at the Barbican, for bringing this season to my attention.
41. There were several panels on 'International Film Adaptation' at the 2007 Popular Culture Association conference held in Boston, USA, 4–7 April 2007.
42. Hutcheon, *Theory*, p. 8.
43. Mbye Cham, 'Oral traditions, literature, and cinema in Africa', in Stam and Raengo (eds.), *Literature and Film*, p. 301.
44. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991).
45. Dissanayake, 'Introduction', p. xiv.
46. Cham, 'Oral traditions', pp. 295–312.
47. Gina Wisker, *Key Concepts in Postcolonial Literature* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 117.
48. Philip Lutgendorf, *The Life of a Text: Performing the Ramcharitmanas of Tulsidas* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), pp. 411–12.
49. The epic has also attracted adaptations by filmmakers outside India, evidenced in the fact that one finds, among the countless retellings of the myth, an American animation *Sita Sings the Blues* (2008), a Japanese–Indian animation *Ramayana – The Legend of Prince Rama* (1992), and an Indonesian–Austrian musical version *Opera Jawa* (2006).
50. Wimal Dissanayake, 'Cinema, nationhood, and cultural discourse in Sri Lanka', in Dissanayake (ed.), *Colonialism and Nationalism in Asian Cinema*, p. 195.
51. *Ibid.*, p. 196.
52. Wimal Dissanayake, 'Sri Lanka: art, commerce, and cultural modernity', in Anne Tereska Ciecko (ed.), *Contemporary Asian Cinema: Popular Culture in a Global Frame* (Oxford: Berg, 2006), pp. 108–19.
53. Sylvie César, *'La Rue Cases-Nègres': du roman au film (étude comparative)* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1994), p. 13.
54. Haseenah Ebrahim, "'Sugar Cane Alley": re-reading race, class and identity in Zobel's *La Rue Cases Nègres*', *Literature Film Quarterly*, 30.2 (2002), 146–52.
55. César, *'La Rue Cases-Nègres'*, pp. 13–14.
56. *Ibid.*, p. 18.
57. Robert Stam, 'Introduction: the theory and practice of adaptation', in Stam and Raengo (eds.), *Literature and Film*, p. 42.
58. Javier Ordiz (ed.), *Federico Gamboa's Santa* (Madrid: Ediciones Catedra, 2002), p. 23.
59. Paula Beegan, 'Envisioning *Santa* in literature and film', M.Phil. thesis, University of Cambridge, 2004.
60. *Ibid.*, p. 10.
61. Johnson and Stam, 'Shape of Brazilian film', pp. 43–5.
62. *Ibid.*, p. 45.

63. Leo Braudy, 'Afterword: rethinking remakes', in Andrew Horton and Stuart Y. McDougal (eds.), *Play It again Sam: Retakes on Remakes* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), p. 331.
64. Pauwels, 'Introduction', p. 9.
65. Hutcheon, *Theory*, p. 145.
66. For in-depth analysis of these film adaptations, see Dovey, *African Film and Literature*.
67. Cham, 'Oral traditions', p. 306.
68. Michael Chanan, presentation of *Una pelea Cubana contra los demonios*, Cine-Cuba Film Season, Barbican, London, 12 July 2008.
69. Randal Johnson, 'Cinema novo and cannibalism: *Macunaíma*', in Johnson and Stam (eds.), *Brazilian Cinema*, p. 180.
70. Stam, 'Introduction', pp. 42–3.
71. Sylvie Groulx (dir.), *In the Shadow of Hollywood*, Canada, 2000, 112min.
72. Ibid.
73. López, 'Trains', p. 103.
74. Johnson and Stam, 'Shape of Brazilian film', pp. 18–19.
75. Med Hondo, 'What is cinema for us?', in Imruh Bakari and Mbye Cham (eds.), *African Experiences of Cinema* (London: British Film Institute, 1996), p. 40.
76. I wish to thank Elaine Savory for bringing this to my attention.
77. Stam, 'Introduction', p. 43.
78. Pauwels, 'Introduction', p. 1.
79. Dorothee Wenner (dir.), *Peace Mission*, Nigeria, 2008, 80min.
80. Roy Armes, *Third World Film Making and the West* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), p. 65.
81. Pauwels, 'Introduction', p. 1.
82. See Abdalla Uba Adamu, Yusuf M. Adamu and Umar Faruk Jibril (eds.), *Hausa Home Videos: Technology, Economy and Society* (Kano, Nigeria: Center for Hausa Cultural Studies in conjunction with Adamu Joji Publishers, 2004).
83. See Karin Barber, *The Generation of Plays: Yoruba Popular Life in Theatre* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000).
84. See Brian Larkin, 'Itineraries of Indian cinema: African videos, Bollywood, and global media', in Shohat and Stam (eds.), *Multiculturalism, Postcoloniality, and Transnational Media*, pp. 170–92.
85. The novella *Devdas* has been adapted to film at least nine times, in multiple Indian languages, in 1928, 1935, 1936, 1937, 1953, 1955, 1979, and twice in 2002.
86. Jaikumar, *Cinema*, p. 19.
87. López, 'Trains', pp. 114–15.
88. Pauwels, 'Introduction', p. 1.
89. Birgit Meyer, 'Ghanaian popular cinema and the magic in and of film', in Birgit Meyer and Peter Pels (eds.), *Magic and Modernity: Interfaces of Revelation and Concealment* (Stanford University Press, 2003), p. 202.
90. Simon During, 'Postmodernism or post-colonialism today', *Textual Practice*, 1.1 (1987), 39.

Fanon, Memmi, Glissant and postcolonial writing

ANJALI PRABHU

Frantz Fanon, Albert Memmi and Édouard Glissant are three creative thinkers who share something of a common *Weltanschauung*. Without taking the more extreme definition from Freud that the latter is the unified solution as generated from a particular perspective of all the problems of the universe, certainly the centrality of the colonial encounter with otherness forms the overt structuring factor for the worldview of each of these formidable intellectuals. However, their creative paths would take different form. The themes that stage the encounter and the timbre of the voice of otherness in the texts of these intellectuals prove to be quite different in each case. In this chapter I will consider the oeuvre of these thinkers as together forming an aesthetic corpus that anticipates the transnational aspirations of a range of postcolonial franco-phone writers of encounter.

A defining moment: literary history and the theme of encounter

In considering this material historically I am reminded of Walter Benjamin's idea that:

Thinking involves not only the movement of thoughts but their arrest as well. Where thinking suddenly stops in a constellation saturated with tensions, it gives that constellation a shock, by which thinking crystallizes into a monad. . . In this structure [the historicist materialist] recognizes the sign of a messianic arrest of happening, or (to put it differently) a revolutionary chance in the fight for the oppressed past. He takes cognizance of it in order to blast a specific era out of the homogenous course of history.¹

This moment of arrest has been translated diversely but it is the *Jetztzeit* – or literally the time of now or the now-time – which becomes a time of recognition of the unfulfilled potentialities of the past. For Benjamin, it is not simply

that the past illuminates the present or vice-versa. Rather, a particular image brings together the moment of the past with the time of the present in the form of a constellation, which implies, primarily, a form of relation by which these entities are held together and produce a particular coherence. To envisage these writers as occupying a generative space for a vast array of texts presents a way to seize a moment, so to speak, in literary history, and blast open the space of national literatures while creating a new constellation or set of relations. It is also to undo a strictly chronological understanding of a section of postcolonial literature. However, it is important to note that such an act of framing is not purely idealistic, nor arbitrary. It is aided, even suggested, by various historical/biographical realities related to the ‘moment’ of these three writers who belong to approximately the same generation – all of them being born in the 1920s.

Another important aspect that this framing is able to capture is the fundamental importance of these thinkers to decolonizing processes and the reciprocal importance of that moment to the thought of these and other *évolués*. Each of these men, all of whom were born into the period of dissent, provides unique experiential and intellectual ways of battling with colonial realities and combating their dominating force. In each of them one finds a transformation of the aesthetic experience of writing/reading into an ethical experience of solidarity. In this sense, the different intellectual and experiential unfolding of the moment represents not just different possibilities of reaction, in each case, but more importantly, different *Weltanschauungen* that constellate that same colonial moment differentially.

In considering Memmi alongside Glissant and Fanon in literary history, the most obvious de-linking that occurs is of an area-specific order. Normally, in overviews or anthologies, one would find Fanon and Glissant under ‘Caribbean’ and Memmi either under ‘North Africa’ or, in nation-specific organization, under ‘Tunisia’. In Patrick Corcoran’s informative introduction to francophone literature, for example, we find Memmi and Fanon/Glissant under Maghreb and Caribbean, respectively.² Clearly, there is reason to use area-specific organization to understand chronological differences in the political history of specific regions and to be able to situate intellectuals within that history. But in truly accounting historically for the way literary writing emerged in postcolonial ‘voice’ the more wide-angle-look allows accounting of personal and theoretical interconnections amongst these intellectuals. It also provides a more accurate sense of common language usage and deployment of categories and concepts that came to be available to, and invented by, the francophone writers who created them.

Poetics of encounter

The contours of the moment I propose are delineated by realities, such as Glissant's long and prolific career, Fanon's explosively short one, and Memmi's unmistakable, though arguably not completely unexpected, shift in ideological position. We need look no further than Glissant himself to find brilliant insight on the very subject of the scope of an historical moment: having had to place himself in contradistinction to his compatriot, Aimé Césaire, Glissant's general position is that one can no longer employ such a poetics of the moment; rather, what is called for is a poetics of duration, as we will see. It is evident these 'moments' or 'periods' are utterly constructed in human thought in order to access a particularly shaped totality, which is, itself, a transposition of reality in the human understanding.

When literature is categorized following colonial political and geographical divisions it becomes more difficult to account for symbolic and political strategies of solidarity that resisted them and eventually ended official colonialism. Grouping these intellectuals transnationally and placing such a conception within a more general postcolonial rather than restrictive francophone frame, as is possible within the vision of this collection, in itself 'postcolonializes', to borrow Ato Quayson's term, the very moment that these writers are purported to constitute here, by rendering visible the reframing action that their work differentially accomplishes on the common *Weltanschauung* we have mentioned.³ With Fanon, we might characterize this moment as the third phase of the intellectual's development – after assimilation and remembering his past – when the native intellectual '[a]fter having tried to lose himself in the people and with the people, will on the contrary shake the people'.⁴ In terms of literary history, if assimilation and a return to precolonial indigenous richness in form and theme are no longer options because of the deep disillusionment that arose from those projects in reality, our three writers assume the task of shaking up their present while providing a template for doing so in aesthetic terms.

Colonial inequality appears exacerbated when viewed within the notion of encounter, because this is a moment in which the historical self of the colonized is interpellated, or called upon to be, 'against' another with a divergent history. The crisis of narration stems from the erasure of indigenous history, lack of a legitimate subject of such a history, and impossibility of collective memory and thus collective consciousness for the colonized. The coming together of these and other elements within the colonial situation will necessitate mythmaking: Aimé Césaire early on recognized, for example, the

centrality of the image of Toussaint L'Ouverture for the Caribbean, and indeed, all colonized peoples.⁵ The advent of literary writing from the post-colonial context in recognizable but thoroughly transformed Western form is thus built upon a historical aesthetic that we might identify in terms of the encounter, but it is, simultaneously, in every sentence directed at undoing the terms of the encounter itself. We find in the Caribbean the most forceful and visibly enduring cultural forms resulting from historical rupture, erasure of memory, and obstacles to collective consciousness because of the lack of what Glissant has called *arrière-pays* or cultural hinterland.⁶ The strong imprint on French writing by colonized persons writing in the Caribbean voice came at a formative moment in the language of postcolonial French and was characterized by a *Weltanschauung* that distinguished it from hexagonal or metropolitan French as much as it marked the latter.

Benjamin's idea is that studying the past should not be in order to recognize that past 'as it really was', but to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up 'in a moment of danger' because it 'threatens both the content of the tradition and those who inherit it'.⁷ In situating a moment shared (but also exploded, and expanded in the senses described above) thematically and historically by these three thinkers, we might study the past to privilege such moments of danger. In doing so, it is first impossible to see francophone texts as merely French or African or Caribbean. Instead, the notion of encounter continues to aesthetically defy their recuperation into the French canon despite the many recent prizes awarded to francophone authors precisely for mastery over a certain French tradition; for example, the Congolese author Alain Mabanckou (Renaudot 2006), the Afghan-born Atiq Rahimi (Goncourt 2008) and Tierno Monénembo from Guinea (Renaudot 2008).⁸ Actually reading through a thematic lens such as that of encounter also precludes simplistically aligning postcolonial texts to a new global multiculturalism by requiring the terms of the encounter to be called up rather than focusing on celebrating 'difference'.

The theme of bilingualism springs in texts ranging from Albert Memmi's *Pillar of Salt*, whose young hero, Alexandre, painstakingly struggles to master French over patois, across to Abdourahman Waberi's *In the United States of Africa*, with its bicultural protagonist.⁹ For the late Moroccan sociologist and writer Abdelkébir Khatibi, bilingualism will produce an aesthetic and an ethics for the 'other thought', which is not yet thought, but which stems from a *double critique* of both Western sociology and Arab metaphysics, as he presents it most cogently in *Maghreb pluriel*.¹⁰ In this way, early literary production by colonials such as René Maran's 1921 *Batouala*¹¹ or the prolific Algerian Mohammed Dib's (1920–2003) earlier realist fiction already anticipates, in the

phenomenological descriptions of colonial space, for instance, the effects of the brutal divisions that colonialism sought to establish and which marked their generation. The development of such understanding of these divisions into forms of antagonism became anchored in the literary text as linguistic and situational ambiguity, a particular type of naïveté in aid of irony as Bernard Dadié's *An African in Paris* (1959) spectacularly presents it, and a proper theorization of the gaze.¹² Cheikh Hamidou Kane's *Ambiguous Adventure* (1961) along with Ferdinand Oyono's *Houseboy* (1956) anticipate Mariama Bâ's *So Long a Letter* (1979), through reflecting upon the formative importance of 'French' school across African colonies (or in the case of Oyono's Toundi, immersion in French culture and especially language), as opposed to either Qur'anic school, trade-based schooling in the family or tribal *métier*, or other forms of schooling in African languages and culture.¹³ The French school becomes a hugely important factor in creating the elites who would write the foundational texts of postcolonial French literature and spawned generations of non-French creators of brilliant French works of literature. At the historical moment when Fanon, Memmi and Glissant were of school age, French school was the only option in Martinique and in Tunisia that any ambitious young person would have seen as the means to succeed. Memmi's Alexandre, the young Jewish boy from the ghetto in Tunis, provides a poignant narrative of alienation from the Jewishness of his family (that is inseparable from poverty) as well as from the privileged French children of colonial school.¹⁴ A more emblematic example from Martinique is Joseph Zobel's José from his novel *Black-Shack Alley* (1930) – now better known through Euzhan Palcy's magnificent film.¹⁵ Here, José's epic struggle, launched and sustained by his grandmother, to stay in French school, etches this theme into postcolonial writing of the moment.

Anchored in schooling but going well beyond it, the ideas of bilingualism, biculturalism and double identity are all at the heart of what would turn out to be not just thematic presences but an aesthetic factor in the three writers under consideration. In their work, it becomes archetypal and thus makes them eminent instantiations of a particular moment, which together they both define and transform. Moreover, this in-between would become emblematic of francophone writing, not simply as the space between the colonizer and colonized, but rolled over backward, it reclaimed a history of transformation within French writing since the French Revolution or even earlier. Voltaire's pamphlets are of a piece with his articles in the *Philosophical Dictionary* and his short stories.¹⁶ At the same time, Voltaire and the Philosophers were already carving out an image of otherness (the Negro from Surinam in *Candide*, the

good savage in Rousseau), essential to understanding Western civilization and to their critique of it. These conceptual processes and divisions already anticipated colonial practices to follow.¹⁷ Montesquieu's 1725 *Persian Letters* transformed the country bumpkin into the naïve Persian traveller and effectively injected the novel form with a narrative consciousness of discrete, distant and incommensurable semiotic spaces.¹⁸ While the nineteenth-century French novel would develop into almost epic form, it absorbed and made its own both the breath of 'reality' folded into structure itself, as seen in Balzac, as well as the painstaking and obsessive awareness of perspective characteristic of Flaubert. Although the primary encounter then seemed to privilege the monumental confrontation of bourgeois excess and moral decrepitude with working-class poverty and struggle, of which the Zola novel remains a superb example, it is well known how much these representations built, with greater detail and the authority of 'information' (conveyed by way of missionary accounts, voyagers, traders and early colonialist journals and writing), upon the earlier cursory tropes of otherness, that, despite the deleterious effects, were forged in the service of a revolutionary ideal. So, if difference functioned to critique France's system of authority, power and inequalities before the Revolution, images of the same inferior otherness seeped into the realist novel or exotic poetry; and (canonically inclined) readings of them perpetuate forms of exclusion and othering, as Françoise Lionnet has convincingly shown regarding Baudelaire's relationship to colonialism as it has emerged in critical interpretation, even when the latter might be inclined towards a postcolonial perspective.¹⁹ In other words, the models of the canon already offered an ethically identifiable aesthetic that this postcolonial moment would irrevocably seize. But they also structured such an aesthetic mode through processes that became inherent to literary narrative and which structurally objectified and excluded spaces and processes of understanding that would be mobilized in postcolonial writing. It is the same idea Glissant had when writing of Faulkner:

One can deplore that Faulkner's work has tended to treat Blacks as things. Nonetheless, through suspense, fragmentation, uncertainty, deferral, the writing of these works has made it likely – and has even authorized a time to exist, a time near our own, when these stories will meet; when these diversified poetics will be united in networks and rhizomes, when these lineages will lose some of the exclusivity that has been the basis of their demands . . .²⁰

Entry into the French language through these models of thought, critique and narration for the first writers from the other side of the encounter was both

enabled and constrained by these factors. Kateb Yacine had recognized, even earlier than Glissant, that same space in Faulkner. In an interview discussing his book, *Nedjma*,²¹ he admits that Faulkner is the type of man he 'detests most'. But why his writing was crucial was because in it there was a close encounter (*corps à corps*) with the reality of the characters, despite 'his reactionary side, his puritanical side, that was racist and sometimes fascinating'.²² In their own time-frame, these writers were also profoundly influenced by the crystallization of such tendencies in French writing of calling up opposing or incommensurable semiotic spaces that was so evident in the Baudelairean aesthetic and soon revolutionized by Mallarmé and later Blanchot. This fed directly from the Dadaists to the Surrealists, who would be part and parcel of the impact of Negritude. As Glissant notes in an interview, the whole team of not just Surrealists but a certain core of French intelligentsia including André Breton, Max Ernst, André Masson, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Wilfredo Lam and Pierre Mabile were physically present in Martinique in 1941, to join the Martiniquans Césaire, René Ménil and Aristide Maugée, who also formed the core of the influential journal *Tropiques*.²³ It is significant that while these individuals were salient intellectuals in the political climate of anti-colonialism, they were also central to the crystallization in French literary aesthetics of a form of unity of oppositional forces, which subtend the revolutionized notion of harmony in the work of art. Without entering into discussion of the influence of 'exotic' cultures in this literary/aesthetic endeavour we can still recall Roland Barthes and China, Antonin Artaud and Bali,²⁴ as well as Picasso's fascination with African art, to name just a few instances of fascination with otherness that were at the heart of artistic revolution. Yet it is perhaps this very structure of French thought that drew energy from new ways of uniting with difference and incommensurability, which became the limits of opposition to colonialism from within it.

So, when Memmi agrees, in an interview, that his *Strangers* is a Racinian *récit*,²⁵ he does not find such a proposition at all condescending because of the entirely natural way in which there was seizure of French, by the colonized elites, through French assimilatory practices that included the establishment of French schools, essay competitions, scholarships to travel to France and the ultimate dream of departmentalizing the colonies of which fantasy Algeria stands as a bloody counterexample. This dream was not a wild fantasy, though, when one considers the trajectory of a politician like Michel Debré, who was prime minister of France from 1959 to 1962. Although he gained attention under Pétain, he went on to become an out-and-out Gaullist who defended French Algeria. But what is interesting in this context is Debré's decision after

the Evian Accords, through which Algeria was deemed an independent nation, to go to the small French island-department of La Réunion where he managed to get himself elected as mayor in opposition to the nationalist-minded communist party headed by Paul Vergès. In other words, the close ties in both intellectual and political terms between France and its colonies was much more intimate through these types of ambitions that were tied to political careers, and not only in one direction: René Maran, for example, would go on to become a *fonctionnaire* and serve as a representative of the colonial government in French Equatorial Africa.

This type of deploying of colonial elites within the French Empire was much more pervasive than we might observe in any other colonial enterprise, and the special place held by Caribbean *évolués* in this hierarchy is enormously significant to literary and intellectual history. It is thus no myth that French assimilatory practices preyed on colonized people's deep desire for wholeness, for which the promise of career building, particularly for men, seemed an enticing offer.²⁶ Although elites were intermediaries and often enjoyed different treatment from mere 'natives' in other colonial contexts as well, French colonialism practised a particular type of stratification of its colonials and offered immediate illusions of assimilation in a form of power that was impossible to resist without drastic rejection. Few were able to accomplish such outright rejection, as did Fanon with poetic flourish in 1956 when he resigned from the psychiatric division of the Blida-Joinville hospital. This rejection, as Fanon explained, resided in the unassailable fact that the notion of 'curing' was absurd while around him colonialism 'dehumanized' an entire people. In the case of René Maran, although he was Guyanese, many consider his home to be in Martinique's Fort-de-France since, as is well known, his birth poetically occurred on a boat while his parents were making the trip to Martinique from their native Guyana. His novel, *Batouala*, being the first book by a black author to win the prestigious Goncourt, thus also beckoned authors from beyond France's shores to infiltrate French prize worthiness as early as in 1921.²⁷

This is not to simplify the use of French by colonized intellectuals, nor to suggest that there were no ruptures of French through diglossia, but rather that these aspects of colonial elites' biculturalism had already been thoroughly theorized at the level of education and formation (in the French sense) such that occupying the ambiguity of that position, even as early as Fanon, is seen less as something to lament than as an inevitable reality that could be wielded as strength: Césaire had already proclaimed French to be a miraculous weapon. Although Fanon himself would be deeply anguished, it was not from a sense of biculturalism but rather from the inequity within its parameters in colonial

culture. Such inequity proceeded from the fact of his black body being apprehended in, and interpellated by, white culture.²⁸ This self-conscious assumption of biculturalism and bilingualism that marked the inception of francophone literature becomes part of a political/aesthetic form at the moment identified in this chapter, and is contended with in diverse ways in the literature that follows. Making encounter central, then, encounter with otherness at the level of self and the gendered, racialized or ethnicized other, with land, with language and with culture, can tell of both a chronological history as well as a more explosive history of moments that can draw together different periods, authors and realities.

Three writers in the mangrove

The mangrove is an apt image, made well known by the Guadeloupean author Maryse Condé in her now canonical *Crossing the Mangrove*, which evokes intersecting realities without privileging a centre, and whose beginning and end are not the prerogatives of any observer.²⁹ Such is Condé's story of Francis Sancher, the ex-colonial whose dead body provokes a series of reflections in the form of 'voices' and thus provides multiple perspectives on an event, on history and on identity. Seeing our three authors in this way amplifies the moment, and indeed destroys it as a singular and contained objectivity, because its compactness cannot be delineated.

Aimé Césaire, who was intimately connected to French thought while sharply aware of his historical place in it as a colonized man, marked the intellectual milieu that would feed francophone writing in the immediate. Michael Dash notes in his introduction to the translation of Glissant's first novel that what Césaire brought with him on his return from France to Martinique, where he would become a professor at the Lycée Schoelcher, was 'this modern notion of the poetic imagination as an instrument of revolution'.³⁰ The 'best' of francophone writing has also been less easy to align with the trends and movements identified in postcolonial theory. Such texts (Césaire's *Notebook of a Return*, Glissant's *Poetics of Relation* or *Malemort*, Memmi's *Scorpion*, Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks*, Assia Djebar's *Fantasia*, Kateb Yacine's *Nedjma*, for example) return to the subject and destabilize its self-assuredness.³¹ The notion of destabilizing the subject might have become explicitly theorized as revolutionary in hexagonal French thought in the post-modern era, but for these francophone texts, such an aesthetics of openness, ambiguity and the demand for the agency of the reader are compelling in a different way because they have been invented creatively from within the aesthetic constraints of French literary history when they 'met' (to evoke

Glissant's statement on Faulkner's blacks) the reality of the theoretical spaces of otherness. These moves in the postcolonializing process targeted the self-assured white subject in the form of the colonialist, the rigidity of separation between white culture that was inaccessible and any 'other' culture that was inferior, and the central authority vested in colonial power to unmake the myths and stories of entire peoples. This combative impulse, arising more widely in postcolonial writing from urgent realities, imbued the narrative with a sense of responsibility that, actually less easily identifiable in unambiguous form in the francophone text, is recognized in postcolonial criticism as the various forms of social realism. Francophone writing on the whole seems somehow more deeply invested in experimental form and theorizing thought about reality than in direct social critique. It is to Homi Bhabha's credit that what he sought to do in providing a particular version of Fanon to the anglophone world was precisely to liberate the writerly aspect of Fanon, the *jouissance* that would prevent easy recuperation of Fanon in the form of single-line manifestos for violence, against colonialism, for African nationalism, for example.³² However, Fanon's *jouissance* was also deeply intertwined with real struggle for liberation from historically weighty forms of domination upon his actions, his experiences and his writing. This interconnection between desire and reality, between poetics and politics, between thought and action is the essence of Fanon's creativity. And none other will understand this better than Glissant, who in many ways is Fanon's kindred spirit. What Glissant has sustained in his writing is the poignancy and continued relevance of encounter as an epistemological shock bearing all the force of Fanon's anguished cry before the almost casual 'Look, a negro!'³³ At the same time, Glissant also accomplishes, in some measure, a positive continuation of the utopian elements in Fanon which, there, were articulated in inchoate moments often mistaken for a misinformed humanism, as in Bhabha's reading,³⁴ but that in Glissant were absorbed and thoroughly theorized in that totalizing movement of reality into thought which is at the heart of the process of what he calls Relation.

Thus, examining the work of these three thinkers as forming a core discourse allows us to view postcolonial writing (here, of the francophone tradition) as not simply responding to the colonial moment, though centrally concerned with it; it can also be seen as an interconnected discourse, which, by virtue of its historical positioning reworks and reinvents notions of the in-between. In this sense their thought incarnates what the Moroccan sociologist Abdelkébir Khatibi famously termed 'unthought thought' or more accurately other thought (*la pensée autre*).³⁵ Of these three theorists, Fanon has been taken up the most widely across literature and theoretical writing in all languages, while

Glissant's entry into mainstream postcolonial studies has been more tentative. Memmi is less known outside francophone circles although his influence also permeates through his Jewish identity. In the case of Fanon, even in the most transnationally applicable parts of his writing, the particular French context of colonialism and of French language is an ineluctable element of his thought. In fact, it is the basic, humanistically inclined Frenchness of Fanon's thought that would become a thorn in the side of a more postmodernist appropriation of it. The impulse is shared – and not ironically in any way – with the French thinkers of his time and beyond, towards collective good that also sustains notions of French universalism: 'What we choose', wrote Sartre, 'is always the better; and nothing can be better for us unless it is better for all.'³⁶

That revolutionary moment of protest preceding formal independences was prolonged through Glissant and Fanon into the aesthetics of a process based in a notion of a progressive totality beyond the moment that these writers themselves could have conceived. And this beyond could not be the fusion of the Negritude moment into that of the proletariat, as per Sartre's analyses in *Black Orpheus*.³⁷ In Glissant's case, the idea of Relation has a self-referentiality much like Deleuze and Guattari's conception of becoming, which is nothing but itself.³⁸ Fanon's work carried in it the anticipation of one of the central ideas shared by later strands of postmodernism: and that is, recognition of the constructed nature of our understanding of reality. But it also carries the Marxian impulse, which is far from contrary to the latter, to study how reality as we know it is only a phantom in the process in which objects lose the reality of their (use) value by the changeable nature of exchange value.

Glissant, born in 1928 in Martinique, would begin his career in poetic form and transform his novelistic writing into the poetic aesthetic that for him was born of the contact between man and land. Amongst his early poetic writing from the 1950s, we can signal *Un champ d'îles* and *Les Indes*.³⁹ As early as this, we see Glissant adopt a different voice in his poetry than might be expected given his activities in France since his arrival in 1946 and his collaboration with other intellectuals involved in the decolonization struggle. Under de Gaulle, he was banned from Martinique until 1965. Before beginning his career in US academic institutions, Glissant established the Institut Martiniquais d'Études, founded the journal *Acoma* and also spent several years as the editor of a UNESCO newsletter from Paris. Particularly in *Les Indes*, which rethinks Columbus's historic arrival in America, Glissant's call for a historical and collective consciousness is already evident; and while this epic poem is dense in its imagery, it prefigures the much later collection of essays published in 1981, and translated by J. Michael Dash as *Caribbean Discourse* as late as 1989.⁴⁰

Likewise Glissant's first novel *La Lézarde* (1958), set in Martinique, would only be translated, again by Dash, in 1985 as the *Ripening*.⁴¹ His most influential essay after the earlier *Intention Poétique* (1969) is probably *Poetics of Relation* (1990).⁴² These and other essays as well as his latest fiction record Glissant's continued fascination with processes of creolization that both exemplify his native landscape and inform his intellectual framework and the strong influence of Deleuzian thought.

Fanon was born in Martinique in 1925 and attended the Lycée Schoelcher in the capital, Fort-de-France, at about the same time as Glissant, who would have been younger. Both were profoundly influenced, as were perhaps any young Martiniquans of the time, by the monumental figure of Aimé Césaire (who returned from France to teach at this school). *Black Skin, White Masks* was published in France on the eve of Fanon's departure to Algeria, as head of psychiatry of the Blida-Joinville hospital in Algiers, with the status of a French *fonctionnaire*.⁴³ He had served in the French army in World War II and then studied in Lyons on a French scholarship. Unfortunately, the plays he is supposed to have written as a student have not been located. From 1956 Fanon was associated with the party newspaper, *El Moudjahid*, after he had joined the revolutionary *Front de Libération Nationale* (FLN) in 1954 and he even went to Ghana as the ambassador of the provisional Algerian government. The two works associated most widely with Fanon are *Black Skin, White Masks*, which first appeared in 1952, and *Wretched of the Earth*, which appeared in 1961 with a preface by Sartre, at Fanon's request, in the year he died in Maryland (USA) of leukaemia.⁴⁴ *A Dying Colonialism* appeared in 1959 as *L'An cinq de la révolution algérienne*,⁴⁵ and contains the famous essay on women in the revolutionary period in Algeria, while *Toward the African Revolution* was published posthumously in 1964 and brings together, amongst other pieces, essays that had appeared in *El Moudjahid*.⁴⁶

Born in Tunis in 1920, Albert Memmi grew up near the Jewish ghetto. He began his education at the Hebrew school but by age twelve he went to the French *lycée*. These experiences are documented in the highly autobiographical first novel *Pillar of Salt*.⁴⁷ His studies at the University of Algiers were interrupted by Vichy rule, during which he was sent into forced labour in Tunisia. He returned to complete his *licence* in Philosophy in 1943, and in 1946, moved to France. From 1923 French law made it easier for Jews to become French citizens; in 1940, under Vichy rule, Jews were subject to the same laws as in Vichy France, following which there was a full-fledged German presence in Tunisia and deportations to European camps. Memmi returned to Tunis with his French wife, an experience recorded loosely in his second novel, translated

as *Strangers*.⁴⁸ Memmi then turned to the essay form: *Colonizer and Colonized* appeared in 1957, followed by *Portrait of a Jew* and *Liberation of the Jew*, both in 1962, and later by *Racism* and *À contre-courants* (Against the Tide).⁴⁹ His later fiction includes *Scorpion* and *Désert*.⁵⁰ In Paris, Memmi has been affiliated with the *Centre national de recherche scientifique* (CNRS) as well as the Sorbonne and served for many years as president of the French chapter of PEN.

For Fanon it was first the generalizability of colonial domination that interested him as a structural repetition of something like the essence of domination. Fanon's critique of Octave Mannoni's theory of the dependency complex of colonized peoples was based in his opposition to Mannoni's distinctions amongst different forms of racism. He showed inferiority to be a result of colonial domination rather than the cause of it, as Mannoni suggested. Regarding women or the 'masses', Fanon has been critiqued by feminists either for overstating women's role in the revolution or somehow reducing them to silence on the one hand, and on the other, by Neil Lazarus, for example, for not accounting properly for the place of the masses. If Lazarus finds his 'utopian conceptualization of the national liberation struggle'⁵¹ was unfounded because, in hindsight, that is not how things played out for these constituencies, perhaps it is equally possible to see utopia differently. That is, there was nothing utopian (in the sense of unreal or unrealizable) regarding the revolutionary role of women in the struggle as Fanon witnessed it and simultaneously wrote about it. Fanon was able to identify how women were and could be equal agents by assuming such an active stance in the creation and forging of their nation. We might thus say that it is reality that has recorded a failure and retrogression from that revolutionary period, and ask why and how women gave up that possible position forged in the anti-colonial struggle. Madhu Dubey, in her inimitable article, excavates Fanon's text for clarity of analysis regarding the necessity to de-link women from tradition and Europeanism from modernity.⁵² This deeply creative and insightful aspect of Fanon's writing was a formative part of the instantiation of postcolonial literature in French. The second lasting mark, which lengthens and opens wide the pre-independence moment, is his conception of this historical process, to which, Fanon writes, 'the unforeseeable should have been opposed'.⁵³ Seeing reality in its unforeseeable possibility, which is somewhat different from being utopian, becomes essential to the writing form, early in francophone texts.

Memmi, who once wrote literally as the 'colonized' and for the colonized, went through a process, of which the most important point was, one might say, that of moving to France from Tunisia rather than to Israel or anywhere else in the world. Caught up in French intellectual circles, his Jewishness becomes a

dominant factor. In his more recent work, his analyses seem to simply turn on the colonized for the lack of progress made since independence, while he allies himself with a more traditional Jewish position in French thought, which is strongly tied to French Republicanism. He sets up the lack of progress as a result of the colonized simply not ‘wanting’ to make any effort. Similarly, he accuses the Arab world of not ‘wanting’ to consider modernization as a way of participating in the universal movement in which all nations are implicated.⁵⁴ It did not help Memmi that another self-identified Jew of visibly right-wing orientation, Alain Finkielkraut, would speak to the media from this very position, blaming, as had Memmi more generally in considering France’s failed multiculturalism, the black and Arab youth (mostly Muslims) who took part in the 2005 riots. Without going into the details of Memmi’s and Finkielkraut’s positions, we may note their departure from an established convention of French-Jewish thought (durably anchored in the intellectual tradition of Léon Blum) that has always been linked to left-leaning positions and the idea that French universalism can appeal to and absorb any particularity by the soundness of its universal values. Memmi would never be able to transcend his dismay at being rejected by his Arab brothers within the newly independent Muslim state of Tunisia. This dismay and disappointment become a resentment that his analyses of immigrant behaviour in France will betray, moving him away from his experiences as a Jew *through*, among other things, the experience of poverty and exclusion.

In some ways, one might say that it is Fanon who would espouse the Sartrean idea – from the latter’s 1945 *Anti-Semite and Jew* – that the unity of a group comes from a common situation.⁵⁵ Memmi would become more invested in the content of Jewishness to combat Sartre’s definition that is built strategically through negation, and perhaps somewhat predictably, he would conceive of Israel as a formative solution. In this sense, Memmi is less committed, particularly after his first two novels and his first essay on the colonial situation, to postcolonialize the Jewish position through solidarity as well as through aesthetically bound moves, which we might identify in literary terms in the forms of analogy, metaphor and juxtaposition or various forms of thematic connection between the position of Jews and other dominated populations across history, geography and political boundaries. We might see in this, more generally, the limits to connections that are possible between Jewish experience and thought and postcolonial thought of the same period. Or it might indicate the individual choice or predicament of Memmi to write, in the end, from a Jewish identity rather than a colonized one. Without needing to reduce Memmi’s writing to one or the other, it is legitimate to trace a shift in his own thought from a pan-colonized position of solidarity of colonized and dominated peoples to a Jewish perspective regarding historical

persecution from the position of a North African Jew having lived through colonialism and Nazism. In *Portrait of a Jew*, Memmi's take on Jewishness jumps from singular experience to universalisms that lack theoretical and narrative conviction.⁵⁶ Following this publication, in the *Liberation of the Jew*, Memmi describes the rupture that Glissant has productively recuperated into form, whereas Memmi ends on a note of despair, returning to a lack of 'content' for Jewishness because of the ruptured history: 'To affirm my Jewishness without giving it a specific content would have been an empty proposition and in the final analysis contradictory';⁵⁷ and later 'In the final analysis, to accept being a Jew is to consent to the whole drama, including the cultural drama. And the source of the cultural drama was to be found in language, but the language of the Jew was in bits and pieces, as all his culture was in bits and pieces if there was a culture.'⁵⁸ Simply put, as an *évolué* who chose France, Memmi is able to better accomplish liberation from colonial inferiority through language and literary recognition than he is from Jewish victimhood even as an elite. His inability to bring together the two in himself is directly linked to colonial assimilatory practices whereby by all accounts Memmi was successfully assimilated to French status upon his arrival in France, becoming a legitimate resident and a recognized intellectual having won various literary prizes including the Fénéon. His disappointment in discovering that anti-Semitism exists in the workingman and amongst the blacks in Dakar's shantytown is surprising and borders on lamentation.⁵⁹ In any event, Memmi states that he has 'been forced to admit that this instinctive solidarity with the downtrodden, which I do not deny and which I shall continue to proclaim will not save me . . . even if those downtrodden of yesterday were finally to take their revenge; for their cause is not exactly mine'.⁶⁰

Glissant would be translated much later than Fanon and Memmi and his rather opaque writing would keep him from being deployed as an authority as widely as Fanon (often in simplified or contracted form) or even his other well-known Caribbean compatriot Antonio Benítez-Rojo. In fact, he would appeal most to postcolonialists of a decidedly postmodernist inclination. Yet, Glissant would also, like Fanon, provide endless inspiration for a range of writers of the francophone regions, well beyond Caribbean shores. To consider Memmi alongside Fanon and Glissant is to irrevocably tie them to French colonial history and the experience of French assimilatory politics. It is also to acknowledge along a continuum the events in contemporary France as having a deep-seated psychological reality that was of a piece with the economic, political and cultural mode of domination and hegemony of the colonial era, which sparked in these three thinkers, as in a whole generation, an extreme reaction that forever would be the source of their emotional responses and intellectual

enterprises. The transnational frame accords very well with the notion of diaspora in francophone literature, which is theorized and aestheticized saliently in representations of Caribbean reality. Soon the postcolonial condition would strongly espouse diaspora as a form of space-making rather than as a given through history. Memmi somehow capitalizes less on rupture as possibility than is the case with Fanon and Glissant, nor does he pick up the doubleness from language as an aesthetic impulse from which hybridity is liberating, as is the case with other North African writers negotiating the presence of Arabic (and Berber) within the French text. However, like Glissant, but also like Kateb Yacine, Memmi will allow his characters re-entry in the corpus of his work and thus creates a veritable fictive space in which to enact his own version of the encounter. Memmi's peculiar migration toward Jewishness serves to acknowledge the multiple intellectual trajectories that the same moment spawned through the intellectualization of experience and the theoretical difficulty of thinking beyond ethnic identity particularly when it is tied to historical victimhood.

While Memmi was in forced labour camps in Tunis, Fanon served with the *Tirailleurs sénégalais* only to return to Martinique already disillusioned with the idea of Frenchness, as David Macy has documented.⁶¹ Albert Memmi's public fall-out with his friend, Albert Camus, suggests some clues regarding the untenable position of 'French' Africans. Camus, of course, as a *pied noir* born in the colony of Algeria, believed fully that French humanism would eventually be capable of restoring humanity and bringing the best to Arab culture. While Memmi felt acutely his difference from Frenchness and was able to recognize his common cause with Arabs, his position was that although he felt himself to be a 'French' African, the *pied noir* was still a colonizer, still a Frenchman, and thus blind to the deep and total transformation of colonial terms that was needed for Africans to be liberated. Claire Denis's 1988 film *Chocolat*, which is set in Cameroon, is a striking rumination on the position of the French African for a generation of young African children of French parentage, who left Africa at that moment of revolution but for whom the only home, Africa, was equally impossible.⁶² Illustrating this predicament, the little France Dalens and the young houseboy Prothée have an exquisitely developed friendship whose impossibility is cleverly inscribed in the first name of the child.

The spectre of Fanon

What is remarkable is the way in which Fanon gave new life to the poetry of Negritude, casting it in direct dialogue with Sartre. Césaire does evoke the Sartrean hero most notably in the form of his Caliban in *Tempête*, when the

character casts off false consciousness in the dramatic end and frees himself from the constraints that such consciousness imposed upon him through Prospero.⁶³ However, Césaire's poetry is really where one glimpses the coming together of his aesthetics and politics. That is to say, particularly in *Notebook of a Return*, what one sees is not so much the dialectic, nor even existential anguish cast in black terms, but really a deep engagement with the mystical, the mythic, the unconscious;⁶⁴ in fact it is where Césaire blazes a metaphysical path quite contrary to a decision, most often attributed to him, whereby Martinique entered departmental status in 1946 (see Murdoch, this volume). That movement joins up with Fanon's lasting gesture towards a human existence outside blackness. The surrealist poets seem almost trivial beside the weight of responsibility felt by the young black students who found themselves in Paris to be, quite simply, niggers. And from this experience would arise a cry that came to be called Negritude, and which sought to encompass the whole world well beyond the context of blackness or Africanness. When Césaire pronounced French to be a miraculous weapon, it was not merely against French colonialism or supremacy. Rather, what he saw was that it enabled a leap towards the survival of humanity in the creativity it allowed him in particular.

By the time Fanon wrote *Black Skin*, the poetic form of Negritude already seemed somehow far removed from the political upheaval that was being felt across the African continent and beyond.⁶⁵ There was also, of course, the disillusionment associated with the scope of Negritude since the decision to departmentalize Martinique. For Fanon there is added militancy, a renewed energy to be drawn from the powerful poetry of Césaire, Léopold Senghor or Léon Damas, as he brings out the black man's self-mocking and self-acceptance when scrutinizing the historical juncture that produced Negritude. The need for self-affirmation is strongly felt beyond the individualistic or biographical interpretation we often find, and it is in this vein we might view the narrative 'I' of *Black Skin* which assumes the voice of a universal/historical black man at the dawn of decolonization.⁶⁶ Without denying the high complexity of *Black Skin*, we may note the tendency in postcolonial critical studies to become overly invested in metaphor, image and symbol in granting this text almost biblical proportions when all referentiality happens within its sutured whole. In this sense, when reading *Black Skin* there is resistance to truly allowing inter-textual dialogue between this text and other accounts of such lived experience, but also more specifically between *Black Skin* and many experiences of blackness under colonialism, which are documented in fictional and non-fictional forms.⁶⁷ Such links with other texts, including the interviews Fanon will later

evoke from his time at Blida-Joinville in Algeria, suggest hybrid spaces that are strongly linked to the realities of colonial domination. Hybridity in the complex form it has taken in postcolonial studies is thus not just some inadequate category to impose on Fanon; rather, reading Fanon carefully suggests a different framing for hybridity itself and it also allows us to effectively link Fanon more productively to Glissant's theorization of hybridity as the endless process of Relation.⁶⁸

Fanon's essay 'Algeria unveiled' reclaims Algerian women's identity as self-fashioning through participation in revolutionary action.⁶⁹ This essential Fanonian idea, also to be seen in his remarks about peasants' revolutionary action in *Wretched*, marks francophone literary writing as much as it has revolutionary groups such as the Black Panthers in the US or the Tamil Tigers in South Asia.⁷⁰ In the literary field, the ultimate space for, in Fanon's somewhat romantic terms, 'pure' or 'absolute' identity comes through reinvention of form: the form of narration, of the conception of the black man, of thought itself, and of collective desire.⁷¹ It is this more than any other aspect of Fanon's writing that is pervasive in the best of literary writing that draws explicitly or implicitly from Fanon. While these may be somewhat more difficult to locate in imputing influence upon younger writers, it is quite centrally present in Glissant or a writer such as the Algerian Assia Djebar, both of whom are intimately familiar with his life and his work.

Another quintessential quality of Fanon's writing, which also lends itself to being placed in a Marxian framing, is the oscillation between particular and general. While refusing Mannoni's division of racisms, Fanon makes several moves to separate the Jew from the black, for instance. The difficulty of being black at the time is clearly recognized to come from the most basic and immediate form of difference as it is articulated in appearance. But this is what distinguishes the black from the Jew. It seems quite obvious that Fanon struggled with this requirement of specificity for he is hardly convincing when he writes that the Jews might have been pursued, exterminated and incinerated, but that those were small familial quarrels.⁷² Yet this form of struggle is not evident in Memmi. Sartre's text provides a backdrop to Fanon's work, as can be followed simply through the notes of the latter. Fanon seems to choose distinction between the Jew and the black because the black is lynched in (and because of) his body and thus knows his difference first as immediate and real physical danger, while the Jew is first and foremost an idea. Perhaps there is truth to this understanding, although the ultimate fate of Jews was so intensely material; but Fanon's return to the body of the black man is best seen as a historically informed move proceeding from the situation of the black man,

which Fanon understands first and foremost from experience. From a literary perspective, Fanon's theoretical writings thus adopted various poetic devices in order to speak through many voices, and irony is one of them.⁷³ But the problem is that irony did not render one position wrong and the other right; rather, it showed how every 'right' position required to be forged *in situ*, from which the entire structure would project a totality we might name utopia in the ultimate project of liberation. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's influential concept of 'strategic essentialism' encapsulates the same motivation, and in the franco-phone novel this same concept has been present though unnamed and has given much impetus to narrative form.⁷⁴ Fanon's refusal to forge ethical positions severed from experience and history has sometimes been seen as a romantic humanism when it is better recognized as fierce dedication to coherence and unity of purpose in revolutionary and liberating goals alongside strong analytical commitment. Without this combination any politics would be fettered to particularities and immediacy and risk becoming desperate terrorism. Such an ultimately humanistic scope for every act is informed by a central aesthetic, which is also its ethics. Fanon's undying legacy, because it is as poetic as it is revolutionary, provides lasting attractiveness for those who are both idealistic and strongly drawn to action.

The way Fanon was able to make explicit the effects of the stark division between black and white would also mark literary creation in terms of its aesthetics. Whether it be Memmi's essays on situations of inequity, or his adventures with bilingualism or biculturalism in his autobiographical novels, the process of entry into the double space and of marking the margins extends and draws upon Fanonian work to properly define these spaces not simply in terms of their physical and political reality but really in terms of the entire psychological canvas that ensued from it. Ferdinand Oyono's novel published four years after the French *Black Skin* stands as perhaps the most active and immediate aesthetic realization of Fanon's work and participates in developing a style of writing that, like Fanon's, becomes an intervention into the historical moment of its conception.⁷⁵ The aspirations to intervene through form and structure as ways of thinking contained in this aspect of postcolonial writing in French somehow marginalize simplistic and nostalgic imitation of or returns to prior forms, language and thought in ways that are perhaps unique and related to the sense of history, of the agency of individuals and peoples in history that was crucial to the legitimacy established even for 'writing back'. For example, Abdelkébir Khatibi's *Mémoire tatouée*, whose subtitle is the 'autobiography of a decolonized man', would actively experiment with form, with the experience of colonialism and its effects on thought processes and

memories, even as it is an active return of the gaze as was *Black Skin*.⁷⁶ The actual creation of the text is seen as a form of agency in Fanon's terms, situated between the languages of French, standard Arabic and the narrator's spoken dialectal form of Arabic. As the narrator writes: 'The West is a part of me that I cannot deny inasmuch as I struggle against all occidends and oriends that oppress and disenchant me.'⁷⁷ Like Fanon's absolute desire for freedom, the decolonizing act here is extended to combat every form of oppression, thus validating the field's recognition in the 1980s that the meaning of postcolonialism had to go beyond a simple response to the isolated oppression ensuing from nineteenth-century colonialism. This valuable aspect of the reach and continued validity of postcolonialism for different but interconnected forms of oppression is echoed in the simple but efficacious idea of 'to postcolonialize', a verb form now used by many to mean something akin to 'decolonize' or 'liberate', while having an explicit intention in Quayson to enlarge postcolonialism's task to combat different hierarchies.⁷⁸ It is in the same sense that Khatibi proposed a 'double subversion' as he sought to think that 'unthought thought' which he termed *la pensée autre*.⁷⁹ Memmi exemplifies an important recognition within postcolonial studies of the usefulness of specificity in advocating for real dominated populations. Forgetting his own criticism of Camus, Memmi is less prepared to thoroughly rethink and reformulate the meaning of his Jewish identity with and through his status as an assimilated postcolonial individual.

At the same time, it is paradoxical to note that while Fanon vehemently denied Sartre's idea of the poet of Negritude being thrown up as genius through historical circumstance and necessity, Memmi appropriates this very idea in an interview: 'In a sense, I had the good fortune. I mean that it was luck for a writer to find himself to coincide in part, with a moment, a significant slice of the history of the world.'⁸⁰ Memmi's experience and dispositions attached him to the realities he has lived, while Fanonian anguish in reality pulled this thought towards theorizing its possibility. Such consciousness in both cases of the position and responsibility of the writer is an acute sense of historical awareness. In fact, this preoccupation both weighs down and liberates francophone writing more than any of its postcolonial counterparts. Whether we see this in Djébar's highly self-conscious representation of Algerian women and her almost perverse presentation of colonial perspective,⁸¹ Glissant's obsessive attention to form and painstaking development of intricate circularity within his narrative prose and poetry, or more recently Patrick Chamoiseau's dizzying array of narrative voices, this historical consciousness of narrating has become an ethical element of francophone aesthetics.⁸²

In a 1971 article that appeared in *Esprit* magazine, Albert Memmi rebukes Fanon for not having returned to Martinique and fought in the Caribbean context.⁸³ This is revealing of a different temperament: one that cannot withstand his own alienation from 'place'. Memmi's departure with the colonial government in 1956 from Tunisia for France appears to be a wound that has never healed. Like Fanon's, Memmi's work exemplifies a desire to liberate the self within the context of liberating the oppressed, the colonized, or the alienated as a people. His writing is frequently marked by the autobiographical impulse in both theme and structure. In his novel *Pillar of Salt*, he traces his childhood and the formative experience of his French education that would be both his blessing and his curse because, as for so many of his generation, the promise of assimilation through the French language had the corollary effect of alienation from his people, his language (here patois) and most consequentially any sense of home.⁸⁴ In this the resemblance with Fanon's experience is unmistakable, when Fanon, as an *acculturé*, the shining example of the French West Indian *assimilé*, arrives in Paris to find he is reduced to being a nigger. But Memmi's work, more than Fanon's, bears the trace of alienation in specific terms of class, language, place and ethnic identity. In Memmi's novel, the strongly autobiographical character Alexandre describes his home and his street that mimics the liminality of his own existence. The street is not quite in the Jewish ghetto but on the outskirts of the city.⁸⁵

A more interesting narrative set-up characterizes *Scorpion*, which is to be taken, according to its subtitle, as an 'imaginary confession'. This is a dramatic text, where the autobiographical familiarity with the first two novels (some secondary characters and spaces of his previous autobiographical novels reappear here) becomes complicated by the presence of multiple narrators. There is Imilio, the writer, who most obviously seems to be an incarnation of Memmi, although he depends on his brother Marcel, who will complete the perspectival task of looking at the character's life. Yet J.H., Imilio's young student, along with Makhlouf the old Jewish uncle, together present what are recognizably the young Memmi and the older Memmi. The impossibility for authoritarian narration characterizes this work, and is seen in the disagreements and concurrences of facts by the different voices. One might wish to recognize a return to Voltaire's notion of cultivating one's garden from the concluding wisdom of *Candide* as, if not a solution, at least a way of being in the world,⁸⁶ when Marcel claims that 'Wisdom means the handling of day-to-day existence.'⁸⁷ Memmi's great influencer Camus had also returned to this simple truth in the form of Sisyphus. Sisyphus takes as his task rolling his boulder up the mountain, but this 'absurd' man does not do it to reach the top or achieve anything nor is he

full of despair or rage. In fact, happiness is in the acceptance of the totality of the situation, to even thrive upon it. When Memmi's J.H. (which we might read to be 'jeune homme' or young man) commits suicide, the meaning is also left open like the colourful description of the death of the scorpion, which inaugurates the novel. Might we not see an unconscious desire in J.H.'s death, through which Memmi breaks symbolically with the thought of his own youthful ardour, an attempt to recuperate that Fanonian revolt which Memmi never was able to embrace in any convincing way? In the novel, there is some doubt as to whether the fictional scorpion, surrounded by fire, is to be seen as having committed suicide. Cleverly, it is the writer, the known romantic, who wishes to see it as suicide while his more practical brother, the ophthalmologist, views such an interpretation as ridiculous. That is an 'old wives' tale' he concludes because the scorpion just died of exhaustion.⁸⁸ This might contain an element of bitterness towards a different brother of Memmi's if we recall how that comrade's death would make him forever a martyr and a hero, particularly for its timing.

Fanon's early death made of him not simply a canonized figure, but his work and life gained a certain poetic defiance that eludes Memmi to this day. Various writers seek that Fanonian quality with a thirst that seems unconscious but which resides at the very core of francophone postcolonial literary innovation. In a more easily identifiable location, Memmi along with a host of writers of his generation and the next took up and continue their own struggles in language: 'The struggle with the French language, which is a superb language, is never ending.'⁸⁹ Glissant also writes: 'We no longer reveal totality within us by lightning flashes.'⁹⁰ Although Glissant is speaking of Césaire, the shadow of Fanon lurks within this image. Memmi will have a much more bitter evocation of Fanon's blazing life. He writes that Fanon is what he is not, a hero of the Third World. 'Heroes die young and I have not been able to escape growing old. The hero chooses tragedy, I plead for happiness . . . In any case, I refuse the demagoguery of just causes.'⁹¹ The idea of Fanon's eternal youth and the circumstances of his enduring poetics are echoed as well by Edouard Glissant. In this vein, we may observe a radiance and vibrancy to every Fanonian sentence. This ethereal picture of Fanon, however, is vindicated in the form of a politics that, fittingly, only Fanon knew how to make concrete. These ideas make their way into Glissant's view regarding why it is difficult to be 'the brother, the friend or quite simply the associate, the compatriot of Fanon, it is because he was the only one to have acted on his ideas'.⁹² Glissant will attribute Fanon's actions to what he calls the principle of diversion: that is, a population such as Martinique's experiences a cloaked form of domination,

one whose hold cannot be revealed from within; Fanon then seeks this principle elsewhere in Algeria and thus links the impossible situation in Martinique to the solutions found there. In these lines we find the idea that Fanon's poetry is the sum total of his life and his acts in a way that would henceforth prove impossible to replicate.

But there is another reason for which Fanon is to be remembered fully, treasured, and the full spectrum of his thought and acts reactivated specifically from within postcolonial studies: it is because it is he, more than Memmi, Césaire, Glissant, or the other most often cited theorists/writers/thinkers, can link us to the realities in the postcolonial world. It is in remembering the totality of Fanon's production of his persona, his legacy, his thoughts, his anguish and his suffering that we can perceive the importance of understanding the complexity in a single autobiography, the value of following the dénouement of a single life, the point of reading one novel. Both Memmi and Glissant share this understanding. The postcolonializing discourse of our three authors together invites us to consider authors such as the fiery Mongo Beti, alongside the highly ambiguous Henri Lopès, or the tragic life of Sony Labou Tansi, with political activists such as Patrice Lumumba or Roland Momie whose lives were also extinguished all too early. Creative expression being intrinsically linked in structure, mood and form with creative action through theorized purpose evident in movement of narrative and action best evokes the life/work of Fanon and characterizes, if we might be permitted such a judgment, the 'best' in postcolonial writing of the encounter, where encounter continues to bind together creativity in action and in thought.

Glissant provides quite literally a sea full of possibilities from within his long and prolific career. Forging a career between the monumental figures of Césaire and Fanon, Glissant's grandeur is quite different: it had to be. It comes from a certain endless quality that is recorded in the repetitions and reinvention that characterize his work and which has been the worthy subject of many scholars. The direct impact Glissant has had on Martiniquan writers is clear, and has been commented upon. It is no accident that Glissant is explicitly and consciously historical, linking his metaphors and meanderings to the movement of history. The writing of Simone Swartz-Barthes (especially in *Ti-Jean l'horizon*) would literally actualize Glissant's notions of openness, non-linearity, and the fluidity between history and fiction.⁹³ Maryse Condé would establish herself as a creolizer in her own right, reinventing the idea of the rhizome – so close to Glissant's development of this Deleuzian image – through the metaphor of mangrove and problematizing the relationship of the Caribbean to Africa from a female perspective.⁹⁴ It is clear that the authors

of *créolité*, Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau and Raphaël Confiant, began their collective thinking first in opposition to Negritude but also to Glissantian opacity.⁹⁵ Opacity returns and reorients both the possibility and the onus of liberation on the dominated entity.⁹⁶ These moments of defiance are to be found sometimes overtly but often at the subtextual level. Although Glissant's fluidity might tempt us into aligning him too quickly with postmodern flux and circularity, his essays and earlier novels allow for a Marxian reading that brings him quite close to Fanon's revolutionary post-Marxian ideals.⁹⁷ There can be no doubt, though, that in drawing explicit inspiration from Glissant's writing these authors have become a veritable powerhouse of magnificent literary innovation and experiment. Glissant's predilection for the boat, for the sea, for openness, for understanding and pursuing the experience of the abyss can also be seen as working through and beyond what Césaire exalted as possibility and utopian, and Fanon had yearned for in every anguished sentence and act. In place of Glissant's contingency at the moment of métissage or historical encounter, one finds Memmi returns to the already-accomplished aspect of reality.

Memmi's interest in the encounter takes different forms. As we saw, in *Strangers*, he builds on Fanon's analyses of the psychological difficulties in the space of the couple attempting to defy colonial division. It is significant that the French title of *Agar* (or Hagar from Hebrew) means 'stranger'. In the Old Testament, Genesis 16, we find that Sarah, Abraham's wife, provided her husband a second wife since she herself was barren. This foreign servant, for she was an Egyptian, was Hagar. The English title suggests a reciprocal 'strangeness' between the members of the couple, while the French is more accurate to the situation in which the protagonist brings his foreign wife home to live amongst his people. According to the biblical story, following the birth of Isaac, Hagar will be expelled along with the son she bore, Ishmael. Memmi's insistence on the form of racism will echo Fanon's obsession with the effect of the white gaze on the bodily schema of the black man. Like Fanon, Memmi will accord primary importance to lived experience as a way of understanding racism and its effects. Yet the theoretical point of difference between Memmi and Fanon is that for Memmi, in his gradual return to the affirmation of difference, such difference seems to exist as a given that may or may not then be used in racist ways. This departs from Sartre, Fanon and Glissant, for each of whom, we might say, difference itself is born of the same situation as the thought about it. Memmi remains at "the thought of the other", what Glissant calls 'moral generosity' that accepts alterity; on the other hand, the more revolutionary form of 'the other of thought', which is itself an altering

process, is less accessed by Memmi.⁹⁸ Glissant, on the other hand, will take the Caribbean as his model less in service of particular incarnations of hybridity than to understand the liberating possibilities held within the reality of unequal encounters.

Politics of encounter: transforming space/time

Glissant's recurrent play between 'here' and 'there' and his fascination with chaos in *Tout-Monde* veritably push the notion of relativity into scepticism about location.⁹⁹ Glissant's poetic drive, through various techniques, draws in outlying areas of exoticism that were constructed by European centredness and ossified through colonial exclusion and exploitation, in order to crack open that structure. This is reminiscent of the way Glissant views Faulkner's narrative of exclusion, as we have seen earlier, which for him allows the time of excluded spaces to, in the future, come together with the time of that which has been excluded. That moment is one recognized and seized by postcolonializing intellectuals. Participating in this moment, extending and redefining it, are authors not only from the francophone world, but from various parts of the recognized postcolonial world as well as of the former metropolises. The 2008 winner of the Nobel Peace Prize, J-M.G. Le Clézio, draws on his ancestral colonial connection with the island of Mauritius, his travels all over the globe, and the substantial time he has spent in New Mexico.¹⁰⁰ In fact, he develops his own form of non-hierarchical relations, global connections and mythical entry into today's realities that joins up with Glissant's innovative circular detours. In Fanon's case, his task was very much implicated in the tightest moment of the colonial hierarchy and bound to it by the circumstance and timing of his death.

In developing such a poetics, Glissant's lengthy career continued to theorize the space sought by Fanon for absolute existence, which colonial culture amputated. Sartre draws attention to the deep interconnection with others that Fanon and Glissant recognize, when he focuses on the paradoxical moment of his existential narrator who looks through a keyhole unobserved. I am what I am, looking in. The moment I hear footsteps approaching, the presence of the other alerts me to my own existence and I am no longer identical with myself because of the split.¹⁰¹ Similarly Fanon describes how even from his space of objecthood, it is the other's attention which is a 'liberation', by momentarily removing him from the world.¹⁰² This beyond, to be found easily in Fanon and Glissant and often becoming a source of their obscurity, is less evident in Memmi. Glissant takes overt inspiration from Victor Segalen (1878–1919), the naval doctor, whose voyages to Tahiti and

China inspired his poetic and novelistic creation. Glissant makes space for a different meaning of exoticism in the encounter with otherness as Segalen inscribes it in his largely ethnographic novel *A Lapse of Memory* (1907; translation, 1995), where he takes on the ethical task of adopting the point of view of the Tahitians under the French civilizing mission.¹⁰³ In reclaiming Segalen for himself, Glissant makes it less easy to ascribe predictable positions based on belonging to particular groups that simplistic appropriations of Fanon have sometimes tended to do. Glissant's work, particularly when read alongside Fanon's, reveals the complexity of Fanon's thought and writing, as it emerges in both the specific Caribbean experience of colonialism and the more general dilemmas and positions of *évolués* under colonial culture.

With Memmi, such an *évolué* returns to Tunisia with his white French wife who problematizes the narrator's desire for Frenchness and for escaping Jewish particularity through his identity as the white woman's husband.¹⁰⁴ The precarious hierarchy between white women and native culture within colonial framing, while both troubling and complex, marginalizes women of colour even further. Solid literary production by women writers such as Assia Djebar and Maryse Condé historicizes and privileges the particularity of women in forging canonical form, even as they continue to theorize from and through the revolutionary language-space inaugurated in the encounter. In a writer like Assia Djebar (b. 1936), we find a reinvention of these questions of self and other, of violence and hybridity, of love and of war strongly present in Fanon and developed in different ways by Memmi in particular. Memmi conquers his in-between position between the native Arab and the French colonialist by movement as a *French* citizen to Paris only to be struck by a return to Jewishness that is all the more painful because it was abandoned. Djebar will exemplify, and particularly in *Fantasia* like no other writer before or since, the anguish of Fanon, the endlessness of Glissant, and the repetitive in-between ambiguity and anxiousness of Memmi.¹⁰⁵ Other Algerian women such as Leïla Sebbar, who was born to an Algerian father and French mother in 1941, raised in Algeria then settled in France, as well as the younger Malika Mokeddem, born in 1949, revolutionize the terms of representation, while fundamentalism within the country emerges strongly. But in these writers one finds equally huge inspiration from their own life experience: Malika Mokeddem's intense, poetic prose, for example draws from her deep connection to her Bedouin roots, while Djebar's complex sentences come from a deep desire for the Arabic language itself – a language from which she has been separated by her attending French school from an early age.¹⁰⁶ Djebar's use of French, while clearly part of her colonial heritage, is used to subvert both

patriarchal power as well as to go beyond 'writing back' to the colonizer. Her use of colonial archives to reimagine Algerian history is brilliant for its exploration of the autobiographical self in the narrative and linguistic task of such a historical endeavour. For her part, the Mauritian writer Ananda Devi Anenden, whose biography does not share the intense political climate of her Algerian sisters, speaks in eloquent, poetic terms through her novelistic array and forms a strong web of identification with the interconnected, transnational canon of quite particularly francophone writing.¹⁰⁷

These brief remarks cannot do justice to any of the authors mentioned in dialogue with the three authors treated here, but they are meant to establish clearly that the parameters of these core writers cannot 'explain' any aspects of particular francophone texts or their authors. Yet it is possible to establish a set of interrelations across time and nation, across gender and particularity, through which we might view the quite special but non-exclusive language-space of francophone literary creation, marked as it was by encounter and quite particularly by its articulation through Caribbean sensibility. In this way we can understand historically how Abdourahman Waberi, a young man from Djibouti (which became a republic as late as 1977), who went to study English in France, became in essence his country's first novelist and produced a text as profound and complex as *In the United States*.¹⁰⁸ Explicitly acknowledging Glissant but unconsciously reinventing Fanon, Waberi, in his satiric transposition of the world where Europe and America are miserable places whose populations flee to the majestic, powerful United States of Africa, is able to erupt into novelistic writing without following any predictable tendencies because of the robust historical presence of a core of writing that has been canonized and made a tradition to contend with, not simply alongside the 'French' canon, but really intersecting it and establishing the space itself of France's 'exotic' others.

At the same time, it is also important to remember that French imperialism was closely connected to promotion of the French language. In fact, the moment of Negritude cannot be properly understood separately from the way France continues to annex its former colonies, well after their official independence, through tools such as the *Organisation internationale de la francophonie*, which brings together the various French-speaking nations, most of which are former colonies. It goes without saying that in proposing such a moment, its reach can and should go well beyond any idea of *francophonie* in order to actualize transnationalism that can itself escape being another new heritage that colonialism had somehow prepared. Thus it is an exciting opportunity to extend this moment fittingly within these volumes by drawing

together the history of Caribbean and Arab literatures, and developments in Latin America for example. At the same time, Glissant gives us a lucid sense of how a moment of danger can perpetuate its reach: 'Every poetics is the search for the reference. The reference *is* only when those it concerns, without exception, are imprinted by it.'¹⁰⁹ If, as in the writers considered here, the encounter itself becomes a poetics, then it seeks out doubly (in the sense of encounter that must implicate meeting 'otherness' *and* in the above sense of poetics that needs a reference) the context and collectivities implicated in/ marked by such a poetics of encounter.

While writing back was seen as an effective but also as a historically limited form of resisting colonial domination, space-making itself was appropriated by postcolonial thinkers. Beginning from an early notion of transculturation, associated with Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortíz, however much it was steeped in a European anthropological model in the end, writers such as Glissant, Derek Walcott or Antonio Benítez-Rojo envisaged Caribbean space as a unity in diversity and as a constant interaction of particular and general.¹¹⁰ Edward Kamau Brathwaite's interest in the figure of the Creole also attempts to use the encounter in its Caribbean and historical specificity as well as to privilege a process of creolization that could produce a new 'wholeness'.¹¹¹ This tendency is strongly present in Fanon even though he is less identified with Caribbean space. In Fanon, it is exhibited in poetic form, through the narrative shifts identified earlier in this chapter. It is also present in the notion of global solidarity versus national particularity that characterizes *Wretched*, and in the more personal struggle between individual and collective consciousness, between reality and utopia in *Black Skin*.¹¹²

We might say, by way of conclusion, that the trauma that marked the encounter was the trauma of historical rupture and of erasure of subjectivity. The continuities we see thematically and aesthetically through the mapping of postcolonial francophone writing by encounter thus carry the history of that traumatic encounter without repeating it. The aesthetically recognizable continuities tell of a history that was never possessed, particularly in the poignancy of Caribbean reality that marked, indelibly, all of francophone writing in sensibility and timbre from its incipience. In literature, the refusal to repeat is not just a question of poetic individuality; it can be read as a historical imperative for healing. Glissant writes: 'Diversion is not a useful ploy unless it is nourished by reversion: not a return to the longing for origins, to some immutable state of Being, but a return to the point of entanglement, from which we were forcefully turned away; that is where we must ultimately put to work the forces of creolization, or perish.'¹¹³ Making detours in form,

postcolonial writing in the francophone voice resolutely returns to the point of entanglement and endlessly creolizes the literary space.

Notes

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Négritude and postcolonial literature

H. ADLAI MURDOCH

Négritude can be defined as an aesthetic and literary movement that began in the 1930s. It centred on the creative and expressive potential of black consciousness, and through its transnational scope became one of the pre-emptive cultural phenomena of the twentieth century. Abiola Irele has proffered a comprehensive definition of Négritude as a ground-breaking literary and cultural phenomenon whose primary accomplishment was the validation and valorization of a wide-ranging black aesthetic. He writes,

In its immediate reference, Négritude refers to the literary and ideological movement of French-speaking black intellectuals, which took form as a distinctive and significant aspect of the comprehensive reaction of the black man to the colonial situation, a situation that was felt and perceived by black people in Africa and in the New World as a state of global subjection to the political, social and moral domination of the West.¹

Négritude was engendered and flourished in Paris in the mid 1930s, largely as a response to the implicit superiority of white colonizing cultures; it was led and fed by the writings of two black scholars from the French colonies, Aimé Césaire of Martinique and Léopold Sédar Senghor of Senegal. Both of these colonial subjects would go on to become major literary figures, and each would play a leading role in the political life of their respective countries of origin; Senghor became the first president of an independent Senegal, and Césaire served simultaneously as mayor of the Martiniquan capital, Fort-de-France, and as Martinique's representative in the French National Assembly for over forty-five years.

Négritude and postcolonial literature

Bridging the boundaries between literary, cultural and political discourses, Négritude emerged at a moment that was arguably the apogee of Europe's

colonial appropriation of its Others; in any event, there was neither hint nor possibility of the material realities and hierarchies of the colonial encounter being superseded when its formative writings began to appear in the early to mid 1930s. Indeed, the 300-year-long trajectory of colonialism was still going from strength to strength, marked by such recent events as the Berlin Conference of 1885 that witnessed the partition and colonial apportioning of Africa, and the 1931 Paris Colonial Exposition that lauded the diversity and depth of France's intercontinental stature as a colonial power. Commemorating the centenary of the conquest of Algeria, the French government brought people from the colonies to Paris for this extravaganza and had them (re)create native arts, crafts and dwellings, including the reconstruction of African, Arab, Polynesian and Asian buildings; the whole production attracted over 33 million visitors over its six-month duration. Essentially empire and the colonial enterprise were represented as mutually beneficial to colonizer and colonized, producing colonial subjects whose loyalty was unquestioned and whose natural resources, goods and services enriched the hexagon.

Such epoch-defining events served to belie the harsh reality that the colonial history of Third World peoples in general, and of the Caribbean people in particular, is a history of marginalization and of a subjection to a discourse of division and othering. This alternative perspective succinctly encodes the background to the struggle of these peoples to establish a cultural and discursive identity of their own. The appropriation of the identity, property and traditions of the colonized by virtue of their representation as intrinsically deprived, benighted and inferior has been shown to be the typical pattern of the colonization process. Inherent in this process is the suppression of national identity and culture, where, as Abdul JanMohamed puts it: 'The colonialist destroys without any significant qualms the effectiveness of indigenous economic, social, political, legal and moral systems and imposes his own versions of these structures on the Other.'² The operation of this dialectic is the crux of the colonial relationship, legitimizing negation and erasure, and reinscribing the sense of inferiority and insufficiency which the colonized traditionally attempt to overcome through mimetic replication of the Other. The critical role of this paradigm in the production of strategies of circumscription calculated to perpetuate procedures of systematized exclusion has been outlined by Fredric Jameson, who inscribes the negation of the colonial subject as 'a strategy of representational containment, which scarcely alters the fundamental imperialist structure of colonial appropriation'; Jameson goes on to further point out that the ultimate result for the colonial subject of the discursive

absence generated by this structural opposition is enforced nonentity: 'the mapping of the new imperial world system becomes impossible, since the colonized other who is its essential other component or opposite number has become invisible'.³ From this perspective, the subjection to a colonial discourse may be seen as an effective means of denying identity and expression to an entire category of marginalized nationalities.

If it is now an accepted convention to date the birth of postcolonial studies as discourse analysis from the publication of Edward Said's *Orientalism* in 1978, postcolonialism as literary criticism and practice was arguably established by the publication of Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin's *The Empire Writes Back* (1989). Further theoretical refinements were put in place by Robert Young (*White Mythologies*, 1990, *Colonial Desire*, 1995), Homi K. Bhabha (*Nation and Narration*, 1990, *The Location of Culture*, 1994), Henry Louis Gates Jr ('Race', *Writing, and Difference*, 1985) and Paul Gilroy (*The Black Atlantic*, 1993).⁴ But while such analyses have provided key terms and conditions for theoretical debates on the anglophone side, it is important to note that parallel discursive developments were taking place within a framework of francophone discourse. At bottom, both fields focused on similar issues, such as diaspora, hybridity, creolization, trans/nationalism, race, ethnicity, identity, community, and the need to confront and displace colonial history. As a result, the discursive origins of the term 'postcolonial' itself emerge from complex issues of racism, colonial domination, and the drive for identitarian and independent discourses.

As its discourses took shape, francophone postcolonial studies were inscribed through such ground-breaking works as Aimé Césaire's *Discourse on Colonialism* (1955), Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) and *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), Albert Memmi's *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (1957), Édouard Glissant's *L'Intention poétique* (1956), *Le Discours antillais* (1981) and *Poétique de la relation* (1990), Bernabé, Chamoiseau and Confiant's *Éloge de la créolité* and Chamoiseau and Confiant's *Lettres créoles* (1995), Abdelkébir Khatibi's *Maghreb pluriel* (1983) and Forsdick and Murphy's *Francophone Postcolonial Studies: A Critical Introduction* (2003).⁵ Clearly, then, the francophone postcolonial field emerged from the multiplicities and fragmentations of France's colonial encounter, and now encompasses the literary and cultural output of such far-flung areas as the Caribbean, the Maghreb, sub-Saharan Africa and Quebec. On the one hand, it is increasingly clear that these varying ethnic and colonial histories, cultures and political realities have produced a variety of different contexts and resonances for the term 'postcolonial'. At the

same time, it is also clear that Negritude was the key discursive avatar that made these subsequent discourses possible.

While Negritude did not specifically launch the drive for nationalism and national expression which has marked so many of France's former territories – most particularly in the latter half of the last century – the themes that it articulates do symbolize a desire for resistance to colonial hegemony on a transnational scale. In sum, the terms of its expression are aimed at the subversion and overturning of the master's discourse, replacing it with the authentic cultural and political voice of these subjected peoples. This transnationalism bent, then, while not overtly political, is underlaid by a desire for cultural autonomy which, in effect, will allow the political discourse to come into being. The evolution of Caribbean discursive strategy has been explored as a strategy of survival that responds to historical imposition by J. Michael Dash, 'French Caribbean Literature ... emerges as an example of the formal or symbolic response to an historical nightmare. What underpins the literary imagination [is] a collective amnesia ... Collective denial, a systematic camouflage, becomes a means of survival.'⁶ It became Negritude's task to supplant denial, allowing contestation and confrontation to become the discursive means of addressing the validation and valorization of Caribbean identity and culture, even while taking an initial step towards the exposure and exorciation of the brutality surrounding colonial hegemony and exploitation.

If Negritude sought to establish a discursive identity for the colonized figured by the experience of dissonance and division engendered by colonial alienation, one result of its attempts to articulate contestatory specificities of identity is the adoption of discursive forms which tend to displace and subvert the norms imposed by the colonizer upon the colonized; the divisions and pluralities of the colonial heritage are subsumed into the discursive matrix and turned to the construction of a new form of expression which adopts fragmentation and displacement as its primary strategy. This frames Negritude's direct challenge to the colonization process itself, which generates structures of erasure and exclusion and inscribes them as primary signifiers in the discourse by which the colonial subject is figured. At this stage, the colonial subject is constructed by the discourse of the Other as a signified in a relationship figured by discursive hierarchies. Chief among these is a mechanism which draws on racial and cultural codes for its continued operation, whereby the subject is in fact the product of a prejudicial interpellation based upon the presumption of racial difference. But the essentialist perspective inherent in such an approach is both dangerously reductive and fatally flawed, as Christian Delacampagne points out: 'Racism ... begins ... when one *derives* the cultural characteristics

of a given group from its biological characteristics. Racism is the reduction of the cultural to the biological, the attempt to make the first dependent on the second. Racism exists wherever it is claimed that a given social status is explained by a given natural characteristic.⁷⁷ Paradoxically, however, even as racism becomes the argumentative centre of a colonial discourse, its dichotomous, oppositional axes are increasingly imbricated in the very discourse it is creating. This self-contradictory basis undergirding French colonial practice would eventually be pointed out by both Césaire (*Discourse on Colonialism*) and Memmi (*The Coloniser and the Colonised*), but the discourse of Negritude would be a proactive precursor in this regard.

In sum, then, the codification of differential subjectivity inscribed in a colonial discourse ultimately overdetermines the perception of both colonizer and colonized, as Homi K. Bhabha has pointed out:

It is an apparatus that turns on the recognition and disavowal of racial/cultural/historical differences . . . It seeks authorisation for its strategies by the production of knowledges of coloniser and colonised which are stereotypical but antithetically evaluated. The objective of colonial discourse is to construe the colonised as a population of degenerate types on the basis of racial origin . . . colonial discourse produces the colonised as a fixed reality which is at once an 'other' and yet entirely knowable and visible.⁸

The result of this discursive paradigm is the structural subjection of both colonizer and colonized to the operation of the discourse; each subject functions only by virtue of its oppositional relationship to the other category. It is through this process of discursive assimilation and mutual cancellation that the hierarchical social and cultural roles of colonizer and colonized came to be encoded and to acquire acceptance, if not legitimation, through practice, and it would be by attacking the contradictions of assimilation and thus the core of colonial praxis that this discourse would be discredited and dismantled.

The colonial praxis of assimilation, which functions through the separation of the colonized person from his or her existential base implies, concomitantly, their gradual participation in their own history as full-fledged subject. But such an assumption is at the very least undermined, if not rendered completely invalid, by the colonial praxis itself; Albert Memmi, in this regard, points out specifically that: 'The colonised . . . is in no way a subject of history any more. Of course, he carries its burden, often more cruelly than others, but always as an object.'⁹ This process of objectification renders the colonized little more than a cipher, subject to the overdeterminations of discourse as well as to those of historical, political and social structures, rather than being able to act

independently, to influence and determine his or her own destiny as a subject. Memmi refers to this process as 'social and historical mutilation', and concludes that as a result of these sociocultural, political and discursive depredations, 'he cannot feel like a true citizen. As a result of colonisation . . . he is only what the coloniser is not.'¹⁰ The irony of being subjected to the assimilation process as a colonized subject is thus the construction of a negative identity, one whose defining characteristics exist only as the converse of those positive traits already appropriated by the colonizer for himself. Ultimately, the colonized subject is relegated to the paradoxical position of being defined in terms of marginalization, opposition and difference through having sought acceptance and recognition through the denial of cultural and subjective integrity implied by assimilation. It is the consequences of this process, both for the subject and the group at large, that Negritude would seek to locate, confront and overturn.

Although the colonial paradigm delineated above makes use of opposition and difference in order to figure both colonizer and colonized, for the latter group these negative impositions include the abdication of traditional models in order to embrace those of the oppressor, and empty gestures toward mimetic repetition and replication of the institutions of the Other. However, in addition to these complex patterns of social force, by far the preponderance of colonialism's discourses of division work to confine and marginalize colonial populations. In the francophone Caribbean of the 1930s, these paradigms both extended and exacerbated its historical relationship to the metropole. Over time, the twin terrors of colonialism and slavery had effectively negated and eradicated the possibility of any sense of black identity across the board, and the resultant instantiation of cultural and subjective inferiority within the black world tended over time to restrain the efforts of these peoples to define themselves and their culture through writing. Negritude's complex patterns of contestation and articulation would engage new modes of perception and articulation, an appropriation of history and heritage that would transform negative values into positive ones, stripping away stereotypes and illusions and replacing complicity with contestation.

Formation and influences

Negritude has long been subject to two competing interpretations, each of which has come to be associated with Césaire and Senghor respectively. On the one hand, Césaire's position saw Negritude as a historically based literary and cultural phenomenon, one that grew out of the related events of slavery, colonialism, racism and exploitation practised by the European powers against

black peoples, countries and cultures. For Césaire, then, Negritude served as the instantiation of a necessary discourse of black liberation. On the other hand, Senghor read Negritude as emerging from an essential, unchanging core of African experiences and belief systems, making it a discourse articulating the pride and praxis of African cultures. From either perspective, Negritude stands as the first iteration of a series of discourses that sought to define the writing emanating from France's colonial periphery on its own terms, rather than through the prism of models developed to reflect and evaluate hexagonal French literature. Angela Chambers puts the argument well, 'The critical models which were developed for the national literatures of the colonial powers proved to be totally inappropriate for the study of texts produced in the colonies and former colonies, as they tended to situate the authors and their works in relation to the national literary tradition, thus defining them as marginal and different.'¹¹ This cultural valorization led by Negritude became the leading edge of a wedge of black nationalism, as well as the vanguard of an internationally recognized literary movement, one arguably launched with the publication of Césaire's book-length poem, *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* (Return to My Native Land) in 1939. In this sense, Negritude was predicated on both literary and ideological tenets, providing a key framework for expressions of cultural identity and affirmation and the movements of political liberation that often followed in their wake. It thus represented a clear and unambiguous break with the past, as Irele puts it, 'The rehabilitation of Africa which stands out as the central project of Négritude thus represents a movement towards . . . the definition of a black collective identity, as well as of a new world view, derived from a new feeling for the African heritage of values and of experience.'¹² At the same time, it is clear that the social and cultural inequities that had long subtended the French colonial framework were henceforth to be foregrounded and interrogated.

It was precisely France's management of its colonial outposts and its insistence on a praxis of assimilation that gave rise to the historic Césaire-Senghor collaboration that was to produce Negritude; both met as colonial scholarship students in Paris. Césaire, who was born in Basse-Pointe, Martinique, in 1913, received an education whose several stages were the product of substantial family sacrifice, 'Secondary education, leading to the possibility of university training in France, required that families outside Fort-de-France make considerable sacrifices to send a child to the Lycée Schoelcher, the only secondary school for Guadeloupe, Guiana and Martinique until after the Second World War.'¹³ Césaire was indeed an exceptional student, leaving behind him an outstanding performance whose level of quality was beyond doubt.

James Arnold sums it up well, ‘On his graduation from the Lycée Schoelcher in 1931 Césaire took prizes in French, Latin, English, and history and was designated the best student overall.’¹⁴ Following this achievement, Césaire travelled to Paris in 1931 at the age of eighteen to attend the Lycée Louis-le-Grand on an educational scholarship.

Academically, what Césaire accomplished is best contextualized by James Arnold’s claim that, from an official standpoint, ‘in 1880 there were considered to be no more than one hundred and fifty children in Martinique who could benefit from a secondary school education’.¹⁵ Césaire continued his outstanding academic work at the Lycée Louis-le-Grand, and in 1935 he passed an entrance exam for the *École normale supérieure*. It was at this juncture that he made several key friendships that were to shape his own literary output as well as that of the greater francophone world for decades to come; from Senegal, he met Léopold Sédar Senghor and Ousmane Socé, and at almost the same time he also made the acquaintance of Léon Damas of French Guiana. Out of this friendship ‘there emerged a solidarity among francophone students of diverse cultural backgrounds that became the point of departure for a robust self-education about the extent and nature of the African heritage’.¹⁶ Together, he and his fellow students rebaptized and relaunched the literary review *L’Étudiant martiniquais* as *L’Étudiant noir* (The Black Student) in March 1935, with Césaire as co-editor; a venture aimed at bringing their black transatlantic colonies together on the common ground of blackness. The goal of the editorial collective, was ‘to foster dialogue between the ethnically fractured black student body around educational, racial, and cultural issues’, a perspective which led almost directly to the Negritude movement.¹⁷

The academic trajectory traced by Léopold Sédar Senghor shows several strong parallels with Césaire’s case. On graduating from the *Cours secondaire de Dakar*, a public institution, Senghor took first place in French, Latin, Greek and mathematics. He then obtained a partial scholarship to pursue literary studies in Paris. Sylvia Washington Bâ underlines the unique and exceptional nature of this accomplishment: ‘It was no mean feat to obtain such a scholarship from the Governor General of French West Africa for, despite Senghor’s very evident merit, young Africans were rarely if ever aided in their attempts at higher education, unless, of course, it was to pursue harmless veterinary studies, as many of them did.’¹⁸ Senghor then moved to Paris and graduated from the Lycée Louis-le-grand in 1931. During these years he forged important friendships while he read African American poets of the Harlem Renaissance and such French poets as Rimbaud, Mallarmé, Baudelaire, Verlaine and Valéry. The end result of this strategic combination of studies and encounters – among

those he met were Aimé Césaire, Léon Damas, Georges Pompidou, Alain Locke, Jean Price-Mars and Claude McKay – was an increasing disillusionment with the political realities of French colonialism, as a result of which ‘he began to question the validity of his situation as an *assimilé*’.¹⁹ As this exposure to other countries and cultures led him to recognize the importance of the cultural revolution already under way among blacks from various and sundry locations, the expression of his ‘integral being’ within a larger context of anti-colonialism assumed ever greater importance for Senghor.

Both Césaire and Senghor thus became strongly influenced by the potential for rehabilitating black history and culture already evinced by such recent movements as the Harlem Renaissance, and admired greatly the work of such poets as James Weldon Johnson, Jean Toomer and Claude McKay. In contrast to Césaire, Senghor’s approach tended to valorize the ‘two fundamentally different yet complementary civilizations – black and white, African and European’ – that had shaped his cultural and intellectual perspective.²⁰ Senghor’s call for a new humanism based on culture would draw on this burgeoning drama of complementarities, leading ultimately to ‘the intellectual exchange and renewal of African and European civilizations, [and] would also become the linchpin of Senghor’s black humanism, his Negritude, his new Francophone Negro’.²¹ For Senghor, then, the struggle against assimilation was not in and of itself a struggle against white culture per se, but more of a personal and political positioning, an additional and alternative grounding of the self.

This group of Paris-based black intellectuals began to articulate an evolving set of politically and culturally oriented discourses. René Menil, a constituent member of the Parisian group that published the radical manifesto *Légitime Défense* (Legitimate Defence) in 1932, was a major influence on Césaire, and would join him later in launching the Martinique-based periodical *Tropiques*. Of even greater importance was the salon of Mademoiselle Paulette Nardal, a principal point of congregation for French and international blacks in Paris between 1929 and 1934, and indeed Paulette Nardal was the only woman whose work would be featured in *L’Étudiant noir*. While the position Nardal took in the journal advocated the internationalization of black consciousness, others, like Gilbert Gratiant, poet and professor at the Lycée Schoelcher, seemed to advocate a strategic combining of black and white cultures. But it was Césaire who, in his article ‘Nègreries: jeunesse noire et assimilation’, spoke most strongly to the need to recognize and affirm the validity of black culture and of the colonized black subject. In accusative, unassailable terms, he ‘decr[ied] West Indian assimilation and advocat[ed] the creation of a new self

rooted in the rediscovery of the authentic self – the creation of race consciousness'. The necessity to articulate the various facets of the black experience seemed to him to be unquestionable. The need to rescue authenticity from assimilation was both urgent and salutary, 'The assimilated Negro lives inauthentically. It is only through . . . liv[ing] authentically one's situation as black, as decreed by nature, that the negro saves himself from madness.'²² Recognizing and confronting this situation would prove to be the most effective means of contesting and conquering the history of black marginality and inferiority.

Much of this stemmed from a group dynamic centred on discussion, disagreement, and the fearless exchange of ideas. Earlier, Nardal had founded the shortlived *Revue du monde noir* (Review of the Black World), whose six issues were published from 1931 to 1932, introducing black French intellectuals to the work of such thinkers as Langston Hughes and Alain Locke; the group that frequented her salon was also influenced by the presence in Paris of the French Guyanese author René Maran, the author of *Batouala*, which had won the French Prix Goncourt in 1921 and had subsequently been banned in French African colonies. Further, the post-World War I period in Paris was witness to an increased cohesion of African and Caribbean blacks. Historically, all these groups had been pitted against each other, subject to the colonial practice of divide and rule; indeed, in a telling interview, Léon Damas aptly characterized this situation thus, 'there was ready opposition of the Martiniquan to the Guadeloupean, to the Guyanese or to the African. People tried to make us believe, for example, that West Indians were superior to Africans.'²³ However, the growing social and cultural tensions of 1920s Paris were themselves exacerbated by a rising tide of racism and exoticism, so that these colonials were reduced to their otherness even as they were increasingly faced with a situation where 'unemployment emerged unchecked alongside xenophobia, racism, and paternalism'. As a result, colonized blacks in the metropole came to see little difference between African- and Caribbean-oriented discrimination, and in fact 'many Antilleans . . . came to realize that the racist capriciousness and inequities experienced by Africans imperiled them as well'.²⁴ Given this turn of events, then, when this group of student intellectuals launched *L'Étudiant noir*, taking a principled stand against black cultural assimilation by encouraging the exploration and valorization of 'the singularity . . . of the black historical experience', this moment became of key importance in the nascent world of black expression; taken together, the articles collected in *L'Étudiant noir* framed Negritude as a literary and ideological movement of French-speaking black intellectuals, one which reflected a revolutionary and transformational reaction to the colonial situation. It marked a revalorization of Africa and Africans

on the part of displaced colonial blacks, affirming an overwhelming pride in black heritage and culture, and contesting the historical stigmatization and pejorative negativity attached to blacks and blackness and reconstructing them in a new, alternative framework of culture and accomplishment.

Gregson Davis emphasizes Césaire's counter-assimilationist role here, pointing out that 'It is against this backdrop of strenuous intergenerational debate on the issue of Antillean racial and cultural identity that Césaire's gesture of re-naming the student organ *L'Étudiant Noir* (as opposed to its previous title, *L'Étudiant Martiniquais*) acquires a certain symbolic importance.'²⁵ It was this issue that witnessed the inaugural use of the word 'negritude'. And while James Arnold emphasizes the role of the increased recognition of African culture in these colonial students' worldview, he gives to Césaire the honour of 'coini[ng] the neologism *négritude*, calling for a resurrection of black values ... being rooted in black history through African language and tribal customs was surely communicated to him as an ideal relation to life, one of which West Indians had been deprived by reason of the combined effects of colonialism and slavery'.²⁶ In this inaugural issue, dated 1 March 1935, the ideas espoused in Césaire's article 'Jeunesse noire et assimilation' took a militant stand against the universalist principles and practices that had long undergirded *francité* and its colonialist avatar, 'Si l'assimilation n'est pas folie, c'est à coup sûr sottise, car vouloir être assimilé, c'est oublier que nul ne peut changer de faune; c'est méconnaître "altérité" qui est loi de Nature' ('If assimilation is not madness, it is certainly stupidity, for seeking out assimilation is to forget that character is immutable; it is to misread "alterity", which is Nature's law').²⁷ In the end, *L'Étudiant noir* managed roughly a half-dozen issues before closing in 1936. During this period Césaire and Senghor, along with their friend and collaborator, the French Guyanese poet Léon Damas, culled from these influences an enabling framework for rehabilitating and resituating the articulation of black consciousness and its attendant cultural expression, even within an ongoing context of colonialism and racism.

Philosophy and practice: Césaire

For Césaire, Negritude was predicated on the view that the specific framework that historically contextualized black existence could be directly traced to the slavery and racism that shaped the colonial enterprise. More generally, Negritude sought to ground and, indeed, to legitimize the difference of the black aesthetic both in a set of biological concepts meant to firmly separate the black from the white experience and in a literary and cultural movement that

developed to express its aesthetic. Initially, however, from an artistic perspective, the expressive framework of Negritude drew heavily on French surrealism. This radical mode of poetic expression, which first made its appearance in post-war France, afforded a means of discursive liberation from an entrenched French rationalism through the abandonment of traditional aesthetic and expressive constraints. To this expressive vein must be added the work of Leo Frobenius, whose ground-breaking *History of African Civilization*, and particularly its exploding of the myth of Negro barbarity as a European invention, was of cardinal importance in expanding Negritude's capacity to valorize Africa-based civilizations and cultures.²⁸ This concatenation of beliefs and arguments accounts for Negritude's general proposition that what was unique to the black experience, what separated it from Western subjectivity and provided the basis for the new aesthetic, was a predetermined predilection for art, emotion, intuition and rhythm, which were then opposed to supposedly Western characteristics of order, reason and logic. These patterns of non-traditional expression laid the foundation for the appearance and argumentation of Negritude.

In literary terms, and especially in Césaire's *Cahier*, which is typically seen as its foundational text, Negritude functions as an assertion of pride, an illumination and affirmation of the stature of black subjectivity. The sentiments voiced in the poem derive their importance equally from their form as well as their content, as a rediscovered empathy with his African ancestry enables the poet to join lyricism to self-revelation. This black subject revels in the rebirth of a black identity that is both historically and culturally grounded; Negritude becomes a framework for creative cultural expression that valorizes black civilizations past and present and thus, at least in the *Cahier*, goes beyond a reductive essentialism based on biology. Ultimately, what is emphasized is the *process* of self-discovery and self-actualization, an ongoing voyage into blackness that replaces the static acceptance of colonial inferiority with the active uncovering of alternative identitarian sites.

Philosophy and practice: Senghor

Senghor differed from Césaire in both his vision and his practice of Negritude; for him, opposing the values of Europe to those of the African world led him to valorize life forces as the essential framework grounding his poetic portraits of African civilization. Arriving in Paris in 1928 on a partial scholarship in literary studies, he studied at the Sorbonne. It was during this period that he began to be influenced by his meetings and discussions with Césaire, Maran, McKay and

the Haitian author and intellectual Dr Jean Price-Mars. Gradually he formed the belief that blacks could benefit by assimilating European culture without severing themselves from their own cultural origins. He promulgated a return to historical and cultural sources through the cultivation of indigenous languages and traditions, and sought to instantiate this value system through the vocabulary, themes and symbolism of his published poetry. His *Hosties noires* and the collection *Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie nègre et malgache de langue française* appeared to mark the centenary of the French abolition of slavery in 1948, joining the already-published collections by Césaire in rehabilitating the perceived ‘primitive’ character of black colonial civilizations.

Irele posits Senghor’s work as embodying ‘the most coherent expression of Négritude considered as a body of ideas relative to the identity and the destiny of the black man, and to his experience of the world’.²⁹ Along these lines, Senghor’s primary themes are alienation and exile, along with a recognition of the central role in subjective development played by the culture and tradition of his African homeland. The importance of the cultural heritage that he was thus able to describe and define for his fellow blacks cannot be overemphasized; as Irele puts it, ‘Senghor’s Négritude defines itself, in its immediate aspects, as a preoccupation with the fact of racial belonging, and as an effort to clarify its particular significance.’³⁰ This insistence on race was predicated on, and a product of, the perception of race as a key component of the colonial framework and the group relationships arising therefrom; in other words, given that racial dichotomies and hierarchies were visibly of key importance to the pursuit of colonialism, this suggested response was predicated on this racism’s hierarchical inversion. The solution appeared to lie in valorizing an alternative set of racial claims, as Irele explains, ‘The opposition of races appears to be the overriding character of the colonial relationship. It engendered in most colonized peoples the immediate association of the political with the racial ... The underlying assumption is that each race is endowed with a distinctive nature and embodies, in its civilization, a particular spirit.’³¹ This valorization of the key tenets and practices of cultural patrimony became a catalyst for black self-realization across the board, demonstrating Negritude’s capacity for engendering pride in authenticity and racial difference in a variety of cultures and locales. Much more so than did Césaire’s, his writing stressed claims for a particular black emotional and psychological experience, an affective rapport that draws on a specifically African relationship to the forces of the universe that is separate and apart from that of the West. Where the black African perceives and internalizes in a subjective way, the argument goes, relating to external stimuli in primarily emotional terms, the Westerner,

in turn, relates to the world through analysis and reason. This is not to claim a monopoly on either category for either group, in his view; while not denying the rational power of blacks, or the emotive capacities of whites, Senghor does see very real differences in temperament and worldview that determine the ways in which certain cultures view and relate to the world.

To a certain extent, the parallel colonial and Parisian experiences of Césaire and Senghor undergirded both the similarities and the differences in their conceptualization and articulation of Negritude. For both subjects, separated by half a world while yet united by the common praxes of French colonialism, their arrival in and experience of the metropole, and the newfound discovery of differences in civilization and culture that separated the colonial centre from its periphery, illuminated the harsh realities of colonial subjection even as it exposed the limits and contradictions of assimilation. But even to question this key tenet of colonial policy amounted to an intrinsically risky move, as Sylvia Washington Bâ points out:

Senghor set about investigating the historical and political facts of slavery and colonization and the latter's concomitant policy of assimilation. To question the validity of this policy, of its explicit and implicit assertions, was to question an entire system of values, an entire way of thinking. Although it was a partial success in the intellectual and academic spheres, the policy of assimilation left much to be desired at the social and human levels. The situation of the *assimilé* in the context of the colonial reality is thus an essentially false one.³²

The recognition of these systemic limitations, and of his own compromised position as an *assimilé*, arguably led Senghor away from the French colonial paradigm and towards a more independent and indigenous framework for cultural expression. In his view, recognizing the history and value of traditional African cultural practices would lead to the smashing of colonial shackles and the implicit political and cultural impositions that accompanied them.

Here, however, Senghor was at an advantage, a locational and cultural one conferred on him from birth: 'As an African, Senghor was better qualified to evaluate the origins and traditions of the black man than his West Indian and American brothers who had never known an authentic African tradition. Mother Africa was for them a mystical and magic land, eminently desirable but never possessed.'³³ In other words, Senghor did not so much discover his Africanness, but rather was led to valorize the materiality of his African history and culture, affirming – in contradistinction to the received colonial perspective – that it was a tradition worthy of pride, of acclaim.

It is key aspects of the resulting worldview, in all its complexity and contradiction, that Senghor would seek not only to incorporate into the discourse of Negritude, but to inflect with these new values of black self-respect. As the new ideology took shape, this core of blackness permeated its discourse to the extent that its values would become central to Negritude's formal praxis of self-expression. In this poetic articulation of Africa's view of human life forces, the interlocking importance of such varied categories as naming, mysticism, imagery, religion and ongoing inscriptions of both the ancestors' role and the vast world beyond the visible realm that frames the network of life forces subtending human existence became the fertile ground of Senghor's expression of an African-derived blackness. This vast world of cultural signification, both backdrop and catalyst for the affirmative articulation of the transnational experiences of an unacknowledged, devalorized and underrepresented black world, is ineluctably linked through a set of disparate elements that themselves are symbolically and symbiotically joined both by colonialism and by a diasporic continuity with Africa. Following from the internalization of the subject's openness to this complex network of life forces, one primary outcome of such an inscription in a range of largely intangible forces lies in an increased openness to the intuitive and the emotive patterns of subjective awareness that emerge from this black world. The basis of this relation, Senghor argues, is specific to the patterns of black experience, and is precisely what separates – but does not hierarchize – the universes of colonizer and colonized. Sylvia Washington Bâ explains the critical tenets of Senghor's perspective this way: 'the black African ... abandons himself to the external stimulus, whether person, object, or force. His relationship with the external stimulus is in the order of emotion because of his disposition toward it and his subjective reaction toward it.'³⁴ As a result, an increasingly controversial binary division of the contemporary subject, pressed into overdetermined groups marked and characterized by logic and reason on the one hand, and by emotion and intuition on the other, was put into place as the discursive ground of Negritude's vision of a bifurcated black versus white world.

While a parallel racialized and bifurcated perspective had arguably served as the more or less explicit rationale for slavery and colonialism, here its key principles were deliberately appropriated, subverted and inverted, as Irele makes clear: 'Each race has its genius, and is apt for a particular kind of expression conforming with its genius ... The whole edifice of Senghor's *Négritude* rests on this foundation: the idea of a collective soul of the black race constituting the unifying concept of "the collective personality of black peoples" which Senghor makes synonymous with *Négritude*.'³⁵ As exclusionary

and essentialist as this argument might seem today, it extended an elaborate and, perhaps, necessary ontology to the concept of Negritude, allowing it to provide an enabling framework for literally hundreds of African and Caribbean writers to express their vision of their own cultural and historical experience well into the 1960s.

Césaire's *Cahier*

Most accounts of literary activity during the period agree that Césaire began the *Cahier* in 1935. The facts point to a visit with a friend to the Adriatic coast of Yugoslavia, and there – moved to reminisce, it is said, by the name of one of the coastal islands, Martinska – he began what would be universally viewed as his *chef d'oeuvre*. The composition of this long poem took several years, during which he continued to work on a Diplôme d'Études Supérieures in Paris. By 1939, when Césaire returned to Martinique permanently, the poem had gone through several iterations, and its first version had already been published in the journal *Volontés*. In between this event and the poem's final, 'definitive' version that appeared under the auspices of *Présence Africaine* in 1956, two other versions appeared, both in 1947, in New York and Paris respectively. This continuous return to origins, so to speak, points to what Gregson Davis calls Césaire's 'long-term engagement in revision that testifies to his creative obsession'.³⁶ Thomas Hale, in a ground-breaking article, explains both the discursive and the cultural impact that the poem made upon its appearance: 'Against the backdrop of a double sense of alienation – separation from his Caribbean homeland, separation from the African heritage which his people refuse to accept – the narrator protests, with a volcanic eruption of invective, the centuries of cultural destruction which Blacks have suffered at the hands of the west.'³⁷ If, at this early juncture, Césaire's goal was to speak on behalf of the disenfranchised, to give voice to the desire for expression of the voiceless, to 'play the role of major spokesman for the black world',³⁸ it should be remembered that global black culture faced a double dilemma embodied and enclosed in the complex confines of contemporary colonialism. On the one hand, French assimilationist praxis was notorious for its systematic suppression or erasure of the indigenous and the replacement of this last by hexagonal structures; what this meant in a material sense was that black populations and cultures colonized by France, both in sub-Saharan Africa and particularly in the Caribbean, 'had no other way to express themselves in print than in French'. On the other hand, and in a much more transnational way, the poem 'signified a response to the century-old problem of the alienation of blacks in history. Once upon a

time, the blacks inhabited their homeland: a whole continent. And then there was the diaspora which all over the world left the blacks enslaved or colonized, with neither a present nor a future nor even a language of their own.³⁹ In other words, finding not only a fresh framework but an innovative discourse to articulate Negritude's alternative to these imposed patterns of marginalization and exploitation would be the central challenge and focus of Césaire's oeuvre.

It is this need to locate and put into practice a discourse of cultural and colonial contestation that contextualizes the content and form of the *Cahier*. This is the literal and metaphorical path forged in Césaire's poem when, as Hale points out, the narrator attempts his return 'to rediscover the cultural heritage of his people in Africa and thus achieve a new sense of individual and collective self-identity'.⁴⁰ In these terms, the characteristics of black culture implicit to its connection with and articulation by and through Negritude appeared to be at odds with the accepted tenets of rationalism, universalism and Christianity which had mediated the principles and practices of colonialism and slavery. At bottom, Negritude would seek to transcend these discursive practices by proposing an alternative to them; such a discourse would accomplish the de-alienation, so to speak, of the black world by embodying the antithesis of the West and by emphasizing an incendiary, if not indeed an insurrectional vocabulary. Indeed, the foundational and formative importance of this initial discourse cannot be overstated, as Mireille Rosello points out: 'Most critics, however, tend to accept the founding "cri nègre" as a successful moment of awakening which enabled the beginning of a different type of communication.'⁴¹ Thus the important self-definitive role of what Hale calls 'the poet's extremely rich and often novel vocabulary, his dazzling and occasionally surrealistic imagery, and, most importantly, the maintenance of a seemingly unstructured flow of verse and prose narrative'.⁴² In its deliberate articulation of a complex and different worldview, then, Césaire's iconic poem broke literal, figurative and necessary new ground. Here, his critical use of existing language forms, as well as his invention and instantiation of new ones, proved to be a ground-breaking act of discursive liberation for the peoples whose culture and history Negritude was meant to embody. Keith Walker clearly encapsulates the indelible nature of Césaire's language use:

he himself chose to write in French with a firm resolve to manipulate the French language to express his own particularity . . . There results a compensatory linguistic aggression: on the one hand, the structures of the language as manipulated consummately in ways that inspire admiration and awe; on the other, the defiant self seeks to undermine and sabotage the structures and tradition of the language.⁴³

It is this strategic combination of awe and defiance that sums up Césaire's approach to the formal and thematic structures undergirding Negritude's expressive framework.

In a certain way, what Césaire was trying to accomplish was encapsulated in a poem he wrote as part of a public exchange with the Marxist Haitian poet René Depestre some fifteen years after the publication of the *Cahier*. Despite its temporal distance from the earlier poem, however, it asserts and reinforces key aspects of the poet's marriage of the discursive and the political in his approach to Negritude. In 'Le Verbe marronner', Césaire adopts as his figurative model the ground-breaking acts of resistance carried out by groups of slaves across the Caribbean when they not only ran away from the plantations but successfully resisted colonial armies and established independent communities of free black people. While the significance of the numerous Maroon communities of run-away slaves that sprang up across the Caribbean as a whole can scarcely be overstated as a symbol of an insistent black resistance and self-affirmation, the two Maroon Wars in Jamaica, fought between British colonists and Maroon armies, are of overwhelming importance in a number of ways. On the one hand, these wars underscored the successful nature of the Maroon communities, particularly given the fact that the colonists were roundly defeated by the Maroons on both occasions, forcing the British to sign peace treaties with them. Indeed, Jamaica was home to more slave rebellions than all of the other British islands combined, underlining both the fierce-minded desire for independence on the part of slaves in the Caribbean in general and in Jamaica in particular, and the extent to which the insistence on an iconoclastic independence was indelibly inscribed in the Jamaican psychological landscape. In Césaire's view, the material and symbolic value of these acts of resistance and independence applied to blacks within and outside the Caribbean, and his instantiation of the Maroon as folkloric hero figure would be recuperated several decades later by another Martiniquan poet, novelist and theorist, Édouard Glissant.

Specifically, Césaire makes use of the poem's content and vocabulary to remind Depestre of a number of seminal events in Haitian revolutionary history, from the drum (*tom-tom*) and its role in the Revolution, to the fervour of Boukman and the key meeting he organized in the woods (*woods of your birth*), to the plantations set alight by the slaves (*our night in flames*). The whole culminates in Césaire's coining of another neologism, and his encouraging Depestre to join him, as Gregson Davis cogently states: 'In inventing a verb, 'to maroon' (*marronner*), based on the noun denoting slaves who escaped from the New World plantation to live in autonomous communities, the speaker

hoists aloft the banner of artistic freedom and resistance to cultural totalitarianism.⁴⁴ These primary motifs of self-definition and self-liberation can be traced back to their earlier function as the principal undergirding structures of the *Cahier*.

In a key sense, then, the *Cahier* can be read as a journey of exploration and rediscovery on several levels; these would include, but not necessarily be limited to, the personal, mediating Césaire's (re)discovery of an inner self, the political (the liberation of Africa-based cultures), the geocultural (the rehabilitation and valorization of views on the colony of Martinique), and the discursive (the construction and articulation of a new, alternative discourse). Through this ongoing construction of a lyric subject, the poet is able to adopt a variety of positionalities and perspectives in order to illuminate the dynamic nature of this discursive quest. Thus what follows the famous opening line 'at the end of the wee hours' is a disconcerting opening image of Martinique, but one necessary to highlight the exploitation and misery that are the seamy underbelly of colonialism, 'this town sprawled-flat toppled from its common sense, inert, winded under its geometric weight of an eternally renewed cross'. Here, the material reality of 1930s Martinique is laid bare, the daily horrors of Fort-de France – and by extension those of the other colonized islands – encapsulated in 'the hungry Antilles, the Antilles pitted with small-pox, the Antilles dynamited by alcohol, stranded in the mud of this bay, in the dust of this town sinisterly stranded'.⁴⁵ The false rationales of colonialism and assimilation are clearly exposed and stigmatized.

From functioning as a spokesman for the black and Caribbean communities, Césaire next extends his perspective to include a variety of victimized and marginalized races; here the 'Kaffir-man', the 'Jew-man', the 'Hindu-man' and the 'Harlem-man' are translated into a universalized figure of human oppression, 'the famine-man, the insult-man, the torture-man you can grab anytime, beat up, kill ... without having to account to anyone'.⁴⁶ Here, the self-proclaimed humanism of Western culture is incontrovertibly shown to be a sham, a hollow falsehood that arrogates to itself the power of violence, of torture, of life and death over so-called inferior races, a totalized system of repression exposed by according the power of speech to the colonized. Indeed, the poet soon repeats and reinforces the liberatory theme and purpose of his articulative act as he directly addresses the personification of his colonial island home: 'Embrace me without fear ... it is for you I shall speak ... "My mouth shall be the mouth of those calamities that have no mouth, my voice the freedom of those who break down in the solitary confinement of despair"'.⁴⁷ Here, vocal empowerment implies political empowerment, as poetry as speech,

as weapon and as revolutionary act is clearly inscribed as the enabling framework of difference that makes possible the expression of Negritude as a tool of colonial contestation.

Ultimately, Negritude embodies and encompasses this broad-based act of self-affirmation through which the poet aims to accomplish the political and cultural rehabilitation of the black world. Through an intricate combination of personification and metaphor, this instantiation of Negritude as a discourse of subjective valorization *avant la lettre* necessitates what Thomas Hale calls an 'imaginary voyage to an Africa his creator has never visited', as 'the narrator first attempts a temporal and spatial return to the origins of the race'.⁴⁸ The layers of colonially induced alienation that he confronts here are simultaneously singular and plural, as the poet speaks to and for his Martiniquan self, his Martiniquan compatriots, and their fellow blacks in similar circumstances across the (third) world colonized by Europe. The poem then arguably reaches its climax as the poet actively engages with the world and the word of Negritude itself to define the boundaries of the new world that this discourse has mediated and engendered. He accomplishes this task in several stages, first by deliberately and methodically reversing the host of negative stereotypes through which the black world has come to be characterized and denigrated. His listing of a series of negative categories and practices inscribes these subjected groups by appropriating the specific terms of their denigration: 'those who have invented neither powder nor compass / those who could harness neither steam nor electricity / those who explored neither the seas nor the sky'.⁴⁹ Obviously, this list of non-accomplishment is a selective one, meant to highlight both the limitations of Western knowledge of its Others and the extent to which such limited perspectives have promoted rather than prevented the enforcement of colonial submission. This is quickly followed by some of the most famous lines in the poem, lines whose significance stems in large part from the fact that, at this climactic moment, Negritude is defined, at least initially, by what it is not: 'my negritude is not a stone, its deafness hurled against the clamor of the day / my negritude is not a leukoma of dead liquid over the earth's dead eye / my negritude is neither tower nor cathedral'.⁵⁰ From this litany of inanimate negativity, the discursive shift to the instantiation of a palette of latent force, one that reverses pre-existing hierarchies of domination and submission, is almost immediate: 'it takes root in the red flesh of the soil / it takes root in the ardent flesh of the sky'.⁵¹ This reversal accomplishes the historical and cultural rehabilitation of an entire people: 'I say right on! The old negritude / progressively cadavers itself / the horizon breaks, recoils and expands ... And the nigger scum is on its feet ... unexpectedly

standing / standing in the hold . . . standing in the blood / standing / and / free.⁵² Through this succession of images of affirmation and verticality, the valorization both of Negritude and of the history and ethnicity that it figures is firmly and inalterably put into place.

It is clear, then, that neither the content nor the form of Césaire's oeuvre can be divorced from the political, economic, historical and sociocultural problematics and hierarchies of the colonial paradigm impinging on his island home of Martinique. In Lilyan Kesteloot's words: 'Césaire effectively gathers together the sum of his own experience and the destiny of his race into a single violent political act, and fuses them in such a way as to make any future scission impossible.'⁵³ The formulation of this discourse articulated the values of both past and present, undoing the effects of centuries of negation to foster and create a new sense of pride and self-worth in the very fact of being black. Césaire addresses and interrogates the very bases of the concept of identity, pitting the void of the past against the rewritten plenitude of values being forged in that very moment of the present. Indeed, Negritude's literary production was not only addressing the issue of the reformation of the spiritual bases of black existence, but was simultaneously accomplishing it materially through that very production. As Sylvia Washington Bâ notes: 'It was this "dark night of the soul", this moral annihilation that obliged the exile to transcend his situation by refashioning it completely . . . the only answer was simple substitution . . . the first step was the understanding of the exact nature of the void.'⁵⁴ This capacity to fuse both thought and action into a polymorphous yet unified whole was one of the cardinal traits of Negritude, embodying its contemporary role as the pre-eminent discursive force in the reconstruction of the literary pluralities that make up the black diaspora.

On the other hand, however, it should also be recognized that the terms in which Negritude was formulated detracted from its claim to be the all-encompassing panacea for the ills afflicting black subjectivity. Specifically, here, the work of Léopold Sédar Senghor arguably exhibited a greater tendency to affirm and reinforce the very reductionist perceptions of blacks that it had set out to refute. In order to combat the established European notion that black culture was inferior, unworthy, and, for all practical purposes, non-existent, Negritude aimed at revising the traditional conception of Africa as a backward, benighted country with little in the way of cultural achievement and whose history had begun only with the arrival of whites. Unfortunately, in order to accomplish this revision, Senghor and, to some extent, Césaire, limited and assimilated African traits to rhythm, intuition and emotion while ascribing to the Western world the privileged monopoly of reason, analytical

thought and the capacity for scientific inventiveness.⁵⁵ The result of this separation and ascription of categories was a perpetuation of sociocultural myths of ‘nature’ versus ‘culture’, of the assimilation of the dominant discourse to the embodiment of norms of civilized thought, and the concurrent construction of alternative fields of discourse to accommodate and to counter the efforts of the less fortunate. In fact, from a broader perspective, such undertakings had proved a longstanding practice as a means of accommodating the challenge of alternative discourses, leading to the dichotomies of relative value effected with regard to Négritude and Western discourse; the ‘inferior’ features of rhythm and emotion provided fodder for the worst of the racial stereotypes, while an opposite but similarly flawed set of stereotypes allowed Western discourse to remain contentedly secure in the corroboration of its innate superiority. Such a reductive binary division, as Patrick Taylor points out, helped in fact to reinforce popular prejudices rather than destroy them, and contradicted the very equalities in perception that it was attempting to secure. Taylor argues that:

Négritude became a narcissistic contemplation of a contrived self; it reaffirmed the Manichaeism of European racism by romanticizing Africa, glorifying intuition over reason, and proudly presenting itself as the antithesis of European culture. By reaffirming black experience, but in a European way, the elite legitimated their own leadership without truly representing their people.⁵⁶

In other words, it can be argued that Négritude’s assertions turned out to be self-serving, vainglorious and foolhardily misguided, exacerbating rather than rectifying the reductive categorisations and misrepresentations under which Blacks in general, and colonial subjects in particular, had suffered for so many years. Indeed, upon closer examination, the great paradox of Négritude turned out to be that, contrary to its own intention, it carried out a perpetuation, rather than an elucidation or a cessation of false dichotomies and reductionist, racially-oriented norms and principles, artificially created in order to enhance the status and value of Western culture and, perhaps even more importantly, to denigrate and destroy any semblance of a legitimate subjectivity on the part of colonized peoples.

Conclusion

In retrospect, we may postulate that Négritude’s inalterable accomplishments were ultimately tempered by a twofold failure. On the one hand, while Négritude effected a necessary and ineluctable transformation in the representation of people of African descent and the terms of their self-articulation, its discourse arguably presented itself as an unconscious – though implicit – participant in the

denigrations and misrepresentations perpetrated upon colonized peoples by Western discursive practice. Indeed, this binary pattern may be summed up by what the novelist Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o has termed 'cultural engineering'. In his introduction to Amon Saba Saakana's *The Colonial Legacy in Caribbean Literature*, he points out, with reference to the principles undergirding the colonial encounter in Africa, that: 'cultural engineering had two aspects: the destruction of Africa's cultures, and the construction, in their place, of foreign cultures of the colonizer ... The aim was [to] make him look down upon his achievements, his capabilities, his vision of self; and to look up to Europe as the Alpha and Omega of human civilization.'⁵⁷ That Negritude should have compounded such gross discursive impositions by exacerbating and even implicitly participating in their production is at the very least a gross misperception of ongoing political realities.

Somewhat ironically, perhaps, one of the most piercing attacks on Césaire and the perceived shortcomings and contradictions of Negritude came from another Martiniquan author and activist, Raphael Confiant, in his *Aimé Césaire: une traversée paradoxale du siècle*, published in 1993. His controversial, and in some eyes, oedipal critique of the policies and legacy of the 'nègre fondamental' encompassed both Césaire's poetic and his political struggles against subjection and dehumanization. These critiques range from castigating Césaire's claims of the incapacity of Creole to express abstract ideas – what Confiant calls 'true linguistic schizophrenia for Martiniquans'⁵⁸ – to interrogating the shape and substance of the departmentalization relation negotiated by Césaire, and the rising tide of consumerism, neo-colonialism, and social and economic inequities that are part and parcel of departmentalization's politics of hexagonal domination. And although Césaire's eventual recognition of these anomalies would ultimately give rise to his famous phrase 'genocide by substitution', the perceived limitations and contradictions of his positionality in the poetic and political domains is the core of Confiant's lengthy disquisition on what he sees as the author's implicit acquiescence to a neo-colonial praxis of assimilation. For Confiant, of key importance among these Césairean paradoxes is what he calls

a complex of 'non-Africanness' or, more precisely, a 'deficit of Africanness', by which he means that Césaire 'posits the Antillean as a 'false Negro', ... an inauthentic being presenting a lack, a deficit of Africanness ... the true, the authentic Negro is in Africa and the Antillean must respectfully, almost filially, follow in his footsteps to find the true path (to his race and his culture).'⁵⁹

This implicit inauthenticity is Confiant's principal complaint against Césaire's Negritude vision. As he sees it, Césaire valorized Africanness at the expense of

Caribbean culture and the Caribbean subject. This vision is admittedly an iconoclastic one, but one that must be considered.

Negritude, then, certainly sought to discredit, if not dismantle, the colonial framework and the attendant racial hierarchies that subtended and extended it. For Negritude was in a certain sense a product of its time; it appropriated the racial basis of modern colonialism to undo the conflation of the political with the racial that was ultimately at the core of the colonial encounter. In poetic terms, the discourse of Negritude was ineluctably ground-breaking; in a memorial following Césaire's death in 2008, Michael Dash made clear the power of his vision, his language, and his legacy:

Césaire's visionary verse inaugurated a new way of writing and of envisioning new beginnings ... The kind of homecoming envisaged in Césaire's poem is less physical than poetic. It is about releasing the power of metaphor or re-establishing the bond between word and world. In writing back to the inauthentic, counterfeit verse of the past, Césaire sought a language that can genuinely represent all that was previously thought unworthy of poetry.⁶⁰

Despite its path-breaking accomplishments at the level of language, however, Negritude drew unconsciously on the binaries of the colonial era. It opened the way for a flood of creative black expression, but it would in time be superseded by alternative approaches to and theories of black identity. Critiques that would be levelled at Negritude by, *inter alia*, Frantz Fanon, the Martiniquan intellectual, and Wole Soyinka, the Nigerian novelist and Nobel laureate, would centre on the concept's racial grounding and its implicit essentialisms, contradictions and limitations, giving rise, for example, to the latter's famous dictum that 'the tiger does not proclaim its tigritude'; given the widely varying social and historical situations involved in the development of black culture, any theory that sought to contextualize and mediate this development needed to be deracialized and decoupled from the pitfalls of binary principles of representation. By moving away from a race-based analysis of culture to one that reflects the range of influences inflecting black historical reality, the differing cultural expressions of black people could be taken into account, catalysed, and valorized. In the francophone Caribbean, the theories of Césaire and Senghor would in time give way to the *antillanité* of Glissant and the *créolité* of Bernabé, Chamoiseau, and Confiant, among others, acknowledging the opening up of the categories of race to those of history, culture and politics, thereby superseding these binary, colonially driven structures to re-establish new boundaries for post-colonial identity.

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Publishing, prizes and postcolonial literary production

SANDRA PONZANESI

A new urge to understand the local vis-à-vis the global has materialized in commercial strategies – such as, for example, the leading role of powerful literary agents, publishing houses' promotion campaigns, international literary prizes, media coverage, internet sites – which all allow for the successful marketing of postcolonial writers to an international readership. This chapter addresses the relationship between postcolonial literature and the publishing industry, and focuses in particular on how institutions such as literary prizes have contributed towards shaping the field and have influenced the level of production, consumption and distribution.

Over the last three decades, in fact, unprecedented numbers of postcolonial authors have successfully managed to acquire visibility, celebrity and a lasting place in the canon by being awarded important literary prizes, such as the Nobel, Commonwealth, Pulitzer, Neustadt, Booker, Orange and many others, paving the way for a new, young generation of postcolonial literary jet-setters. Besides presenting an overview of the major authors who have entered the literary pantheon of the Nobel (Wole Soyinka, Nadine Gordimer, V.S. Naipaul, J.M. Coetzee), of the Booker (Salman Rushdie, Keri Hulme, Michael Ondaatje, Chinua Achebe), of the Commonwealth (Amitav Ghosh, Rohinton Mistry, Zadie Smith, Andrea Levy) or of the Neustadt (Nuruddin Farah, Patricia Grace), to name but a few laureates, this chapter also focuses on minor literary prizes that struggle to promote postcolonial literature in the vernacular languages, such as the African Noma literary prize or the Indian Sahitya Akademi award, or prizes that concentrate on specific geographical areas such as the Macmillan literary prize and the Caine Prize, both for Africa.

Nobel Prize in Literature (1901)

The Nobel Prize in Literature is one of the most cherished and authoritative institutions in the literary field and is considered to be the highest achievement a

living author can aspire to. One of the general requirements set by the Swedish Academy is that the prizes should be conferred on candidates who have bestowed 'the greatest benefit on mankind', by moving literature 'in an ideal direction'.¹ Richard Jewell commented that the understanding of the idealistic tendency as intended by Alfred Nobel (who was a utopian idealist, a radical anticleric and an unmarried man) was turned upside down by the Academy which, particularly in the first decade, gave a conservative turn to the notion of idealism interpreted more literally as the ideas of 'great style' and of 'universal interest'.²

As with any prize, the Nobel Prize is based on a process of inclusion and exclusion. It is not only renowned for its prestigious list of distinguished laureates but also for its resounding omissions. The list is haunted by the ghosts of many monumental figures for whom this illustrious prize remained elusive: Leo Tolstoy, Joseph Conrad, Henrik Ibsen, James Joyce, Henry James, Virginia Woolf, Franz Kafka, Marcel Proust, Jorge Luis Borges, Italo Calvino, Maguerite Yourcenar, to name but a few. As Burton Feldman notes: 'As the list of laureates makes clear, the Nobel Prize in literature is still far from being the global award it claims to be. Its prizes have repeatedly gone to writing in a few major European languages, primarily English, French, German, Spanish'.³ The history of the Nobel Prize does, indeed, see the prize being awarded to a disproportionate number of Scandinavian writers (almost one-seventh of the total), and the lack of the award to any writers from India apart from Tagore (who won the 1913 prize for a translation of his work), from Brazil or the Netherlands, and no Nobel Prize for work written in the Bantu or Malayalam languages, or any other 'minority language'.

One reason for this is the limited linguistic competence of the Swedish Academy jury. This renders the Nobel committee overly dependent on translations, the quality of which is notoriously capricious and also politically and commercially biased. Whereas the Nobel Prizes in science and peace are truly international awards, the prize in literature is not. However, moving beyond its familiar linguistic horizons will not, as such, make the prize international. An attempt was made in the last decade to have the prize compensate for its shortcomings and to redress the accusations that the prize is patriarchal and eurocentric. There has been, for example, an attempt to close the gender gap. Only eleven women have been literary laureates in almost a century: six in the first ninety years, and five since 1991 (Gordimer, 1991, Morrison, 1993; Szymborska, 1996, Jelinek, 2004; and Lessing, 2007). As Jewell wrote:

Feminist critics earlier in the century may have been somewhat mollified by the fact that from 1926 through 1945, four of fifteen winners were women. Yet since

World War Two until recently, when Nadine Gordimer was chosen, during a 45-years period only one woman, a German Swede (Nelly Sachs) was selected. So bad is this record that it begs the question of culture and 'great literature' from a gender perspective: are female Euro-American authors even less able to produce literature for the great Western canon than are non-Euro-American people? ⁴

It is interesting to explore the relationship between the Nobel Prize in Literature and the Third World Writer, later to be included under the banner of postcolonial writing.

If the Nobel Prize has been slow to recognize the talents and literary worth of authors from non-Western countries or from former European colonies, writing in the language of their former masters, it now seems that the Nobel Prize is attempting to make up for lost time. The new policy since the 1980s has been to open up the prize to a more global dimension of what was, until then, perceived to be world literature. A considerable number of postcolonial writers have been awarded the prestigious prize over the past few decades.

Wole Soyinka

The prize's reputation as a purely European affair changed when Wole Soyinka was awarded the prize in 1986, followed by the Egyptian Mahfouz in 1988, and shortly afterwards by the anti-apartheid writer Nadine Gordimer in 1991, by the Caribbean poet Derek Walcott, well-versed in European styles and genres, in 1992, by the first African American writer, Toni Morrison, in 1993, by another Caribbean novelist, V.S. Naipaul, in 2001, by another South African, J.M. Coetzee, in 2003 and by the Rhodesian/English Doris Lessing in 2007.

Wole Soyinka was the first African to win the Nobel Prize. Born near Ibadan, Nigeria, of the Yoruba tribe, Soyinka is world renowned for his numerous dramatic works, novels, essays and poems. He was educated in Nigeria as well as in the UK, where he studied at the University of Leeds. Soyinka attracted international attention for his outspoken criticism of the Nigerian government, particularly during the civil war. Soyinka appealed in an article for a ceasefire between opposition groups and the government. As a result, he was arrested in 1967, accused of conspiring with the Biafran rebels, and held as a political prisoner for twenty-two months until 1969.

Soyinka's struggle for freedom of speech in Nigeria might have made him a better candidate for the Nobel Peace Prize, but it certainly made him a stronger candidate to become the first African Nobel laureate for the literature prize as he was already well known in Sweden as a political dissident. The Nobel Prize does, in fact, have a long record of writers whose political views conflict with those of their country's regime. Examples are the dissident writers of the former Soviet

Union, including Aleksandr Isayevich Solzhenitsyn (1970). In the past Russian writers, such as Pasternak (1958), were forced to decline the award out of fear of being stripped of their citizenship were they to travel to Sweden to accept it.

Gordimer, awarded the prize in 1991, was also singled out for her lifelong battle against the apartheid regime in South Africa, which fell in 1990 with the release of Nelson Mandela. Somehow the Nobel, in an attempt to become more diversified and inclusive of Third World culture, blatantly applies Jameson's concept that 'all third-world texts are necessarily ... allegorical, and in a very specific way: they are to be read as what I will call *national allegories*'.⁵ The Nobel follows Jameson's dictum which assumes that the Third World intellectual's position is always political in one way or another, as there is no division between the private and the public, and that the individual story is not libidinal but always collective, implying that Third World literature is more realistic and less sophisticated in its representational strategies as it always accounts for a position of embattlement.

Soyinka had been passed over the year before in favour of the French *nouveau roman* writer Claude Simon. This led to outrage in Nigeria and other African countries as people there clamoured for the long-overdue Nobel Prize to be awarded to a writer from the African continent. However, Soyinka had his own national detractors who were not easily charmed by the lustre of the Nobel Prize. The Igbo literary critic and newspaper columnist Chinweizu commented that Soyinka's selection by the Swedish Academy did not mean recognition of Nigeria's or Africa's exceptional literary achievement, but that is was simply a reconfirmation of European prejudices about African cultural heritage.⁶ The prize was indeed perceived as small-minded and at times openly uneducated and colonialist as it recognizes that strand of African literature written in European languages, bestowing recognition only on African writers who write in accordance with the concept of literary excellence held by a group of Europeans. Therefore, for Chinweizu to embrace the prize meant a rejection of Africa's indigenous and vernacular tradition in favour of European hegemony. He coordinated the attack on Soyinka and the Nobel Prize in the pages of the African journal *Transition*, denouncing Soyinka as a 'Euromodernist' who assiduously aped the practices of twentieth-century European modern poetry. In Africa, wrote Chinweizu, the Nobel can be won only by a writer who carefully applies just enough 'Africaneque patina and inlays to satisfy the Western tourist taste for exotica. Such works become sophisticated literary versions of airport art. It is thus that the Eurocentric disorientations induced by the Nobel prize divert some African writers... from devoting their full energies to developing African... literature.'⁷

This squabble did not go unnoticed by the Swedish Academy, which had decided in the early 1980s to expand its area of interest and prestige to a more global dimension, also in the light of what was going on with other literary prizes, such as the Booker, which, since 1981, had significantly changed the perception of global literature with *Midnight's Children*. However, the question was, who would be the right candidate for such a change in direction? Who could embody the principles of the Nobel Prize and still be able to cater to a new audience more global in taste and imbued with a new postcolonial awareness?

For years the name of Léopold Sédar Senghor has circulated as a Nobel favourite. A giant of African literature, founder of the Negritude movement and the first president of independent Senegal for almost two decades, he combined both political commitment and a literary rootedness in African cultural traditions. He was admitted in 1984 to the French Academy, one of the most prestigious and also chauvinistic institutions of French culture. The Academy has only forty seats and its members are selected for life. Even today the French Academy allows for little diversity among its members. After Senghor, the writer and translator François Cheng became the first Asian to be a member of the Academy in 2002, and Assia Djebar was admitted in 2005 as the first writer from the Maghreb to achieve recognition. The first woman to be admitted to the Academy was Marguerite Yourcenar in 1985.

This serves to emphasize the considerable status Senghor had achieved when the Swedish Academy decided to pass him over for the much younger anglophone Soyinka. The choice was interpreted as favouring postcolonial, avant-gardist and therefore more globally palatable writing over the old, anti-colonial, black nationalist and francophone writer. In his article James Gibbs mentions that there was speculation that to pass over Senghor was a way of punishing the French for Sartre's famous refusal to accept the Nobel Prize.⁸ Besides being seen as a struggle between two linguistic centres of power, Paris and London, it was as if the rhetoric of authenticity based on black national identity had served its purpose for the anti-colonial struggle, which had lost its cachet in the 1980s in the new era of rampant globalization. As James English writes:

it was a language suited to cultural nationalism rather than to cultural globalism, being rooted in a paradigm of resistance that, as Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri argued, has become increasingly anachronistic and ineffective with the rise of a new, transnational form of sovereignty (which they call 'empire'). Senghor's discourse of black cultural nationalism lacked a strategy for articulating in this new context the particular without the universal, or for putting local forms of cultural capital into circulation in a rapidly evolving marketplace of 'world' culture.⁹

The story goes that Soyinka himself was opposed to the Negritude movement, being in favour of a more cosmopolitan aesthetics. The debate was unleashed in an article that Soyinka published in 1975 in *Transition*, one of the leading intellectual African magazines, of which he was then editor. In the article he attacked the followers of the *authenticité* school for producing a kind of 'neo-Tarzanism', naïvely based on a poetics of pseudo-tradition based on native resources. Soyinka was therefore one of the most outspoken critics of Negritude which, in his eyes, encouraged African self-absorption and affirmed one of the central eurocentric prejudices against Africans, namely the dichotomy between European rationalism and African emotionalism which he expressed in the famous mocking comment that 'A tiger does not proclaim its tigritude. . . it acts.' Soyinka's formalist procedures positioned him better in Europe than in Africa. Soyinka was also nominated for the Neustadt Prize in 1986, thanks to the support of Maya Angelou, but the prize eventually went to the Swiss Max Frisch. Obviously success in Western and European circles made him prey to the accusations made by the supporters of cultural authenticity such as Chinweizu, who considered Soyinka's literature a sell-out to the West. For the critics at home he had been effectively manipulated to function as a neo-colonial insider in the demolition of the reputations of 'authentically indigenous Nigerian writers'.¹⁰

Soyinka was much more in line with the tradition of liberal humanism advocated by the Swedish Academy, in which the universal could be marketed thanks to the local inflection without risking becoming embroiled in national culturalisms. The Nobel Prize was indeed awarded to Soyinka for his being a cosmopolitan writer whose African roots happened to provide one of the many ingredients for his complex and highly personal vision. The award was presented to Soyinka by the secretary of the Swedish Academy for having managed to 'synthesise a very rich heritage from [his] own country, ancient myths and old traditions, with literary legacies and traditions of European culture'.¹¹ The press saw him as someone 'who in a wide cultural perspective and with poetic overtones fashions the drama of existence'.¹²

Despite its new policy of diversity, the Nobel committee aimed, above all, to honour a new brand of world literature, which could be identified with local roots or regional sites of production but which transcended the local in its achieved form of transcendent humanity. Therefore, the prize may have a postcolonial or multicultural flavour but it must always engage with an articulation across national boundaries, striving for a global reach, both in aesthetic and economic terms. This aspiration often implies the recognition of a 'local' or, to put it even better, a non-Western writer as a spokesperson for and

representative of their community of origin. However, this aspiration also implies disjunction, as the laureate must be able to rise above a kind of universalized definition of literary worth and imaginative power which often has to appeal to a cosmopolitan audience. As English writes:

The prize has become a means of articulating, across the various and far-flung sites of its production, a particular category of literature that might be recognized as properly ‘global’, a literature whose field of production and of reception could be mapped – and whose individual works could be valued – only on a world scale.¹³

It is interesting to note that in the Swedish Academy press release for the so-called ‘postcolonial authors’ there appears to be a balancing act between the supposed tokenism for the exotic other and the emphasis on a kind of transcendental literary quality that manages to capture the essence of humanity.

Mahfouz was, for example, praised as a writer ‘who, through works rich in nuance – now clear-sightedly realistic, now evocatively ambiguous – has formed an Arabian narrative art that applies to all *mankind*’.¹⁴ In a similar vein, Gordimer was signalled out as someone ‘who through her magnificent epic writing has – in the words of Alfred Nobel – been of very great benefit to *humanity*’.¹⁵ For Walcott the speech runs as follows: ‘Walcott’s style is melodious and sensitive. It seems to issue principally from a prolific inspiration. In his literary works Walcott has laid a course for his own cultural environment, but through them he speaks to each and *every one of us*’.¹⁶

V. S. Naipaul

In the speech for the press release, V. S. Naipaul was praised ‘for having united perceptive narrative and incorruptible scrutiny in works that compel us to see the presence of suppressed histories’, and further ‘Naipaul is Conrad’s heir as the annalist of the destinies of empires in the moral sense: what they do to *human beings*. His authority as a narrator is grounded in his memory of what others have forgotten, the history of the vanquished.’ Or ‘His travel books allow witnesses to testify at every turn, not least in his powerful description of the eastern regions of the Islamic world, *Beyond Belief*. The author’s empathy finds expression in the acuity of his ear’.¹⁷

V. S. Naipaul is an interesting laureate whether or not we wish to include him in the postcolonial pantheon. The Nobel Prize was conferred just after the attack on the Twin Towers, when tension between East and West, the so-called ‘clash of civilization’, was reaching an explosive dichotomization. The Swedish Academy briefly discussed suspending the prize due to the US strikes on Afghanistan, but finally decided it was appropriate to rise above current events,

and present the award, in its 100th anniversary year. Therefore the choice of V. S. Naipaul as the marker of these two crucial events could not but generate further controversy.

In his novels V. S. Naipaul celebrates the struggle with the primitive colonial background of Trinidad, prey to apathy and doomed to failure, and the need to find the centre, therefore not endorsing the postcolonial critical paradigm of contesting Western master narratives but, on the contrary, embracing them. In his many travelogues, the most well known of which is the India trilogy,¹⁸ Naipaul has a mordant and unforgiving vision of the countries he visits. His two travelogues through Muslim countries, *Among the Believers* (1981) and *Beyond Belief: Islamic Excursions among the Converted Peoples*, (1998) are no exception, though the *New Republic* hailed the first as ‘the most notable work on contemporary Islam to have appeared in a very long time’.¹⁹

In these books Naipaul presents a vision of Pakistan, Iran, Indonesia and Malaysia through interviews which are at times repeated with the same people in order to arrive at an understanding of Islamic fundamentalism. In the prologue to *Beyond Belief*, Naipaul notes that he has written ‘a book about people ... not a book of opinion’. However, his claim is not completely justified as he writes: ‘There probably has been no imperialism like that of Islam and the Arabs. ... Islam seeks as an article of the faith to erase the past; the believers in the end honor Arabia alone, they have nothing to return to.’²⁰ Naipaul views Islam in the Indian context as even worse as he states that Islam has been far more disruptive than British rule.

V. S. Naipaul had been mentioned as a possible candidate for the Nobel for several years. However, the awarding of the prize after 9/11 was perceived by many Muslim communities as an obvious provocation. An Iranian newspaper denounced Naipaul for spreading venom and hatred²¹ and BBC *Newsnight* concentrated on Inayat Bunglawala of the Muslim Council of Britain, who thought the award was a ‘cynical gesture to humiliate Muslims’.²² As French writes: ‘At this point in British history, when the sensational and immediate matter above all else and fame was becoming more important than the achievements that might give rise to fame, Naipaul’s half century of work as a writer seemed less significant than his reputation for causing offence.’²³

Naipaul’s two books on Islam were condemned at the time they were written, particularly in the Muslim world. However, after 9/11 they were hailed by Western liberals as prophetic and illuminating. On the receipt of the Nobel the *Guardian* commented that ‘In recent years, political comment has been read into the award ... Naipaul, though undeniably a colossus of the book world on literary merit alone, is also no stranger to political controversy.

He caused an outcry earlier this month by comparing Islam's effects on the world to those of colonialism.' The article continues by quoting Naipaul's vision of Islam that he sees having a calamitous effect on converted peoples, pointing in particular to Pakistan. Naipaul describes the 'abolition of the self demanded by Muslims' as worse than 'the similar colonial abolition of identity'. In answer Ahmed Versi, the editor of the *Muslim News*, described Naipaul as 'basically a Hindu nationalist, who has a deep dislike of Muslims'. The *Guardian's* article continues by quoting Horace Engdahl, the secretary of the Swedish Academy, who conceded that Naipaul might be seen as a political winner, but added:

I don't think we will have violent protests from the Islamic countries and if they take the care to read his travel books from that part of the world they will realise that his view of Islam is a lot more nuanced . . . What he's really attacking in Islam is a particular trait that it has in common with all cultures that conquerors bring along, that it tends to obliterate the preceding culture.²⁴

Interestingly enough, writers such as V. S. Naipaul, but also Soyinka and J. M. Coetzee, are often accused by their own communities of having compromised their aesthetics and political stance in the name of a generalized humanity, and therefore against the principle of postcolonial critique which aims to subvert master narratives and Western representational strategies.

The Booker Prize for Fiction (1968)

The Booker Prize, established in 1968, is perceived to have a multicultural consciousness and a postcolonial cachet, and is considered to be one of the most prestigious awards for the book of the year. When the Booker Prize was first established, the aim was to create an English-language Prix Goncourt, an award that would encourage the wider reading of the very best in fiction across the UK and the Commonwealth.

The Booker Prize is also interesting from a postcolonial perspective because, even though it has a reputation as a postcolonial literary patron, the sponsor is a corporate agricultural enterprise whose financial resources emanate from a sugar plantation (Demerara) in Guyana. The Booker company, founded in 1834, achieved rapid prosperity under an exploitative colonial regime, which somehow contradicts the charitable nature of the Book Trust which, since 1971, has administered the Booker Prize for Fiction. Sponsored by Booker plc, it soon became one of the most prestigious cultural institutions in the field of literary awards. In 2002, sponsorship was transferred to an investment

company, the Man Group plc, and the Booker Prize became the Man Booker Prize for Fiction.

The Booker Prize is particularly influential for the postcolonial field, as, since its inception, it has recognized writers of the calibre of V.S. Naipaul (*In a Free State*, 1971), Nadine Gordimer (*The Conservationist*, 1974) long before they achieved wide international appeal, and in their case, the Nobel Prize. The Booker Prize also launched and treasured bright new talent, such as Salman Rushdie who won the prize for his *Midnight's Children* in 1981, which was later awarded the Best of the Booker for the award's twenty-fifth anniversary in 1993 and again for its fortieth anniversary in 2008. Apart from Rushdie, who has been repeatedly shortlisted and longlisted for his many other books (*Shame*, 1983; *The Satanic Verses*, 1988; *The Moor's Last Sigh*, 1995; *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*, 1999; *Shalimar the Clown*, 2005; *The Enchantress of Florence*, 2008), Indian writers do particularly well in the Booker and successful winners have included Arundhati Roy for *The God of Small Things* (1997), Kiran Desai for *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006), a prize that eluded her mother Anita Desai who was shortlisted three times without ever making it to the big prize (For *Clear Light of Day*, 1980, *In Custody*, 1984; *Fasting, Feasting*, 1999), and Aravind Adiga for *The White Tiger* (2008), the same year that Amitav Ghosh was also shortlisted for his *Sea of Poppies*.

Luke Strongman points out several trends within the colonial/postcolonial themes that underlie the Booker Prize. For example, there is the celebration of several novels that express nostalgia for the Raj: J. G. Farrell's *The Siege of Krishnapur* (1973), Ruth Praver Jhabvala's *Heat and Dust* (1975) and Paul Scott's *Staying On* (1978). Another strand analysed by Luke Strongman is the end of metanarrative, in which diverse postcolonial prize-winning novels are linked by their postmodern narratives and exploration of postmodern society in the aftermath of empire. As he writes, these novels:

trace empire's edge, the borderline between empire and 'Other', the transition from modernity to postmodernity: geographical, racial, psychological limits, the liminal spaces and time zones in which territories are mapped, the boundaries of discourse established and dissolved, periods in which the narratives of history are deformed and reformed, and the dissolution of the binding force of empire.²⁵

In this league he lists Booker novels such as Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981), Ben Okri's *The Famished Road* (1991), Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient* (1992). Strongman also lists several critical voices that express 'post-colonial pessimism' by voicing the disaffection and malaise linked to migrant displacements and colonial folly: V.S. Naipaul's *In a Free State* (1971); Nadine

Gordimer's *The Conservationist* (1974); J. M. Coetzee's *Life and Times of Michael K* (1983); Keri Hulme's *The Bone People* (1985); Peter Carey's *Oscar and Lucinda* (1988). Recent novels such as Peter Carey's *True History of the Kelly Gang* (2001) and J. M. Coetzee's *Disgrace* (1999) could probably be added to this latter category of Strongman's subdivision.

Keri Hulme

Strongman places Keri Hulme's *The Bone People* (1983, 1985) on the list of 'postcolonial pessimism'. The prize was accepted on her behalf by a singing collective of Maori tribeswomen, which led to the scandal of racial inauthenticity as Keri Hulme is anglophone and only one-eighth Maori blood, but most importantly she was raised and educated as a white anglophone in New Zealand.

Keri Hulme's novel *The Bone People* was published in 1983 with a very small non-profit feminist press. It received few reviews in the Maori and alternative press. This was Hulme's first novel, although she had previously published poetry and short stories, and it was characterized by a strange mix of genres and languages. The novel was not a serious candidate for the international marketplace, which was another reason for surprise when *The Bone People* won the Booker Prize in 1985. The British press seized upon the race controversy surrounding the author, who was published as a Maori writer across national borders. The scandal about cultural inauthenticity fanned the cultural wars taking place in the 1980s in the United States, with increasing white resentment for the opportunistic appropriation of positive discrimination policies. The Booker Prize, continuing its well-established reputation of attracting media attention through the provocation, scandal and dispute surrounding *The Bone People*, was once again the perfect reason to provoke the by now well-established tradition of Booker-bashing. Since 1981, the year of *Midnight's Children*, the prize had gone to writers from India, Australia (Keneally), South Africa (Coetzee) and New Zealand, and the Booker was accused of accommodating an overdose of postcolonial political correctness. For *The Bone People* it was interesting that race as a point of controversy was chosen at a time when multiculturalism in literature was being placed high on the agenda in the United States. It was a moment at which established old national canons were starting to disintegrate in favour of racially defined sub-literatures, making the balancing act between aesthetic and sociological interest a reason for controversy in its own right. One of the aims of the Booker Prize was indeed to attract attention and conquer the US market, also by embracing these controversies, and by competing with the American Pulitzer

Prize, which is seen as the Booker's major rival. One of the limitations of the Booker Prize is indeed that it is not open to books published in the US, and that it accepts nominations of original full-length novels, written in the English language, by a citizen of either the Commonwealth of Nations or Ireland, which therefore excludes the US. The latter, in turn, only awards the Pulitzer Prize (which is mostly renowned for its prize for journalism but which does have a special category for fiction) for distinguished fiction by an American author, preferably dealing with American life. *The Bone People* ended up being one of the Booker's most controversial selections, which led to an avalanche of publicity for the Booker, the author and the novel. As James F. English writes:

The novel's allegorization of colonial contact through a trauma and recovery-paradigm centered on familial dysfunction and child abuse, coupled with its unabashedly New Age mysticism, should, I think, be taken neither as representative tendencies of specifically Maori literary culture nor as telltale symptoms of contamination and inauthenticity that expose Hulme's Pakeha roots. They are, rather, signal features of a properly global brand of indigenouness, in this case of Maoriness that can hold its value as much on the world wide field of English letters (the field onto which, after all, the Pegasus is supposed to translate 'indigenous' writing). It is just such universally recognizable signs of indigenouness that prizes celebrate across all domains of 'world culture'.²⁶

By being the only winner of a truly global prize, *The Bone People* consequently became the archetypal Maori novel in the pantheon of world literature, turning Keri Hulme into the most famous contemporary Maori writer and therefore erasing her mixed European origins. In this case the shift from capital to clamour and finally to canon has been rather swift: *The Bone People* is safely established as the Maori entrance into the world literature canon and has been included in the syllabi of postcolonial and world literature courses, becoming a classic, a world-certified, globally consecrated Maori novel. As James F. English further writes: 'The book is in this respect a typical product of world literature: a work of subnational literature whose particular (New Age, magical indigenouness) form of subnationality is the basis of its eligibility for global renown, and whose global renown in turn secures its place on the field of subnational or indigenous writing.'²⁷

The Booker Prize has been surrounded by many other controversies of an ethnic or postcolonial nature. When John Berger won with *G* in 1972, he denounced the prize from the stage because of Booker's record of 'sweated black labour in the West Indies', deriving its income from sugar factories in Guyana. Berger announced that he was giving half his prize money to the Black Power movement, which had disbanded two years earlier.

The Booker Prize is also characterized by scandals of a more trivial nature, such as the repeated references to the misbehaviour of Salman Rushdie who, when his novel *Shame* was passed over for J. M. Coetzee's *The Life & Times of Michael K* (1983), pounded his fist on the table saying that the judges knew 'fuck all' about literature. Or, for example, when the BBC's live broadcast showed Ian McEwan leaving the award ceremony gala dinner at the British Museum with his entourage. McEwan was running for the Booker Prize for the second time with his novel *Black Dog* (in 1981 he was shortlisted for *The Comfort of Strangers*) and was clearly disappointed not only at not being awarded the prize (he was to receive it later for his novel *Amsterdam*, 1998) but also because the jury did not even manage to find an outright winner and awarded the prize jointly to Michael Ondaatje for his masterful *The English Patient* (1992) and to Barry Unsworth for *Sacred Hunger* (1992).

Michael Ondaatje

Michael Ondaatje represents an interesting postcolonial author, as he not only achieved international status thanks to the Booker Prize, but reached stellar fame with the successful Hollywood adaptation of his convoluted novel at the hand of the British director Anthony Minghella. Many works of Booker prize-winners have been adapted either for film or television. Some of them fall into the category of Raj nostalgia, such as James Ivory, *Heat and Dust* (1983), based on Ruth Praver Jhabvala's novel (1975), and the BBC television serialization of *The Raj Quartet* based on Paul Scott's imperial oeuvre.

Though the cinematic plundering of literary texts is as old as the film industry itself, and institutionalized in the *dual* screenwriting Oscar category, the Booker Prize has been a remarkably consistent source of adaptations. However, as Philip French wrote:

Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient* (winner in 1992) is an immensely complex piece of storytelling, looking at the war from the viewpoint of four sharply contrasted characters living at a shattered villa in Tuscany during the months leading up to V-E Day in May 1945. It is a subtle meditation on history, nationality, warfare, loyalty and love, but it is also a gripping mystery story.²⁸

French reports the difficulty of translating Ondaatje's highly poetic language and complex storyline into effective cinematic language, and praises Minghella's successful work as director, the camera work, the exemplary photography, editing and first-class performances which make *The English Patient* a technical miracle. The film won nine Academy Awards and was considered to be a critical

and commercial success. However, *The English Patient* clearly shows the path taken by a postcolonial novel, which is turned through adaptation into a successful and outspoken exotic product, a Hollywood production at its best.

What at the literary level is a complex postmodern novel about the impossibility of rendering the concept of nation and identity, if not through different unreliable viewpoints or by elisions, becomes a love story in the desert, with stereotypical representations. The complexity of flashbacks in the narration are simplified for cinematographic purposes into a linear, progressive narration with the four narrative viewpoints reduced to two (British Katherine and Almásy, the mysterious English Patient). The roles of Kip, the Indian sapper, and of Hana, the vulnerable French-Canadian nurse, are pushed to the background, making an empty concept of the counterhistory advocated by Ondaatje.

Many critics were outraged at the romanticization of the character of Almásy, a German Nazi spy. Other postcolonial critics were appalled at the marginalization of the role of Kip who was introduced by Ondaatje to bring corrections to Western history, where, for example, the role of the Indians in the British Army is often silenced and erased, and of Hana who represents the role of carer but also the combative role of women on the frontline.

To conclude, whereas Ondaatje's novel was seen as a complex and multi-layered postcolonial statement, Minghella's film was accused of reproducing an orientalist story in which central characters such as Kip and Hana become mystical others.

This case illustrates how the institution of literary prizes has helped cannibalize and commercialize 'otherness' by marketing the exotic and authenticity appeal of postcolonial literatures. However, it is only when such honoured postcolonial texts are adapted for film and television, or even for musicals, that the true impact and magnitude of these commercial institutions is evidenced, as with *The English Patient*. Nonetheless, the wide appeal of a Hollywood movie revitalizes the interest in and sales of the adapted novels, which continue to have a parallel life of their own, and whose counterhegemonic strategies remain effective.

In the case of the Booker Prize, which is still considered to be the literary patron of postcolonial literature, at least in the English language, the question is whether the prize has successfully furthered the development and spread of postcolonial literature and the prestige of postcolonial writers or whether it has narrowed down the field to a handful of names that appear time and again on the long-and shortlists.

The Belgian economist Victor Ginsburgh analysed whether the Booker Prize had a durable impact on the success and sales of the winners from 1969 to 1982. He evaluated the level of reprints ten years after a book was nominated or

shortlisted, and he showed that the winners' longevity is no greater than that of their shortlisted peers. He concluded that awards are bad indicators of the fundamental quality of literary work or talent, since most of the choices made by judges in aesthetic competitions do not stand the test of time.²⁹ Obviously these whimsical results are because the Booker is awarded for the book of the year, which is something that is more fickle and erratic in the long term than prizes conferred for an author's entire oeuvre. This is why the Booker decided in 2005 to launch a prize in a different category: the Man Booker International Prize.

The Man Booker International Prize (2005)

The Man Booker International Prize was created in 2005 to redress the anglocentric bias of the Booker Prize. It is awarded every two years to a fiction writer of any nationality, provided that the work is written or is available in English. The prize, worth £60,000, is for the writer's whole oeuvre, and it also focuses beyond the Commonwealth and Ireland. In a way it competes with the Neustadt Prize, which is also awarded every two years for lifetime achievement. The inaugural prize went to the Albanian poet Ismaël Kadare in 2005, and the second to Chinua Achebe in 2007. This was a long-awaited prize for the Nigerian writer, who in 2008 celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of the publication of his *Things Fall Apart*, the most influential modern African novel.

Achebe had previously been under the banner of the Booker Prize for a long time. His fifth novel *Anthills of the Savannah* (1987), about a military coup in a fictional West African nation, was a finalist for the Booker Prize. The novel was hailed by the *Financial Times* as follows: 'In a powerful fusion of myth, legend and modern styles Achebe has written a book which is wise, exciting and essential, a powerful antidote to the cynical commentators from "overseas" who see nothing ever new out of Africa.'³⁰ Achebe was considered to be the writer who had long deserved recognition, but the prize went to Penelope Lively's novel *Moon Tiger* (1987).

The Man Booker International Prize does not have the tradition and resounding appeal of the Booker Prize, but it does capitalize on the lifetime achievement of writers who might otherwise have been overlooked over the years for linguistic and commercial reasons.

The Neustadt International Prize for Literature (1969)

The Neustadt was originally established in 1969 under the heading of Books Abroad International Prize for Literature before assuming its present name in

1976. The Neustadt is considered to be a conscious global alternative to the euro-centric Nobel Prize and it is one of the very few international prizes for which poets, novelists and playwrights are equally eligible. The prize has been awarded to many postcolonial authors of the calibre of Patricia Grace (New Zealand) in 2008, Assia Djebar (Algeria) in 1996, and Kamau Brathwaite (Barbados) in 1994, Raja Rao (India) in 1988, and many others nominated for their lifelong work, such as Wole Soyinka, Chinua Achebe and Mahasweta Devi and so forth.

The Neustadt is a truly multilingual, multicultural event, with both juries and nominees drawn from various countries and linguistic backgrounds. It is a biennial award established to promote a regional university, the University of Oklahoma, and its quarterly journal, *World Literature Today*. The prize is awarded in every even-numbered year and taps into the international mechanism of literary awards and financial prestige in order to promote the local, by adhering to a global formula with a global reach and impact.

Nuruddin Farah

The Neustadt Prize for Literature has brought important writers into the international spotlight such as Nuruddin Farah (b. 1945), who received the prize in 1998. A writer of Somali origin, Nuruddin Farah was declared persona non grata in his native country, and after many migrations (India, Italy, Nigeria, Kenya) he settled in South Africa, where he lives in voluntary exile. Farah writes about the destiny of his shattered Somalia, from which he was forcibly removed, and is also an outspoken intellectual who denounces the fate of migrants and refugees. He accuses the European Union of being just another scapegoat for 'postcolonial responsibility'. The European Union is, according to Farah, another empire of a more sophisticated order, which has taken on the role of negotiating away the imperial responsibilities of countries such as Britain, France, Portugal, the Netherlands and Italy. The people of this new empire are barricading themselves within an empty rhetoric of fear and helplessness. Farah addresses the responsibilities of the European Union, because he too has occupied the ambiguous territory of colonization and was forced to see himself as someone else's invention.³¹ At the International Literary Festival of The Hague, Farah gave the winter lecture in January 2009 entitled 'A Sense of Belonging – A Contemporary Story on Migration'. In this lecture, in which he combines his personal story with that of many other migrants and refugees, he said:

I do not know what an American or a European would make of the complicated nature of my life, including the fact that even though I wanted it, I could not

continue travelling on a Somali passport after January 1999, because no country would issue visas to me, nearly a decade after the collapse of the structures of the state. It would not make sense to an American or a European to hear that, to spare me becoming stateless and a refugee, half a dozen African governments bestowed their nationalities on me – to facilitate my travel across borders. Now that I feel more at home in Cape Town than ever before, following the collapse of my marriage, and because my children love visiting me here, where they have many of their friends, maybe the time has come for me to add the South African nationality to the half dozen citizenships I've held since my birth.³²

He points out that since 9/11 the status of the immigrant is further complicated by the issue of religion, blurring the insider/outsider differences within each European entity, with the Muslims seen and dealt with as undesirable aliens, even if they are nationals. He proclaims that after 9/11 Europeans have become inherently discriminatory towards Muslims whatever their provenance, and look upon them with dread. Whereas discrimination against black people may take more subtle forms, the manner in which Muslims are dealt with is blatantly racist and demeaning. Farah also described the particular quality of his profession as a writer which he compares to that of map making:

I think of my novels as a cartographer might think of her/his relationship to the maps she/he draws, in which representations of the curved surface of the Earth are made flat in order to represent it in a deductible, calculable format – scientifically, aesthetically. This way, the curved surface of the three dimensional space is skilfully represented in two dimensions with readable, speedily communicable, accurately calculable, balanced surfaces. The cartographer's representation of the three dimensional space is in correlation of the two-dimensional one, which represents the imagined, rendering it into its visible equivalent. This, to my mind, is comparable to the exiled novelist's writing about an imagined place, which she/he equates to its invented reality.³³

Farah concludes that his life in exile is not just a question of loss, but that exile has, at the same time, afforded him the opportunity to become himself, a writer with a wider, more inclusive world vision, who owes his persona to a world much larger than the one he was born into, a world unknown to his parents and to his other family members, and who fearlessly tackles some of the most unpalatable topics.

These are the writers cherished and lauded by the Neustadt Prize, which has rightly been defined as the 'more globally conscious alternative to the Nobel'.³⁴ And yet Farah is named by many as the most important African candidate for the Nobel Prize in Literature. This makes competition among literary prizes even more rewarding for the celebrated authors. But it is also a

kind of vicious circle as the prizes tend to circulate among a restricted number of authors, who become the epitome of literary prestige. In many cases the prize works, as George Bernard Shaw so poignantly put it, ‘as a life belt thrown out to a swimmer who has already reached the shore’.³⁵

The Commonwealth Writers’ Prize (1987)

The Commonwealth Writers’ Prize is of particular interest for the field of postcolonial literature as its launch in 1987 dealt with a controversial but also almost obsolete category. As Salman Rushdie wrote in *Imaginary Homelands* in 1981, ‘Commonwealth Literature does not exist’ except as a ghetto of the standard British curriculum. Rushdie criticized the term for artificially linking writers of disparate origin and aesthetic principles. To further quote Rushdie:

by now ‘Commonwealth Literature’ was sounding very unlikeable indeed. Not only was it a ghetto, but it was actually an exclusive ghetto. And the effect of creating such a ghetto was, is, to change the meaning of the far broader term ‘English literature’ – which I’d always taken to mean simply the literature of the English language – into something far narrower, something topographical, nationalistic, possibly even racially segregationist.³⁶

The prize, organized and funded by the Commonwealth Foundation in collaboration with support from the Macquarie Foundation, was set up to promote outstanding literary talent existing in many parts of the Commonwealth, whose work makes a significant contribution to contemporary writing in English. The Commonwealth Foundation established the Commonwealth Writers’ Prize in 1987 ‘to encourage and reward the upsurge of new Commonwealth fiction and ensure that works of merit reach a wider audience outside their country of origin’. The prize is therefore intended for four regions (Africa, Canada and the Caribbean, Europe and South Asia, Southeast Asia and South Pacific) offering both a prize for best book and a prize for best first book for each region plus an overall winner in both categories. Each year the final award programme is held in a different country, rotating around the different Commonwealth regions. There are a number of interesting winners, in both categories, who did not manage to reach more publicized prizes such as the Booker, or who recur on the Booker longlist without making it to the shortlist. Examples include Rohinton Mistry (Commonwealth Prize twice for *Such a Long Journey* in 1992 and for *A Fine Balance* in 1996) or Vikram Seth (*A Suitable Boy*, 1994), Caryl Phillips (*A Distant Shore*, 2004) or best First book such as Vikram Chandra (*Red Earth, Pouring Rain*,

1996) and Zadie Smith (*White Teeth*, 2001). These are books that otherwise would not have achieved a network of international publicity. There is also overlap between the Commonwealth Prize and the Booker Prize, as for example in the case of J.M. Coetzee (*Disgrace*, 2000) who also won the Booker Prize in 1999, or Peter Carey (*True History of the Kelly Gang*, 2001) who also won the Booker Prize in 2001. Rohinton Mistry was shortlisted for the Booker Prize in 1996 with *A Fine Balance*, whereas Zadie Smith was shortlisted for the Booker Prize in 2005 for a different book, *On Beauty*. There is also overlap between the Commonwealth Prize and other prizes, such as the Orange Prize for fiction, a prize exclusively bestowed to female writers, from all over the world writing in English, and comprising a female jury. When the prize was launched in 1996 writers such as A.S. Byatt protested saying that these initiatives were the kind of action that would intensify the ghettoization of women writers, and that to launch such a prize was in itself deeply sexist. However, as Richard Todd writes: 'women buy and read more fiction than men, probably write more, but win fewer prizes and less recognition in the world of prize culture. Until recently women have been grotesquely under-represented, for instance, in Booker juries.'³⁷ And the Orange Prize with its system of long- and shortlists has certainly helped to increase the visibility of female writers and to scout new postcolonial talents such as Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, a Nigerian writer who was shortlisted for *Purple Hibiscus* in 2004 and who won the Orange Prize for fiction in 2007 with *Half of a Yellow Sun*. The Orange also confirmed discoveries made by the Commonwealth Prize, such as Zadie Smith shortlisted in 2001 for *White Teeth* (shortlisted again in 2003 for *The Autograph Man*) and who won the Orange Prize in 2006 for *On Beauty*. Another overlap between the Commonwealth and the Orange Prize is, for example, Andrea Levy who won the prize for *Small Island* in 2004 and the Commonwealth Prize in the same year.

Despite its function as a promoter of literatures in English from the Commonwealth region, the prize made a somewhat anachronistic entrance in 1987, which marks the beginning of what would become postcolonial studies, with its different genealogy and critical take on the idea of literature in English from the former colonies. Commonwealth literature was established around 1950 and referred to English-language literature from the former British colonies. It therefore included writers from white settler communities (Australia, Canada) and writers from countries who fought in order to achieve independence from British rule. As an area of study it became an institution thanks to the first university chair at Leeds University in 1972 with William Walsh. However, the term 'Commonwealth literature' continued to be contested as it reaffirms the centrality of the English language, and the British

nation, once the empire had been dismantled. The prize's inception in 1987 came therefore at a time when the category of 'Commonwealth literature' had truly started to fall into disrepute, substituted by a much more politically engaged and globally resonant term such as 'postcolonial literature', which would open the field to areas and languages beyond the anglophone world, though that will remain the reference parameter for a long time to come. It is not surprising that the Commonwealth Foundation decided to reactivate the value of the term by launching a prize in the global marketplace under new rules of art which foresee a specific economy of prestige in which literary merit is filtered through many agents with marketing and ideological interests.

Amitav Ghosh

These considerations make the controversy surrounding Amitav Ghosh all the more poignant. In 2001 Ghosh declined the best book award for the Eurasian region of the Commonwealth Writers' Prize for his *The Glass Palace*, on the grounds that he was unaware that his publishers had entered the book for this prize and he objected to the classification of 'Commonwealth Literature'.

Ghosh's main objection to the contest was that only English-language writing is eligible for the awards, excluding books in the vernacular. In his open letter to the contest administrators he says:

As a grouping of nations collected from the remains of the British Empire, the Commonwealth serves as an umbrella forum in global politics. As a literary or cultural grouping however, it seems to me that 'the Commonwealth' can only be a misnomer so long as it excludes the many languages that sustain the cultural and literary lives of these countries (it is surely inconceivable, for example, that athletes would have to be fluent in English in order to qualify for the Commonwealth Games).

And further along in the letter:

The issue of how the past is to be remembered lies at the heart of *The Glass Palace* and I feel that I would be betraying the spirit of my book if I were to allow it to be incorporated within that particular memorialization of Empire that passes under the rubric of 'the Commonwealth'. I therefore ask that I be permitted to withdraw *The Glass Palace* from your competition.

Ghosh concludes:

My objections to the term 'Commonwealth Literature' are mine alone, and I trust you will understand that I could hardly expect to sustain them if I allowed one of my books to gain an eponymous prize.³⁸

In the end these kinds of scandals, though negative, refocus media attention on the prize and on the existence of the term 'Commonwealth literature'. Ghosh was shortlisted in 2008 for the Man Booker Prize for his novel *Sea of Poppies*. The prize went to another Indian writer Aravind Adiga for *The White Tiger*. Gaiutra Bahadur wrote that it would have been a bit of a joke played by history if the Man Booker Prize had gone to *Sea of Poppies* by Ghosh. This in light of the fact that

the novel tells the story of 'coolies' forced to leave India to cut cane on plantations much like the ones owned by the Bookers. Josiah Booker I, the Liverpool merchant who struck out to Demerara in 1815, not only helped provide Ghosh with a backdrop for his historical epic through his demand for near-slave labour, but posthumously provided the Kolkata-born writer with a £2,500 check for representing those near-slave labourers in prose.³⁹

This leads to an examination of literary prizes established outside the Western publishing industry centres to account for alternative modalities of evaluation and prestige. I restrict myself here to the Caine, Macmillan and Noma prizes for the African continent and to the Sahitya Akademi Award for the Indian subcontinent.

African literary prizes⁴⁰

The exponential growth of literary prizes, not all on the same level of commercial visibility, aesthetic recognition or financial reward, has begun to make conspicuous inroads into remote regions of Africa. The establishment of new prizes creates a kind of joint venture between pure development aid in the old forms and new commercial structures for the distribution of cultural capital. So, in 2002, we saw the appearance of the New Macmillan Writer's Prize for Africa.

Before the Macmillan prizes became prominent, another prize drew the attention of the international public, the Caine Prize for African Writing. The prize is named after the late Sir Michael Caine, former chairman of Booker plc. The prize was first awarded at the Zimbabwe International Book Fair 2000 in Harare, and in 2001 at the Nairobi Book Fair. The winner is announced at a dinner in Oxford in July, to which the shortlisted candidates are all invited. The prize aims to give visibility to a literature formerly the sole turf of the Heinemann African Writers Series, and to boost the short-story genre that has a long and strong tradition in African countries but which tends to be ignored on the literary prize circuit. The three African winners of the Nobel

Prize in Literature, Wole Soyinka, Nadine Gordimer and Naguib Mahfouz, are patrons of the Caine Prize and this should guarantee quality and prestige. Ben Okri, chairman of the judges for the Caine Prize 2000, stated:

I believe the Prize will achieve excellence and transform perceptions.

Whatever helps the literature of Africa enriches the literature of the world.

However, a guideline for submission runs as follows: 'The Prize is awarded to a short story by an African writer published in English, whether in Africa or elsewhere (indicative length, between 3000 and 10,000 words).' This already reinstates the exclusive realm of writing in the English language. The other problematic category is the specification of the notion of African writer: "'An African writer" is taken to mean someone who was born in Africa, or who is a national of an African country, or whose parents are African, and whose work has reflected African sensibilities.' This latter guideline leads us to a new, and dubious, category of 'reflecting African sensibilities' which stretches the imagination and is projected as literal, as if that quality could be measured and agreed upon without hesitation. This supports and reinforces the view, as Huggan writes:

of African literature as primarily an export product, aimed at a largely foreign audience for whom the writer acts, willingly or not, as cultural spokesperson or interpreter. This view is of course simplistic, overlooking as it does the geographical complexities of audience formation (local, metropolitan, trans/national, diasporic, etc.), as well as the intrinsic nexus of related historical reasons for the primacy of European languages in the development of African literature as a recognised literary/cultural field.⁴¹

Another African prize is the Noma Award for Publishing in Africa, established in 1979, whose principal aim is the encouragement of publication in Africa of works by African writers and scholars. The US\$10,000 prize is awarded annually for an outstanding new book in any of the following three categories: (i) scholarly or academic; (ii) books for children; and (iii) literature and creative writing. Although literature is one of the categories in which books must be submitted, and works of fiction and poetry have won the prize on a number of occasions, the Noma Award is a book prize; it is not a literary award, as it is frequently and mistakenly described.

Books are admissible in any of the languages of Africa, both indigenous and European. The award is open to any author who is indigenous to Africa, but entries must be submitted through publishers. This submission guideline is more in tune with the complexities of the African continent, with its broad multilingual composition and a need for strong pedagogical input (offered

by the scholarly and academic category). However, the difficulty of evaluating texts in different languages, referring to diverse unique traditions and cultural backgrounds, makes for insurmountable problems when assessing the work through translations, referees and committees. The selection inevitably involves levelling the richness and diversity on offer, and does not solve the problems of oral works that cannot be submitted in this format. Furthermore, the Noma Award has very little visibility on a global scale and within the internationalization of literature it barely manages to compete with other ventures that more rapidly hurl African literature into the limelight.

Conferring prestigious literary prizes has meant that many African authors and books have acquired visibility across Africa and throughout the world. Again, these prizes are pretty much Western based and dependent on a system of value judgments not untouched by the definition of African aesthetics as more sociologically marked and resting upon anthropological notions of exoticism and 'African sensibilities'. Authors such as Soyinka received the Nobel Prize (1986) along with Nadine Gordimer and Coetzee, who doubled up with other prizes such as the Booker, which was also received by Ben Okri. Nuruddin Farah received the Neustadt Prize (1998), Chinua Achebe the Commonwealth Prize (1972) and the Man Booker International Prize in 2007, and Ama Ata Aidoo the Commonwealth Writers' Prize for the Africa Region (1992). African writers writing in French received the Prix Goncourt such as Tahar Ben Jelloun 1987, while Assja Djebar received international prizes in Germany and the United States (Neustadt, 1996).

If we compare these cases with the winners of the Noma Award for Publishing in Africa (Mongane W. Serote and Meshack Asarem, 1982; S. Khodja & Charles Mingoshi, 1992; K. Toure, 1996; D. Samb, 1999; Kimani Njogu & Rocha M. Chimera, 2000) we get a clear picture of the different impact of the various prize-giving institutions. When positioned in the old imperial centres, in alliance with the capitalist centres of the new global order, literary prizes manage to either overrule or overshadow the more localized enterprises, though the latter are more in keeping with a sustainable development of literature.

Indian literary prizes: the Sahitya Akademi Award (1954)

The Sahitya Akademi Award is a literary honour in India. Established in 1954, it is awarded annually by the Sahitya Akademi, India's National Academy of Letters, for outstanding literary works published in any of the twenty-four

major languages of India, including English. These languages include Assamese, Bengali, Bodo, Dogri, Gujarati, Hindi, Kannada, Kashmiri, Konkani, Maithili, Malayalam, Manipuri, Marathi, Nepali, Oriya, Punjabi, Rajasthani, Sanskrit, Santhali, Sindhi, Tamil, Telugu and Urdu. The prize is intended to keep alive the dialogue among the various linguistic and literary zones and groups also through seminars, lectures and symposia, to increase the pace of mutual translations.

Writers in the English language who have received the prize include authors who have been recognized by other international prizes (Anita Desai, 1968; Vikram Seth, 1988; Amitav Ghosh, 1989; Sunetra Gupta, 1996; Amit Chaudhuri, 2002). However, the prize demonstrates that the most interesting things happening in Indian literature are not in English, but produced in the many other languages, and they are often not translated either into English, or any of the other languages.⁴² This would contest once and for all Rushdie's claim in the Vintage anthology issued in 1997 to celebrate the fifty years of India's independence:

This is it: the prose writing – both fiction and non-fiction – created in this period by Indian writers *working in English*, is proving to be a stronger and more important body of work than most of what has been produced in the 16 'official languages' of India, the so-called 'vernacular languages', during the same time; and indeed, this new, and still burgeoning, 'Indo-Anglian' literature represents perhaps the most valuable contribution that India has yet made to the world of books.⁴³

For a writer who had once accused Commonwealth literature of being an exclusionary ghetto, this claim sounds like a repetition of Macaulay's statement made in 1835, more than 150 years previously. When Macaulay had been asked to give his views as to whether education in India should be imparted in the 'traditional' mode with Sanskrit and Arabic as the foundation and mediums or whether a 'modern/non-traditional' method with English as the medium and as the source of knowledge should be adopted, he opted for the latter and his view prevailed. Macaulay's notorious 'Minute on Indian Education' (2 February 1835) was the result, in which he stated that:

I have no knowledge of either Sanscrit or Arabic. But I have done what I could to form a correct estimate of their value. I have read translations of the most celebrated Arabic and Sanscrit works. I have conversed both here and at home with men distinguished by their proficiency in the Eastern tongues. I am quite ready to take the Oriental learning at the valuation of the Orientalists themselves. I have never found one among them who could deny that a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia. The

intrinsic superiority of the Western literature is, indeed, fully admitted by those members of the Committee who support the Oriental plan of education.⁴⁴

This dismissal of Indian literature in vernacular languages is something that still stands today in the avalanche of globalization that favours a rather limited array of linguistic diversity, due to the homogenization brought about by the advancement of new media technologies. However, it also marks the increasing corporate conglomeration of the publishing industry and the annexed award industry, which makes diversity and localization a new important element of global consumption but which also pushes minority languages and small publishing houses to the margins of bankruptcy, when not in line with the modes of production and circulation.

Conclusion: capital, celebrity, canon

There are several cautionary tales surrounding the role that the glamour of literary prizes offers to literature. As James English writes 'But we will see as well, that for all they have done to improve the competitive position of local and minor cultures, the institutions and marketplaces of global prestige have been at best a mixed blessing for those engaged in the ongoing project of cultural postcolonization.'⁴⁵

This line of argumentation is sustained by the fact that even though over the past two decades an increasing array of postcolonial authors have been awarded prestigious international literary prizes, ranging from the international and more prestigious Nobel Prize, to the commercial Booker, to the respectful American Pulitzer, to an old regime prize such as Commonwealth or to other minor national prizes (Derek Walcott, V. S. Naipaul, Salman Rushdie, Arundhati Roy, Michael Ondaatje, Ben Okri, Chinua Achebe without excluding the subcategory of Commonwealth authors, Peter Carey, J. M. Coetzee, Margaret Atwood, Nadine Gordimer, Keri Hulme and so on), this does not necessarily imply an expanded audience awareness of the differentiations and complexities of postcolonial literatures. On the contrary, as Huggan argues, it has 'paradoxically narrowed this awareness to a handful of internationally recognised postcolonial authors'.⁴⁶

First of all, it most often concerns authors who have already achieved international prominence, so that while bestowing prizes may reinforce their critical visibility, it more significantly promotes both the authors and their publishing houses commercially. A second point is that the process of canonization which in recent years has become progressively susceptible to the influence of market forces loses, at least in the short term, its critical edge

and incorporates award-winning authors as forms of bland multiculturalization of the canon. Typically this generally involves granting access to post-colonial authors as remakers and respondents of an established and consolidated Western tradition (the rewriting of Western literary genres, the problem of intertextuality, the abrogation and appropriation of the English language). Thirdly, it almost automatically makes a cultural commodity of postcolonialism, which glamorizes the exiled, cosmopolitan and diasporic authors as the best spokespersons for former colonial outposts which are still under the spell of exoticism and colonial nostalgia. Finally, the crucial movement in the current era towards the absolute relocation of the English language as the international and neo-imperial lingua franca pushes an enormous amount of literatures written in other languages, not only major European ones, but in particular the numerous languages of Africa, South Asia and the rest of the world, towards the abyss or towards total disappearance from the international podium. Translation as a form of redemption and rescue functions only marginally as a system of rebalancing, considering that translation is subject to a far-reaching range of ideological distortions of its own.

However, as I have argued elsewhere,⁴⁷ the awarding of prestige not only confirms older mechanisms of canonization and new forms of neo-colonialism, namely that postcolonial texts considered to a certain extent innovative and subversive become neutralized by their inclusion in the international aesthetic circle and consumption for their exotic otherness. It also significantly points towards a shift in the aesthetic of reception which makes the so-called international paradigm of aesthetic evaluation and appreciation open up to more diversified and unfixed criteria of recognition which reflect societal and aesthetic changes at large. Therefore, it is important to distinguish a short-term from a long-term canon: the short-term canon is much more prey to the fleeting seduction of the forces of global capital and of the glitz and glamour of star celebrity annexed to the literary prize industry; the long-term canon, instead, is clearly a better indicator of the slow transformation of the value-endowed paradigm attached to postcolonial literature which is here to stay.

Notes

1. Agneta Wallin Levinovitz and Nils Ringertz (eds.), *The Nobel Prize: The First 100 Years* (London: Imperial College Press, 2001), p. 138.
2. Richard Jewell, 'The Nobel Prize: history and canonicity', *Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association*, 33.1 (Winter 2000), 97–113, at 105.
3. Burton Feldman, *The Nobel Prize: A History of Genius, Controversy, and Prestige* (New York: Arcade Publishing, 2000), p. 59.

4. Jewell, 'The Nobel Prize', p. 107.
5. Fredric Jameson, 'Third-World literature in the era of multinational capitalism', *Social Text*, 15 (1986), 65–88, at 69.
6. Chinweizu, Onwuchekwa Jemie and Ihechukwu Madubuike (eds.), *Toward the Decolonization of African Literature: African Fiction and Poetry and Their Critics* (1980; Washington, DC: Howard University Press, 1983), p. 163.
7. James Gibbs and Bernth Lindfors (eds.), *Research on Wole Soyinka* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1993), p. 346.
8. James Gibbs, 'Prize and prejudice: reaction to the award of the 1986 Nobel Prize for Literature to Wole Soyinka, particularly in the British press', *Black American Literature Forum*, 22 (Autumn 1988), 449–65, at 459.
9. James F. English, *The Economy of Prestige: Prizes, Awards, and the Circulation of Cultural Value* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), pp. 300–1.
10. Chinweizu et al., *Toward the Decolonization of African Literature*, p. 208.
11. English, *The Economy of Prestige*, p. 302.
12. http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1986/index.html, accessed 26 February 2009.
13. English, *The Economy of Prestige*, p. 304.
14. http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1988/index.html, accessed 26 February 2009.
15. http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1991/index.html accessed 26 February 2009.
16. http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1992/index.html, accessed 26 February 2009.
17. http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/2001/index.html, accessed 26 February 2009.
18. The India travelogue trilogy deals with Naipaul's agonized, but also disappointing encounter with his country of origin, India, which he visited at regular intervals. They are: *An Area of Darkness* (London: André Deutsch, 1964), *India: A Wounded Civilisation* (London: André Deutsch, 1977), *India: A Million Mutinies Now* (London: Heinemann, 1990).
19. Quoted on the back cover of the paperback edition of V. S. Naipaul, *Among the Believers* (1981; New York: Vintage, 1982).
20. V. S. Naipaul, *Beyond Belief: Islamic Excursions among the Converted Peoples* (London: Little, Brown, 1998).
21. In Patrick French, *The World Is What It Is: The Authorized Biography of V. S. Naipaul* (London: Picador, 2008), p. xi.
22. BBC, *Newsnight*, 12 October 2001.
23. French, *The World Is What It Is*, p. xi.
24. 'V. S. Naipaul wins 2001 Nobel Prize', Staff and agencies, guardian.co.uk, 11 October 2001, www.guardian.co.uk/books/2001/oct/11/nobelprize.award-sandprizes/print, accessed 30 March 2009.
25. Luke Strongman, *The Booker Prize and the Legacy of Empire* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2002), p. 105.
26. English, *The Economy of Prestige*, p. 318.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 320.
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30. M. Hope, 'African tyrant, *Anthills of the Savannah*', *Financial Times* (26 September 1987), p. xxii.
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32. Nuruddin Farah, 'A Sense of Belonging – A Contemporary Story on Migration', presented at the International Literary Festival of The Hague, 2009.
33. Ibid.
34. Graham Huggan, *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins* (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 119.
35. Renee Winegarten, 'The Nobel Prize for Literature', *American Scholar* 63.1 (1994), 65–75, at 65.
36. Salman Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands. Essays on Criticism, 1981–1991* (London: Granta Books, 1991), p. 63.
37. Richard Todd, 'Has the Booker Prize changed since 1996?' in Wolfgang Görtzschacher and Holger M. Klein (eds.), *Fiction and Literary Prizes in Great Britain* (Vienna: Praesens Verlag, 2005), pp. 8–19, at 14.
38. www.amitavghosh.com, accessed 28 February 2009.
39. Gaiutra Bahadur, 'Revenge of the colonized?' *The Wall Street Journal*, 24 February 2009, www.livemint.com/2008/11/06233927/Revenge-of-the-colonized.html?pg=1, accessed 24 February 2009.
40. For a more elaborate discussion on African literature and literary prizes see Sandra Ponzanesi, 'Under erasure: the commercial sustainability of minority literatures and cultures', in Graham Huggan and Stefan Klasen (eds.), *Perspectives on Endangerment* (Hildesheim, Zurich and New York: Olms Verlag, 2005), pp. 137–49.
41. Huggan, *The Postcolonial Exotic*, p. 34.
42. See for reference the link http://society.indianetzone.com/literature/1/sahitya_academy_awards.htm
43. Salman Rushdie and Elizabeth West (eds.), *The Vintage Book of Indian Writing, 1947–1997* (London: Vintage, 1997), p. x.
44. Thomas Babington Macaulay 'Minute on Indian Education' (2 February 1835), www.geocities.com/bororissa/mac.html, accessed 24 February 2009.
45. English, *The Economy of Prestige*, p. 263.
46. Huggan, *The Postcolonial Exotic*, p. 119.
47. Sandra Ponzanesi, 'Boutique postcolonialism: literary awards, cultural value and the canon', in Görtzschacher and Klein (eds.), *Fiction and Literary Prizes in Great Britain*, pp. 107–34.

Key journals and organizations

IRA RAJA AND DEEPIKA BAHRI

This chapter furnishes a history of key journals and institutions that have shaped the contours of the field of postcolonial studies. Although controversy and debate characterize discussion on the definition, scope and duration of the ‘postcolonial’,¹ the origins of the field are usually located without much dispute around the late 1970s. Customary accounts of the beginnings of postcolonial studies index the cultural, postmodern, literary and textual turn in a line of enquiry which began and developed much earlier in history, political science, and anthropology.² The emergence of the ersatz ‘Third World’ in the wake of the 1955 Bandung conference constitutes some of the prehistory of the field, although admittedly under the nametag of ‘Third World’ rather than ‘postcolonial’, and largely within disciplines other than literary studies. Beginnings are notoriously provisional, but even so, the field of what Aijaz Ahmad calls ‘literary postcoloniality’ is not without its own prehistory, one that goes by the name of Commonwealth literary studies (CLS), and has been poorly integrated into usual accounts of the rise of postcolonial studies.³ Enmeshment in the scope, definition and task of postcolonial studies and contemporary interest in the ‘beyond’ of postcolonial studies – often conceived in terms of the future or as transcending historical colonialism altogether – sometimes displaces a more thorough understanding of its complex origins, its multiple strands and regional dimensions. In each of these areas, key journals and institutions have been instrumental in the development of a rich set of resources for a study of the literature, culture and theoretical insights associated with the experience of colonialism and its aftermath. It is the aim of this chapter to tell that story.

Commonwealth literature

Beginnings

When an article on ‘new trends in Commonwealth literature’ published in the *Times Literary Supplement* of 16 September 1965 claimed that ‘the first

conference on Commonwealth literature ever to be held' was in 1964 at the University of Leeds, it inaugurated an accepted convention in histories of the field. This history has since been revised to account for the early development of CLS in the US.⁴ But even at the time, a group of American scholars who called themselves the Conference on British Commonwealth Literature (CBCL) had noted that the *TLS* was 'not altogether current on developments from the Western side of the Atlantic. For the record, our own organization has been meeting annually since 1958.'⁵ In fact, American interest in CLS went even further back than the CBCL. In the 1940s, Bruce Sutherland at Pennsylvania State College and Joseph Jones at the University of Texas offered the earliest university courses in 'Commonwealth' literature from the white settler colonies.⁶ In 1961, A. L. Mcleod of the State University of New York edited the first single-volume study on the subject, *The Commonwealth Pen* (Cornell University Press), in which he expanded the scope of the field beyond the former white dominions to include a raft of new writers from the newly liberated British colonies around the world. In April 1962, the CBCL, initiated a biannual *Newsletter*; in 1965 it secured permanent 'Group' status at the Modern Languages Association (MLA) meeting. In 1967, the MLA Group 12 (later named Division 150) renamed its newsletter *World Literature Written in English* (*WLWE*), which went on to become a full-fledged international journal of the same name in 1970.⁷ By all accounts, Americans were the first to identify the potential for professional specialization in CLS.

Yet the Leeds conference of 1964 continues to be regarded as the 'true' beginning of the field and the site of its formal establishment, not least because CLS was perceived as the authentic expression of postcolonial societies definitionally and durably tied culturally to the empire that had ruled them. As Tim Watson notes, British-style CLS claims a characteristically 'strong sense of community and commitment' which is seen as lacking in the American endeavour more readily associated with a more professionally opportunistic postcolonialism.⁸ While Britain's relationship to Commonwealth literature might be viewed as a desire for hegemony in an area about which Britain could continue to feel proprietary even after its status in world affairs had diminished, American interest is sometimes cast as accidental rather than historically significant. Terry Goldie claims that American interest was 'simply a reflection' of immigration and of institutional opportunities provided by American professional organizations such as the MLA.⁹ American hopes for 'extensive liaison and cooperation' with the Leeds-sponsored Association for Commonwealth Literature were never met or matched on the other side.¹⁰ As A. N. Jeffares's reasons for not inviting any Americans to the Leeds conference suggest – lest

they “over-run” the field¹¹ – a ‘closer articulation’ between the two sides was precisely what the Leeds group looked to avoid.¹² Indeed, we might speculate that quarrels about the authentic provenance or inheritance of CLS reflect not only the role of institutions in the development of this field of study but also a politically charged rivalry between US and British aspirations.¹³

Tim Watson’s account of the disciplinary formation of CLS in the US, coinciding with the spectacular growth of American studies across the world in the wake of European imperialism and the new set of global power relations that followed from it, establishes American interest in the field as deliberate rather than incidental.¹⁴ While the promotion of American studies, often as an explicit aspect of US foreign policy,¹⁵ is widely recognized for its hegemonic ambitions, the fact that the supposedly gentler field of CLS afforded a similar opportunity for America is less well known. American resources funded projects aimed at exercising greater control of the field on the understanding that it would challenge not just the notion of literary universality and the myth of a British-dominated canon,¹⁶ but also provide America with yet another arena in which to exert its influence. Thus, a number of some of the most visible literary journals from the Commonwealth, such as *Transition* in Uganda, *Encounter* in Britain, *Der Monat* in Germany, *Preuves* in France, *Quadrant* in Australia, and *Quest* in India, as well as a large number of conferences, including the one at Leeds, were in fact at least partly sponsored by the Congress for Cultural Freedom, an international cultural organization headquartered in Paris,¹⁷ which was revealed in 1967 to have been directly funded by the CIA. Clearly, American interest in the field not only predates its customarily recognized alliance with the rise of postcolonial studies, but is interestingly embedded in US aspirations for a sphere of influence in the study of literature globally.

The British Commonwealth

Commonwealth literary studies were thus well underway in the US when Jeffares hosted the 1964 Leeds conference, which resulted in the constitution of the Association of Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies (ACLALS) and the *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* (JCL). As its first editor Arthur Ravenscroft notes in his account of the origins of JCL, the title was suggested by Douglas Grant, a Professor of American Literature at Leeds, who argued that if it were called simply the *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, most academic librarians would have to order it.¹⁸ Other benefits of the chosen name became apparent over the years, not least with regard to funding. Alastair Niven acknowledged the enormous debt owed to the Commonwealth Foundation, without whose ongoing support it was unlikely that the journal

could have stayed afloat.¹⁹ To the founding members of *JCL*, however, it was clear that the title was ‘a piece of convenient shorthand’ which should not be construed as ‘a perverse underwriting of any concept of a single, culturally homogeneous body of writings to be thought of as “Commonwealth Literature”’.²⁰ Distinctions between Canadian, Nigerian and Australian writing were acknowledged, even as there was plenty of discussion about what constituted Canadian literature and whether the term African literature could be applied to all works written by Africans in English or African languages. While these debates continued, however, in the final analysis, as Ravenscroft claimed, all writing which was recognizably in the English language would have to take ‘its place within the body of English literature, and [become] subject to the criteria of excellence by which literary works in English are judged’. The ‘best’ Commonwealth writers in English, in other words, were expected to at once transcend the parochial *and* convey a dimension of ‘Canadian-ness’ or ‘West-Indian-ness’, as the case might be.²¹

The inaugural editorial of *JCL* located the journal firmly in the genial liberal humanism of its time. It defined two purposes: first, to put writers and students of English literature in some twenty or thirty countries in touch with one another, as against fostering links exclusively with the metropolitan centres of London and New York. To this end, it carried a comprehensive annual bibliography, which recorded the poetry, drama and fiction of each country so that interested people might have a conveniently accessible account of what was being written in different parts of the Commonwealth.²² Further, recognizing that some countries had long-established literary traditions other than English which were likely to influence anglophone writing in those areas, the bibliography was to include sections on translations from these other literatures.

The journal’s second purpose was to debate, even discover, what literary values should be applied to these literatures.²³ How, for instance, was one to assess a new African novel when there was so much uncertainty about just what the African novels were or what they were trying to do? The journal sought to spread ‘more detailed knowledge’ of these literatures as a way of facilitating relevant comparison in the critical appraisal of Commonwealth writing. Each issue contained reviews of recent publications in order to inform and stimulate criticism. And under the editorship of Andrew Gurr in 1979, a Critical Forum ‘less weighty than an article but more considered than a letter’ was introduced to engage with questions that presumably resonated across the Commonwealth, about writing in English as a foreign language or in a different culture, grappling with postcolonial and non-metropolitan problems of

identity and political stance and so on. As Gurr said, ‘we all (if only on the evidence of our reading *JCL*) are looking for signs that our problems are not unique, that our experiences are shared and that consequently we may be able to learn from the struggles of our neighbours’.²⁴

This optimism about comparative research was also visible in the founding of *ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature*, started in 1970 in Leeds under A.N. Jeffares, and later moved to the University of Calgary, Canada. In his inaugural editorial, Jeffares announced he was less interested in ‘the splitting of hairs in defining Commonwealth literature, or searching for Australian or Canadian or American identity’ than in ‘the assessment of work on a detached basis’.²⁵ *ARIEL* invited contributions on all literature in English, including American. The final criterion was ‘good writing’, although, in true liberal spirit, Jeffares granted that ‘[m]any readers will define “good” differently’.²⁶ Even as he endorsed the tradition of New Criticism which always returned the reader to the text, Jeffares conceded that a thorough knowledge of the text needed to be accompanied by a knowledge of ‘the history behind it’.²⁷ Again, following *JCL*, he recognized the need for good translation as a means of ‘the widening. . . of local, provincial, and national writing into something we can all apprehend, assimilate – and appreciate’.²⁸ His staunch assimilationist approach notwithstanding, Jeffares’s patronage of CLS at the time was a bold move in terms of the academic establishment, at once challenging the Leavisite ‘Great Tradition’ and New Critical assumptions about the autonomy of literature from its social or political contexts.²⁹

Other significant players in this emerging field included commercial publishers. Alan Hill at Heinemann initiated its African Writers Series (AWS) in 1962, at a time when ‘the very idea of an African literature was still controversial in many respected circles in the West’.³⁰ In Africa, though, it coincided with a call from the newly independent countries in Africa in the late 1950s to replace the old colonial curricula of European educational literature with literature by and about Africans. The period saw the development of a pan-African series, totalling an impressive 270 titles between 1972 and 1984,³¹ all designed for classroom use, issued solely in paperback for easier affordability by African students. According to Achebe, the voluntary editor for the series who chose its first hundred titles, the launching of AWS was ‘like a starting pistol to African writers for which the writers were waiting on the starting line’.³² Insofar as winning prizes is an indication of success, the AWS has an enviable record of three Nobel laureates – Wole Soyinka (1986), Naguib Mahfouz (1988) and Nadine Gordimer (1991), along with a series of other international honours. The success of the AWS encouraged Heinemann to

launch another series in the following decade, on Caribbean writers. Other publishers joined in, with Longman introducing its Drumbeat Series of Commonwealth writing, and the Women's Press launching a Black and Third World Women Writers Series.³³

Debates and developments

While Jeffares was arguing for all anglophone literatures from the Commonwealth to be seen as contributing 'to our common heritage', another opposing view had been gathering strength. It was first expressed almost a decade before Jeffares's *ARIEL* editorial, by F.W. Watt in an essay on Canadian Literature published in *The Commonwealth Pen* (1961). 'It makes no sense to say', Professor Watt had asserted, 'that to write in the English language is simply to contribute to the great treasury of English literature.'³⁴ Nor was this view limited to the North American academy. Jeffares's claim that writers were obliged to make themselves comprehensible to a wider readership in view of the overseas markets,³⁵ forcefully articulated at the Leeds conference in 1964, had been partially answered at the conference itself by Chinua Achebe:

I don't know if African writers write with a foreign audience in mind. What I do know is that they don't have to. At least I know that I don't have to. Last year the pattern of sales of *Things Fall Apart* in the cheap paperback edition was as follows: About 800 copies in Britain, 20,000 in Nigeria, and about 2,500 in all other places. The same pattern was also true of *No Longer at Ease*.³⁶

The many attractions of the metropolitan publishing industry notwithstanding, what is called into question here is the argument about the absolute necessity for the writer to be universally comprehensible, and by extension the notion that all anglophone literature was to regard itself as contributing to the enrichment of a common heritage. Thus, even in the founding moments of CLS, there was little consensus over the governing truths of the discipline.

Indeed, differences over readership, intelligibility, market, universality, specificity and fit within the larger canon became only more pronounced with time. At the Commonwealth conference in Aarhus in 1971, Ravenscroft reiterated his earlier stance: To think of all the diverse writers whose work was open to more than English literary traditions as 'being inheritors of a central cultural legacy that spread from Britain is now an utterly ill-equipped approach'.³⁷ While race and geography were deemed inadequate as modes of organizing these diverse literatures,³⁸ no other satisfactory organizing principles looked ready to replace them. In hindsight, early intimations of postcoloniality were apparent in *JCL*'s 1969 issue's proposal for looking at the effect of

the 'historical colonial experience' on the writers' aims as one tentative way forward.³⁹ The first move in this direction was made when editors identified four distinct categories: literature from British settled countries; literature from countries once occupied by the British, such as India; African literature; and literature from the West Indies.⁴⁰ Subsequent developments in the field suggest that these categories have continued to be significant.

Looking back upon the first twenty years of *JCL* in 1984, Alastair Niven concluded that despite the countless editorials urging scholars of CLS to adopt comparative frameworks, few of the articles submitted to the journal had been truly comparative or showed evidence of cross-fertilization between the various areas of the Commonwealth, or indeed suggested that there was any identifiable coherence in the varied literary productivity from the Commonwealth. Niven expresses his disappointment thus: 'The evolution of Commonwealth literary studies was once one of the great hopes for cultural contact across continents. Have we lost direction or am I imagining things?'⁴¹

Regardless of editorial intentions and the efforts of transnational cultural/critical subnetworks such as the ACLALS, whose very existence was predicated on the assumption that the pursuit of comparative research between literatures with a shared developmental history would teach us all something of significance about our own literatures, the dominant impulse in Commonwealth criticism through the 60s and 70s remained one of trying to demonstrate the idea of a 'national literature' or a 'national consciousness in literature',⁴² rather than seeking comparisons or parallels between cultures. As the West Indian Edward Baugh observed in 1989, in 'Commonwealth' criticism there had 'not been all that much real meeting of minds across cultural and national boundaries'.⁴³

New negotiations

The 1980s posed new kinds of challenges. Universities, especially the arts and the humanities, were facing financial cuts, courses were being discontinued, chairs and lectureships going unfilled, and research grants were increasingly scarce.⁴⁴ After a fairly prosperous beginning, the Heinemann AWS was also facing difficulties. By the mid 1980s, only one or two new titles a year were being published, and much of the back catalogue had fallen out of print. Yet, the undertow of resistance was strong.⁴⁵ Among other places, this was evident in the entrepreneurship and imagination of scholars such as Anna Rutherford and Susheila Nasta, who saw to the establishment of two new international journals, *Kunapipi* (1979) and *Wasafiri* (1984), respectively.

A small but ambitious journal, *Kunapipi* set itself the task of publishing creative writing, a project that inevitably involved discovering and advancing

writers from the postcolonial margins, as well as publishing a range of other material including critical work, work of artists, articles related to historical and sociological topics. The annual spring issue carried a review of the major literary events in the various regions. Through literary criticism aimed at introducing individual works and writers from varied cultural contexts to a broad readership, *Kunapipi*, along with the Dungaroo Press, provided a forum for a body of critical commentary that was instrumental in establishing the academic credentials of the discipline.

Wasafiri was published under the auspices of the Association for the Teaching of Caribbean, African, Asian and Associated Literatures (ATCAL), a national organization in Britain which acted as a pressure group in the late 1970s and early 1980s to persuade examination boards to include and to take seriously the writings of authors such as Sam Selvon, Jean Rhys, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, Anita Desai among others. In addition, it held annual conferences and provided resources and information to teachers, librarians and students attempting to put together courses and materials on a subject area that was unknown and invisible to many.⁴⁶ ATCAL folded in the early 1990s but its interests in education, canon formation and multicultural approaches to the teaching of literature were taken up by ACLALS, while *Wasafiri* continued to provide a forum for creative and critical writing, reviews and interviews.

At the time of *Wasafiri*'s appearance in 1984, multiculturalism and cultural diversity were important buzzwords among educational institutions, though few university departments actually taught courses that reflected this interest. Practice in institutions of higher education and teachers' training was piecemeal, with pockets of activity in a few locations such as the Universities of Leeds and Kent. On the whole, there was little real acceptance or knowledge of even major writers like Chinua Achebe and Bessie Head.⁴⁷ Ten years later, Nasta could look back on the 'remarkable growth of interest and the proliferation of new courses' in the 'New Literatures in English' both at undergraduate and postgraduate levels.⁴⁸

While the above magazines and journals enjoyed international visibility, their efforts were more than supported by a large number of regional publications which had been 'springing up like mushrooms over the Commonwealth'.⁴⁹ Many of these new literary and literary-critical magazines emerged at the behest of ACLALS, which had branches spread throughout the English-speaking world, encouraging the development of local anglophone writing but also, through special issues, promoting new literatures in English from across the Commonwealth. By the end of the 1980s, new literatures in English had gained notable institutional recognition in England and also many parts of the

Commonwealth. But success came with its own set of anxieties. There was a nagging sense that the gains had been made at the cost of an almost total subservience to a set of critical standards established at the literary centres of Britain and US.⁵⁰ The English language which had initially provided a tenuous cohesion now came to be seen as oppressive in many circles, with writers like Ngũgĩ repudiating it to write in their own language. Likewise, despite consistently stated editorial policies of encouraging work from the regions, writers who wrote about their home regions from the central metropolis received more attention from a journal like *JCL* than writers who stayed in their regions and wrote only for them. Nor had what Andrew Gurr called the most obvious form of ‘translation’, i.e. the comparison of an unknown writer from one region with a more internationally known figure, been much practised.⁵¹ Even when comparative paradigms were pursued, they yielded differences more than continuities, leading Gurr to conclude that the true topos of commonwealth literature ought to be built around some slogan such as ‘vive la différence!’ The contradictory expectation of the readers and writers of *JCL* to be at once broadly international and narrowly regional had resulted in a range of articles in a journal like *JCL*, so wide as to encompass ‘the two-eyed speaking to the two-eyed all the way to the blind leading the blind’.⁵²

But even as the methodological framework for reading CLS began to look questionable, alternative paradigms had been emerging with a more regional/hemispheric focus: *Meanjin* (1940), *Research in African Literatures* (1970) and *Callaloo* (1976). Along with a more narrowly confined geographical scope, each of these journals in its own way also paved the way for an interdisciplinarity – an alternative sort of comparatism if you will – that was to become the hallmark of postcolonial critical practice.

Meanjin began in Brisbane, with a declared early interest in defining ‘an Australian character’. Founding editor Clem Christesen advised early contributors to emphasize ‘the development of a strong and virile Australian culture, with all the significant marks of “difference”’ and invited ‘authentic Australian bush and city “colour” poetry’.⁵³ Its other abiding concern was to find institutional recognition for the new writing.⁵⁴ By the end of the 1950s, *Meanjin*’s agenda had been substantially advanced, thanks to its own efforts but also on account of the broader agreement between literary critics and Australian historians on the fundamental significance of the tradition of Australian writing. Paradoxically, however, it was during the 1950s that elements of the cultural context which had fostered the notion of ‘an’ Australian character began to shift. The influx of postwar immigration radically changed the demographic character of Australia, and the talk of a singular national character

began to sound distinctly archaic.⁵⁵ As Graeme Turner points out, scholars now started to critically examine the meanings attached to national culture. The previously useful alliance between literature and history was ill equipped to answer new questions about how Australia was *represented* in the media, and about the consequences and effects of these representations – questions, in other words, into the functioning of culture itself and the processes of its formation.⁵⁶

Located between the purely literary *Southerly* and the more political *Overland*, *Meanjin*'s interests at once encompassed questions of Australian cultural identity, as well as international cultural developments.⁵⁷ Christesen was particularly suspicious of the commodity culture that was entering Australia in the wake of American influence in the 1960s. Although his fear that this would destroy people's capacity to appreciate higher art forms was openly elitist,⁵⁸ *Meanjin* remained influential right through the 1960s, partly by presenting a forum of debate on these very issues. In 1966–7, Christesen commissioned the ground-breaking 'Godzone' series of seven essays on Australian history, politics and popular culture, particularly youth culture.⁵⁹ In the context of increasing tensions in Australia over the Vietnam War and the international phenomenon of mounting student radicalism, polemical essays published in *Meanjin* became more numerous, shorter and less 'academic'.⁶⁰ In 1968, Christesen commissioned a more extensive series under the heading of 'The Temperament of Generations', which marked a shift in the editorial policy away from the scholarly orientation of the Cold War years towards making *Meanjin* more into a journal of comment.⁶¹ Over the following years, *Meanjin* continued to host a range of critical voices – from a series of essays on Australia's relationship with its neighbours, notably Allan Healy's sharp denunciation of Australian colonial policy in New Guinea and Humphrey McQueen's scathing critique of Australian racism to Craig McGregor's exploration of the dark side of rock culture, among others. Diverse sources and a synthesizing impulse – evident in these landmark series – were models for future work in the area of Australian history and culture. But even as *Meanjin* was moving away from being a purely literary venture to a cultural one, Christesen continued his policy of publishing Australian writing as well as a range of writers from other countries including R. K. Narayan, Chinua Achebe, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, to mention only a few in a long and distinguished list.

Research in African Literatures began with a very different kind of mandate from *Meanjin*. 'For many years', as one reviewer of its twenty-fifth anniversary issue had noted, '*Meanjin* just about *was* Australian literature.'⁶² *RAL*, on the

other hand, emerged at a time when African literatures were being studied more widely and intensively than ever before but there was no professional publication that united the varied but overlapping interests of its dispersed intellectual community. *RAL* sought to remedy this situation by providing an international, interdisciplinary forum for students and teachers of African literatures.⁶³ The journal began as the official journal of the African Literatures Seminar of the MLA and the African Literature Committee of the African Studies Association.⁶⁴ Within ten years it had grown from a biannual publication of about 100 pages per issue to a quarterly containing 160 pages per issue. The tables of contents of the early numbers show that it was a capacity-building project aimed at establishing the canonical standards for what was still an emergent field: reports of research in progress, curricularization, libraries and archives, bibliographies, conferences, new journals, reviews.⁶⁵ The success was evident in the recognition of *RAL* as the single most important factor in placing Africa and its literatures on the curricular map of the Euro-American academy.⁶⁶

As David Attwell notes, the historical depth and diversity of the early issues were quite remarkable in a context that was only just starting to register the break-up of the New Critical consensus.⁶⁷ Yet its method – primarily of archival research aimed at observing, measuring, classifying, evaluating, listing –⁶⁸ and the subject of its study (‘people of colour’), both recalled what Rey Chow describes as ‘the massive information retrieval that constitutes the study of non-Western cultures under the establishment known in the US as “area studies”’.⁶⁹ Moreover, the founding editor, Bernth Lindfors’s seeming obliviousness to the processes of canonization of African literatures and how they advanced ‘larger modernist projects grounded in Western epistemologies’ was a further source of anxiety.⁷⁰ If ‘theory’ or a self-reflexive critical practice that is alert to the ‘cultural politics of knowledge production’ is what distinguishes the old area studies from the new cultural studies,⁷¹ then Lindfors’s *RAL* seemed closer to the older model than it did to the new practice.

Yet there was a difference. According to H. D. Harootunian, while the establishment of area studies programmes promised to ‘transcend’ disciplinary boundaries ‘to provide holistic and integrated accounts of different regions’, its relentless kinship with strategic policy making – involving ‘contract research’ aimed at serving national interests – meant that area studies ‘was never able to free itself from the pursuit of a knowledge bonded to the necessities that had given it shape’.⁷² *RAL*’s pursuit of interdisciplinary enquiry, on the other hand, was unhampered by comparable affiliations. The journal’s focus allowed for a wide-ranging definition of literature that took into consideration both

oral and written expressions from all over the continent as well as a recognition of a host of issues understood to diversify African literature and its criticism, such as the transition to full democracy in South Africa, Nigeria's post-mortem of its civil war, Uganda's campaign against AIDS, and Malawi's analysis of repressive autocracy.⁷³ Further, as Supriya Nair points out, the impact of the history of modern colonialism and slavery, focused through the emergence of new literatures in English, was also evident in the comparative focus of *RAL*. The first kind of comparison was based on the shared experience of European colonialism across much of the world, although the review sections of the journal indicated a growing ambivalence towards such broad paradigms.⁷⁴ The second kind of comparison took the form of locating the anglophone African text within the English literary tradition and tracing its connections to other English texts, although this too was not without misgivings underscored by the recurring discussions in the journal of influence vs plagiarism.⁷⁵ Yet another aspect of the comparative work in the journal was a diasporic one, identifying African influences in the US but also, less frequently, the Caribbean and Latin America.⁷⁶

The black diaspora was explored much more fully in *Callaloo*, a journal which emerged in the mid 1970s alongside a number of prominent publications associated broadly with the New Left and with 'new social movements' and the aesthetic issues and innovations they engendered, including *Feminist Studies* (1972), *Critical Enquiry* (1974), *Radical History Review* (1975) *Signs* (1975) and *Social Text* (1979). Subtitled 'A Black South Journal of Arts and Letters', from the second issue onwards in 1978, *Callaloo*, however, clearly set out to provide a regional forum for the voices of the Deep South. What it shared with these other publications was a commitment to collaboration, interdisciplinarity, and dialogue and models of working collectives.⁷⁷ Looking to distinguish itself from other black journals which were more pointed towards black creative expression, such as *Obsidian* (1975) and *Hambone* (1974), as well as those more oriented towards contemporary criticism on black US literature, such as *African American Review* (1967), *Callaloo* chose to publish visual art next to fiction, interviews next to cultural and literary criticism, memoir next to contemporary poetry, engaging in disciplinary and genre boundary crossing from its inception and insisting on the centrality of the 'present artistic practice' to any understanding of contemporary culture.⁷⁸

In the mid 1980s the journal broadened its purview to take stock of contemporary black culture and criticism from around the world, publishing originals alongside English translations when necessary. As Tom Dent stated in his preface to the first issue, one of the things the journal was about was

repositioning 'the Black South not just as the Black Belt but instead as a transnational south: a field that foregrounds and explores the links among black expressive practices in the US, the Caribbean, South American and Africa itself'.⁷⁹ Also helpful is Brent Edwards's reminder that in 1976 the journal's founding editor Charles Rowell's critique of Black Arts drew on extended citations not only from James Weldon Johnson and Gwendolyn Brooks, but also from contemporary Caribbean and African writers such as Edward Kamau Brathwaite and Ezekiel Mphahlele. This theoretical and referential breadth was quite radical for its time, and it sets the tone as early as the 1980 triple issue which included two pioneering special sections: 'South of the South: A Special Section from the Caribbean and Latin America' edited by Melvin Dixon and 'African Literature' edited by David Dorsey.⁸⁰ *Callaloo*, moreover, expanded its scope beyond even the African diaspora with special issues devoted to Native American literature, the Confederate flag debate, Puerto Rican women writers, Dominican literature, Cuban literature, postcolonialism, Hurricane Katrina, among others. Yet the journal remained vigilant of the publication needs of its primary constituency as well as of the racial politics of the American literary establishment.⁸¹

Noticeable in this record of geographic and hemispheric journals is the absence of corresponding developments in the study of South Asian literature and culture. With the exception of the newer and lesser-known *South Asian Review*, a refereed journal of the South Asian Literary Association, the impact of writing by those of South Asian descent appears to be reflected not in journals dedicated to this geographic area but in non-area-specific publications devoted to broadly cast Commonwealth, postcolonial, transnational and theoretical issues.

Meanjin, *RAL*, *Callaloo* and *South Asian Review* all began by addressing a regionally defined readership. In practice, however, they have also provided a methodological bridge to the cultural studies orientation we today associate with dedicated postcolonial journals such as *Interventions* and *Postcolonial Studies*.

Interdisciplinary journals

The disciplinary shifts anticipated by the above journals, sometimes in spite of their stated mission, found unforeseen avenues of development with the arrival of post-structuralist theory, especially when mediated via Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978). Through an analysis of the Western academic discipline of Orientalism, Said establishes the relationship between knowledge and power. While the Commonwealth paradigm had analysed literature in terms of what it represented, even comparing representations with their referents to test for

accuracy, Said drew upon the Foucauldian concept of discourse to move away from the *description* of the material factors governing empire to the discursive construction of the Orient as an object of knowledge and the ways in which this construction serves the cause of empire.⁸² Said's subject of analysis in *Orientalism* was representation, its structure and governing assumptions, and the Western ideologies it projects.⁸³ No longer was it possible to continue with the old liberal notion that knowledge of the text 'included the history behind it', as if the historical, political and economic factors were 'external to the field itself'.⁸⁴ As the full implications of Said's treatise were gradually absorbed, they fuelled a vigorous debate in literary studies which by the mid 1980s had spread to encompass virtually every discipline in the humanities and social sciences. A dramatic new era of interdisciplinary interest in postcolonial issues now swept through journals, some of the most influential among which were located in the North American academy. These journals, defined by broad rather than exclusively postcolonial interests, helped in the accreditation in the early 1980s of an array of interdisciplinary research initiatives, which together with colonial discourse analysis, were geared to examine 'how dominant systems of knowledge had effected the discursive relegation and institutional oppression of subordinated communities and marginalised cultural traditions'.⁸⁵ The following discussion will engage closely with key theoretical developments in postcolonial studies sparked by essays published in these journals.

Hybridity and its discontents

Such was the force and impact of Said's argument in *Orientalism* that for about five years after its publication in 1978, it occasioned scarce disagreement.⁸⁶ The apparent tardiness of responses to Said's book was accentuated by the fact that full-length studies of the developing area of postcolonialism were themselves slow to appear. The first preliminary survey of postcolonial criticism, by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back*, was only published as late as 1989. A number of literary journals, on the other hand, had been engaging with similar questions since the 1960s, as the foregoing discussion has clarified. Around the mid 1980s these were joined by several non-dedicated interdisciplinary journals, and it was here that searching critiques of *Orientalism* were first published. Special issues of *Critical Inquiry* (1985 and 1986), *New Literary History* and *Cultural Critique* (1987), *Oxford Literary Review* (1987 and 1991), *Public Culture* and *Social Text* (1992) invited contributors to link literary enquiry with newer critical discourses such as feminism and deconstruction, thus significantly altering the dominant modes of analysis in

the field. Interdisciplinary journals were particularly receptive to configurations such as colonial discourse analysis which insisted upon the importance of studying literature together with history, politics, sociology and other art forms rather than in isolation from the multiple material and intellectual contexts which determine its production and reception.⁸⁷ It was through these journals that some of the most influential postcolonial concepts would gain widespread currency and force.

The major charge against *Orientalism* was that it cast both the West and the Orient in overly monolithic forms, ignoring how the resistance and complicity of the colonized peoples were mutually entangled with the knowledge that was being produced about them. Homi Bhabha's 'Signs taken for wonders' (*Critical Inquiry*, special issue: "'Race", Writing and Difference', 1985) was a significant early challenge to Saidian binaries. On the one hand, Bhabha turns to Lacanian categories to rewrite the colonial encounter as one of deep-seated anxiety for the colonizer,⁸⁸ manifested in a fracturing of colonial authority.⁸⁹ On the other, he rewrites the agency of the colonized not as an attribute of the insurgent subaltern trying to undermine and defeat an oppressive opponent, but as textual performance. Political engagement as a conscious challenge to colonial authority was thus reinscribed by Bhabha as a spontaneous auto-critique – 'the effect of an ambivalence produced within the rules of recognition of dominant discourses' – ⁹⁰ which was always already enclosed in every colonial encounter.⁹¹

While for Said the issue of otherness was primarily a racial one, Bhabha's rewriting of the effects of the colonial encounter as the production of hybridization 'rather than the noisy command of colonialist authority or the silent repression of native traditions', admitted no trace of antagonism, let alone a racial one.⁹² As Daniel Boyarin argues, Bhabha's focus on borders and thresholds as sites where identities are performed and contested disavows the historical experience of borders as places where people have been detained, interrogated, imprisoned, even shot. Boyarin foregrounds what he calls the double-edged quality of hybridity: on the one hand, the hybrids 'represent . . . a difference "within", a subject that inhabits the rim of an inbetween reality, but on the other hand, the literal ascription of hybridity on the part of the hegemonic discourses to one group of people, one set of practices, disavows the very difference within by externalising it'.⁹³ Thus, even as it was enlisted to challenge notions of purity, hybridity could itself become essentialized as the disowned other, reinforcing notions it was meant to disavow.

In 'The economy of the Manichean allegory: the function of racial difference in colonialist literature' (*Critical Inquiry*, 1985), Abdul JanMohamed challenges

Bhabha's assumption of what he calls the unity of the 'colonial subject', against which he posits the dichotomy of the Manichean allegory as the central trope in colonial discourse. Through the formal devices of colonialist fiction (genres, stereotypes and so on), the mechanism of the Manichean allegory secures for its colonialist readers the affective pleasures that lie in feelings of moral superiority and the material profits that motivate imperialism. JanMohamed argues that Bhabha's 'fetishization' of colonial discourse as the privileged object of analysis 'served the same ideological function as older, humanistic analyses, i.e., it repressed the political history of colonialism'.⁹⁴ A better way of understanding colonialist discourse, he suggested, was through a mapping of its ideological function in relation to actual imperialist practices.⁹⁵ Aware of what he called the limitations of 'a certain vintage of Marxism' so preoccupied with an 'objective' analysis of mapping the terrain that it did not adequately theorize the subject,⁹⁶ JanMohamed turns to psychoanalysis and Lacanian categories. In placing colonialist fiction within the sequential narrative of the development of the psyche – where 'imaginary' texts, which adhere to a fixed opposition between self and the colonized other, correspond to the earlier, less evolved stage of human development, while 'symbolic' texts, which attempt to go beyond Manichean binarisms, signal a more advanced stage in the developmental paradigm – JanMohamed's essay effected an interesting if subtle reversal of colonialist stereotypes. But its chief contribution lay in its timely challenge to colonial discourse analysis from a counter-hegemonic political perspective which exhorted postcolonial theory to engage more closely with the relationship between the political economy of colonization and its cultural forms of which the text was but a part.

As the key terms of postcolonial theory were being developed and debated in dialogue with major Western theories, Barbara Christian's essay 'The race for theory' (*Cultural Critique*, special issue: 'Minority Discourse', 1987), strikes an early note of misgiving about theory's alienating language and discursive modes. Christian was writing in the context of a widespread backlash against what she called 'the incomprehensibility of the language set adrift in literary circles' which has 'silenced many of us to the extent that some of us feel we can no longer discuss our own literature'.⁹⁷ In calling attention to the profound sense of disempowerment that she as a West Indian academic in the US, and others like her, felt under the new academic dispensation, Christian cast Western theory as yet another tool of imperialist domination. Her perception was shared widely among the academic community, eventually leading some of the best-known theorists in the field to recognize the need for them to be more accessible to those in whose name they were purportedly speaking.⁹⁸

Christian's concern in the essay about keeping the focus on literature and literary criticism would seem prescient in the light of subsequent debates on the neglect of aesthetic considerations in literary and postcolonial studies.⁹⁹ Her other argument, that categories such as minority discourse were symptomatic of 'a western dualistic frame which sees the rest of the world as minor and tries to convince the rest of the world that it is major usually through force and then through language',¹⁰⁰ also found wide support.¹⁰¹ Although insofar as it now extended the subject of domination to include 'internally colonized' cultures within the nation state in the 'developed' world itself rather than confined to territories 'out there', minority discourse remained an attractive and empowering model to others.¹⁰² Even more critically, the model of minority discourse offered a newer conceptualization of a robust 'third space', that went beyond the pallid visions of the multicultural and the syncretic, and to which one might look for what Benita Parry calls 'new modes of address to construct not-yet-existing conditions'.¹⁰³

Postcolonialism and postmodernism

In their introduction to *Relocating Postcolonialism*, Ato Quayson and David Goldberg note that the destabilization of binaries, which constitutes one of the chief preoccupations of postcolonial studies, is often framed as an attempt to get the extratextual world of social relations on a more just footing. Destabilization, in other words, furnishes the pretext from which postcolonial criticism is viewed as an ethical enterprise. This in turn defines a peculiar paradox: while a suspicion of any given metanarratives is necessarily anti-foundationalist, these anti-foundationalist procedures are contradictorily aligned to the assertion of an ethical standpoint. This contradiction, they suggest, lies at the heart of possibly the most bitter criticisms of postcolonial theory.¹⁰⁴

Elements of this debate were incipient in an essay by Fredric Jameson, 'Third-World literature in the era of multinational capitalism' (*Social Text*, 1986). One of the determinants of capitalist culture, or the culture of the Western realist and modernist novel, Jameson argued, is a radical split between the private and the public. In Third World texts, on the other hand, even those that are seemingly private and invested with a properly libidinal dynamic, the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public Third World culture and society.¹⁰⁵ This allegory, however, doesn't recall 'an elaborate set of figures and personifications to be read against some one-to-one table of equivalences' so much as 'the more alarming notion that such equivalences are themselves in constant change

and transformation at each perpetual present of the text'. Through a reading of the Chinese writer Lu Xun, Jameson was able to show his use of allegory to be 'profoundly discontinuous, a matter of breaks and heterogeneities, of the multiple polysemia of the dream rather than the homogeneous representation of the symbol'.¹⁰⁶ Paradoxically, then, it is the anti-foundationalist underpinning of the allegorical mode which enables Lu Xun to undertake the social critique characteristic of his work. Jameson clarifies his point by extending the scope of his analysis to the general dilemma of African intellectuals after the achievement of independence, which, like that of Chinese intellectuals after the Cultural Revolution,¹⁰⁷ lay in a passion for change and social regeneration which has not yet found its agent. Insofar as the achievement of independence meant that the adversary who spoke another language or wore the visible trappings of colonial occupation was now replaced by one's own people, the connections to external controlling forces became more difficult to represent. This resulted in a crisis of representation,¹⁰⁸ which was then resolved through recourse to an unstable allegory that – given the complexity of its social referent as well as the personal risk to a public intellectual in Communist China – would short-circuit any attempts to find one-to-one equivalences.

The paradox of postcolonial theory which was captured in Jameson's reading of Third World literature was subsequently rehearsed in debates over postcolonial theory's paradoxical relationship with postmodernism. But in the meanwhile, Jameson's essay came in for a sharp critique from Aijaz Ahmad. In 'Jameson's rhetoric of otherness and the "national allegory"' (*Social Text*, 1987), Ahmad argued that the 'cognitive aesthetics of third world literature', which Jameson had set out to offer, rested upon the suppression of a multiplicity of significant differences among and within nations, and made it possible for him to cast the Third World as a civilizational Other to the West. Moreover, in describing both the First and the Second World in terms of their production systems, while situating the Third World merely in terms of its 'experience' of colonialism and imperialism,¹⁰⁹ Jameson had suspended the Third World outside the sphere of conflict between socialism and capitalism. '[H]ow does one understand the third world?' Ahmad asks. 'Is it pre-capitalist? Transitional? Transitional between what and what?'¹¹⁰

While Ahmad's rebuttal of Jameson's main thesis about all Third World literature being a national allegory as a reductive and ignorant reading of Third World literature (a term rejected by Ahmad as carrying no epistemological currency) has made many wary of pursuing his line of enquiry, others have shown Jameson's claims to be relevant, particularly to Africa. As Ato Quayson points out, African aesthetic theories habitually read literature and politics and

political ideology simultaneously. His assertion that ‘no single discourse in any putative discursive network in Africa has been able to differentiate itself from the political’ is a powerful endorsement of Jameson’s thesis.¹¹¹ Nor is Quayson alone. Dipesh Chakrabarty’s observations about the absence of the bourgeois private in Indian culture point in a similar direction:

Anyone who has tried to write ‘French’ social history with Indian material would know how impossibly difficult the task is. It is not that the form of the bourgeois private did not come with European rule. There have been since the middle of the nineteenth century, Indian novels, diaries, letters, and autobiographies, but they seldom yield pictures of an endlessly interiorised subject. Our autobiographies are remarkably ‘public’ ... Public without private?¹¹²

Even if the ‘public’ in Chakrabarty’s argument doesn’t quite correspond to the ‘political’ in Jameson, his critique of terms like ‘pre-capitalist’ or ‘pre-bourgeois’ or ‘transitional’ for their reading of Third World history as a lack, an absence, or an incompleteness that translates into ‘inadequacy’,¹¹³ is an apposite addendum to Ahmad’s response.

Yet Ahmad’s chief criticism of Jameson was that he had unduly privileged the nation as the primary category of political mobilization in the Third World, a critique that seemed particularly just in relation to what is often cited as a textbook case for Jameson’s thesis, Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children*. For many, the full thrust of Ahmad’s critique really hit home when the novel was described on its dust-jacket in the hyperinflated terms of ‘a continent finding its voice’. But what the debate over *Midnight’s Children* most usefully clarified was not that the nation was an illegitimate category, but that the ‘crisis of meaning’ which had ostensibly gripped this nation had no real purchase on the postcolonial entity called India. As Kumkum Sangari’s ‘The politics of the possible’ (*Cultural Critique*, 1987) argued in the context of a wider discussion on magic realism, not all modes of non-linearity can be conflated with those of the decentred postmodern subject. Sangari called for distinguishing the problem of meaning and representation that beset the Third World from the slippage of meaning and of the ‘real’ which confronted academic discourses of Europe and America at the time,¹¹⁴ in the process disengaging the postcolonial from its overdetermined relationship with the postmodern.

Many of these issues were again reprised by Kwame Anthony Appiah in his article ‘Is the post- in postmodernism the post- in postcolonial?’ (*Critical Inquiry*, 1991). In his analysis of a recent New York exhibition on African art, in which all exhibits except one were in the mould of the Africa of ‘Primitivism’,¹¹⁵ Appiah had noted that postmodernism was really a

continuation of the modernist legacy of casting Africa in a relation of otherness to the West. The lone exception, identified as *Man with a Bicycle*, was thus described in the exhibition catalogue as belonging to a 'neotraditional' mode which, Appiah argued, could be read as another way of being traditional. In contrast, the *Man with a Bicycle* was for Appiah a testimony to the universal geographical significance of Western modernity.¹¹⁶

The rest of the essay goes on to sketch Africa's relationship to modernity as it looked from inside Africa. First, there was the second-generation African novel which Appiah calls 'postcolonial', whose shared prefix with the postmodern misleadingly suggested a kinship between the two terms based on a similar rejection of earlier legitimating narratives.¹¹⁷ Misleading because the imperative behind the postcolonial novel's assault on realism was not postmodernist but postnativist and postnationalist: Appiah maintains that the first generation of modern African novels were realist legitimations of nationalism. They were characterized by a celebratory tone which became rare after the 1960s, by which time nationalism had clearly failed and the nationalist bourgeoisie which spoke on its behalf had been discredited.¹¹⁸ Novels of the second stage identified, and rejected, the realist novel as part of the tactic of nationalist legitimation.¹¹⁹ In other words, for Appiah, as for Sangari, the postcolonial novel has a historically conjunctural logic to it that must be distinguished from the universalist aspirations of the postmodern. But where the postcolonial novel really played a critical role was in its conceptualization of Africa's relationship to modernity. Unlike modernism and postmodernism, it rejected the binarism of self/Other, Africa/ West, as well as nationalist divisions within the African continent: 'We are all already contaminated by each other.'¹²⁰

However, even as he endorses the postcolonial novel's appeal to an 'ethical universal', Appiah finds its stance unduly pessimistic, even derivative of and capitulating to institutions such as universities and publishing houses of the West. The postcolonial African novel's universal respect for human suffering, he suggests, at once points towards Africa's shared humanity with the rest of the world and, through the sheer enormity and scale of that suffering, casts it as an Other.

This then brings Appiah to another form of cultural production in the postcolony which simultaneously constitutes a response to modernism/ post-modernism's casting of Africa as the 'official other' of the West as well as an antidote to the dark vision of the postcolonial novelist, namely the sculpture titled *Man with a Bicycle*. As a product of a capitalist exchange of commodities, the *Man with a Bicycle* gives the lie to the exhibition curator's implicit belief that modernity is a cultural phenomenon not to be found in Africa. As someone

who doesn't relate to the bicycle as a Western invention, the Man symbolizes yet another mode of challenging the dichotomy of self and other. In contrast to the postcolonial novel, he represents a far 'less anxious creativity' that seemed to thrive despite all the negatives with which Africa struggles on a daily basis.¹²¹ Appiah's essay did more than confirm the increasing segregation of the postcolonial from the postmodern. It introduced a new dimension to the postcolonial debate by showing how an understanding of the postcolonial changed not just along a spatial and temporal scale, but also along the lines of genre: unlike the postcolonial novel, the sculpture of the man with a bicycle was not invested in defining itself against a past. In other words, not all cultural production in the postcolony was equally or in the same way postcolonial.

The debate over postmodernism and postcolonialism was in the end enormously suggestive for its unpacking of the relationship between literature and politics on the one hand and the differential impact of capitalism on postmodern and postcolonial cultures on the other – a debate which has been foundational for the subsequent development of postcolonial concerns into an investigation of the evolving contours of globalization.

Subalternity and representation

Two other much-read essays explored the issues around subaltern agency from the perspective of 'failure': Dipesh Chakrabarty's 'Postcoloniality and the artifice of history: who speaks for the "Indian" pasts?' (*Representations*, 1992) and Achille Mbembe's 'The banality of power and the aesthetics of vulgarity' (*Public Culture*, 1992). Although Chakrabarty, a historian of the Indian subaltern studies group, aligns himself with Bhabha's project of identifying a form of historical agency in the colonized sphere through a critique of nationalist historiography, his critique draws less upon literary/ psychoanalytic insights of colonial discourse analysis and more on a mix of traditional historiography with Gramscian, Foucauldian and Marxian insights.¹²² Chakrabarty argues that the universalization of the nation state as the most desirable form of political community has meant that the subaltern figure in Indian history, which often arrogates subjecthood to itself by mobilizing anti-historical and anti-modern means, cannot find any theoretical legitimacy within the knowledge regimes of the university. Nationalist Indian historiography, in other words, buys into the universalizing knowledge claims of 'Western civilization'. Paradoxically, while these can only be challenged via the postcolonial project of 'provincializing Europe', such a project is impossible to realize within the institutional site of the university 'whose knowledge procedures will always take us back to the terrain, where all contours follow that of [Chakrabarty's] hyperreal Europe'.¹²³

If Chakrabarty's essay concerns the failure of nationalist historiography to cast the subaltern as anything but a figure of lack, and relatedly, its inability to accommodate the failed resistance of the subaltern in the nationalist archive, Mbembe is concerned with the failure of the subject in the postcolony to rebel as a function of the logic of familiarity and domesticity that exists between the *commandement* and its target.¹²⁴ In removing the subaltern figure away from the familiar ground of resistance and agency, Mbembe takes us into unfamiliar territory, insisting on its indigeneity in the context of the postcolonial episteme. Like Bhabha, Mbembe seeks to go beyond the binary categories of subjection and autonomy used in standard interpretations of domination, but unlike him, Mbembe does not turn to a model of hybridity in which all contradictions are resolved in the third space. Rather he directs us to the provocative scenario of 'political improvisation'. He shows how, while the symbols and rituals of authorization are often engendered by those in power, these are actively appropriated by the populace and made 'commonplace'.¹²⁵ Obscenity and vulgarity which constitute one of the modalities of power in the postcolony are also arenas of its deconstruction or its ratification by subalterns.

Mbembe's essay casts new light on earlier pronouncements on the question of subaltern agency, in particular Gayatri Spivak's claim in her essay 'Can the subaltern speak?' (*Wedge*, 1985) that subaltern practice cannot signify 'as itself' across the divide that separates social elites from those who are not elite.¹²⁶ Spivak's comments may be taken to mean that the subaltern who can speak has either already graduated from its subaltern status and become a part of the elite, or that within elite spheres its voice is irrecoverable, not least because 'whatever is read (i.e. represented) as "subaltern" within elite discourse has for her always already been made over, appropriated, translated, traduced'.¹²⁷

While Mbembe's essay seems to be arguing for heterogeneous modes of reinscription by the subaltern colonized subject which cannot be understood by the standard Western discourse of agency, resistance etc., when read in the context of Spivak's argument, it presents us with a curious scenario: first, this colonial subject/subaltern has clearly not graduated from anything. The various subversive gestures of this agentic and active subaltern figure, at the end of the day, amount to no more than occasionally causing the *commandement* to stub its toe, doing no violence to the *commandement's* material base.¹²⁸ On the other hand, insofar as it is able to mimic various forms of elite consumption, occupying multiple mobile positions, bargaining and negotiating 'in the conceptual marketplace' which constitutes its own episteme,¹²⁹ it may no longer be described as subaltern. Does this mean that it occupies some kind of 'intermediate position between "full" subalternity and hegemony', as Bart

Moore-Gilbert argues in his critique of Spivak's essay?¹³⁰ The answer would seem to be 'No', for even when the subaltern appropriates the voice of the elite to speak, its subalternity is never in doubt, troubling Spivak's contention that 'If the subaltern can speak then, thank God, the subaltern is not a subaltern anymore.'¹³¹ At the same time, Mbembe's subaltern belies any suggestion of mobility that one might be tempted to extract from Moore-Gilbert's reference to an 'intermediate' position: the subaltern in Mbembe's essay certainly occupies an intermediate position but there is no suggestion of movement, only of unrelieved stasis.

Meanwhile, Spivak's suggestion that the 'historically muted subject of the subaltern woman' in particular was inevitably consigned to being either misunderstood or misrepresented through the self-interest of those with the power to represent,¹³² has generated considerable anxiety around the figure of the Third World woman.¹³³ Spivak's 'Can the subaltern speak?', Chandra Talpade Mohanty's 'Under Western eyes: feminist scholarship and colonial discourses' (*boundary* 2, 1986) and Sara Suleri's 'Woman skin deep: feminism and the postcolonial condition' (*Critical Inquiry*, 1992) constitute a potent cluster of influential essays that set the tone for debates on the relationship of feminism and postcolonialism. Together these essays have propelled substantive interdisciplinary discussion around questions of representation of the self and others, the perils of essentialism, the serviceability of the ideological construct of the Third World woman, 'questions of positionality and location', as Lata Mani phrases it, for the postcolonial intellectual,¹³⁴ and the prospects for a global feminism.

The centrality of the figure of woman to the colonial project is evident in the work of many postcolonial scholars who explore the feminization of the Orient, colonial anxieties about interracial rape and racial mixture, and the casting of colonialism as *mission civilisatrice*. Spivak famously describes British intervention in the Sati practice in India as 'white men saving brown women from brown men'.¹³⁵ Elsewhere, she underscores the dependence of literary constructions of Western female subjectivity on the withholding of rights and freedom from her imperially subjugated other.¹³⁶ Chandra Talpade Mohanty reaches a similar conclusion in her survey of Western feminist texts about women in the Third World: 'Western feminists alone become the true "subjects" of this counter-history. Third world women, on the other hand, never rise above the debilitating generality of their "object" status.'¹³⁷ Drawn in broad strokes within a global framework, Third World women are thus seen as an undifferentiated group uncomplicated by the heterogeneity that characterizes their counterpart in the more developed world. Oppression becomes a

Third World preserve, while Third World women are reduced to objects of consumption for a developed world which can implicitly and complacently reaffirm its superiority to the rest as the ‘norm or referent’.¹³⁸ Insisting on the heterogeneity of the lives of Third World women, Mohanty pleads for a more nuanced, interrelational analysis that does not limit the definition of the female subject to gender and does not bypass the social, class and ethnic coordinates of those analysed.

Sara Suleri takes similar aim at the monolithic construction of the Third World woman, suggesting that the ‘coupling of *postcolonial* with *woman* ... almost inevitably leads to the simplicities that underlie unthinking celebrations of oppression, elevating the racially female voice into a metaphor for the “good”’.¹³⁹ However, she also criticizes a series of critical moves made by Third World feminist scholars (including Mohanty for assuming a nativist authentic position) in the Western academy in response to a climate of receptiveness to representations of ‘marginal’ subjectivity. She criticizes the ways in which the deplorable construction of Third World woman as a hegemonic and powerless category perversely prepares the ground for producing an iconic and politically untouchable position of Third World womanhood. This position then provides a space from which Third World feminist critics can speak, ironically with the very privilege, she discloses, whose lack is thought to characterize the status of Third World women. Suleri closes by advocating a feminist theory of experience located in more material realism, such as that of the law or the state.

Clustered around the bristly problem of representation, these essays have been tremendously influential not only in discussions on gender in literary studies, anthropology, sociology and other disciplines, but also in other contexts involving the treatment and discursive presentation of difference. Various informed by psychoanalysis, philosophy, Marxism, postmodernism and ethnographic theory, these essays display the inherent interdisciplinarity characteristic of this phase of the development and evolution of postcolonial studies.

Institutionalizing postcolonial studies

If dedicated journals and discussion groups explicitly using the term ‘postcolonial’ signal the institutionalization of a field, postcolonial studies has only recently achieved this status. In May 1996, in response to brisk scholarly activity in the profession, the MLA Division on Postcolonial Studies in Literature and Culture came into existence.¹⁴⁰ As the Executive Committee’s application to the MLA programme committee noted in 2006, after ten years as

a discussion group, membership stood at 3,534 – over 10 per cent of the MLA overall, possibly the largest of the MLA's forty-eight Discussion Groups, and among the very largest of its eighty-five Divisions. As the application, drafted by David Chioni Moore on behalf of the group, points out, the designation 'postcolonial', initially intended as a largely geographic or geohistorical designator, had grown into a full-fledged *approach* to all manner of literary, language and cultural studies. Moore's unpublished account locates the appearance of the term 'postcolonial' in 1952 with A. R. Dunlap and E. J. Moyné's publication of 'The Finnish language on the Delaware', in *American Speech*. Six years later, the influential journal *Comparative Literature* published Justus M. Van der Kroef's essay on 'The colonial novel in Indonesia', a contribution which anticipated some of the colonial discourse analysis to appear in subsequent decades. The term 'postcolonial' appeared sporadically in the subsequent few decades before making its debut in *PMLA*, in the annual MLA Bibliography, in June 1967.

At the MLA's centennial convention in New York in 1983, the University of Texas's Gayatri Spivak organized a special session titled 'Colonialist and Postcolonialist Discourse', featuring Columbia University's Edward Said, Homi Bhabha of the University of Sussex and William Pietz, a PhD candidate at the University of California, Santa Cruz. The rest, as they say, is history, the journal part of which we have narrated above in some detail. By 1990–1 the term 'postcolonial' was featured prominently: first, in a *PMLA* scholarly essay – Debra Castillo's 'Coetzee's *Dusklands*: the mythic *punctum*' (1990); next, in *PMLA* editor John Kronik's announcement (1991) of 'a new special topic: Colonialism and the Postcolonial Condition', to be coordinated by Linda Hutcheon and Satya P. Mohanty; and finally, in an MLA Presidential Address by Catherine Stimpson, 'On differences' (1991). At the MLA Convention in 2001, the term postcolonial appeared in the titles of twenty-six papers and nine panels. In 2006, the discussion group on Postcolonial Literature and Culture was finally awarded Division status.

Among the various developments that eventually led to institutional recognition for postcolonial studies from the MLA, periodicals have clearly played a vital role. More than books, it is the 'repetitive, assertive, labour-intensive, voracious community' that makes a journal 'an exemplary "community of dissensus"',¹⁴¹ which has fostered the debates, discussions and academic exchanges that helped shape the new field. By the late 1990s, the field of postcolonial studies had become practically an industry. Two new dedicated postcolonial journals inaugurated this new phase in 1998: *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies* (UK) and *Postcolonial Studies: Culture,*

Politics, Economy (Australia). The impact of debates in the discipline since the publication of *Orientalism* was evident in the new journals' abandonment of what Graham Huggan has described as the 'earlier text-centred definitions of postcolonial criticism as a locus of anti-imperialist resistance' for a more contemporary focus on a range of cultural products within global modernity.¹⁴² And yet, despite their similarities, these are two very different journals.

Interventions' founding editor Robert Young introduced it as 'a specialist journal for postcolonial research, theory and politics, which aims to be both interdisciplinary and international in scope and reach'.¹⁴³ Alongside disciplines like history, anthropology, politics and psychoanalysis, which had played a prominent role in the development of the field until this point, *Interventions* also sought to critically engage with other fields such as international relations, development economics and area studies which despite their disciplinary proximity had not been accounted for in the development of postcolonial studies. For Young, the fundamental guiding principle of the journal was 'to make academic work accountable and to foreground that accountability by forging links with the lived politics of the social world, recovering histories, and creating possibilities for new dynamics of cultural and political practice'.¹⁴⁴ A special section in each issue called 'Situations' was aimed at providing a forum for activists to discuss significant contemporary political issues 'without being required to observe the usual academic discursive protocols'.¹⁴⁵

The second journal, *Postcolonial Studies*, was affiliated to the Institute of Postcolonial Studies, Melbourne. Shunning what it called the 'self-conscious politicisation' of the humanities academy in recent years,¹⁴⁶ the new journal marked a cultural turn which entailed a greater *theoretical* self-consciousness. The inaugural editorial claimed that since the postcolonial was now 'respectable, popular, publishable and pedagogically secure', it was time for it to become 'self-critical and introspective, and so also, to resist the seductions of canonicity and disciplinarity'. The journal set itself the following agenda: 'From the Simpsons to Suttee, from Madonna to Mao, "our" postcolonialism offers a new promiscuity which not only heads "downmarket" but along the way, breaks through the cordon that separates the anthropological-based cultural studies practiced in relation to non-western societies from the popular culture schools that focus on the popular in the West'.¹⁴⁷ Redefining conventional categories of popular culture as well as traditional interdisciplinarity, the journal embraced experimentalism. By the end of the first year, it had shed its subtitle, as well as edged away from the Institute which remained committed to a more self-consciously political agenda. Its suspicion of 'institutions' was articulated in the journal's fourth issue in the following terms: 'Surely the one

political question posed by postcolonial scholarship must be how best to operate within the institutions to which we are so intimately connected and yet produce the necessary side effects that will broaden the terrain that enables and allows for different forms of authoritative speech?¹⁴⁸

The recurrent emphasis on interdisciplinarity in the development of postcolonial studies warrants examination. As Huggan argues, what often passes for interdisciplinarity in postcolonial studies, while politically concerned, ‘remains firmly text-based’, and reconfirms ‘the historical rootedness of postcolonial studies in literary criticism’.¹⁴⁹ Huggan then goes on to distinguish between *individually* generated models of interdisciplinary transgression from *collaboratively* implemented initiatives of the type more common in the sciences than the humanities, which work towards integrating different intellectual training and disciplinary perspectives.¹⁵⁰ If we accept the latter as a more genuine brand of interdisciplinarity, then far from having reached the end of its heady ride, postcolonialism is only just hitting its interdisciplinary stride. In light of this critique, one response to the earlier question of institutions, namely, how to innovate given institutional constraints, might be to say that a more appropriate question for postcolonial studies to consider is how to do things alongside institutions rather than in spite of them. Genuine interdisciplinarity, which is not common because most individuals are trained in only one or two disciplines, would seem to need the backing of institutions to foster collaboration between people with different disciplinary training.

Another potential ally in the future of the field would be new developments in publishing technology. Online technologies have not only reduced the cost of managing and publishing a journal, but more importantly, have made it possible for journals to offer free access and gain widespread distribution at no additional cost. With the closure of *Jouvert: Journal of Postcolonial Studies* (1997–2003), *Postcolonial Text* (2004) emerged as the only fully online, refereed postcolonial journal, in part as a response to a call in 2002 by the Commonwealth Foundation, which funds the ACLALS, for greater public engagement on a local and global level as a requirement for ongoing funding. Since the Canadian chapter of the ACLALS received some of this funding, founding editor Ranjini Mendis was keen to fulfil the requirement. When the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada stated its desire for better, more effective ways of disseminating knowledge and building bridges between the academic community and the public in 2003, Mendis decided to explore the possibilities of an online medium by which journals could provide readers across the world with free access to new research and writing in postcolonial studies. Finally, in 2004, in collaboration with John Willinsky, who was at the time working on Open

Journal Systems designed to help scholarly journals publish online in an open-access format, Mendis launched the inaugural issue of *Postcolonial Text*.¹⁵¹ As Willinsky and Mendis note, open access seemed especially appropriate to a field like postcolonial studies which was 'given to critiquing geo-political relations of centre and periphery regarding knowledge production, critiques that called for, in effect, a new geography of scholarly publishing that would reposition the traditional scholarly publishing centres and their editors'.¹⁵² Its use of a web-based editorial process meant that editors with access to the internet anywhere in the world could have complete and equal say in running the journal. Although the work published in *Postcolonial Text* has yet to be cited by other scholarly works, it is still early days for the medium.

No less significant, although less studied and warily cited, is the proliferation of postcolonial resources on the web. Among these are the longstanding Postcolonial Studies website at Emory University (1996), which provides introductory information on the field, major authors, theorists and issues,¹⁵³ and The Imperial Archive website hosted by the School of English at Queens University of Belfast.¹⁵⁴ The oldest and most ambitious is George Landow's site on Postcolonial and Postimperial Literature in English which has moved locations a few times.¹⁵⁵ Although cyberspace offers a unique medium for mounting and disseminating information quickly, it is dependent on institutional support for domain space and subsidies for labour necessary to keep the information up to date. A shortfall in this kind of support or the movement of personnel from one institution to another can cause these resources to vanish overnight. While it is as yet unclear how web technologies will impact upon the field, the Wikipedia phenomenon not least among its manifestations, it is clear that these will be developments to watch alongside the evolution of time-honoured institutions such as ACLALS and its related branches across the globe. Given continuing interest in postcolonial topics and methods, the development of new publishing technologies, and the discernible commitment of the field to continuous revision, self-examination and innovation, the horizon of the future seems live with promise.

Notes

We are grateful to the amazing people at the Interlending and Document Delivery Service, Borchardt Library, La Trobe University, Melbourne, without whose support we could not have written this chapter.

1. See Ann McClintock's eloquent critique in 'The angel of progress: pitfalls of the term "post-colonialism"', *Social Text*, 31.32 (1992), 84–98; Arif Dirlik, 'The postcolonial aura: Third World criticism in the age of global capitalism', *Critical Inquiry*, 20 (Winter 1994), 328–56. In 'Notes on the post-colonial', *Social Text*, 31.32 (1992),

- 99–113, consider Ella Shohat's injunctions when using the term: 'the concept of the "post-colonial" must be interrogated and contextualized historically, geographically, and culturally. My argument is not necessarily that one conceptual frame is "wrong" and the other is "right", but that each frame illuminates only partial aspects of systemic modes of domination, of overlapping collective identities, and of contemporary global relations', pp. 111–12. See Gayatri Spivak in 'Neocolonialism and the secret agent of knowledge', interview with Robert Young in *Oxford Literary Review*, 13 (1991), 220–51: 'I find the word postcolonialism totally bogus', p. 224. In 'Notes on the post-colonial', Ella Shohat calls for a systematic interrogation of the term because of its susceptibility 'to a blurring of perspectives', p. 110. See also Graham Huggan, 'Postcolonialism and its discontents', *Transition: An International Review*, 62 (1993), 130–5; Vijay Mishra and Bob Hodge, 'What is post(-)colonialism?' *Textual Practice*, 5.3 (1991), 399–414; Stuart Hall, 'When was the "postcolonial"? Thinking at the limit', in Iain Chambers and Lidia Curti (eds.), *The Postcolonial Question: Common Skies, Divided Horizons* (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 242–60.
2. Aijaz Ahmad, 'Postcolonialism: what's in a name?', in Román de la Campa, E. Ann Kaplan and Michael Sprinker (eds.), *Late Imperial Culture* (London: Verso, 1995), pp. 11–32.
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 4. See R. T. Robertson, 'The Hussites: a pre-history of ACLALS 1945–54', in Hena Maes-Jelinek, Kirsten Holst Petersen and Anna Rutherford (eds.), *A Shaping of Connections: Commonwealth Literature Studies – Then and Now* (Sydney: Dungaroo Press, 1989), pp. 3–7; A. L. Mcleod, 'Commonwealth studies in the United States', in Maes-Jelinek, Petersen and Rutherford (eds.), *A Shaping of Connections*, pp. 9–13; Tim Watson, 'Is the "post" in postcolonial the US in American studies? The US beginnings of Commonwealth studies', *ARIEL*, 31.1–2 (2000), 51–72.
 5. *CBCL Newsletter*, April 1966, p. 3.
 6. A. L. Mcleod, *The Commonwealth Pen: An Introduction to the Literature of the British Commonwealth* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1961), p. 2.
 7. *WLWE Newsletter*, April 1967, p. 2.
 8. Watson, 'Is the "post" in postcolonial', p. 57.
 9. Terry Goldie, 'Introduction: queerly postcolonial', *ARIEL*, 30.2 (1999), 10.
 10. *CBCL Newsletter*, Nov. 1966, p. 9.
 11. Mcleod, 'Commonwealth studies in the United States', p. 12.
 12. *CBCL Newsletter*, April 1966, p. 3.
 13. Watson, 'Is the "post" in postcolonial', p. 52.
 14. Gauri Vishwanathan, 'An introduction: uncommon genealogies', *ARIEL*, 31.1–2 (2000), 23.
 15. Watson, 'Is the "post" in postcolonial', p. 61.
 16. *Ibid.*, p. 60.
 17. *CBCL Newsletter*, April 1963, p. 7.
 18. Ravenscroft, 'Twenty-one years of *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*: the origins', *JCL*, 21.1 (1986), 3.
 19. *JCL*, 15.1 (1980), 4.
 20. *JCL*, 1.1–3 (1966), v.
 21. *Ibid.*
 22. *JCL*, 2.1–3 (1967), vi.
 23. *Ibid.*
 24. *JCL*, 14.1 (1979), 7–8.

25. *ARIEL*, 1.1 (1970), 7.
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27. *ARIEL*, 1.4 (1970), 6.
28. *ARIEL*, 2.2 (1971), 6.
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32. Quoted in ibid., p. 164.
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34. Quoted in Mcleod, *Commonwealth Pen*, p. 1.
35. A. N. Jeffares, 'Introduction: Address to the members of the Leeds Conference on 9th September 1964', in John Press (ed.), *Commonwealth Literature: Unity and Diversity in a Common Culture*, extracts from the proceedings of a conference held at Bodington Hall, Leeds, 9–12 September 1964 (London: Heinemann, 1965), p. xiii.
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37. Arthur Ravenscroft, 'Conference on Commonwealth literature: Aarhus, Denmark, 26–30 April 1971 – a report', *JCL*, 6.2 (1971), 127–8.
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39. Ibid.
40. Ibid., pp. v–vi.
41. *JCL*, 19.1 (1984), ii.
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45. *JCL*, 20.1 (1985), 1; *Wasafiri*, 6.7 (1987), 2.
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47. Ibid., pp. 3–4.
48. Ibid., p. 4.
49. Jeffares, 'Introduction: Address to the members of the Leeds Conference', p. xvi.
50. Flemming Brahms, 'Entering our own ignorance: subject-object relations in commonwealth literature', *WLWE*, 21.2 (1982), 222.
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52. Ibid., pp. 7–8.
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70. Kenneth W. Harrow, 'Bernth Lindfors and the Archive of African Literature', *RAL*, 32.4 (2001), 148–9.
71. See Chow, 'Theory, Area Studies, Cultural Studies', p. 110.
72. H.D. Harootunian, 'Postcoloniality's unconscious/area studies' desire', in Miyoshi and Harootunian (eds.), *Learning Places*, pp. 156–7.
73. Na'Allah, 'A conversation with Bernth Lindfors', p. 28.
74. Nair, 'A critical cartography', pp. 78–9.
75. *Ibid.*, pp. 82–3.
76. *Ibid.*, pp. 78–81.
77. Brent Edwards, 'Southern Cross: reflections on the orientation of *Callaloo*', *Callaloo*, 30.1 (2007), 44.
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Index

- Abad, Gémino H. 365, 372
 Abbey Theatre, Dublin 559
 Abbiw, D. K. 694
 Abdalla, Abdilatif 758
 Abdel-Qadir, Ghazi 633
 'Abdu, Shaykh Muhammad 254
 Abdullah, Mena Kashmiri
 'The Red Koran' 760
 Time of the Peacock 760
 Abiakam, J., *How to Make Friends* 1007
abiku, as literary topos 165–6
 abject, figure of 890–1
 al-Abnūdī, 'Abd al-Rahmān 266
 Aboriginal literature (Australian)
 activist 522–3
 audiences 520
 autobiographical 519–23, 537
 development of genres 511
 dreaming, as theme 514
 emergence (1960s/70s) 512–13
 engagement with Aboriginality/whiteness 514
 forms of English 516–18
 historical fiction 523–5
 novels 523–30
 parodic/neo-primitivist strategies 1000
 poetry 514–19
 poverty/disadvantage, focus on 513–14
 religious themes 745
 short stories 530
 studies 515
 theatre 530–1
 use of traditional material 511–12, 517
 violence, depictions of 513, 525–9
 Aboriginal literature (Canadian) 484–507
 diversity 506–7
 expansion (post-1990) 505–7
 limited outlets 492
 literary nationalism 488
 modes of self-identification 486–7, 489
 oral elements 489–92, 507; overlap with
 textual 490–1
 postcoloniality 485, 492–4
 protests at governmental policies 500–2,
 504–5
 religious/spiritual elements 497–9, 766
 specialized publishing houses 505
 'treaty literature' 491
 Aboriginal peoples (Canada)
 alienation 502
 'assimilation' policy, destructiveness of 500,
 502–5
 balance of power in settler conflicts 495–6
 communication/conflict with settlers
 494–502
 forced settlement 503
 learning of European languages 495, 496
 marriage regulations 502
 nomenclature 485–9; banning of term 508;
 preferred term 487
 paternalist attitudes to 502–3
 proportion of population 484
 protests at colonial policy 496–7
 residential schools, abuse of pupils 510, 744
 resistance to land encroachment 499–500
 'status Indians' 488, 502
 targeting of languages for elimination 490
 vocabulary 484
 'White Paper' protests (1969) 504
 see also Aboriginal literature (Canadian); First
 Nations

- Aborigines (Australia) 21, 72–3
 assimilationist government policy 519, 536
 brutalization, fictional reflections 525–9
 development of writing 511
 forcible removal of children 119–20, 519
 gender relations 522
 ghostly presence, evocations of 465–7,
 994–5
 internal power relations 519
 land ownership claims 119–20, 512
 legal definition 513, 535
 nations 513
 poetic depictions 455
 property litigation 481–2
 protectionist government policy 519, 536
 protest movements 450–2, 512, 538
 terminology 513
 urbanization 530
 see also Aboriginal literature (Australian)
- Aboulela, Leila 756–7
 The Translator 757
- Abrahams, Peter
 Mine Boy xliv, 342
 Wild Conquest 743
 A Wreath for Udumo 745–6
- Abu-Haidar, Farida 141
- Abu Madi, Iliya, *The Memorial of the Past* xxxviii
- Académie Française 1131
- Acadia 188
- Achebe, Chinua xli, 151, 152, 162, 169, 696,
 699, 719, 776, 904, 905, 1012, 1142, 1149,
 1159, 1160, 1162, 1164
 biography 943
 comments on language 720, 722, 723, 727
 Man Booker International Prize lxi, 1127,
 1141, 1151
 ‘The African writer and the English language’
 704
 Anthills of the Savannah 931, 1141
 Arrow of God 97, 160, 747
 ‘Christmas in Biafra’ 746
 (ed.) *Don't Let him Die* 943
 No Longer at Ease 97, 1160
 see also *Things Fall Apart*
- Ackermann, Inge 631
- Acosta, Joseph de 298, 299
- Act of Union (UK 1800) 540–1, 542, 549, 550
- Adams, Howard, *Prison of Grass: Canada from a
 Native Point of View* 504
- adaptation(s), cinematic 1040, 1048–50
 of Booker Prize winners 1139–40
 colonial 1044–5
 neutralization of political content 1060, 1140
 rightward/leftward direction 1052–4,
 1057–8
 studies 1048–50
 see also postcolonial film adaptations
- Addai, Patrick
 Die Grossmutter übernimmt das Fernsehen 641
 Worte sind schön, aber Hühner liegen Eier 641
- ADEFRA (Black German women's
 organization) 637
- Adéjobí, Oyín/Adéjobí (Opera) Company 144, 146
- Adelson, Leslie 632
- Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi
 Half of a Yellow Sun 1145
 Purple Hibiscus 1145
- Adiga, Aravind, *The White Tiger* lxi, 429–30,
 1136, 1147
- Adiga, M. Gopalkrishna, *Song of the Earth and
 Other Poems* li
- Adorno, Theodor 1002
- Adūnis (ʿAlī Aḥmad Saʿīd) 268–9
 *The Fixed and the Changing: A Study of
 Conformity and Originality in Arab
 Culture* lii
 The New Noah 267–8
 Songs of Muḥyar the Damascene xlvii
- Afghan War (1838–42) xxxiv
- Afghan War (1919) xxxix
- Afghanistan, Soviet invasion (1980) liii
- Africa
 broadcast media 694–5
 Colonial Film Units 1042–3
 education: traditional systems 686; under
 colonial rule 687
 effect of/on French presence 604–5
 francophone literature 609–13
 intellectuals' post-independence dilemma 1172
 Islamic conquest 81
 nationalist leaders' autobiographies 115–16
 postcolonial cinema 1045–6
 print culture, spread of 687–8
 social/intellectual elites: under colonial
 rule 687; precolonial 686
 spread of Christianity 81–90
 traditions: Caribbean adaptation 228, 231;
 colonists' attempts to eradicate 86–7, 686
 see also African Christianity; African
 languages; African literature; African
 popular literature; names of individual
 countries
- African American Review* 1166
- African Christianity 81–90, 102
 contemporary debates 95–6
 early history 685

- Holy Spirit, focus on 82
 native versions 82, 87–9, 143
 nineteenth-century revival 82
 persecutions 88
 ‘reversed resistance’ 88
 role in development of written literature 686–8
 twentieth-century consolidation 82–3
- African languages 154–5, 681–2
 diversity of writing systems 688
 evolution 685–6
 literary requirements 699
 literary use, debates on 681–5, 688–9, 696–9, 713
 material/metaphysical functions 697–8
 mutability of colonial policies 689, 691
 orthographic standardization 687–8
 politics of, dual approaches to 681–2
 (problems of) reconciliation with Latin alphabet 688
 relationship with European 687–8, 697
 role of multimedia 695
 social/ideological restrictiveness 698–9
 translations into 691–2
- African literature 96–102
 in ancient societies/languages 685–6
 Christian themes 745–50, 783
 cultural nationalism 682–3, 696–7
 definition(s), attempted 683
 dependence on Western publishers 1017–18
 emergence under colonial rule 693–4
 ‘exoticism,’ alleged 1017–18
 genres 783
 importance in development of language 695
 Islamic themes 755–7
 linguistic debates *see* African languages
 local readership 1018
 nationalist/Marxist criticisms 1017–19
 postcolonial emergence 682–3
 prizes 1147–9
 relationship with orality 137, 139, 142–3
 salience of ‘colonial experience’ 682, 697
 transformations 142–3
 treatment of indigenous traditions 695–6, 755–6, 766, 783
 Western readership, (assumed) targeting 1018–19, 1148
see also African poetry; African popular literature; African prose fiction; African theatre; *names of individual countries/literatures*
- African National Congress lix, 339, 344
- African poetry 151–9
 choice of language 151, 152–5
 choice of poetics 151
 debate on proper forms 151–5, 169
 relationship with orality 155–7, 167–8, 959–69
 themes 941
 ‘third generation’ poets 155–6
- African popular literature 1006–20
 academic criticisms 1011–12
 attempts at suppression 1012
 authors’ personal involvement in selling 1015
 bestsellers, choice of subject matter 1014–15
 critical neglect 1018–19
 diversity/vitality 1019–20
 focus on ‘small’ concerns 1007, 1017
 folk influences 1010
 gender stereotypes 1016
 inclusiveness 1007, 1014
 influence of/on Western culture 1012–13
 ‘locally published,’ as preferred term 1016
 moralistic content 1007, 1009–10
 overlap with internationally produced fiction 1016
 private printing 1014
 (problems of) definition 1013–17
 public/political sphere 1008
 publishers 1015–16
 readership 1013–14, 1017
 reworking of Western genres 1014
 sales figures 1015
 scandalous elements 1007–8
see also newspapers
- African prose fiction 159–66, 1174
 colonial origins 928
 interjections by audience 163–5
 narrative framework 163–5
 newspaper serialization 693–4, 1010–11
 realist vs non-realist 159–60
 treatment of class structures 908–9
- African theatre 142–51
 art theatre 146–51
 changing perceptions 146
 development in response to circumstances 145–6
 generic hybridity 144–5
 reliance on oral sources 143
- Africville (Nova Scotia), destruction of 208
- Afrikaans, attempt to institute as national language 691
- Afrikaners 333–4
 linguistic/literary identity 334–5
 postcoloniality 334–5

- Afrique, je te plumerai* (1992) 1046
 Afro-Germans *see* German postcolonial literature; Germany: black population
 Agamben, Giorgio 464
 Agard, John 941
 Agbabi, Patience 589, 965–8, 969, 977
 ‘Prologue’ 966–8
 use of academic vocabulary 967–8
 Aggrey, Kwegyir 115
 Agnant, Marie-Célie 209
 Un alligator nommé Rosa 209
 Le Dot de Sara 209
 Le Livre d’Emma 209
 Aguiar, Fred, *Feeding the Ghosts* 239
 Aguinaldo, Emilio 357
 Ahmad, Aijaz 5, 1155
 ‘Jameson’s rhetoric of otherness and the “national allegory”’ 1172–3
 In Theory: Class, Nations, Literatures lix
 Ahmad, Kassim, *Drought on the Meadows* 758
 Ahmad, Mahmud Wad (the Mahdi) 251, 263
 Ahmad, Shahnon
 Srengenge: A Novel from Malaysia 758
 Tivi 758
 Tok guru 758
 Ahmad Bey 253
 Ahmed, Khaled 404
 Ahmed Khan, Sir Syed 427
 Ahmed-ud-din, Feroz 408
 Aidoo, Ama Ata 1149
 No Sweetness Here 1
aisling (vision/dream verse) 548–9
 Aiyar, Pallavi, *Smoke and Mirrors* 430
ajami poetic tradition 695
 Ajayi, Ade 783
 Ajewole, O., *Never Pity Ladies* 1007
 Akbar, (Mughal) Emperor 657, 763
 Akinitan, Awobò, *Igbèhin A Dun tabi Omo Orukan* 694
 Akiwenzie-Damm, Kateri 484, 490, 491–2, 505, 506, 507
 My Heart Is a Stray Bullet 196
akpalu (dirge), Ewe traditional form 156, 158
 Alafenish, Salim 633
 Alam, Muzaffar 657, 676
 Alam, Shamsur 409
alàrínjò (African theatrical form) 145
 Alencar, José de 1048
 Alexander VI, Pope xxiii
 Alexie, Robert Arthur 506
 Alexis, André 206
 Alexis, Jacques Stéphen 848, 865
 General Sun, My Brother 865
 The Musician Trees 865
 Alfon, Estrella 365
 Alfred, Taiaiake 506
 Algeciras Conference (1906) xxxviii
 Algeria
 French occupation xxxiii, 251, 255, 1074–5, 1083; centenary 1101
 postcolonial cinema 1047
 War of Independence (1954–62) xlv, 16, 269–70, 280
 Algonquin people, relations with settlers 495–6
 Ali, Agha Shahid 396, 397–8, 432, 437, 721, 940, 972–4
 ‘The Dacca Gauzes’ 941
 ‘Film *Bhajan* found on a 78 RPM’ 974
 ‘From Amherst to Kashmir’ 973–4
 ‘God’ 972, 974
 The Half-Inch Himalayas lvi
 ‘Karbala: A History of the House of Sorrow’ 973–4
 ‘Lenox Hill’ 972–3
 The Rooms Are Never Finished 972
 ‘Srinagar Airport’ 974
 ‘Summers of Translation’ 974
 Ali, Ahmed 786–7
 Purple Gold Mountain 403
 Twilight in Delhi 762, 787
 Ali, Monica, *Brick Lane* 598, 762
 All-India Progressive Writers Association 426
 allegory 905
 role in indigenous narratives 471–2
 as sole option of postcoloniality 861–2, 1171–3
 Allen, Chadwick 470
 Allen, Lillian 205–6, 884
 Conditions Critical 206
 Freedom (CD) 206
 Revolutionary Tea Party 206
 Women Do This Every Day 206
 Allen, T.W. 5
 Allende, Isabel 15
 The House of Spirits liv, 852, 867
 Allfrey, Phyllis 249
 Allied (publishers) 1032
 Alloula, Abdelkader 755
 Alloula, Malek, *The Colonial Harem* liv
 Allsopp, Richard 216–17
 Alot, Magaga, *A Girl Cannot Go on Laughing all the Time* 1015
 Althusser, Louis 96
 Aluko, T. M. 1012
 One Man, One Wife 160, 747
 Alunan, Merlie M. 372

- Álvares Cabral, Pedro 293
 Alvi, Moniza 406
 Amadi, Elechi, *The Concubine* 160
 Amado, Jorge
 Dona Flor and Her Two Husbands 1058
 The Violent Land xliii
 Ambai (C. S. Lakshmi), *The Purple Sea* lix
 Ambedkar, B. R. 673
 Amellal, Karim, *Discriminez-moi. Enquête sur nos inégalités* 617
 American Indian Movement 504
 American Revolution xxx, 718
 influence in other colonies 14, 540
 'American Tropics: Towards a Literary Geography' project 831
 Americas, migrations to 8–9
 Amin, Qasim
 The Liberation of Women 757
 The New Woman 757
 Amin, Samir
 Imperialism and Unequal Development liii
Amistad (slave ship) 35
 Amuta, Chidi 695
 Anam, Tahmina, *A Golden Age* 762
 Anand, Mulk Raj 426–7, 786, 904, 1036
 see also *Untouchable*
 Ananthamurthy, U. R., *Samakara (Funeral Rites)* xlix, 653
 Anderson, Amanda 1002
 Anderson, Benedict 126, 420
 Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism liv
 Anderson, Kim 506
 Anderson, Michael 451–2
 Anderson, Osborne Perry, *A Voice from Harper's Ferry* 204–5
 Anderson, Patrick 192, 356
 Anderson, Sherwood, *Winesburg, Ohio* 929, 930
 Anderson, Sue see Kartinyeri, Doreen
 Anderson, Warrigal 521
 Andrade, Joaquim Pedro de 1057
 Andrade, Mario de 311
 Macunaima xli, 1057
 Andrew, Dudley 1048
 Andrews, William 112
 Andrić, Ivo 774
 Anenden, Ananda Devi 1094
 Angeles, Carlos A. 372
 a stun of jewels 372
 Angelou, Maya 1132
 Angira, Jared
 'They Will Go On' 748
 'Unction' 748
 Anglicism, as British policy in India 417, 425, 661–2, 677
 Anglo-Irish Treaty (1921) 542
 al-'Ānī, Yūsuf 251
 'animist realism' 857–8, 996–7
 Anishinabek Nation (Ontario) 508
 Annamayya, Yathavakkala, *Sarvesvara Sataka* 659
 Annan, James Kofi, *Campus Relationships: The Untold Story* 1009
 Anne Devlin (1984) 566
 'Annie Pengelly' (Goodison) 953–8, 959
 alliterative techniques 954–6
 referencing of historical figures 956
 reworking of legal vocabulary/ethos 954, 958, 977
 style 953
 Anouilh, Jean 341
 anthologies
 critical-theoretical orientation 24
 selection principles 24–5
 Anthony, Michael
 The Year in San Fernando xlviii
 anthropology 23, 85–6, 314–15, 805, 813, 1095
 appropriation by (de)colonized peoples 118–19, 120
 and autobiography 117–19
 parodied 999–1000
 and primitivism 984, 985, 986–7
 'anthropophagy' movement (Brazil) 319, 325
 anti-colonial feeling/movements 552
 among Western writers 257
 as foundation of creativity 219
 literary expressions 267–8, 277–8, 426–7
 Antoni, Robert
 Carnival 230, 245
 Anuar, Hedwig 363
 Under the Apple Tree: Political Parodies of the 1950s 363
 Anyidoho, Kofi 155–7, 169
 'Tsitsa' 157–8
 Ao, Temsula 402–3
 apartheid regime (South Africa) xlv, 895–7
 abolition lix, 16, 89, 330, 345–6, 1166
 activism against 116
 creation 690–1
 educational/linguistic policies 689–91
 laws 902
 limited reform liv
 official languages 690–1
 press censorship 1011

- apartheid regime (South Africa) (cont.)
 religious differences under/following 759
 resistance movement 330, 339–45
 socio-economic place of Africans 689
 as special type of colonialism 330
 suppression of opposition 339–40, 343–4
 UN condemnation xlvii
 West German support 621
see also 'postapartheid'
- Apídan* (Nigerian theatrical form) 143
- Apocalypse Now* (1979) 1063–4
- Aponte, José Antonio 305
- Appadurai, Arjun 4, 1016–17
- Appannah-Mouriquand, Natacha 815–16
- Appiah, Kwame Anthony 446
 'Is the post- in postmodernism the post- in
 postcolonial?' 1173–5
- Appleyard, John Whittle 688
- appropriation, literary 715
- Aquin, Hubert 182, 184
 'La fatigue culturelle du Canada français' 184
Prochain Épisode 184
 'Profession: écrivain' 184
Trou de mémoire 184
- Aquino, Benigno Simeon 'Ninoy' 372
- Arab Congress (Nablus 1922) xl
- Arab world/cultures
 colonial brutality 255–6
 contacts with colonialists 250–1
 cultural industry 259
 disillusion with postcolonial regimes 261–2
 European models 250, 252, 255; objections to
 258–9
 history 262–4
 identity crises 265–7
 independence movements 258, 261
 nationalist movements 265–7
 postcolonial repression/conflicts 257,
 272–3, 279
 revivalism 250, 267–8
 transitional period 259
- Arabic (language)
 use in Africa 685–6
 use in India 656–7
- Arabic literature
 autobiography 108–9, 258, 259–62, 280
 colonial ideology 276–7
 engagement with Islamic themes 268–9,
 280–4
 novels 271–7
 poetry 266, 267–72; new directions 269–70
 and postcoloniality 256–62, 273
 and postmodernism 277–9
 representations of European women 279–80
 role of humour 276
 role of land 265–6
 sermons 281–3
 short stories 275–6
 traditional sources 277–8
- Aragon, Louis 840
- Arasanayagam, Jean 407–8
- Arau, Alfonso 1058
- Araullo, Jesusa, and Luis Castilleo, *A Modern
 Filipina* 367
- Aravamudan, Srinivas, *Guru English* 666
- Arcellana, Francisco 365
- archaeological sites 871–2
- area studies 1165
- Arenas, Reinaldo
Farewell to the Sea liv
- Argentina
 film industry 1045
 independence xxxii
- Arguedas, José María 292, 324–5
 suicide 325
Everyone's Blood xliii
The Fox from Above and the Fox from Below 325
- Arguilla, Manuel 365–6
How My Brother Leon Brought Home a Wife
 365–6
- ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature*
 I, 3, 1159
- Aristide, Jean-Bertrand lviii, 812
- Aristotle 792
- Armah, Ayi Kwei 151
The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born xlix
see also *Two Thousand Seasons*
- Armes, Roy 1061–2
- Armstrong, Jeannette 187, 505
Breath Tracks 196
 'Indian Woman' 486–7
Slash 197, 504
- Armstrong, Neil 64, 869
- Arnold, A. James 989–90, 1106–7, 1110
- Arnold, David 124
 (and Stuart Blackburn), *Telling Lives in
 India* 108
- Artaud, Antonin 1074
- Asarem, Meshack 1149
- 'Ascendancy Gothic' 557–8
- ASEAN (Association of South-East Asian
 Nations) 352
- Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths and Helen
 Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back* lvii, 4–5,
 108, 171, 447, 705, 728–9, 1102, 1168
- Asia, missionary work 83

- Asia Publishing House of Bombay 1029
 Aslam, Nadeem, *Maps for Lost Lovers* 762
 Asserate, Asfa-Wossen, *Ein Prinz aus dem Haus David: Und warum er in Deutschland blieb* 641
 assimilation
 as French colonial policy 1104–5, 1106, 1115;
 critiqued 1108–9, 1113
 literature as 319, 325
 Assiniwi, Bernard 196
 Association for the Teaching of African,
 Caribbean, Asian and Associated
 Literatures (ATCAL) 1162
 Association of Commonwealth Literature and
 Language Studies (ACLALS) 1157, 1161,
 1162
 Astaire, Fred 962
 Asturias, Miguel Ángel 15, 292, 321, 837–40,
 841, 858
 Nobel Literature Prize xlix
 Legends of Guatemala 838, 840, 846–8
 Mr President xliv, 847
 (trans.), *Popol Vuh* 838, 862
 see also *Men of Maize*
 al-Aswani, ‘Alā 281–3
 Atahualpa, King of the Incas 298
 Atatürk, Mustafa Kemal xl
 Attakathas (classic Indian texts) 659
 al-‘Attar, Hasan 17
 Attridge, Derek, and Marjorie Howes,
 Semicolonial Joyce 788
 Attwell, David 153–4, 329, 334, 338, 341, 343,
 897, 1165
 Atwood, Margaret xliii, 179–80, 189–90, 776,
 782, 1151
 Alias Grace 189–90
 The Blind Assassin lx
 Bodily Harm 190
 The Edible Woman 190
 The Handmaid’s Tale 190
 The Journals of Susannah Moodie 189
 Power Politics 189
 Surfacing 180, 190
 Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature 180
 You Are Happy 189
 Atyame, Philomène
 Mord ohne Anklage: Eine Erzählung nach wahren Ereignissen in Kamerun 644
 Der schwarz-weiße Kontinent: Die Quidproquos (Abengs Entscheidung) 643–4
 Aubert de Gaspé, Philippe-Ignace-François
 (films), *L’Influence d’un livre* 175
 Aubert de Gaspé, Philippe-Joseph (père), *Les Anciens Canadiens* 175, 211
 Auden, W.H. 341
 Journey to a War 356
 Augustine of Hippo, St 81
 Confessions 109
 Austen, Jane 776, 777, 787, 789
 Pride and Prejudice 1063
 Australia
 1960s counterculture 456–7
 American presence (in Vietnam years) 452–3
 Asian immigrant community 457–64, 760–1
 as ‘blank canvas’ (*terra nullius*) 455–6, 458–60, 462
 ‘boat people,’ policy towards 464
 constitutional referendum (1967) 512, 534–5
 creation of Commonwealth xxxvii, 446
 European immigration 467–9
 exploratory voyages 62
 founding of colony xxx, 8
 Gold Rush, literary depictions 459–60
 literary journals 1163–4
 National Enquiry into the Separation of
 Aboriginal and TSI Children from their
 Families 521
 national unity, literary commentaries
 459–60, 462
 ‘neo-colonial’ culture 446
 political developments 449–52, 457
 publishing industry 446
 settler population, composition/attitudes 19
 ‘White Australia’ policy 450, 457, 512
 see also Australian literature; ‘Terra Australis Incognita’
 Australian literature 21, 452–69, 893–5
 ‘Australian Gothic’ 464–7
 deconstruction of colonial traditions 465,
 467–9
 exploration of Asian experience 457–64
 formal characteristics 448–9
 influence of American genres 465–6
 ‘late imperial romance’ 457
 national identity, moves to establish 446
 new dynamic (post-1965) 447–8, 452–7
 pastoral 462, 464–5, 467
 postcoloniality 450, 457–9, 462–4
 religious themes 742–3, 744–5
 settler narratives 466–7
 ‘authenticity,’ debates on 467–8, 477–8, 1137
 autobiography/ies 22, 23, 107–31
 collaborative 520
 collective 124–7
 critical studies 108, 119

- autobiography/ies (cont.)
 defined 107
 expression of ethnic/cultural identity 108,
 111–12, 117–21
 fictionalized 128–31
 indigenous 519–23
 in local languages 112
 mixing of genres 114, 117–18
 of nationalist leaders 69–70, 114–17
 new forms 131
 and postcoloniality 107, 121–2, 131, 783
 relationship with historical truth
 123–4
 rise in popularity (C19) 109–10
 role in anti-colonial nationalism 113–17
 settlers' 112–13, 174
 spiritual 112
 as Western genre 110
- Avelar, Idelber 318
 Avicenna *see* ibn Sina
 Avorgbedor, Daniel K. 157
 Awatere, Arapeta, 'Lament for Kepa Anaha
 Ehau' 475
 Awatere, Donna, *Maori Sovereignty* 532
 Awoonor, Kofi 156, 158
 'The Cathedral' 746–7
 'Songs of Sorrow' 959
 Ayim, May (Sylvia Opitiz) 637, 638
 influence 638–9
 Blues in schwarz weiss 638
 *Entfernte Verbindungen: Rassismus,
 Antisemitismus, Klassenunterdrückung* 638
 (ed., with Katharina Oguntöye and Dagmar
 Schultz), *Farbe Bekennen: Afro-deutsche
 Frauen auf den Spuren ihrer Geschichte*
 637, 638
 'Grenzenlos und unverschämt' 638
 Nachtgesang 638
 Ayyüb, Dhū al-Nūn 254
 Duktūr Ibrāhīm 254, 258–9, 272,
 273–4, 279
 Al-Azhar University, Cairo 260, 686
 Azikiwe, Nnamdi 69, 121
 My Odyssey 115
 Zik: Selected Speeches xlvii
 Aziz, Mohammad Ali bin Abdul 363
 Aztecs
 destruction of state xxiv, 874
 language, translations/dictionaries xxiv
 Spanish accounts of 290
 surviving testimony 297–8
 Azuela, Mariano, *The Underdogs* xxxix
 'Azzam, Samira, *Little Things* xlv
- Bâ, Amadou Hampâté, *The Fortunes of Wangrin*
 163, 164–5, 756
 Bâ, Mariama, *So Long a Letter* liii, 756, 1072
 Bâ, Sylvia Washington 1107, 1113, 1114, 1120
 Ba Jin, *Family* 116
 Babar, Emperor xxiv
 Bach, Johann Sebastian 791–2
 Bachchan, Abhishek 675
 Bachchan, Amitabh 649, 650
 Bachchan, Jaya 649, 675
 Bachelard, Gaston 813
 Bachi, Salim 609
 Badiou, Alain 464
 Baenga, Thomas Bolya, *Cannibale* 749
 Bagchi, Jashodhara 677
 Baghdad Railroad xxxviii
 Bahadur, Gaiutra 1147
 Bahadur (comic hero) 430
 Bahamas li
 Bahar, Tek Chand 676
 Bailey, Brett 349
 Baker, Florence 67
 Baker, Samuel 67
 Bakhtin, Mikhail 130, 518, 698, 872–3, 879,
 886, 901, 946–7, 978
 'Toward a methodology for the human
 sciences' 882
 al-Bakri, Shaykh 253
 Balandier, Georges 95, 98
 Balcells, Carmen 859
 Baldwin, Shauna Singh, *English Lessons* 909, 930
 Bali xxxviii
 Ball, Micheline 207
 Ballantyne, R. M. 65
 The Coral Island 807
 Balzac, Honoré de 1073
 Bame, Kwabena 1016
 Bamiro, Edmund 722
 Bandle(-Thomas), Biyi 3, 30
 Bandler, Faith
 Wacvie 522
 Welou, My Brother 522
 Bandopadhyay, Mani, *The History of Puppets* xlii
 Bandung Conference (1955) 16, 1155
 Banerjee, Sarnath 430
 Corridors 1036
 Bangladesh li, 385
 creation (1971) 416, 762–3
 Indian poets' links with 391
 languages 653
 poetry 408–9
 prose fiction 433–4
 War of Independence (1971) 408, 433–4

- Banim, John/Michael 557
banlieues (suburban housing schemes), as social/
 literary setting 611–12, 615–18
 Bansal, Roma, *One Afternoon* 1035
 Bantu Education Act (SA 1953) 689–91
 Bantu people/culture 86, 94–5
 literature 152
 Banville, John
Birchwood 558
The Sea lxi
 Barakāt, Hudā, *Stone of Laughter* 266–7
 Baratham, Gopal, *A Candle or the Sun* 378
 Barbados xxvi
 Barbary States xxiv
 Barber, Francis 34
 Barber, Karin 143
 ‘The popular arts in Africa’ 1012–13, 1017
 al-Barghūhī, Murīd 261
I Saw Ramallah 765
 Barker, Francis 781
 Barker, Jimmy 521
 Barnato, Barney (Barnet Isaacs) 335
 Barnett, Clive 4
 Barnouw, Eric 1062
La Barre du jour (journal) 189
 Barreto, Bruno 1058
 Barry, Sebastian, *A Long, Long Way* 565
 Barth, John 925
 Barthes, Roland 1074
 Barton, Edmund xxxvii
 Barungi, Violet, *Cassandra* 1014
Baste (Maghreb theatrical form) 143
 Basu, Samit, *The GameWorld Trilogy* 1036
 Bates, H.E.
The Jacaranda Tree 356
The Purple Plain 356
 Batista, Fulgencio xlv
 Battala trade presses 1026, 1036
 Battiste, Marie 506
 Baudelaire, Charles 1073, 1074, 1107
 Baudissin, Wolf Heinrich, Graf von xxxiii
 Baudrillard, Jean 430, 995
 Baugh, Edward 1161
 Bautista, Cirilo 372
 Baxter, James K. 743
 al-Bayātī, ‘Abd al-Wahhāb 268–9
 ‘A’isha’s Mad Lover’ 269
 ‘I Am Born and Burn in My Love’ 269
Love Death and Exile lviii
 ‘Reading from the Book of al-Tawasin by
 al-Hallaj’ 269
 ‘Variations on the Suffering of Farid al-Din
 al-Attar’ 269
 Bayet-Charlton, Fabienne, *Watershed* 524–5
 bazaar art 420–1
 beach, as space of change 823
Beau Travail (1999) 1055
 Beauharnais, Josephine de *see* Josephine,
 Empress
 Beckett, Samuel 409, 559, 560–1, 562–4
 Nobel Literature Prize 1
All That Fall 563–4
Endgame 563
Krapp’s Last Tape 563
Malone Dies 563
Molloy 562
The Unnameable 563
Waiting for Godot xlv, 563
 Beckles, Hilary 225–6, 244
 Beckmann, Max 835
 Beegan, Paula 1053
 Begag, Azouz 610–11
Béni ou le paradis privé 611
Le Gone du chaâba 611
 Behan, Brendan, *Borstal Boy* 562
 Behn, Aphra, *Oroonoko, or The Royal Slave* 30–2,
 39, 574
 autobiographical elements 31
 compared with other narratives 31, 32, 35
 reasons for writing 31
 sources 30
 Behr, Mark 349
 Behrendt, Larissa, *Home* 524
 Beier, Ulli 148
 Beldham, William ‘Silver Billy’ 225
 Belghoul, Farida 610
Georgette! 611
 Belgian Congo xxxvi, xxxviii, 561
 independence xlvii
 Belgium, domestic politics 96
see also Belgian Congo; Leopold II
 Belinga, Jean-Félix Belinga
Gesang der Trommel 642
Ngono Mefane, das Mädchen der Wälder 641
Wenn die Palme die Blätter verliert 643
Wir drei gegen Onkel Chef 643
 Bell, Bernard 57
 Bell, Gertrude 67
 Bell, Madison Smartt 222
 Belleair, Lisa 514, 519
 Ben Barka, Mehdi
 ‘Resolving the ambiguities of national
 sovereignty’ xlvii
 Ben Jallūn, Abd al-Majīd 258
 Ben Jelloun, Tahar 608, 609, 615, 1149
The Sand Child lv

- ben Joned, Salleh, *Sajak-sajak Saleh: Poems Sacred and Profane* 758
- Bengal
colonization 386–9
social/cultural customs 774
- Bengal, Nawab of 654–5, 656
- Bengali (language) 651, 668–9
impact of Partition 651–2
literary modernism 425
literature in 387–8, 653
reading public 653
threats to 1058
- Benítez-Rojo, Antonio 215, 773, 812–13, 1082, 1095
- Benjamin, Walter 692, 1068–9, 1071
- Bennett, Bruce 447
- Bennett, Compton 1044
- Bennett, Donna 171, 192
- Bennett, Hazel *see* Sherlock, Philip
- Bennett, Louise 577, 939, 940, 964, 978
‘Bans o’ Killing’ 716
‘Independance’ 818
Jamaica Labrish xlix
- Bennett, Ronan, *The Catastrophes* 565
- Bennie, John 692
- Benoît, Pierre, *L’Atlantide* 1044–5
- Bentinck, Lord 417, 420, 662–3, 678
- Beothuk people (Newfoundland) 187
- Bergen Museum 870–1, 899
- Berger, John 1138
- Berlin, Free University of *see* Otto Suhr Institute
- Berlin Conference (1884) xxxvi, 16, 1101
- Bernabé, Jean, Patrick Chamoiseau and Raphaël Confiant, *In Praise of Creoleness (Éloge de la créolité)* lviii, 608–9, 1090–1, 1102, 1123
- Berque, Jacques 172, 184
- Berry, James 578
- Bersianik, Louky
L’Eugélonne 191
Le Pique-nique sur l’Acropole 191
- Bessette, Gérard 185
- Bessora, *Petroleum* 614
- Best, Beverley 4
- Bethlehem, Louise 154
- Bethune, J. E. D. 1027
- Beti, Mongo 1019, 1090
see also *The Poor Christ of Bomba*
- ‘Beurs’ (Arab-French writers) 610, 612–13
- Beverley, John 123–4
- Beyala, Calixthe
Les Honneurs perdus 612
Lettre d’une Afro-française à ses compatriotes 612
Le Petit Prince de Belleville 612
- Bhabha, Homi K. 4, 5, 6, 97, 259, 280, 332, 428, 470, 593, 795–6, 833–4, 834–5, 880, 881, 885, 897, 898, 1042, 1077, 1175, 1176, 1179
critiques 1169–70
The Location of Culture lx, 72, 310, 311, 312, 866, 1102
Nation and Narration 180, 1102
‘Of mimicry and man’ 795
‘The Other Question: stereotype, discrimination the and discourse of colonialism’ 1104
‘Signs taken for wonders’ 1169
- Bhagat, Chetan, *Five-Point Someone* 1029, 1032–3, 1035
- Bhakti* movement 678
- Bhardwaj, Vishal 782
- Bhatt, Sujata 400, 401, 405
‘A different history’ 401
- Bhattacharya, Bhabani
A Goddess Named Gold 1029
He who Rides the Tiger 1029
Music for Mohini 1029
So Many Hungers! xliv, 1029
- Bhushan, Bibhuti 774
- Bhutan 409
- Biafra I
- Biafran War (1967–70) 629, 746, 1129
- Bianco, José, *Shadow Play* 849
- Bibb, Henry 204
- Bible 741, 792, 1091
African translations 685, 688
Indian translations 665, 666, 691–2
influence on modern poetic diction 970
- biblical opera/drama, in African culture 143–4
- biculturalism, NZ policy of 471–2, 533–4
- Big Bear, Chief 186, 195, 499–500
- Biko, Steve 116, 340, 341
I Write What I Like li
- Bildungsroman* 783–5, 885–92, 935
African 886
in Arab literature 273
generic characteristics 885–6
- bilingualism 1071–2
see also Indian literature; newspapers
- Bill C-31 (Canada 1985) 510
- bin Robert, Shaaban, *The Day of Reckoning* 758
- Binyon, Laurence 389
- Biography* (journal) 127–8
- Biondi, Franco 631
- Bioy Casares, Adolfo, *Morel’s Invention* 849
- Birch, Tony 514
‘Chronicles’ 519
Shadow Boxing 530

- Bird, Isabella 66
 Birdsell, Sandra 186
 Birney, Earle 187
Birth of a Nation (1915) 1044
 bishops, black 93
 Bismarck, Otto von 620–1
 Bissoondath, Neil 203
 A Casual Brutality 203
 Selling Illusions 203
 The Unyielding Clamour of the Night 203
 The World Within Her 203
 Biyaoula, Daniel
 Agonies 613
 L'Impasse 613
 Bizet, Georges 1057
 Bjornson, Richard 629
 Black, Ayanna (ed.), *Voices: Canadian Writers of African Descent* 205
 'black Britain,' evocations of 590
 Black Consciousness Movement 340–2
 'Black Hole of Calcutta' xxix
 'Black Legend' 295, 297
 Black Panthers 450–1, 1085
 Australian Party 526–7
 Black Power 53, 223, 450–1, 474–5, 512, 516
 Blackburn, Stuart *see* Arnold, David
 Blais, Marie-Claire 185, 191
 L'Ange de la solitude 191
 Les Nuits de l'underground 191
 Une saison dans la vie d'Emmanuel 191
 Blake, William 341
 Songs of Innocence and Experience 9
 Blanchot, Maurice 1074
 Blank, Arapera 531–2
 blindness, as metaphor 254
 Blixen, Karen, *Out of Africa* xlii
 Bloch, Ernst 793, 800, 1002
 Blodgett, E. D. 172
 blogging 1034
 Bloom, Harold 772
 The Anxiety of Influence 794
 blues, cultural significance 49–51, 53
 Blum, Léon 1081
 Blum-Byrnes Accords 1059
 Blunden, Edmund, *A Hong Kong House: Poems 1951–1961* 356
 Boas, Franz 118
 Boehmer, Elleke 5, 576
 Colonial and Postcolonial Literature 108
 Boer Republic, proclamation of xxxv
 Boer War (1899–1902) xxxvii, 19, 334
 Boey Kim Cheng 375, 766
 Bogle, Paul 232
 Bohemia, Jack 521
 Boissière, Ralph de 224, 235
 Crown Jewel xlv
 Bokwe, John Knox 338
 Boland, Eavan 566
 Bolaño, Roberto, *Distant Star* 324
 Bolden, Buddy 202
 Bolívar, Simón xxxi–xxxii, 14, 552
 'Reply of a South American to a gentleman of Jamaica' 304
 Bolivia 316
 independence xxxii
 Böll, Heinrich 622
 'Bollywood' 414, 436, 437, 649, 652, 1060–3
 academic disdain 1061–2
 contribution to postcolonial development 1061
 global elements/appeal 1063
 local outlook/aesthetics 1062–3
 output 1061
 Bombal, María Luisa, *House of Mists* 849
 Bombay *see* Mumbai
 Bonaparte, Joseph *see* Jose I of Spain
 Bonaparte, Napoleon *see* Napoleon I, Emperor
 Bonasso, Miguel, *Memory of Death* lv
 Bond, Patrick 345, 349
 Bond, Ruskin 1030
 The Room on the roof 421
The Bone People (K. Hulme) lv, 477–8, 532, 537–8, 810–11
 Booker Prize 1127, 1137–8
 criticisms 477
 global recognition 1138
 Bongie, Chris 803, 825
 Bonifacio, Andrés 357
 Bontempelli, Massimo 836–7, 863
 bookcases, role in middle-class Indian culture 774
 Booker Prize xlix, 1127, 1131, 1135–1, 1147
 attraction of controversy 1137–9
 impact of success on sales 1140–1
 ineligibility of American books 1137–8
 postcolonial significance 1136–7
 source of finances 1135–6, 1138, 1147
Books of Chilam Balam (traditional Maya works) 847
 Borchgrevink, Mr (missionary) 898
 Borduas, Paul-Émile 182
 Borges, Jorge Luis 15, 323, 850, 865–6, 1128
 The Garden of the Forking Paths 849
 'Pierre Menard, author of *Quixote*' 323
 A Universal History of Infamy xlii, 849
 Borom Sarret (1964) 694–5, 1046

- Børtnes, Jostein 882
 Bose, Buddhadeva (Buddhadeb) 393,
 1030
 Bose, Sugata 434
 Bosquo, Monique 193
 Bostock, Gerry, *Here Come the Nigger* 530
 'Boston Tea Party' xxx
 Botha, Louis xxxviii
 Bouchard, Michel-Marc 192
 Boucher, Denise, *Les Fées ont soif* 191
 Boudreau, Diane, *Histoire de la littérature
 Amérindienne au Québec* 196
 Boukman, Dutty 1117
 Boulaga, Fabien Eboussi 92, 96
 Boulou, Jean-Eric
 La Question blanche 617
 Supplément au roman national 617
 Bourbourg, Charles-Étienne Brasseur de 292,
 862
 Bourdieu, Pierre 257, 258
 Bovell, Dennis 589
 Bowen, Elizabeth, *The Last September* 557
 Bowering, George 186–7
 Burning Water 187
A Boy Called Twist (2005) 1057
 Boyarin, Daniel 1169
 Boyce, William Binnington, Rev., *Grammar of
 the Kaffir Language* 692
 Boyd, George Elroy, *Consecrated Ground* 208
 Boyden, Joseph 492
 Born with a Tooth 199
 Three Day Road 199
 Boylan, Claire
 Holy Pictures 566
 Home Rule 566
 Boyle, Danny 443
 'Boy's Own' Paper/adventure novels 65,
 805, 807
 bpNichol 187
 Braithwaite, E. R. 577–8, 583
 Paid Servant 584
 To Sir, With Love 580–1, 583
 Brand, Dionne 191, 193, 206–7, 240
 Another Place, Not Here 207
 At the Full and Change of the Moon 207
 Bread out of Stone 207
 Earth Magic 206
 Inventory 207
 Land to Light on 207
 A Map to the Door of No Return 207
 *No Burden to Carry: Narratives of Black Working
 Women in Ontario* 206
 No Language Is Neutral 206–7
 Sans Souci and other stories 206
 Thirsty 207
 What We All Long For 207
 Brant, Beth 506
 Food and Spirits 196
 Mohawk Trail 196
 Brant, Joseph (Thayendanegea) 195,
 496–7
 Brant, Molly (Degonwadonti) 496
 Brata, Sasthi
 Confessions of an Indian Woman Eater 1031
 She and He 1031
 Brathwaite, Edward Kamau 3, 18, 216, 217,
 226–7, 231, 233, 234, 242, 245, 246–7,
 785–6, 808, 812, 816, 939, 947, 961, 1095,
 1142, 1167
 linguistic/visual approach 219–20, 227, 242,
 244, 247, 803, 810, 940
 use of Christian idioms 970
 The Arrivants liv, 57, 226–7, 750, 808, 942
 Barababan Poems 227, 244
 Born to Slow Horses 244
 'Caliban' 808
 Contradictory Omens 217
 Creole Society 217
 *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica
 1770–1820* 823
 History of the Voice lv, 938
 'Irae' 970
 'Rites' 226
 Trench Town Rock 239
 Braudy, Leo 1054
 Brazil
 abolition of slavery 315
 film industry 1048, 1066; funding 1054
 independence xxxii, 16, 317
 Modernist movement 318, 319–22
 Portuguese discovery 293
 slave trade/experiences 48–9, 56; destruction
 of documentation 48–9, 51
 Brébeuf, Jean de 173
 Brecht, Bertolt 206, 341, 452, 629, 696
 The Threepenny Opera 630
 Breckenridge, Carol 1016–17
 Breeze, Jean 'Binta' 229, 589, 963–5, 966, 969,
 977, 980–1
 'The Arrival of Brighteye' 965
 'riddym ravings (the mad woman's poem)'
 963–5
 Brennan, Timothy 966
 *Salman Rushdie and the Third World: Myths of
 the Nation* 775–6
 Breslin, Paul 793

- Breton, André 840, 844, 1074
Surrealist Manifesto 840
- Brew, Kwesi 746
- Brewster, Anne 450
- Bride and Prejudice* (2004) 1063, 1065
- Bringing Them Home* (Aus. governmental report) 521
- Brink, André 347–8
Devil's Valley 348
Looking on Darkness 743, 909
Praying Mantis 748–9
- Bristol 11
- British Columbia 186–7, 208
- British North America Act (UK 1867) 499
- Broca, Paul 950
- Brodber, Erna 231, 245
Myal 54
- Brontë, Charlotte 776
Jane Eyre 233, 778, 779, 887–8, 890, 891
- Brook, Peter 341
- Brooke, Charlotte 559
- Brooke, Frances, *The History of Emily Montague* 173–4, 189
- Brooks, Gwendolen 1167
- Brooks, Lisa 491
- Bropho, Robert 521
- Brossard, Nicole 189, 191
L'Amér ou le chapitre effrité 191
Baroque d'aube 191
Le Désert mauve 191
Hier 191
La Lettre aérienne 191
- Brouillette, Sarah 595–6, 1032, 1035–6
- Brown, Hazel 522–3, 525
- Brown, John 204–5
- Brown, Paul Fehmiu 207
- Brown, Roosevelt 451
- Brown, Sterling 959–60
- Brown, Stewart, et al. (eds.), *Voice Print* 229, 245
- Browne, Charles Brockden 557
- Brue, André de xxviii
- Brunei 352, 353
economy 353
independence 355
- Brunton, Alan 474
- Brusnahan, Margaret 518
- Brutt-Griffler, Janina 709
- Brutus, Dennis 339
Letters to Martha xlix
‘Our aim our dreams our destinations’ 748
- Bryant, A. T., Father 690
- Brydon, Diana 171
- Buckingham, J. S. 771
- Buddhism 353, 765
- Buganda 68–9
see also Uganda
- Bukharin, Nikolai, *Imperialism and World Economy* xxxix
- Bulalia, Urvashi 435
- Bulayumi, Espérance-François Ngayibata 644
Sina: Das Kongo-Schicksal 643
- Bulosan, Carlos 381
America is in the Heart xlvii, 381
(ed.), *Chorus for America: Six Filipino Poets* 381
- Bunglawala, Inayat 1134
- Bunyan, John, *The Pilgrim's Progress* 665, 691, 692, 701
- bureaucracy 18
- Burgess, Anthony, *The Long Day Wanes* 356
- Burgos-Debray, Elisabeth 122–3
- Burke, Edmund 225
- Burke, John Muk Muk 514, 518, 524
- Burke, Robert O'Hara 455
- Burkina Faso, cinema 1041
- Burma *see* Myanmar
- Burnett, Paula (ed.), *The Penguin Book of Caribbean Verse* 233
- Burns, Walter Noble, *The Robin Hood of El Dorado* 875
- Burroughs, Edgar Rice, *Tarzan of the Apes* xxxix, 1044
- Burton, Sir Richard 60
- Buruma, Ian, *The Road to Babel* 724
- Buss, Helen 189
- Butler, Judith 990
- Butler, Octavia, *Kindred* 57
- BWIA (airline) 219
- Byatt, A.S. 1145
- Byrd, Rudolph 869
- Byron, George Gordon, 6th Baron 771–2
- Byzantine Empire 740
- Cabeza de Vaca, Álvar Núñez 301
The Narrative 301
- Cabral, Amílcar, *Return of the Source* li
- Cabrera Infante, Guillermo, *Three Trapped Tigers* xlviii
- Cabreros Laya, Juan, *His Native Soil* 368
- Caccia, Fulvio 193
(and Antonio d'Alfonso, eds.), *Quêtes: textes d'auteurs italo-québécois* 194
- Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* (Césaire) 226, 606, 939, 989–91, 1076, 1084, 1115–21
aims 1115–16
articulation of principles of Negritude 1116–17, 1118–20

- Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* (Césaire) (cont.)
 composition/revisions 1115
 cultural impact 1115
 interpretations 1118–20
 role in development of Negritude 1106, 1111
- Caine, Sir Michael 1147
- Caine Prize for African Writing lx, 1127,
 1147–8
 problems of admission criteria 1148
- Caitani Mutharabaini* (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o)
 163–4, 692, 750, 931
 compared with other works 164
 treatment of native traditions 926
- Calcutta *see* Kolkata
- Calder, Alison 185
- Callaghan, Morley, *The Loved and the Lost* 208
- Callaloo* (journal) lii, 3, 637, 1163, 1166–7
 broadening of scope 1166–7
- Callixtus III, Pope 81–2
- Callois, Roger 459
- Calvino, Italo 850, 868, 1128
- calypso 229, 961–3
- Camayd-Freixas, Erik 836, 863, 987–8, 1002
- Cambodia 352, 353
 internal discord 355
 languages 358
- Cambridge* (C. Phillips) 31–5, 36, 237, 596
 characterization of narrators 37–8, 39
 handling of sources 32, 33–5, 37, 47
 narrative structure 32–3
 plot summary 32
 treatment of female characters 37–41, 54
 treatment of religion 40
 use of irony 38
- Cambridge History of Latin American Literature*
 309
- Cameroon
 colonial history 625
 traditional culture 627–8
 writers from 624–30, 643–4
- Caminha, Pêro Vaz de 293, 295
- Camões, Luís Vaz de xxv
Lusiadas 300
- Campbell, Maria, *Half-Breed* 195–6, 197, 504–5
- Campbell Scott, Duncan 502
- Campos, Haroldo de 323
- Camus, Albert 257, 275, 341, 1083, 1087,
 1088–9
The Outsider xliii
- Canada
 Anglo-French conflicts 19, 171–2
 Asian immigrant community/literature
 199–204, 761
 'assimilationism', policy of 500, 502–5
 British occupation/rule xxix, xxx
 calls for federation with UK 178
 calls for national unity 178–9
 Caribbean diaspora 235
 child deportations to 9
 citizenship, establishment of (1947) 171
 Confederation (1867) 171, 176
 Constitution (1867) 171
 division into Upper/Lower provinces xxx
 Dominion status xxxv, 499
 establishment of border with US xxxii
 first settlements 484–5, 494
 immigration policy 205
 independence liv
 indigenous peoples *see* Aboriginal peoples
 (Canada); First Nations
 multiculturalist policies 193
 national culture 176; State promotion 179
 new provinces xxxviii, 211, 212
 reunification of Upper/Lower provinces
 xxxiv
 Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples
 198, 505
 Royal Commission on Bilingualism and
 Biculturalism 193
 shifting power relations 171
see also Canadian literature; French Canadian
 literature
- Canada Council for the Arts 179
- 'Canadian Indian (literature)', problems of term
 487–8, 508
- Canadian literature 171–210
 Aboriginal *see* Aboriginal literature
 (Canadian); First Nations
 beginnings 172–3
 critical studies 179–80
 diasporic: Afro-Caribbean 204–10; Chinese
 200–1; Italian 194; Japanese 201–2; Jewish
 192–3; South Asian 202–4
 magical realist 855–6
 national character 176–7
 'native vs cosmopolitan' debate 177, 179
 new locales 177–9
 place in postcolonial studies 171–2
 poetry 176–7
 prose fiction 177–9, 180–2; early
 developments 173–4
 regional 185–8
 religious themes 742, 744
 studies/anthologies 1–2
 women's writings 188–92
see also French Canadian literature

- Canadian Literature* (journal) 179
Canadian Women Studies/Les Cahiers de la femme (journal) 189
 Candido, Antonio 318, 325
 cannibalism 319
 canon (of English classical works)
 alternatives to 773–6
 as basis of (post)colonial evaluation 717, 718–19
 curricular emphasis on 718
 (method of) definition 772, 774
 mutability 773–4
 as portable property 774–5
 postcolonial reworkings 775–6, 778–82, 787–9, 794–7
 Cão, Diego 82
 Capilano, Joseph, Chief 195
 capitalism, ‘vernacularizing’ 420–1
 Capuchins, missionary work/writings
 84, 87
 reports on work (*relations*) 90
 Cardiff 11
 Cardinal, Douglas J. 506
 Cardinal, Harold, *The Unjust Society* 195, 505
 Carew, Jan, *The Wild Coast* 751
 Carey, Peter 3, 453, 776, 1151
 Jack Maggs 479
 Oscar and Lucinda lvii, 465, 743, 1137
 The True History of the Kelly Gang lxi, 1137, 1145
 Carey, William 665
 Caribbean (region/cultures)
 connective role of ocean 812–13
 contribution to world culture 215–16
 definitions 215–16
 diasporic communities 216
 education 228, 232
 emigration to UK 74, 577–8; accounts of 579–86
 experience of colonial rule 1071, 1101–2, 1105
 geography 216
 inventiveness 216, 228
 languages 216–17, 735; *see also* creoles
 linguistic nationalism 720
 literacy levels 228
 music 228
 ‘nation language’ 785–6
 ocean, importance of 803
 popular culture 228–31
 rejection 215–16
 religious practices 230–1, 245
 socio-economic problems 75, 218–19, 239–40
 South Asian/Islamic population 760
 space, nature of 1095–6
 survival of colonialism 218
 women’s movement 240
 see also Caribbean literature; UK immigrant community; *names of islands*
 Caribbean Artists Movement 235
 Caribbean literature
 autobiographical fiction 128–30
 challenges facing 240–1
 choice of language 721–2, 785–6
 depictions of suffering 239–40
 diasporic 233–8
 drama 231
 f rancophone 608–9
 historical fiction 232
 influence/re-envisioning of European standards 231–2, 233
 innovativeness 215
 orality 228–9, 232
 poetry 233, 941
 publishing outlets 232
 as response to colonialism 219
 transnational influences 233–4
 travel writing 74–6
 treatment of Christianity 750–2
 use of creole/pidgin forms 711, 721–2
Caribbean Voices (radio) 578–9
 Carleton, William, *Wild Goose Lodge* 557
 Carlyle, Thomas 284
 Carman, Bliss 176
 Carmichael, Mrs 37
 Carmichael, Stokely 223
 (and Charles Hamilton), *Black Power* 450
 Carnival
 colonial restrictions 241
 fictional representations 230
 role in Caribbean culture 229–30
 Carpenter, Kevin 806
 Carpentier, Alejo 247, 292, 310, 318, 321, 850, 863, 864, 903
 biography 840, 842–3, 864
 comparisons with writers from other cultures 857, 858
 role in evolution of magical realism 833, 835, 837–40, 841, 852
 Ecúé-Yamba-ó 838, 839, 840, 842, 843, 846
 The Lost Steps xlv, 982, 993, 995
 ‘On the marvellous real in America’ 841–4, 863–4, 996
 see also *The Kingdom of This World*

- Carr, Emily 187
 Carr, Marina, *Portia Coughlan* 566
 Carrasco, David 509
 Carretta, Vincent 54
 Carson, Edward xxxix
 Cartelli, Thomas 782
 Carter, Angela, *Nights at the Circus* 852
 Carter, Jimmy liii
 Carter, Martin 246–7
 Poems of Resistance xlv
 Cartier, Jacques 172–3, 194, 195, 484, 485
 Cary, Joyce 1044
 Mister Johnson 917
 Casanova, Pascale 796
 The World Republic of Letters 607
 Casely-Hayford, J. E. 69
 Ethiopia Unbound xxxviii, 114
 Casey, Maryrose 512
 Casgrain, Henri-Raymond 175
 Castellanos, Javier, *Gaa ka chhaka ki* 326
 Castilleo, Luis *see* Araullo, Jesusa
 Castillo, Debra A. 5, 1179
 Castillo, Erwin, *The Firewalkers* 370
 Castro, Brian
 Birds of Passage 458–60
 Shanghai Dancing 460, 462
 Castro, Fidel xlv, 14, 74
 ‘History will absolve me’ xlv
 Catholic Church/Catholicism
 African clergy 89–90
 approval of colonial conquests 81–2
 ban on unauthorized printing xxiv
 books banned by 100
 educational monopoly 96
 establishment in Canada xxx
 inculturation debates 90
 in Ireland: anti-establishment literature 544;
 links with nationalism 550, 551–2
 martyrs 88
 relationship with empire/colonization 740
 ritual significance of mundane objects 15–16
 role in French Canadian culture 182
 in Southeast Asia 353
 terminology 103
 upholding of establishment views 550–2, 561
 Catholic Emancipation, campaign for
 541, 551
 Cecil, Sir Robert 60
 Céitinn, Seathrún 552, 555
 Foras Feasa ar Éireann 550
 Celan, Paul 636
 censorship, film 1043
 see also apartheid
 Centre des Religions Africaines 95–6
 Cervantes Saavedra, Miguel de xxiv
 Don Quixote xxv–xxvi
 Césaire, Aimé xli, 36, 156, 235, 274, 311, 560,
 700, 793, 807, 821, 831, 938–9, 940, 961,
 989–93, 1070–1, 1074, 1075, 1076,
 1083–4, 1089, 1112
 early life/education 1106–7, 1108
 influence on later writers 227, 234, 1079
 interpretation of Negritude 1105–6,
 1110–11; compared with Senghor’s
 1112–13
 role in Negritude movement 1100, 1108–9,
 1110, 1111
 Discours sur le colonialisme xlv, 2, 226, 1102,
 1104
 ‘Nègreries: jeunesse noire et assimilation’
 1108–9, 1110
 Une tempête 97, 99, 778, 782, 808, 1083–4
 ‘Le Verbe marronner’ 1117–18
 see also *Cahier d’un retour au pays natal*
 Césaire, Suzanne 821
 Ceylon, (conflicts for) posession of xxvii, xxviii
 see also Sri Lanka
 Chabria, Priya Sarukkai 402
 Chadha, Gurinder 1063, 1065
 Chakaipa, Patrick F., *Love Is Blind* 750
 Chakrabarty, Dipesh 312, 780, 783, 1173
 ‘Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History’
 1175–6
 Chamberland, Paul 184–5
 Chamberlin, J. Edward 490–1
 Chambers, Angela 1106
 Chamoiseau, Patrick 217, 529, 608, 793, 1087
 Un dimanche au cachot 609
 Solibo magnifique 609
 Texaco lix, 609
 see also Bernabé, Jean
 Chamoiseau, Patrick, and Raphaël Confiant,
 Lettres créoles 1102
 Champlain, Samuel de 173
 Chanady, Amaryll 848, 865–6
 Chand, S., & Co. (publishers) 1029
 Chand, Tara 670
 Chandra, Sarat 774
 Chandra, Vikram
 Love and Longing in Bombay lx, 432
 Red Earth, Pouring Rain 1144
 ‘Shakti’ 908
 Chandraratna, Bandula
 Eye for an Eye 763
 Mirage 763
The Changing Countryside (1965) 1051

- Chaplin, Charlie 144
 Chapman, Michael 341
 character, postcolonial depictions/reversals 909–10
 Charef, Mehdi 610
Le Thé au harem d'Arché Ahmed 611–12
 Charles I (Charlemagne), Holy Roman Emperor 740
 Charles II of England xxvii, 656
 Charles IV of Spain 13
 Chatterjee, Partha 419, 421
Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse lvi
 Chatterjee, Upamayu, *English, August* lvii
 Chatterjee (Chattopadhyay), Bankim Chandra 425, 671, 679, 774, 776, 928
Rajmohan's Wife 1027
 Chatterjee (Chattopadhyay), Sarat Chandra, *Devdas* 1062
 Chatwin, Bruce 72–3
The Songlines 72–3, 986
 Chaudhuri, Amit 425, 1150
Afternoon Raag lvii
 Chaudhuri, Nirad C. 73, 675, 776
The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian xlv, 73
The Continent of Circe 73
A Passage to England 73, 584, 924–5
 Chaudhuri, Rosinka 1026–7
 Chauhan, Anuja, *The Zoya Factor* 1035
 Chaulet-Achour, Christine 1000–1
 Chauveau, Pierre-Joseph-Olivier, *Charles Guérin* 175
 Chedid, Andrée, *From Sleep Unbound* xlv
 Cheever, John 850
 Chen, Willi, *King of the Carnival and Other Stories* 230, 760
 Cheney-Coker, Syl 747
 Cheng, François 1131
 Cheng, Vincent 789
 Chennai (Madras), development of printing/journalism 667
 Cheong, Colin
The Stolen Child 376
Tangerine 378
 Cheong, Felix 375
 Chettur, G. K. 389
 Chevrier, Jacques 613, 614
 Chi, Jimmy
Bran Nue Dae 531
Corrugation Road 531
 Chiampi, Irlemar 834, 850, 861
 Chicano literature 874–80, 899
 language mixing 721
 'chick lit', popularity in India 430, 1034–5
 child migrations, forced 9, 119–20
 Childs, Peter, *Post-Colonial Theory and English Literature* 778–9
 Chile
 film industry 1045
 independence xxxii
 national symbols/literature 301
 Spanish conquest 300–1
 Chimera, Rocha M. 1149
 China
 cessions of territory xxxiv, xxxvii
 Cultural Revolution 1172
 labour migrations from 199–200
 opening of ports to foreign trade xxviii
 trading relations 354
see also Hong Kong; Opium Wars
 Chinweizu 1018, 1130, 1132
 (with Onwuchekwa Jemie and Ihechukwu Madubuike), *Toward the Decolonization of African Literature* 938
 Chipamaunga, Edmund O. Z., *A Fighter for Freedom* 746
 Chitre, Dilip 395–6
Anubhavamrut (trans.) 396
 'Ode to Bombay' 722
Chocolat (1988) 1083
 Chong, Denise
The Concubine's Children 200–1
The Girl in the Picture 201
 Chow, Rey 1165
 Choy, Wayson 187
All That Matters 200
The Jade Peony 200
Paper Shadows: A Chinatown Childhood 200
 Chraïbi, Driss, *The Simple Past* xlv
 Chrisman, Laura 161, 335, 337
see also Williams, Patrick
 Christesen, Clem 1163–4
 Christian, Barbara, 'The Race for Theory' 1170–1
 Christianity
 among Aboriginal Canadians 497–9
 Andean 15–16
 canonical scriptures 741
 common core of beliefs 741
 Gaelic 545
 Great Schism (1054) 741
 'liberation' theology 739
 'muscular' 805
 postcolonial approaches to 742–53, 765
 reconciliation with slavery 745

- Christianity (cont.)
 relationship with territorial conquest/
 colonization 82, 299, 740–2
 role in representations of colonial state 739
 studies 739–40
 theory vs practice, indigenous critiques
 500–2
 varieties 764–5
see also African Christianity; Bible; biblical
 drama; Catholic Church; missionaries;
 prayer
- Christophe, Henri 223, 842
- Chu, Garrick, *et al.* (eds.), *Inalienable Rice: A
 Chinese & Japanese Canadian Anthology*
 200, 201
- Chuah, Guat Eng, *Echoes of Silence* 725
- Chughtai, Ismat, *The Quilt and Other Stories* xliii
- Churchill, Winston xl
- Cicogna, Enrico 860
- Cieza de Leon, Pedro 294
- cinema, African 694–5
- Cipriani, Arthur Andrew, Captain 224
- Cirque du soleil 185
- Cisneros, Sandra 721
- Citizenship Act (UK 1948) xlv
- civil war, treatments in Arabic literature 266–7
- ‘civilizing mission’ (of colonialism) 61, 84–6,
 264, 319, 416, 419, 604, 686–8, 984–5
 fictional representations 907
 indigenous critiques 496–7
 modern expressions 509
- Clapperton, Hugh 145
- Clare, Monica 521, 522, 523
Karobran 512, 524
- Clark, Jennifer 451
- Clark, John Pepper, *America, Their America* 74
- Clarke, Austin ‘Tom’ 205, 235–6
 ‘Easter Carol’ 751
Growing Up Stupid under the Union Jack 235
More 205
Nine Men Who Laughed 205
Pig Tails and Breadfruit 236
The Polished Hoe 205, 236
In This City 205
Toronto Trilogy 205
- Clarke, George Elliott 193, 204, 207–8
Beatrice Chancy 207
 (ed.), *Eyeing the North Star* 205
 (ed.), *Fire on the Water: An Anthology of Black
 Nova Scotian Writing* 188, 205, 207–8
Execution Poems 207
George and Rue 207, 208
Québécoisité 207
Salt Water Spirituals and Deeper Blues 207, 208
Trudeau: Long March, Shining Past 207
Whydah Falls 207
- ‘Classic’, defined 789–90
see also canon
- Clavel, Robert xxviii
- Clavell, James 356
- Clay, Bertha M. 1015–16
- Clement, Marie 506
- Cleven, Vivienne 514
Bitin’ Back 527
Her Sister’s Eye 527
- Cliff, Michelle 128, 240, 809, 819
Abeng 54, 221–2
No Telephone to Heaven lvii, 809, 919
- Clifford, Hugh 356
- Clifford, James 788, 863, 872, 873
 ‘Identity in Mashpee’ 887
- Clive, Robert 654–5, 656
- Clutesi, George 196
- Co-operative Movement 553
- Coetsee, Jakobus xxx
- Coetzee, Carli *see* Nuttall, Sarah
- Coetzee, J. M. 4, 108, 130–1, 776, 795
 biographical reminiscences 791–2
 criticisms 1135
 Nobel Literature Prize liv, 3, 1127, 1128,
 1129, 1149, 1151
Age of Iron 743
Boyhood 130
Diary of a Bad Year 130–1, 136
Disgrace lx, 130, 348–9, 743, 1137, 1145
Dusklands 5, 931
Foe 130, 912
Life and Times of Michael K liv, 343, 1137,
 1139
Summertime 130
Waiting for the Barbarians liii, 130, 743
 ‘What is a classic?’ 777, 789–92
Youth 130
- coevalness, principle of 24–5
- Cohen, Bill 521
- Cohen, Leonard 193
Beautiful Losers 181–2
- Cohen, Matt 193
- Cohen, Patsy 522
- Cold War 355
- Coleman, Daniel, *Masculine Migrations* 192
- Coleridge, Samuel Taylor 35, 869
- collectives, autobiographical testimony 124–7
- collectivity, representations of 916–17
- Collins, Merle 249, 804
The Colour of Forgetting 819

- Collins, Michael 556
 Collits, Terry, *Postcolonial Conrad* 787–8
 Collymore, Frank 232, 245, 246
 Colombia
 guerrilla fighters 777–8
 secessions from xxxiii
 Colonial Conference, London meetings
 1887 xxxvi
 1902 xxxvii
 colonial fiction
 characteristic features 907
 narrative techniques 905–6
 stereotyping of natives 921–2; linguistic
 917–18
 colonialism 6–12
 (alleged) mutual benefit 1101
 ‘divide and rule’ principle 1109
 formal establishment 18, 58
 justifications 1044, 1114
 role of native elites 68–9
 trade-offs among powers 8
 two phases of 6–8
 as ‘underside’ of modernity 296
 unsystematic origins 58
 see also anti-colonial feeling; economic basis
 of colonialism; space-making, colonial;
 names of colonial powers/colonies
 Columbus, Christopher xxiii, xxxiii, 16, 60,
 129, 290, 808, 842
 journals 59, 76, 293–5
 Committee of Imperial Defence xxxvii
 Commonwealth, declaration of xxvii
 Commonwealth Conference
 1953 xlv
 1976 lii
 Commonwealth Foundation 1144, 1157–8,
 1181
 Commonwealth literature 714, 1155–61
 comparative studies 1161
 establishment as field of study 1145, 1155–60
 implied hierarchy 24
 internal distinctions 1158
 objections to use of term 704, 932, 1144,
 1145–7, 1160–1
 Commonwealth Writers’ Prize lvi, 1127, 1144–7
 refusal to accept 1146–7
 communism 489
Comparative Literature (journal) 1179
 ‘complaint tradition’ 716, 719
 Compton, Wayne
 49th Parallel Psalm 208
 (ed.), *Bluesprint: Black British Columbian
 Literature* 205, 208
 Performance Bond 208
 Conan, Laure 191
 Condé, Maryse 233, 609, 615, 1090, 1093
 Crossing the Mangrove 1076
 Segu lv
 Confederation of New England xxvii
 Confederation of United Provinces of Central
 America xxxii
 Conference on British Commonwealth
 Literature (CBCL) 1156
 Confiant, Raphaël
 Aimé Césaire: une traversée paradoxale du siècle
 1122–3
 see also Bernabé, Jean; Chamoiseau, Patrick
 Congo (Kongo), Portuguese colonization/rule
 82, 87–8
 see also Belgian Congo; Democratic Republic
 of the Congo; Zaïre
 Congress for Cultural Freedom 1157
 Connolly, James 558
 Labour in Irish History 558
 Conrad, Joseph 137, 793, 986, 1044, 1128, 1133
 postcolonial reworkings 776, 777, 787–8
 Almayer’s Folly 356, 788
 The Congo Diary 779
 Falk: A Reminiscence 356
 Heart of Darkness xxxvii, 778–80, 788, 894,
 911–12, 986, 988, 1064
 Lord Jim xxxvii, 986
 The Nigger of the Narcissus xxxvii, 914
 Nostramo xxxvii
 The Secret Sharer 356
 ‘Youth’ 356
 Conrad, Sebastian 623
 Constantine, (Roman) Emperor 740
 Constitution Act (Canada 1982) 487
 convergence 315
 convicts, deportation 8, 19
 Cook, James, Captain 62
 Cook, Ramsay 173
 Cooper, Brenda 996, 999
 Cooper, Frederick 109
 Cooper, J. California
 Family 57
 In Search of Satisfaction 57
 Cooppan, Vilashini 773
 Cope, Jack, *The Fair House* 743
 Coppola, Francis Ford 1063–4
 Coptic sects/script 81, 685
 Copway, George (Kahgegagahbowh) 195,
 498–9
 *The Life, History and Travels of Kah-ge-ga-gah-
 bowh* 498

- Corbalis, Judy, *Tapu* 745
 Corcoran, Patrick 1069
 Cordeiro de Mata, Joaquim 693
 Corelli, Marie 1036
corrido (genre) 879
 Cortázar, Julio 321, 850, 903
 ‘Axolotl’ 321–2
 Hopscotch xlviii
 Cortes, Fidelito C. 372
 Waiting for the Exterminator 372
 Cortés, Hernán xxiv, 290, 295, 332, 874, 876
 Coser, Stelamaris 52
 Cotnoir, Louise 189
 Counter-Reformation 550
 Coupland, Douglas 187
 Couto, Mia
 Every Man is a Race lviii
 Sleepwalking Land 855, 857
 Couzens, Tim 152
 Crane, Stephen 793
 Crapsey, Adelaide 366
 Crate, Joanne, *Pale as Real Ladies: Poems for Pauline Johnson* 196
 Craveirinha, José, ‘Manifesto’ 939
 Crawford, Evelyn 522
 Crémazie, Octave 175
Creole, USS xxxiv
 creoles (languages) 785
 Jamaican, use in popular poetry 883
 literary use 237, 721–2
 non-standardization 229, 245
 use in film 1052
 as varieties of English/full languages 710–11
 viewed as inferior 711
 Creoles (people)
 literary depictions 890, 891
 role in Latin American society 289
 ‘creolization’ 217–18, 711, 821–6
 diverse impacts/understandings 821–2, 824–6
 poetic expressions 963
 Crichton, Michael, *Congo* 65
 cricket, role in Caribbean/Indian culture 225–6, 431, 715
 crime fiction 376
criollos (American-born Europeans), role in decolonization 13–14
Critical Inquiry (journal) 1166, 1168–9, 1173–5
 critical theory 718, 1084
 Croker, Thomas Crofton 559
 Cromer, Lord 253, 254, 256, 267, 269, 284
 Cromwell, Liz (ed.), *One Out of Many* 205
 Cromwell, Oliver 542
 Crowther, Ajayi, Bishop 93
 Bible translation 692
 liminal position 93
 Yoruba grammar/dictionary 692
 Crozier, Lorna, *A Saving Grace: The Collected Poems of Mrs Bentley* 190
 Cruikshank, Julie, *Life Lived Like a Story* 127
 Crummey, Michael, *The River Thieves* 187
 crusades 740
 Cruz, Conchitina
 Dark Hours 373
 elsewhere held and lingered 373
Cry, the Beloved Country (film, 1995) 1056–7
 Crystal, David 707
 Cuauhtémoc (Aztec leader) 876
 Cuba
 abolition of slavery 315
 conflicts for possession of xxxvii, 13
 fictional depictions 838
 literary/popular traditions 247
 poetry 940
 Revolution (1959) xlvii, 852–3, 860
 slave narratives 305–7
 (struggle for) independence xxxiv, xxxvi
 US occupation (1906–9) xxxviii
 US protectorate xxxvii
 Cugoano, Ottobah 32
 Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil of Slavery 574
 cult objects, missionaries’ opposition to 87
Cultural Critique (journal) 1168, 1170–1, 1173
 culturalism 663
 Curnow, Allen 475, 743
 ‘Dialogue with Four Rocks’ 743
 ‘House and Land’ 475
 ‘The Skeleton of the Great Moa in the Canterbury Museum, Christchurch’ 475
 Trees, Effigies, Moving Objects 470
 Currie, Sheldon, *Glance Bay Miners’ Museum* 188
 Curtin, Philip 68
 Cyprian, Bishop 81
 Cyprus xli
 da Cruz e Souza, João 307
 da Cunha, Euclides, *Os sertões* 319
 Dabydeen, Cyril 193, 203
 (ed.), *Another Way to Dance* 202
 Dark Swirl 203
 Drum of My Flesh 203
 (ed.), *A Shapely Fire* 202
 The Wizard Swami 203

- Dabydeen, David 237, 248, 816
The Counting House 597
A Harlot's Progress 597
 'Miranda/Britannia' poems 810
Slave Song 237
Turner 237, 597
- Dadié, Bernard, *Un nègre à Paris* 607, 1072
- D'Aguiar, Fred
British Subjects 597
Feeding the Ghosts 34, 597
The Longest Memory 597
- Dai, Mamang 402–3
- Daisne, Johan (Herman Thiery) 862
- Dakkani (language) 657
- d'Alfonso, Antonio *see* Caccia, Fulvio
- Dalisy, Jose Y., Jr
Oldtimer and Other Stories 370
Selected Stories 370
- d'Alpuget, Blanche
Monkeys in the Dark 457
Turtle Beach 457
- Dalziell, Rosamund, *Selves Crossing Cultures* 127
- Damas, Léon-Gontran xxxix, xli, 235, 247, 1084, 1107, 1108, 1109, 1110
Pigments 606
- Dampier, William 62
- Damrosch, David 773
What Is World Literature? 793–4
- Dan George, Chief 196
- Dangarembga, Tsitsi 1046–7
The Book of Not 746, 1046
Nervous Conditions lvii, 692, 746, 784, 1046
- Dangor, Achmat 349, 759
Kafka's Curse 759
- Dante (Alighieri) 218, 995
De vulgari eloquentia 785
- Danticat, Edwidge 239, 804, 861
Brother I'm Dying 239
 'Children of the Sea' 812
The Farming of Bones 239
- Dar-al-Islam* 740
- Daramola, Olu 144
- Darío, Rubén 312
- Darrieuseucq, Marie, *Pig Tales* 852
- Daruwalla, Keki N. 395, 428
A Summer of Tigers lx
- Darville, Helen, *The Hand that Signed the Paper* 468
- Darwin, Charles, *The Origin of Species* 250
- Darwish, Mahmūd 261, 269, 560
Lover From Palestine li
Memory for Forgetfulness 261
- Das, Kamala 398–9, 400, 403, 429, 1030
The Descendants 714, 722
 'An introduction' 399
Summer in Calcutta xlviii
- Das, Mahadai, 'They Came in Ships' 815
- Das, Sisir Kumar 666–7, 671
- Dash, J. Michael 1076, 1078–9, 1103, 1123
- Davey, Frank 186
- Davidson, Arnold 185
- Davies, Alan 707
- Davies, Gwendolyn 187
- Davies, Sir John, *A Discovery of the True Causes why Ireland was never Entirely Subdued* 546, 547
- Davin, Nicholas Flood 744
- Davis, Gregson 1110, 1115, 1117–18
- Davis, Jack 515, 516, 521, 531
Kullark 530–1
- Davis, Thomas (Ireland) 558
- Davis, Sir Tom (Cook Islands) 813
- Davitt, Michael 558
The Fall of Feudalism in Ireland 558
- Dawood, Yusuf 11
- Dawson, Ashley 589
- Day, Lal Behari, *Gobinda Samanta* 1028
- Day of Mourning (Australia 1938) 530
- Daylight, Phyllis 522
- al-Dayyāf, Aḥmad b. Abī 253
- Dé, Shobha 1031
Socialite Evenings 1031
- de Certeau, Michel 993
- de Chirico, Giorgio, *The Enigma of Arrival* 785
- de Costa, Ravi 451
- de Gaulle, Charles 1078
- De Loughrey, Elizabeth 27
- de Man, Paul 323
- de Quincey, Thomas 869
- de Silva, Colin 766
- de Silva, Gregory 360
- de Souza, Eunice 399–401, 403, 942
 'de Souza Prabhu' 399–400
- De Ungria, Ricardo M. 372–3
- de Valera, Eamon 565, 567
- de Zoysa, Richard 408
- Deane, Seamus 564
Celtic Revivals 560
Reading in the Dark 564
- Death and the King's Horseman* (Soyinka) 146–51
 speech styles 148–9, 150–1
- Deb, Raja Radhakanta 677
- Deb, Siddhartha 432
- Debi, Rassundari, *Amar Jiban* 112
- Debré, Michel 1074–5

- decolonization 12–16
 autobiography under 121–2
 as basis for understanding poetry 938–9
 impact on popular literature 1011
 ‘imperative’ 505–6
 narrative process 273
 resignification 316–17
- Defoe, Daniel 776
 see also Robinson Crusoe
- Degla, Luc
 Das afrikanische Auge 642
 Frechheiten 642
- del Monte, Domingo 306
- Delacampagne, Christian 1103–4
- Delany, Martin, *Blake, or The Huts of America* 205
- Deledda, Grazia 774
- Deleuze, Gilles 1078, 1079, 1090
- Dell, Ethel M. 1015–16
- Demetillo, Ricardo 371
- ‘Demidenko affair’ 468
- Democratic Republic of the Congo ix
 education 96
 official religions 89
 see also Zaire
- Demoulins, Edmond, *À quoi tient la supériorité des Anglo-Saxons* 255, 273–4
- Dening, Greg 805
 Islands and Beaches 823
- Denis, Claire 1055, 1083
- Denmark, abolition of slave trade xxxi
- Denness, Rose 531–2
- Denning, Michael 1032
- Dent, Tom 1166–7
- Depestre, René 1117–18
 A Rainbow for the Christian West 751
- Derozio, Henry Louis Vivian 386, 387, 771–2, 1026–7
 critical commentary 771–2
 as national poet 772
 postcoloniality 771–2
 The Fakir of Jungheera 771–2
 ‘The Harp of India’ 387, 771, 772
 ‘To India – My Native Land’ 387
- Derrida, Jacques 316, 326, 949
- Des prêtres noirs s’interrogent (Black Priests Questioning)* (collection) 89, 100
- des Rosiers, Joël 209
- Desai, Anita 427, 721, 723, 776, 1150, 1162
 Bye-Bye Blackbird 586, 922–3, 924–5, 928
 Clear Light of Day liiii, 433, 1136
 In Custody 1136
 Fasting, Feasting 1136
- Desai, Kiran 3
 The Inheritance of Loss lxi, 432, 1136
- Desani, G. V. 905
 biography 413
 All About H. Hatterr xliv, 412–13, 904
- Descas, Alex 1055
- Deserontyon, John, Capt. (Odeserundiye) 497
- Deshapande, Gauri 399, 400
 ‘The Female of the Species’ 399
- Deshapande, Shashi 904
- Desjardins, Richard 185
- Desnos, Robert 840
- Dessalines, Jean-Jacques 223
- destabilization, processes of 1076–7, 1171
- Devdas* (films, various years) 1062, 1067
- Devi, Ananda 615, 815–16
- Devi, Mahasweta 653, 1142
 Mother of 1084 li, 1057–8
- Devil on the Cross* (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, English version) 163
 see also Caitani Mutharabaini
- Devkota, Laxmi Prasad 409
- Devlin, Anne
 After Easter 566
 Ourselfs Alone 566
- Dewart, Edward Hartley (ed.), *Selections from Canadian Poetry* 1–2, 176
- Dharker, Imtiaz 400, 401–2
 ‘Not a Muslim Burial’ 402
- Dharwadkar, Vinay 404, 653, 679
- Dhlomo, Herbert I. E. 151–5, 156–7, 169, 338
 choice of language 152–4, 684
 contradictions in poetic theory 155
 imagery 154
 review of Vilakazi 152–3
 Valley of a Thousand Hills xliii, 153–4, 748
- Dhlomo, R. R. R. 338
- Dhondy, Farrukh
 Bombay Duck 765
 Come to Mecca 761
 East End at your Feet 761
- Dhoomil, *From the Parliament to the Street* li
- Dhoulagarle, Koorle 521
- di Cicco, Pier Giorgio 193
- Di Kopane, Dimpho 1057
- Diagana, Moussa, *La Légende de Wagadou* 1056
- Diagne, Ahmadou Mapaté, *Les Trois Volontés de Malic* 606
- Diallo, Bakary, *Force-Bonté* 606
- dialogue 917–19
 use of local expressions 918
 vocabulary lists 918
- Diamond, Stanley, *In Search of the Primitive* 985

- diaspora(s) 19–20, 127–8, 171, 199–210, 239
 Caribbean 233–8
 causative factors 20
 conceptual changes 20
- Díaz, Jesus, *The Initials of the Land* lvi
- Díaz, Porfirio 1039, 1052–3
- Diáz del Castillo, Bernal 290
- Dīb, Muḥammad 271, 1071
Trilogy 261
- Dickason, Olive 503, 504
- Dickens, Charles 776
Great Expectations 478–9, 796–7
Oliver Twist 1057
- Dickinson, Peter (ed.), *Here Is Queer* 192
- ‘Dies Irae’ (medieval chant) 970
- Dieterlen, H.I., Rev. 701
- Dillon, Sarah 870, 872
- Dimalanta, Ophelia Alcantara 372
- al-Dimashqī, Ibn Zakī 282
- Dimock, Wai-Chee 775
- Dinshaway massacre (1906) 256
- Diome, Fatou
La Préférence nationale 613
Le Ventre d’Atlantique 613
- Dionne, René (ed.), *Anthologie de la littérature franco-ontarienne des origines à nos jours* 188
- Diop, Birago
Sarzan 97–8
Tales of Amadou Koumba xlv
- Diop, David 696, 747, 961
Hammer Blows xlv
- ‘Nigger Tramp’ 747
- Dirlik, Arif 119, 313
- ‘Discourse on the Logic of Language’ (Philip)
 947–50
 annotative text, content/layout 949–50
- disease *see* plagues
- Dissanayake, Wimal 1066
- Divakaruni, Chitra Banerjee 1030
Arranged Marriage 930
- Dix, Otto 835
- Dixon, Graeme, *Holocaust Island* 518
- Dixon, Melvin 1167
- Dixon, Thomas, *The Clansman* 1044
- Djaïdani, Rachid
Boumkæur 617
Viscéral 617
- Djaout, Tahar 755
- Djebbar, Assia 609, 756–7, 1047, 1087, 1093–4
 awards/nominations 1131, 1142, 1149
 influence of Fanon 1085
Fantasia: An Algerian Cavalcade lv, 1076
Far from Medina 757
- Djeħa* (Maghreb theatrical form) 143
- Djibouti 1094
- Djouder, Ahmed, *Désintégration* 617
- Dodd, Bill 521
- Dogrib people 487–8
- Dom John of Brazil xxxii
- Donaldson, Tamsin 521
- Donnacona (Iroquois chief) 173, 484
- Donne, John 341
- Dorall, Edward 380–1
Arise O Youth! 380
A Tiger Is Loose in Our Community 380–1
The Young Must Be Strong 380
- Dorfman, Ariel 3
Widows liv
- Dorscht, Rudy 189
- Dorsey, David 1167
- Dotoevsky, Fyodor 774
- Douglas & McIntyre (publishers) 505
- Doutre, Joseph, *Les Fiancés de 1812* 175
- Doyle, Arthur Conan 1036
- Doyle, Roddy, *Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha* lix
- Drabble, Margaret, *The Gates of Ivory* 356
- Dracius, Suzanne, *L’Autre qui danse* 609
- Dramatic Performances Act (India 1876) 1026
- Dransfield, Michael 452
- Drew, Benjamin (ed.), *The Refugee: or the Narratives of Fugitive Slaves in Canada* 204
- Drewe, Robert, *A Cry in the Jungle Bar* 457
- Drum* (magazine) 338–9, 342, 1011, 1012
- drum music/poetry 156
- d’Souza, Charmayne 400
- Du Bois, W. E. B. xxxviii, 118, 129, 204–5, 336
- dub poetry 588–9, 883–5, 949, 963–5
 hubs 884
 performance 884, 963
- Dube, John 338
- Dube, John Langelibele 338, 684, 688–9
Amagama Abantu 689
Isitha Somuntu Nguye Uqobo Lwakhe (The Weakness of the Blackman Is Himself) 689
A Talk about My Native Land 688
uJege insila kaShaka 689
The Zulu Appeal for Light 689
- Dube, Mickey Madoda 1056
- Dubey, Madhu 50, 1080
- Ducharme, Réjean 185
- Duff, Alan 478, 533, 534, 538
Jake’s Long Shadow 533
Once Were Warriors 533
Out of the Mist and Steam 533
What Becomes of the Broken-Hearted 533

- Duffy, Enda 789
 Duigan, John 1060
 Duiker, K. Sello 349
 Dumdum, Simeon, Jr 372
 The Gift of Sleep 373
 Third World Opera 373
 Dumont, Gabriel 499
 Dumont, Marilyn 506
 A Really Good Brown Girl 196
 Duncan, Sara Jeanette, *The Imperialist* 178
 Dungaroo Press 1162
 Dunlap, A.R. 5, 1179
 Dunqul, Amal 268
 Duplessis, Maurice 182
 Durand, Claude/Carmen 860
 Durham, Lord 174–5
 During, Simon 110, 1063–4
 Durwārah, Fu'ād 278
 Dutt, Govin Chunder 387, 388–9
 Dutt, Greece Chunder 387, 1027
 Dutt, Hur Chunder 387, 1027
 Dutt, Ishan Chunder 1027
 Dutt, Kylas Chunder, 'A Journal of Forty-Eight Hours of the Year 1945' 671
 Dutt, Michael Madhusudan 387–8, 428, 776, 1027
 The Captive Ladie 388, 1027
 'King Porus – A Legend of Old' 388
 Rizia: The Empress of Inde 1027
 Dutt, Omesh Chunder 387
 Dutt, Shoshee Chunder 387, 388, 1027
 'The Republic of Orissa' 388
 Dutt, Smarajit 781
 Dutt, Toru 387, 388–9, 428, 1027
 'Our Casuarina Tree' 389
 Duvalier, François 'Papa Doc' 751
 Duvalier, Jean-Claude 'Baby Doc' lvi, 208–9
 Eagleton, Terry 789
 (with Fredric Jameson and Edward Said), *Nationalism, Colonialism and Literature* lviii
 Eakin, John Paul 117
 East Africa
 British rule 10–11
 Indian population 10–11
 radical theatre 783
 East Germany
 fiction set in 642
 postcolonial status 622
 East India Company, xxviii–xxix, xxxii, 110, 385, 420, 654–5
 Charter 656, 662; 1833 renewal 662
 education policy 662
 expansion of power 656
 nationalization xxx
 study of Indian languages 657, 677
 East Timor *see* Timor-Leste
 East-West (publishers) 1032
 Easter Rising (Ireland 1916) 556, 559, 565
 Eaton, Edith (Sui Sin Far) 200
 Echevarría, Esteban 304–5
 The Slaughterhouse 305
 Echewa, T. Okinbaran, *The Land's Lord* 747
 Eco, Umberto 868
 École littéraire de Montréal 176
 economic basis of colonialism 264, 620–1
 export-oriented 18
 productivity-oriented 17
 Ecuador, independence xxxi, xxxiii
 Eddy, Thomas, Commissioner 496
 Eden, Emily, *Up the Country* 67
 Edenic motifs, in accounts of discovery 294–5
 Edgell, Zee, *Beka Lamb* 751–2
 Edgeworth, Maria 557
 Edmund, Mabel 522
 education
 of colonial leaders 69, 576
 'filtration theory' 661, 662
 planning 718
 see also Africa; India; missionaries; United Kingdom
 Education Act (UK 1835) 417, 420
 Edward VII of England xxxvii, 68
 Edwards, Brent Hayes 238, 248, 1167
 Ee Tiang Hong 362, 373–4
 I of the Many Faces 361
 Effa, Gaston-Paul
 Nous, enfants de la tradition 614
 Tout ce bleu 613
 Voici le dernier jour du monde 613–14
 'effective history' 21–2
 Eglinton, John 562
Egúngún (Nigerian theatrical form) 143, 145
 Egypt
 anti-British sentiment, expressions of xlv, 269
 cinema 1041
 establishment of modern state xxxi, xxxiii
 European assault (1956) 257
 French invasion (1798–1803) 17, 250, 252–3
 League of Nations mandate xl
 Revolution (1952) 278
 seizure of Suez Canal xlvi
 views of European culture 17
 writing systems 685

- Ekama, André
Der einsame Kandidät 642
Im Spinnenetz der Privilegien 643
Schwarzer sind im weißen Himmel 642
- Ekwensi, Cyprian 1019
Jagua Nana xlvii
- El Loko, *Der Blues in mir* 640–1
- Elangovan 364
- Elgin Treaty (1851) xxxiv
- Eliot, George, *Middlemarch* 916
- Eliot, Samuel A. 204
- Eliot, T. S. 4, 227, 391, 403, 453, 776, 785–6, 789–92, 791–2, 793, 795, 940, 974, 975
 ‘The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock’ 409
 ‘The Waste Land’ 270, 271
- Elizabeth I of England 60, 573
- Elliott, Lorris 207
 (ed.), *Other Voices* 205
- Ellison, Ralph 49–50
Invisible Man xlv
- Eloy Martinez, Tomás 859
The Peron Novel lvii
- Emberley, Julia 189
- Emecheta, Buchi 720, 776, 779
In the Ditch 586–7
The Joys of Motherhood liii
Second-Class Citizen 586–7, 904
- Emerson, Ralph Waldo 879
- Emmanuelle, Sister 82–3
- Emory University 1182
- Empire Windrush*, SS 234, 577, 579, 584, 596, 598, 599, 965
- ‘en-strangement’, theme of 996–7
- encounter, theories of 1068, 1070–1, 1076, 1095–6
- endonormativism 717–18
 regional variations 718
- Engdahl, Horace 1135
- England
 black servants, employment of 573
 colonial annexations xxvi, 6–7, 544–5; *see also* India
 conflicts over colonial possessions xxv–xxvi, xxvii, 8
 National Debt xxviii
see also United Kingdom
- English, James F. 1131, 1133, 1138, 1151
- English (language) 703–29, 776–7, 785–7
 accents, mockery/ironic use 725–6, 917–18
 African acquaintance with (in South Africa) 690
 as alien to postcolonial communities 716, 723–4
 arguments for use of 683–4, 723, 728, 732
 ‘bad’ varieties 716–17
 calls for renaming 730
 characterization, use of dialect forms for 724
 class associations 427–8
 evolution (in postcolonial India) 435–6
 extralinguistic features, importance of 708
 forms of, choice between 720–2, 919
 global spread/nature 23, 785–7, 1152
 hybridization 359–60, 361, 436, 581–2
 imposition 719; in Ireland 543; poetic responses to 941, 947–50
 in India 660–9, 670–2, 786–7; diverse forms 787; dominance/official use 385–6, 417–19, 649–50, 651, 652–3, 654–6; early printing 1026–7; objections to use 672–3; rivalry with Hindi 673–5; translations from 668
 as ‘killer’ 728
 as language of African poetry 152, 154–5
 as link/neutral language 713, 732
 ‘literatures’ 704
 made mandatory in Canada 503
 ‘ownership,’ questions of 705, 713, 719–20, 728
 ‘postcolonial’ 705, 709
 range of terminologies 706–7
 referencing in literary works 724–6
 rejection by postcolonial writers/theorists 392, 393, 398, 404, 438–9, 715–16, 733, 1163
 reversal of restrictions on 716
 South Asian/Indian, literary use 385, 394–5, 410, 714
 teaching/use in SE Asia 356–73, 705
 terminology 704–5
 use of plural 704
 use with lower case 705
 writers’ comments on use of 703, 722–6
see also ‘global English’; ‘new English’
- English literature *see* canon
- The English Patient* (film, 1996) 3, 202, 1065, 1139–40
- The English Patient* (Ondaatje) lix, 3, 202–3, 919
- Booker Prize 1127, 1136, 1139–41, 1151
- Engmalchin* (hybrid linguistic form) 361
- Eni, Emmanuel, *Delivered from the Powers of Darkness* 1016
- Enoch, Wesley 531
see also Mailman, Deborah
- Enright, Anne, *The Gathering* lxi, 566
- Enright, D. J. 356

- 'Entente Cordiale' xxxvii
Environment and Planning D: Society and Space
 (journal) 4
 environmental issues, addressed in fictional
 works 180, 182
 epic(s)
 early conquests presented as 300–1
 film adaptations/references 1050–1
 indigenous 926–7
 postcolonial referencing 42, 44–5, 47,
 55, 529
 Equiano, Olaudah, *The Interesting Narrative of
 the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus
 Vassa, the African* 30–2, 67–8, 572, 574–5,
 581, 597, 600
 compared with other narratives 31, 35
 disputes as to authenticity 54, 68
 as source/influence 32
 Eraly, Abraham, *Night of the Dark Trees* 753
 Errilla y Zúñiga, Alfonso de xxiv
 La Araucana 300–1
 Erdrich, Louise, *Tracks* 914
 Ernst, Max 1074
 Esa, Mohammed 633
 'La Escalera' uprising (Cuba 1844) 306
 Eskimo, use of term 488
 Esonwanne, Uzoma 11
 Espinet, Ramabai
 'An Ageable Woman' 830
 The Swinging Bridge 239, 815
 Esquemeling, Alexander Oliver xxviii
 Esquivel, Laura 15
 Like Water for Chocolate 1058
 'essentialism, strategic' 1002, 1086
 Essop, Ahmed 759
 The King of Hearts and Other Stories 759
 The Third Prophecy 759
 Estavam, Fr *see* Stephens, Thomas
 Etherton, Michael 783
 Ethiopia xli
 adoption of Christianity 685
 civil war (1970–91) lviii
 Orthodox Church 686
 ethnography 292
 and autobiography 117, 118–19, 123
 and film 1043–4
 informing of prose fiction narratives 159–60,
 161, 321–2
 Étienne, Gérard 208–9
 Un ambassadeur macoute à Montréal 409
 Au bord de la falaise 209
 Une femme muette 209
 Le Nègre crucifié 209
 La Pacotille 209
 Vous n'êtes pas seul 209
 L'Étudiant noir (*The Black Student*; formerly
 L'Étudiant martiniquais) 1107, 1109–10
 European Union, criticisms of 1142–3
 evangelization/culture, debates on 102
 Evaristo, Bernardine
 The Emperor's Babe 600
 Lara 600
 Soul Tourists 600
 Evasco, Marjorie M. 372
 evolution, racial theories based on 984
 see also Social Darwinism
 Ewe (language) 156–8, 169, 959
 exodus, postcolonial treatments 765
 exploration *see* travel narratives
 export, gearing of colonialism to *see* economic
 basis of colonialism
 Eze, Kingsley Charles, *How to Avoid Mistakes and
 Have a Good Life* 1014
 Ezekiel, Nissim 392, 393, 394, 403, 408, 428–9,
 1030
 Collected Poems lviii
 'Very Indian Poems in Indian English' 394
 Fabian, Johannes 84–5, 91–2, 117
 Time and the Other lv, 984
 Fagan, Kristina 506
 Fagbamigbe (publishers, Nigeria) 1015–16
 Fagunwa, D. O., Chief
 Irínkerindo Nínú Igbó Elégbe 692
 see also Ògbójú Ode Nínú Irínmalè
 Faisal, Emir xxxix
 Faiz, Faiz Ahmed 396, 406, 560
 Prison Thoughts xlvii
 Falkland Islands xxxiii
The Famished Road (Okri) lviii, 165–6, 766, 855,
 857–8, 926, 996–9
 Booker Prize 1136, 1149
 magical/realist duality 997–8
 Fanon, Frantz 2, 123, 172, 184, 217, 226, 263–4,
 272, 274, 311–12, 340, 778, 807, 940,
 991–3, 1068–70, 1091, 1095
 aesthetics 1078
 biography 1079, 1084–5, 1088
 commentary 1077
 criticisms 1080, 1088, 1089
 critiques of Negritude 1123
 death 1079, 1089, 1092
 development of political thought 1075–6,
 1080, 1083
 education 1072
 as exemplar of postcoloniality 1090

- expressions of Negritude 1083–7
geographic placement 1069
increasing militancy 1084–5
influence/legacy 1085, 1086–7, 1091, 1093, 1094
and ‘moment of arrest’ 1069, 1070
oscillation between particular and general 1085–6
place in postcolonial studies 1077–8, 1082
posthumous repute 1089–90
racial theory 1085–6
resignation from psychiatric post 1075
treatment of identity 1085
‘Algeria unveiled’ 1085
Black Skin, White Masks xlv, 2, 226, 782, 796, 961–2, 963, 1076, 1079, 1084–5, 1086, 1087, 1095, 1102
A Dying Colonialism (L’an V de la révolution algérienne) 1079
Toward the African Revolution 1079
The Wretched of the Earth xlvii, 261, 558, 1079, 1085, 1095, 1102
fantasy, in Latin American literature 321–2
Faraghānī 271–2
Farah, Nuruddin 1127, 1142–4, 1149
concerns for migrants/refugees 1142–3
Close Sesame 755
Maps lvi, 913
‘A sense of belonging: a contemporary story on migration’ (lecture) 1142–3
Sweet and Sour Milk liii
Faris, Wendy B. 852, 866, 996
Farrell, J. G.
The Siege of Krishnapur 1136
Troubles 558
Farrokhzad, Forugh
Another Birth xlviii
Fauconnier, Henri, *La Malaise* 356
Faulkner, William 850, 853, 1073–4, 1076, 1092
Absalom, Absalom! 895
Go Down, Moses 929
The Unvanquished 929
Faustina, Bama, *Karukku* 753
FCAATSI (Federated Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders) 515, 516
Fédération des Étudiants d’Afrique Noire Française (FEANF) 606
Federmann, Raymond 925
Fee, Margery 508
Feldman, Burton 1128
Feminist Studies (journal) 1166
feminist writers/theory 1177–8
in Canada 190–2
in India 400, 435
in Ireland 566–7
Fenellosa, Mary 391
Fenian movement *see* Irish Republican Brotherhood
Fennario, David, *Balconville* 183
Fenton, James, *The Memory of War* 356
Feraoun, Mouloud 271
Fernando, Lloyd 362, 363
Green Is the Colour 760
Scorpion Orchard 377
Fernando, Nihal 407
Fernando, Patrick 407
The Return of Ulysses 407
Ferré, Rosario 249
Ferron, Jacques 185
Feuchtnner, Veronika 635
Fianna Fáil 556
The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing 566
Fielding, Helen, *Bridget Jones* series 1034
Fielding, Henry, *Shamela* 910
Fielding-Hall, H., *Thibaw’s Queen* 356
Figueroa, Loida 249
Fiji xxxv
Islamic community/literature 760
film 22, 1039–64
about colonial conquests 1043
appeal to illiterate 1040
architectural features 1047
breadth of reach 1040–41
censorship laws 1043
contrasted with literature 1040–1, 1047
‘documentary,’ falsification 1044
entertainment, as primary function of 1061–2
ethnographic 1043–4; critiqued 1047
reinforcing of colonial ideology 1039, 1040, 1041, 1042–5; suitability for 1042–3
sound technology, impact on language of 1062–3
tailoring to supposed limitations of audience 1042–3
unavailability to colonised peoples 1041
and wars of liberation 1041
see also adaptations; postcolonial film
Findlay, Timothy
Not Wanted on the Voyage 192, 742
The Wars 742
Fine Gael 556
Finkelkraut, Alain 1081
Fireweed (journal) 189
Firmat, Gustavo Pérez, *Bilingual Blues* 715

- Firmina dos Reis, Maria 307
 First Nations (Canada) 172, 487–8
 drama 196–7
 government policy towards 195, 502–3
 literature 194–9
 novel 197–8
 oral narratives/testimony 119–20
 subcategories 487–8
 usage of term 196–7, 488
 Fischer, Michael 119
 Fishman, Joshua 720
 Fitch, Ralph 655–6
 Flaherty, Robert 1044
 Flanagan, Richard, *Wanting* 479
 Flaubert, Gustave 60, 774, 1073
 Florentino, Alberto 370–1
 Flores, Ángel 848–9, 865–6
 Florida xxxii
 Florio, John 172–3
 Fogarty, Lionel 514, 517–18
 ‘Frisky Poem and Risky’ 518
 Kargun 517
 New and Selected Poems 518
 Foggo, Cheryl, *Pourin’ Down Rain* 208
 Foley, Gary 451–2, 527
 Folklore of Ireland Society 555
 Fools (1997) 1056
 Forbes, Crudella 239
 Forbes, John 453
 Ford-Smith, Honor 125, 127
Forest of a Thousand Demons (Fagunwa tr.
 Soyinka) see *Ògbójú Ode Nínú Irínmalé*
 Forsdick, Charles, and David Murphy,
 Francophone Postcolonial Studies 1102
 Forster, E. M. 423, 1028, 1044
 A Passage to India xl, 73, 912
 Fort William, College of 657, 665, 669–70
 Fortes, Meyer 985
 Foster, Cecil 193, 206
 Foster, David, *Moonlite* 459
 Foster, Georg 658
 Foucault, Michel 97, 111, 259, 278–9, 676, 1175
 Fourth Dimension Publishers (Nigeria)
 1015–16
Le Foyer Canadien (journal) 175
 ‘Fragments out of the Deluge’ (Okigbo) 943–7,
 978
 individual voice 947
 religious symbolism 944–5
 style 945–6
 treatment of myth 946
 Frame, Janet
 Intensive Care 472–3
 ‘Letter’ 476
 frame narratives 910–13
 France
 Caribbean diaspora 235
 changes of slavery policy 222
 colonial annexations xxvi, xxvii–xxviii,
 xxviii–xxix, 6–7, 289, 354, 604
 colonial rule 1106; disapproval of conduct
 253, 494–5; education policy 1072;
 linguistic basis 1094–5; mobilization of
 local elites 1074–5; repressiveness 251
 see also assimilation
 colonial student presence 606
 culture, outsiders’ views of 17
 expansionism within Europe xxvii, xxxi, 13
 film(s): US restrictions on showings 1059; use
 in colonies 1039
 immigration policy 607
 literary history, processes of transformation
 1072–4
 loss of colonies xxxi, 19, 605
 military use of colonial troops 10
 as model for Arab culture 252–3
 nineteenth-century fiction 1073
 Overseas Departments (Dom-Tom) 605
 see also Martinique
 publishing industry 607–8
 socio-economic integration policies, failure
 of 611–12
 sociopolitical unrest (2005) 615, 616
 transition to postcolonialism 604
 see also French postcolonial literature; French
 Revolution
 France, Anatole 262
 Frank, André Gunder, *Capitalism and
 Underdevelopment in Latin America* xlix
 Franklin, Benjamin 114
 Franklin, Sir John 742
 Fraser, Brad 192
 Fraser, Robert 156, 959
 Frazer, James George 984
 The Golden Bough 946
 free verse 375
 Freedom Charter (SA 1955) 339, 342
 Freetown Debate (1888) 102
 Freire, Paulo, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* li
 French, Patrick 1134
 French, Philip 1139
 French Canada
 attitudes to multiculturalism 193
 cultural nationalism 182
 internal cultural differences 194
 rebellions against British rule 174–5, 181

- separatist movement 183–5
- settlements 212
- treatments in anglophone fiction 177
- French Canadian literature 172, 174–6, 182–5
 - black 208–9
 - poetry 183–4
 - prose fiction 177, 183
 - regional 188
 - religious themes 742, 744
- French (language) 357, 605, 698
- Caribbean literature 1071–6, 1094–6
 - colonial imposition 1074–6, 1094–5, 1115
- French postcolonial literature 604–18
 - African domination 605–6
 - awards 608
 - cross-ethnic alliances 616
 - heterogeneity 607
 - immigrant narratives 613–15
 - sociopolitical context 615–18
 - see also *banlieues*; ‘Beurs’
- French Revolution xxx, 219–20
 - influence in colonies 540
- Freud, Sigmund 869, 894, 1068
- Freyre, Gilberto, *The Master and the Slaves* xlii
- Friedman, Susan 880, 881
- Friel, Brian, *Translations* 564
- Frisch, Max 1132
- Frobenius, Leo 625, 627, 992, 1111
 - parodied 999–1001
- Frye, Northrop 147, 179, 180
 - Anatomy of Criticism* 137
- Fuentes, Carlos 321, 903
 - ‘Chac Mool’ 321, 322
 - The Death of Artemio Cruz* xlviii
 - The Old Gringo* 1060
- Fugard, Athol 3, 340–1
 - The Island* 340–1
 - Sizwe Banzi is Dead* li
- Fugitive Slave Act (US 1850) 174, 204
- Fukuyama, Francis 778
- Furet, François 316
- Furtado, Joseph 389
- Fyans, Foster, *Memoirs Recorded at Geelong, Victoria, Australia* 113
- Ga (language), religious/historical writings 94
- Gabriela (women’s organization, Philippines) 127
- Gaelic Athletic Association 553
- Gaelic (Irish)
 - circulation in manuscript form 548
 - colonists’ attitudes to 546–7
 - as focus for cultural resistance 548–50
 - literature in 543, 544
 - nationalists’ detachment from 552
 - preservation of traditions 549–50
 - revivalism 552–5, 558–9, 926
 - (weakening of) links with Catholicism 550–1
- Gaelic League 552–5, 560, 562
 - aims 553–4
 - extent of success 554–5
- Gaffney, Ellie 522
- Gaines, Ernest, *A Long Day in November* 929
- Gainsborough, Thomas 575
- Galang, Zoilo M.
 - A Child of Sorrow* 365
 - Tales of the Philippines* 365
- Gale, Leona, *Angélique* 207
- Gale, Mary-Anne see O’Brien, Lewis Yerloburka
- Galeano, Eduardo, *The Open Veins of Latin America* li
- Galgut, Damon, *The Good Doctor* 348–9
- Gallant, Mavis 190
- Gallegos, Rómulo, *Dona Barbara* xli
- Gallo, Bernardo da 103–4
- Galmahra (Jacky Jacky) 455
- Gama, Luís 307
- Gamalinda, Eric T. 372–3
 - The Empire of Memory* 370
 - Lyrics from a Dead Language* 373
 - My Sad Republic* 370
 - Zero Gravity* 373
- Gambia xlviii, l
- Gamboa, Federico, *Santa* 1052–4
- Gamboa, Sarmiento de 294
- Gandhi, Indira xlviii, liii, 203, 427
- Gandhi, Leela 782–3
- Gandhi, Mohandas K. (Mahatma) 339, 391, 409, 423, 427, 429, 438, 672–3, 917
 - arrests/imprisonment xxxix, xl, xlii
 - assassination xliv
 - characterization in others’ narratives 115
 - education 69, 576
 - role in Indian politics xxxix, xl, xlii
 - Autobiography* 110, 114
 - Hind Swaraj* xxxviii
 - The Story of My Experiments with Truth* 69
- García Márquez, Gabriel 15, 324, 591, 833, 850, 903
 - Nobel Literature Prize liv, 3, 850, 860, 861;
 - acceptance speech 7, 867
 - Big Mama’s Funeral* 853
 - In the Evil Hour* 853
 - ‘The Handsomest Drowned Man in the World’ 320–1
 - Leaf Storm* 853–4

- García Márquez, Gabriel (cont.)
Love in the Time of Cholera lv, 1060
 'Monologue of Isabel watching it rain in Macondo' 853
No One Writes to the Colonel 853–4
see also One Hundred Years of Solitude
- Garcilaso de la Vega 301–2, 550, 842
- Garland, Hamlin, *The Much-Travelled Road* 929
- Garneau, François-Xavier 175
- Garner, Helen, *Monkey Grip* 456–7
- Garro, Elena, 'Blame the Tlaxcaltecs' 322
- Garuba, Harry 857–8
- Garvey, Marcus 208, 223–4, 230, 232, 234–5, 240, 336
- Gates, Henry Louis, Jr 5
Colored People 108
'Race,' Writing and Difference 1102
- GATT (General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade) 1059
- Gatti, Maurizio (ed.), *Littérature amérindienne du Québec* 196
- Gauvin, Lise 185
- gay themes/writers 127, 192, 396–7, 468–9
see also lesbian writers/themes
- Gebre Yesus, Afe Werk', *Libb-weled tarik* 693–4
- Gee, Maurice, *In My Father's Den* 743
- Geertsema, Johan 136
- Ge'ez (language) 685
- Gelede* (Nigerian theatrical form) 143
- Gélinas, Pierre, *Les Vivants, les morts et les autres* 183
- gender
 bias, in nationalist leaders' narratives 114–15, 117
 identity, issues/ambiguities 72
see also feminist writers/theory; lesbian writers/themes; women
- Genette, Gérard 933
- Genootskap vir Regte Afrikaners* (Society of Real Afrikaners) 334
- genre(s)
 analysis 137, 901
 constraints of 885–7
 conventions of 883
 European, postcolonial engagement with 776, 782–5
 hybridization 882–4, 978
 postcolonial use 22, 903–6, 928–31; historical outline, impossibility of 904–5, 932
 rise, in popular fiction 1024–5
see also names of genres/literary streams
- George, David 204
- George, James, *Ocean Roads* 823
- Gérard, Albert S. 693, 701
- Gérin-Lajoie, Antoine, *Jean Rivard le défricheur* 175
- German literature, immigrant/multi-ethnic 631–45
 African immigrant 639
 Arab 633–4
 black (Afro-German) 637–9
 diversity 644–5
 immigrant narratives 631, 639–41
 Latin American 634
 postcoloniality 622–4, 640, 644
 retelling of African tales 639–40, 641–2
 Turkish 632–3
- Germany
 'asylum compromise' 631
 black (Afro-German) population 637; rights movement 637
 citizenship laws 631
 colonial annexations xxxvi, 6–7, 620
 colonial rule, methods 620–1
 educational policy 621
 emigrations to North America xxix
 immigrant population 622–3, 630–1, 639–44; assimilationist policy towards 644–5; relationship with state, literary explorations 640
 loss of colonies 621
 Nazi regime, colonial policy 621
 racial issues, complexity 623–4
 racist attitudes, critiqued 625–7
 rebellions in colonies xxxvii, 620
 reunification (1990) lviii
 Turkish community 624, 630–1
 unification (1871) 620
 wartime occupation by colonial troops 626
see also East Germany; German literature; West Germany
- Gewirtz, Paul 952–3
- Ghali, Boutros (Egyptian premier) xxxviii
- Ghalib (Mirza Asadullah Baig Khan) 404, 406, 670–1
- Ghallāb, 'Abd al-Karīm, *Master Ali* 261
- Ghana
 colonial news media 1006
 independence xlvi, 115, 682
 popular theatre 1016
- Ghana Broadcasting Company 694
- Ghartey, J., *Twer Nyame* 694
- al-Ghazali, Abn Hamid 259
The Deliverance from Error 109

- al-Ghūḥānī, Jamāl
Khiṭaṭ 279
Tajalliyyāt 279
Zaynī Barakāt 272
- Ghose, (Sri) Aurobindo 387, 389–90, 392, 393
Savitri 390
- Ghose, Kashiprasad 387, 1027
- Ghose, Manmoham 387, 389, 396, 397
- Ghose, Zulfikar 404
The Loss of India 762
 ‘The Marble Dome’ 763
- Ghosh, Amitav 4, 427, 434, 776, 1127, 1150
 refusal of Commonwealth Writers’ Prize 1146–7
In an Antique Land 430, 434
The Glass Palace 909, 1146–7
The Hungry Tide 434, 908, 993–4, 995
The Sea of Poppies 434, 1136, 1147
The Shadow Lines lvii, 433, 437, 784
 ‘The Testimony of My Grandfather’s Bookcase’ 774
 ‘ghost/host’ analytical approach 882–3, 886–7
- Gibbons, Rawle 231
A Calypso Trilogy 230
- Gibbs, James 1131
- Gide, André, *Voyage to the Congo* xli
- Giguère, Roland, *L’Age de la parole* 183
- Gikandi, Simon 18, 98, 163–4, 628, 698, 782, 1019
- Gikuyu (language)
 criticisms of choice of 720
 orthography 688
 reasons for choice of 683
- Gilbert, Kevin 451–2, 514, 515, 516–17
Because a White Man’ll Never Do It 450–1, 516
Black from the Edge 516
Blackside 516
The Cherry Pickers 511, 530
 ‘Look Koori’ 517
People Are Legends 516
 ‘Shame’ 516–17
- Gilbert, Sky 192
- Gilgamesh* (Babylonian epic) 44, 946
- Giliomee, Hermann 334
- Gilkes, Michael 231
- Giller Prize (Canada) 492
- Gilroy, Beryl 236
Black Teacher 236, 584–6
Boy Sandwich 236
- Gilroy, Paul 223–4
The Black Atlantic 48, 236, 1102
- Ginsburgh, Victor 1140–1
- Giraldus Cambrensis (Gerald of Wales) 545
- Giscard d’Estaing, Valéry 607
- Gissing, George, *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* 784
- Gita Govinda (traditional) 406
- Githae, Charles K., *A Worm in the Head* 1008
- Gladstone, W. E. 113
- Glassco, John 192
- Glissant, Édouard xli, 217, 226, 608, 793, 803, 812, 816, 819, 821, 824–5, 832, 1068–70, 1077, 1082, 1089–90, 1091–2, 1095–6, 1117, 1123
 biography 1078–9
 education 1072
 geographic placement 1069
 influence on later Martiniquan writers 1090
 influences 1085
 interviews 1074
 legacy 1090–1, 1094
 and ‘moment of arrest’ 1069
 place in postcolonial studies 1077–8, 1082
 poetics 1070, 1078, 1087, 1092–3, 1095
La Case du commandeur 914
Un champ d’îles 1078
Le Discours antillais (Caribbean Discourse) liv, 217, 608, 825–6, 1078, 1102
Faulkner/Mississippi 1073, 1076
Les Indes 1078
L’Intention poétique 1079, 1102
La Lézarde 1078–9
Mahagony 914
Malemort 914, 1076
Ormerod 609
Poétique de la relation 608, 1076, 1079, 1102
The Ripening xlvi, 1076
Sartorius 609
- ‘global English’ 726–9
 as ‘mythical’ 727
 rejection of concept 727–8
- globalization 75–6, 127–31, 239, 564, 765, 778
 early modern beginnings 299–301; failures 301; moral ground 299
 economic 264
- Globe Theatre xxv
- Glover, Dennis 475
- Goa xxiii
- Gobineau, Joseph-Arthur, comte de 992
- Godard, Barbara 189
 (ed.), *Gynocritics: Feminist Approaches to Canadian and Quebec Women’s Writing* 189
- Godbout, Jacques 185
- Godden, Rumer 1044
- Godfrey, Dave 180
The New Ancestors 181

- Godin, Gerald 184–5
 Goethe, Johann Wolfgang von 658
 Die Leiden des jungen Werther 259
 Gogol, Nikolai 850
 Goh Poh Seng 362, 364, 374, 379, 382
 The Elder Brother 379
 If We Dream Too Long 376
 The Immolation 378
 The Moon Is Less Bright 379
 When the Smiles Are Done 379
 Goh Sin Tub 362
 Gokhale, Namita, *Paro: Dreams of Passion* 1031
 gold, search for 294–5
 Gold Coast *see* Ghana
Gold Coast Leader (newspaper) 1006, 1020
Gold Coast Nation (newspaper) 1006, 1020
 Goldberg, David *see* Quayson, Ato
 Goldie, Terry 490, 1156
 Gomes, Albert 224
 Gomes, Carlos 1048
 Gómez de Avellaneda, Gertrudis, *Sab* 305–6, 307
Gone With the Wind (1939) 634
 Gonzales, Rodolfo ‘Corky’ *see* I Am Joaquín
 Gonzalez, N.V.M. 365, 369, 371, 381
 The Bamboo Dancers 369
 Bread of Salt xlv
 Children of the Ash Covered Loam 369
 Season of Grace 369
 The Winds of April 368
 González Echevarría, Roberto 841, 845–6, 863, 993
 Gooderham, Kent (ed.), *I Am an Indian* 196
 Goodison, Lorna 128, 206, 240
 Fool-fool Rose is Leaving Labour-In-Vain Savannah 206
 ‘Guinea Woman’ 956, 962
 From Harvey River 240, 956
 Travelling Mercies 240
 Turn Thanks 240
 see also ‘Annie Pengelly’
 Goodweather, Hartley *see* King, Thomas
 Goolagong, Evonne 521
 Goonaratne, Yasmin 406–7
 The Lizard’s Cry 407
 Goosen, Jeanne 349
 Gopal, Priyamvada 426
 Gordimer, Nadine 130, 776, 782, 895, 897, 1159
 critique of white liberalism 341–2
 Nobel Literature Prize lviii, 3, 1127, 1128–9, 1130, 1133, 1147–8, 1149, 1151
 Burger’s Daughter liii
 The Conservationist li, 1136
 July’s People 342–3
 ‘The Moment Before the Gun Went Off’ 895–7
 A Sport of Nature 909
 Gordon, Charles, General 251
 Gordon, George William 232
 Gorky, Maksim 774
 Görlach, Manfred 710
 Gorton, John 536
 Gosse, Edmund 391
 Gothic, postcolonial literary features 894
 see also ‘Ascendancy Gothic’; Australia
 Goto, Hiromi 193
 Chorus of Mushrooms 202
 The Kappa Child 202
 Gottfried, Amy 51
 Gouaffo, Albert 643, 646
 Goumane, Dembo, *Dembo Story* 617
 Government of India Act (UK 1935) 673–4
 Gqoba, William Wellington 693
 Grace, Patricia 531–2, 534, 804, 1127, 1142
 Mutiwhenua 531
 Potiki 532, 533, 820, 823
 Waiariki and Other Stories 531
 Gramsci, Anton 1175
 Granada xxiii
 Grant, Agnes 492
 Grant, Charles 662
 Grant, Douglas 1157
 Grant, George
 Lament for a Nation 181
 Technology and the Empire 180–1
 graphic novels 430, 1036
 Grass, Günter 591, 622
 The Tin Drum 866
 Gratiant, Gilbert 1108
 Gray, Stephen 744
 ‘Great Trek’ (South Africa 1836) xxxiii–xxxiv, 333–4
 ‘green imperialism’ 805
 Greenblatt, Stephen 293
 Greene, Graham 457, 1028, 1044
 The Heart of the Matter xlv
 Journey without Maps 71
 The Quiet American 356
 Greene, Thomas 44, 55
 Greene, Tim 1057
 Greenstein, Michael 192
 Gregory, Augusta 559
 see also Yeats, William Butler
Gregson v Gilbert (legal decision, 1783) 951–3
 Grenville, Kate, *The Secret River* 466–7
 Griffith, D. W. 1044

- Griffiths, Gareth 112
 see also Ashcroft, Bill
- Griffiths, Linda 197
- Grignon, Claude-Henri, *Un homme et son pêché* 176
- griots (storytellers) 1050–1
- Gronniosaw, Ukawsaw 32, 574
- Grosse, Pascal 621
- Grosz, George 835
- Grotowski, Jerzy 341
- Grove, Frederick Philip 192
 Settlers of the Marsh 185
- Grove, Richard 805
- Groyon, Vicente, *The Sky over Dimas* 370
- Grusser, John Collen, *Confluences* 47–8
- 'grunge lit' 468
- Guamán Poma de Ayala, Felipe, *Letter to the King* 302–3
- Guatemala xxiv, 316
 independence xxxii
 suppression of Maya culture 122
- Guattari, Félix 1078
- Guène, Faïza
 Du rêve pour les oufs 617
 Kiffe kiffe demain 617
- Guenther, Irene 836
- Guerrero, Wilfrido Ma. 367, 370–1
 Forever 367
 Frustrations 367
 Half an Hour in a Convent 367
 Wanted: A Chaperon 367
- Guevara, Ernesto 'Che' 14, 860
 Guerrilla Warfare xlvii
- Guèvremont, Germaine 191
- Guha, Ramachandra
 A Corner of a Foreign Field 431
 India after Gandhi 430–1
- Guha, Ranajit liv, 123, 315
- Guiga, Tahir 1042
- Guillén, Nicolás 156, 234, 247, 315, 940
 'Ballad of Two Grandfathers' 941–2
 Son Montijó xli
- Guimães Rosa, João 324
 The Devil to Pay in the Backlands xlvii, 320
- Güiraldes, Ricardo, *Don Segundo Sombra* xli
- Gujilec (publishers) 1036
- Gulab, Rupa
 Chip of the Old Blockhead 1035
 Girl Alone 1034
- Gunnars, Kristjana 186
 The Prowler 186
- Gupta, Sunetra 903, 918, 1150
 The Glassblower's Breath 909, 924
 A Sin of Colour 909
- Gurnah, Abdulrazak 759
 Paradise 759
- Gurr, Andrew 1158–9, 1163
 'Guru English' 666
- Gusdorf, George 110
- Gutiérrez Alea, Tomás 1057
- Guy, Rosa 249
- Guyana xlix, 828
- Guzmán, Martín Luis, *The Eagle and the Serpent* xli
- Gwala, Mafika 341
- Habekost, Christian, *Verbal Riddim* 883
- Habermas, Jürgen 414
- Ĥabībī, Emīle, *The Secret Life of Saeed, the Ill-Fated Pessoptimist* li, 264, 265, 275–6
- Haddad, Malek 271
- al-Hadj, Messali 270
- Hage, Rawi
 Cockroach 210
 De Niro's Game 210
- Hagedorn, Jessica 383
 Dogeaters 382
- Haggard, H. Rider 65, 337, 1044
 King Solomon's Mines 65, 335; film adaptations 1044; referencing in anti-colonial writings 335–6
 'On Fiction' 335
- Haggis, Jane 4
- Haile Selassie, Emperor 230–1
- Haiti
 inspiration for Carpentier 842–3, 864
 literature 239
 political changes xxxix, lvi, lviii
 refugees from 208–9
 see also Haitian Revolution
- Haitian Revolution (1791–1803), xxx–xxxii, 14, 16, 219–20, 222–5, 305, 1117–18
 fictionalized representations 223, 841–3
 historical accounts 222–3, 224–5
- al-Ĥakīm, Tawfīq 258, 260
 'Awdat al-rūh 260
 Bird of the East 255, 258, 262, 279
 The People of the Cave xlii
 Sijn al-'Umr (The Prison of Life) 260
 see also Ḥusayn, Ṭāhā
- Hakluyt, Richard 60, 655
- Hale, Thomas 1115, 1116, 1119
- Haley, Alex, *Roots* lii, 57
- Halfe, Louise
 Bear Bone and Feathers 196
 Blue Marrow 196

- Halhed, N. B. 658
 Hall, Rodney, *Just Relations* 459
 Hall, Stuart 512, 594, 869, 961
 New Ethnicities 590
haló (dirge), Ewe traditional form 157
 Halpe, Ashley 406
Halqa (Maghreb theatrical form) 143, 145
Hambone (journal) 1166
 Hamilton, Charles *see* Carmichael, Stokely
 Hamsun, Knut 774
 Han Suyin
 And the Rain My Drink 363
 A Many-Splendoured Thing 363
 Haq, Kaiser 408–9
 ‘Bangladesh ’71’ 408
 Black Orchid 409
 ‘Brown, Powerless’ 409
 Haqqī, Yahyā 254
 The Lamp of Umm Hashim 17, 254, 255, 274, 279
 Hardiman, James 559
 Harding, John 531
 Hardt, Michael 1131
 Hargreaves, Alec 608, 610
 Harkin, Margo, *Hush-a-Bye Baby* 566
 Harlem Renaissance 1108
 Harlow, Barbara 780
 Harootunian, H. D. 1165
 Harper, Elijah 198, 505
 Harper, Stephen 510
 Harris, Claire
 Fables from the Women’s Quarter 205
 She 205
 Harris, Wilson 217, 218, 578, 776, 779, 793
 Carnival Trilogy 218, 752
 The Guyana Quartet 752
 Palace of the Peacock xlvii, 993, 994, 995
 Tradition, the Writer and Society xlix
 Harrison, Dick 185
 Hartlaub, Gustav 835
 Hartman, Saidiya 36
 Hartnett, Michael 555
 Hasan, Anjum 402, 432
 Hashmi, Alamgir 403, 404, 405
 ‘Voyage East’ 405
 Hastings, Warren 658
 Haudenosaunee people
 conflicts with settlers 495–6
 loss of lands 497
Hauka (Hausa folk performance) 137–9, 145,
 150–1
 defined 138–9
 Hau’ofa, Epeli 804, 813, 815, 821
 ‘Blessed are the Meek’ 817–18
 Hausa (language) 688
 films in 1062
 Hawaii 113
 Hawi, Khalil, *From the Vineyards of Lebanon* lviii
 Hawkesworth, John, *Oroonoko* 30
 Hawley, John C. *see* Krishnaswamy, Revathi
 Hawthorne, Nathaniel 929
 Hayden, Robert, ‘Middle Passage’ 35, 43
 Haykal, Muḥammad Ḥusayn 284
 Head, Bessie, 339, 1162
 The Collector of Treasures lii
 A Question of Power lii
 Head, Harold (ed.), *Canada in Us Now* 205
 Healy, Allan 1164
 Healy, Dermot 565
 Heaney, Seamus 567, 782
 Nobel Literature Prize lx, 564
 North 564
 ‘Requiem for the Croppies’ 568
 Hearne, Samuel, *Journey from . . . Hudson’s Bay to
 the Northern Ocean* 173
Heat and Dust (1983) 1136, 1139
 Heath, Roy A. K. 721
 The Armstrong Trilogy liii
 The Shadow Bride 760
 Hébert, Anne 185, 191
 Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich 217
 Heidegger, Martin 992
 Heim, Otto 533
 Heinemann (publisher)
 African operation 1015, 1018
 African Writers Series xlvii, 1159–60, 1161
 Heiss, Anita
 I’m not a racist, but . . . 519
 Who Am I? The Diary of Mary Talence 524
 Helgoland xxxvi
 Hemingway, Ernest, *In Our Time* 929
 Hémon, Louis, *Maria Chapdelaine* 175
 Henderson, James (Sakéj) Youngblood 506
 Henderson, Jennifer 189
 Henderson, Michael, *Log of a Superfluous Son*
 472, 473
 Henry, George (Maungwudaus) 498
 Henson, Jim (escaped slave), *Broken Shackles* 205
 Henson, Josiah 204
 Henty, G. A. 65
 On the Irrawaddy 356
 Herbert, Xavier
 Capricornia 744
 Poor Fellow My Country 744–5
 Herder, Johann Gottfried von 658
 Herero people, massacres (1905–7) 620, 639,
 925

- Hernández, José 307
Martín Fierro 319
- Heron, Gil-Scott 968
- Herrera y Tordecillas, Antonio de, *General History of the Deeds of the Castellians* 295
- Hesse, Hermann, *Siddhartha* xl
- Hestermann, Sandra 908
- Hewett, Dorothy 452
- Hewitt, John, 'Colony' 565
- L'Hexagone* (publisher) 183
- Heykal, Mohamed Hussein, *Zeinab* 1048
- Heyns, Michiel 349
- Hibbert, Joseph 230
- Hidalgo, Bartolomé 304
- hieroglyphs 685
- Higgins, Aidan, *Langrishe, Go Down* 558
- Highway, Tomson 192, 196–7, 506
Dry Lips Oughta Move to Kapuskasing 196–7
Ernestine Shuswap Gets Her Trout 197
The Kiss of the Fur Queen 198, 510, 744
The Rez Sisters 196–7
 (and Linda Griffiths), *Jessica* 197
 (and Linda Griffiths), *The Book of Jessica* 197
- Hikayat Abdullah* (Malay, traditional) 377
- Al-Hilali, Huda 633
- Hill, Alan xlvii, 1159
- Hill, Errol 229–30
Man Better Man 230
- Hill, Lawrence
Any Known Blood 207
Black Berry, Sweet Juice 207
The Book of Negroes 207
- Hind Pocket Book (publishers) 1029
- Hindi (language) 421–2, 649
 as anti-colonial tongue 672
 educational use 674
 evolution 668, 669–70
 grouping of other languages under 651
 literature in 660
 national status 652, 673, 676
 protests at elevation 674–5
 reading public 653
 rivalry with English 673–5
 standardization 670
- Hindus/Hinduism
 devotional song, incorporation in poetry 974
 mythology, literary referencing 765–6
 nationalism 765
see also Hindi; Hindutva; India
- Hindutva (Hindu-ness), as Indian ruling
 principle 415, 431–2
- history
 pitfalls of 262–4
 truthfulness 262–4
- Hitchcock, Peter 884
- Hitler, Adolf 621
- HIV/AIDS, narratives/allegories of 1008, 1057
- Ho, Louise, *New Ends and Old Beginnings* 383
- Hô Chí Minh, *Colonization of Trial* xli
- Ho Mingford, *Sing to the Dawn* 378
- Hobsbawm, Eric 447–8
- Hobson, J.A., *Imperialism* xxxvii
- Hocart, A.M. 985
- Hochbruck, Wolfgang 187
- Hodge, Merle 128
Crick Crack Monkey 1
- Hodgkins, Jack 187
The Invention of the World 856
- Hodgson, Elizabeth, *skin painting* 519
- Hofmeyr, Isabel 112
- Hogarth, William 597
- Holden, Philip, *Autobiography and Decolonization* 108
- Hollaman, Keith *see* Young, David
- Holland, Patrick, and Graham Huggan, *Tourists with Typewriters: Critical Reflections on Contemporary Travel Writing* 80
- Hollywood
 options on literary works 1048
 rise of studio system 1043
- Holocaust, depictions/referencing 407, 468–9
 postcolonial treatments 765
- Holt, Yvette 519
The Home and the World (1984) 1066
- Homer, *Iliad/Odyssey* 792
 referenced in postcolonial poetry 36, 44–5
- Hondo, Med 1057
- Hong Kong 352, 353
 British takeover/rule xxxiv, xxxvii, 8
 economy 353
 languages 358, 359–60, 712, 719, 723
 literature in English 383
 nature of postcoloniality 353
 return to China (1997) lx, 355
- Honolulu Conference (1952) xlv
- Hood, Hugh, *The New Age/Le Nouveau siècle* 742
- Hope, Christopher, *Darkest England* 909, 931
- Hopkins, Gerard Manley 966
- Hopkinson, Nalo 239
- Horace (Q. Horatius Flaccus) 792, 966
- Hornung, Alfred, and Ernstpeter Ruhe,
Postcolonialism and Autobiography 108
- Hosain, Attia, *Sunlight on a Broken Column* xlvii, 433, 762
- Hosain, Shahid 404
- Hoskote, Ranjit 397

- Hossaini, Khaled
The Kite Runner 763
A Thousand Splendid Suns 763
- Hourani, Albert, *Arabic Thought* 255
- Hove, Chenjerai, *Bones* lvii
- Howard, Albert *see* Widdowson, Frances
- Howard, John 464
- Howell, Leonard 230
- Howells, Carol Ann 189
- Hoves, Marjorie *see* Attridge, Derek
- Hsieh Ping-Ying, *Autobiography of a Chinese Girl* 116
- Hsu Wei, *Ching Ping Mei* xxiv
- Huddart, David, *Postcolonial Theory and Autobiography* 108
- Hudson Bay Company 173, 499
- Hufana, Alejandrino G. 371–2
- Hügel-Marshall, Ika, *Daheim Unterwegs: Ein deutsches Leben* 637
- Huggan, Graham 456, 458, 595–6, 922, 1002, 1148, 1151, 1180, 1181
The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins 775–6, 1017–18
 ‘A tale of two parrots’ 795
see also Holland, Patrick
- Huggins, Rita/Jackie 522
- Hughes, Langston 939, 959–60, 1109
 ‘I Too’ 878–9
- Hughes, Ted 341
- Hugo, Victor 774, 843
- Huhndorf, Shari 493
- Hulme, Keri 3, 532, 534, 804, 1151
 racial identity 477–8, 1137, 1138
see also *The Bone People*
- Hulme, Peter 218, 574, 781, 808
Colonial Encounters: Europe and the Native Caribbean, 1492–1792 lvi
- Hume, David 911
History of England 546
The Hunters (1957) 1044
- Hurston, Zora Neale 118–19
- Husain, Intizar 762
Basti 762
- al-Husaini, Ishaw Musa, *A Chicken’s Memoirs* xliii
- Ḥusayn, Tāhā 254, 259
Adīb (Man of Letters) 260
Al-Ayyām (The Days) xli, 256, 258, 259–60, 262–3
 (and Tawfiq al-Ḥakīm), *The Enchanted Palace* 277
- Hussain (grandson of the Prophet) 973–4
- Hussein, Ebrahim 695, 758
- Huston, Nancy 608, 615
- Hutcheon, Linda 21, 148, 171, 172, 268, 1000, 1055, 1179
see also Richmond, Marion
- Huxley, Aldous 472
- Huyssen, Andreas 881
- hybridity 880–2, 897
 defined 880
 literary/generic, mixture 883–4
 and postcolonial poetry 940–1
 of postcolonial spaces 1084–5
 problems of categorization 880–2
 and the uncanny 892–3
see also genre; palimpsest
- Hyde, Douglas 552–4, 562
- Hyder, Qurratulain 762
River of Fire xlvii, 434–5, 763
- I Am Joaquín* (Gonzales) 874, 875–80, 882, 897
 approach to history 875–7
 generic characteristics/mixing 879–80
 poetic influences 877–8
- Ibitokun, B. M. 168
- ibn Battuta, Abu Abdullah Muhammad 59–60
- ibn Khaldun 281
- ibn Munqidh, Usama, *The Book of Learning By Example* 108, 259
- ibn Sina, *The Life of Ibn Sina* 108, 259
- ibn Tufail, *Ḥayy Ibn Yaqdhan* 806
- Ibrahim, Hafiz, *Diwan* xlii
- Ibrāhīm, Ṣun’allah, *Al-Lajnah (The Committee)* 265, 276
- Ibrahim Pasha 250
- Ibrati, *Aijaz-ul Mohabbat* 657, 676
- Ibsen, Henrik 1128
- Icaza, Jorge, *Huasipungo* xlii
- Idi Amin 10
- Idris, Suhayl, Dr, *al-Ḥayy al-Lātinī* 274–5
- Idris, Yūsuf 275
- Ifā* (African divinity chant) 141
- Igbo people/culture 159, 162
 narrative/poetic representations of British colonization 943–7
- Igloria, Luisa 382
- Iguh, Thomas, *The Sorrows of Love* 1014
- Ihimaera, Witi 477–8, 532, 534, 804
The Dream Swimmer 534
The Matriarch 532, 766
The New Net Goes Fishing 532
Pounamu Pounamu 531
Tangi 531
The Whale Rider 814
Ilanga lase Natal (periodical) 684

- Ilio, Dominador 371–2
 ‘imagined communities,’ cinematic presentation 1050
 Imbert, Enrique Anderson 862
 immigration literature *see* Caribbean; UK
 immigrant community
 Immorality Act (SA 1950) 347, 902
 imperialism
 linguistic 706–7, 728
 persistence of mythology 777–8
see also colonialism; *names of (neo-)imperial powers*
 Incas, accounts of conquest 298, 302
 inculturation, colonial/mission policy 100, 102
 debates in Catholic Church 90
 indentured labour 10–11, 18, 20, 75, 758, 815–16
 India 544
 alternative Christian communities 752–3
 anti-obscenity laws 1026
 British occupation/rule xxxiii, xxxiv–xxxv, 264; cultural impact 416–22; debate on best policy 417, 661–2; educational policy 358, 416, 417–19, 660–8, 671, 928, 1150–1; effect on Muslim life/community 762–3; linguistic implications 654–5, 658; study of English literature 418–19; use of film 1039, 1043
 caste system 422–3
 cinema 1041, 1045; *see also* ‘Bollywood’
 coalition politics 432
 Congress Party 673
 Constitution xlv, 673, 676
 critiques of modern society 75
 diversity 429
 economic liberalization 429–30, 432, 1030, 1032
 education policy/legislation 674
 feminized personification 114–15
 General Emergency (1975–7) 427, 428, 431, 438
 independence (1947) xlv, 16, 412, 415–16
 national identity 415–16
 nationalist historiography, (alleged) failure 1175–6
 nationalist movements 672–5, 1027
 new states 674
 Northwestern Provinces 670
 Parliament, first sitting xl
 print industry 420–1, 665–7, 1025–7
 secular nature of state 415
 Shakespeare, adaptations/attitudes to 776, 781–2
 spirituality 429
 television 430, 1031–2, 1051
 trading relations 354
 women’s experiences/testimony 125–6
see also Indian languages; Indian literature;
 Indian popular culture; Indian publishing
 industry; Partition
 Indian Act (Canada 1876) 488, 502–3, 508
 Indian languages 413–14, 419–22, 439–40, 649–75
 (award-winning) literature in 1149–51
 Bible translations 665, 666
 Census records 651
 culturally valid, limiting of numbers 668–9, 678
 European impact 651, 653–4
 families 651
 history 650–4
 Linguistic Provinces Committee (1948) 674, 675, 679–80
 northern lingua franca (proto-Hindi/Urdu) 669–70
 number 651–2
 objections to use of 720
 officially recognized 651–2, 668–9
 range of scripts 422
 reading publics 653
 regional bases 651–2, 673–4, 675
 relationship with nationalism 672–5
 rivalry between 649
 rivalry with English 649–50, 713, 721
 three-language formula 428, 674
 translations from English 665, 668
 Indian literature 412–39
 autobiographies of nationalist leaders 114–15
 bilingual 671
 class divisions 908
 diasporic 815–16, 824
 difficulty of finding publishers 1028
 ‘division of labour’ (poetry/prose) 425–6, 428–9
 drama 440
 expressions of marginalization 432
 generic characteristics 671, 903–4
 global popularity 1033–4
 indigenous traditions 419
 languages 413–14; choice of 721, 722, 786–7
 national narratives 429–35, 437–8, 784
 nationalist 671–2
 nativism 438
 non-fiction 430–1
 Northeastern 432

- Indian literature (cont.)
 prizes 668, 1149–51
 range of approaches to study of 21
 rejection for moral degradation 668, 678
 relationship with nation 413
 religious themes 752–3, 762–3
 small-town/village focus 429–30, 432, 438
 ‘sublinguistic’ 653–4
 women’s 435
see also Indian novel; Indian poetry; South Asian literature
- Indian Mutiny (1857) xxxv, 16, 671
- Indian National Congress xxxvi
 outlawing xlii
- Indian novel(s) 424–8, 436–8
 new developments (1980s) 427–8
 newspaper serialization 1027
 primacy over other genres 424–6
 retention of colonial stereotypes 922–3
 search for ‘mythic’ style 437
 ‘secular canon,’ emergence of 431–2
 Western influence 928–9
- Indian poetry 428–9, 437
 bi-/multilingual 395–6, 399, 401, 405–6
 cultural dislocation 386–9
 domination of South Asian corpus 385
 English translations 406
 glorification of Hindu past 386, 387–8;
 rejection 392–3
 identity crisis 392–4
 mystical 390
 nationalist 386–7, 771–2
 new directions 397–8
 Northeastern 398, 402–3
 post-independence 392–403
 recent developments 403
 women’s 398–403; distinctive characteristics 399, 400
- Indian popular culture 1025
 genres 1036
 redefinition 1031–6
 revitalization (1980s) 1030–2
 suppression of obscenity 1026
see also ‘chick lit’
- Indian publishing industry 1032–4
 business methods 1033, 1035–6
 entry of overseas firms/TNCs 1027–8, 1030,
 1032–4
 post-independence changes 1028
 prices 1035
 print runs 1038
 small presses 1030
- Indigènes de la République* 605
- Indigenous American literature, studies 493
- indigenous populations/cultures (general)
 accounts of conquest 297–8, 301–3, 302–3;
 shortage of 173
 autobiographical writing/testimony 119–21
 as ‘blank canvas’ for colonists 293–5
 Caribbean 218
 ‘cosmovision’ 509
 destruction, planned/attempted 19, 122,
 290–1, 296–8
 global networks/movements 512, 654
 Latin American 288, 289–92
 modern narratives’ engagement with 322
 notation systems 290–1
 portrayal in settler narratives 195, 293–5
 relations between 19
 religious traditions 765–6
 spiritual traditions 765
- Indo-Anglian literature 2
- Indonesia 131, 352, 353
 independence xlii, 355, 757–8
 internal discord 355
 languages 358
- Inés de la Cruz, Juana
 ‘Divine Narcissus’ 299
 ‘Soirée of Four Nations’ 299
- infantilization, as colonial stereotype 85, 92
 objections to 94
- Innes, C.L. 574, 576
The Cambridge Introduction to Postcolonial Literatures in English 108
- ‘inside-outsider’ status, of immigrant/
 postcolonial writers 571–2, 575, 584–5
 new approaches to 590–1
 rejection 590
see also travel narratives
- Inter-Americas Treaty of Arbitration
 (Washington 1929) xli
- interdisciplinarity 1181
- internal focalization, technique of 905–6
- internet
 impact on autobiographical writing 131
 impact on popular literature 1011
 impact on South Asian poetry 410
 postcolonial studies sites 1182
 and publishing 1034
- intertextuality 925–7, 930
- Interventions* (journal) 3, 1167, 1179–80
- interviews (with writers) 722–4
- Inuit people 487
 defined 488
 denial of legal protection 503–4
 migrations 503–4

- Ipeellie, Alootook 506
 Iqbal, Muhammad, *Complaint* xxxix
 Iranian Revolution (1979) 281
 Iraq
 resistance to British rule 263, 272, 283–4
 US invasion (2003) lxi
 Ireland
 agriculture, centrality to economy 542
 Anglo-Irish relations 19
 bardic orders 546, 547–50
 clan system, destruction of 539
 cultural movements 553–4
 (debatable) colonial status 539, 541–2, 543–4, 939
 divisions in settler community 539–40
 emigration from 539–40, 542
 English colonization xxiii, xxv, 539, 544–5
 English writings on 545–7
 European views 542–3
 fomenting of sectarian unrest 540–1
 Great Famine (1840s) 542
 Home Rule debate xxxix–xl
 immigration 564, 567
 incorporation into Union (1801) xxxi
 land ownership 542
 negative stereotyping of native population 541–2, 545–6, 556
 Parliament, calls for 551–2, 555
 partition xl
 Plantation 545–6, 549
 population, decline in 542
 postcolonial studies 567–8
 rebellions 540–1, 542, 546
 recruitment of soldiers/officials 541
 religio-ethnic hierarchies 541–2
 republican movement 555–6, 559
 settlers' worldview 544–7
 supremacy of Anglican elite 540
 unrest 539–41
 women's movement 564, 565–7
 see also Gaelic, literature in; Irish Free State; Irish literature; Northern Ireland
 Ireland (modern state) *see* Irish Republic
 Irele, F. Abiola 683, 696, 697, 699, 992, 1100, 1106, 1112, 1114
 The African Imagination 141–2
 Irish Free State xl, 543, 544
 sexual discrimination 565
 Irish (language) *see* Gaelic
 Irish Literary Theatre 553
 Irish literature 542–4, 556–68
 civilizational collapse, as theme 563–4
 diversity 543
 folk culture, influence of 559, 926
 historical fiction 556–7
 modernist 543
 nationalist 544
 political 558
 postcoloniality 544, 564–7
 Revival (c. 1890–1930) 558–62, 926
 see also Gaelic; lamentation, poetry of
 Irish Republic 544
 Irish Republican Army (IRA) 556
 Irish Republican Brotherhood (Fenian movement) 555–6
 irony, and use of language 724–5
 Iroquois people, relations with settlers 495–6
 see also Haudenosaunee; Wendat
 Irving, Washington
 History of the Life and Voyage of Christopher Columbus xxxiii
 The Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent. 929
 ISD (Initiative of Black Germans) 637
 Ishiguro, Kazuo, *The Remains of the Day* lvii, 593–4
 Islam
 in Arab literature 280–4
 attitudes to marriage/gender issues 756–7
 'awakening' 281–3
 criticized for imperialism 1134–5
 diasporic communities 754, 759–63
 dogma 754
 fundamentalist 754–5, 763–4, 764–5, 1134;
 satirized 758
 history 753–4
 hostility towards, post-9/11 600, 1143
 imperialist associations 753–4
 in Indian literature 432–3
 legacy in Arab countries 254–5
 migrations 754
 poetry exploring traditions of 401–2
 and postcolonial literature 755–64, 765, 926–7
 prayers, poetic engagement with 972–4
 rejection by new Arab elites 254–5, 268
 rift with Hinduism 668, 670
 sacrifices required by 283
 scholarship 754
 in Southeast Asia 353, 354
 spread in Africa 686
 see also *Dar-al-Islam*; Sufism
 island literature 802–26
 deconstruction of isolation myth 802–3, 807
 favoured spaces/chronotopes 822–4
 gendering of imagery 807, 816
 national identity, treatments of 804
 patriarchal model, reworking 807–8

- island literature (cont.)
 proliferation 806, 807
 racial/genealogical concerns 804
 treatment of decolonization/sovereignty 816–21
 treatment of local concerns/languages 810–11
- islands
 archipelagoes, mutual influence within 803
 contribution to colonial culture 802–3, 805
 isolation, stereotypical view of 802–3, 805–7;
 literary deconstructions 802–3, 807
 as loci of cultural/material exchange 802–3
 scholarship 805
 as *tabula rasa* 806
see also island literature
- Israel
 foundation xliv, 1081
 peace accord with PLO lix
- Italy
 treaty with Ethiopia xli
- Iyengar, Srinivasa 2
- Iyer, Pico 75–6
Video Night in Kathmandu 75
- al-Jabartī, ‘Abd al-Raḥmān 253
- Jabavu, D. D. T. 338
- Jabavu, John Tengo 693
- Jabrā, Jabrā Ibrāhīm
The First Well: A Bethlehem Boyhood 261
The Ship l
- Jacobinism 549
- Jacobitism 549
- Jacobs, Harriet, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* 36, 53
- Jacobs, Peter (Pahtaysagay) 498
- Jacobs, Rayda
Confessions of a Gambler 759
The Slave Book 759
- Jagose, Annamaria, *Slow Water* 745
- Jaico (publishers) 1028–9, 1032
- Jaikumar, Priya 1041–2, 1044, 1062
- Jain, Kajri 420–1
- Jain, Smriti, *Kkrishnaa’s Confessions* 1035
- Jaipur Congress (1948) *see* Indian languages:
 Linguistic Provinces Committee
- Jakobson, Roman 966
- Jamaica xxvii–xxviii
 Maroon colonies 221
 rebellions against colonial rule 232
 women’s experiences 125
- Jamaica School of Drama 231
- Jaman Shah 1028
- Jambhekar, Bal Gangadhar Shashtri 667
- James II of England xxviii, 31
- James, C. L. R. 2, 224–6, 240, 241, 311, 576
 legacy 225–6
Beyond a Boundary xlviii, 128, 224, 225–6
The Black Jacobins xliii, 215, 222–3, 224–5, 248, 558
Letters from London 224
Mariners, Renegades and Castaways 224
Minty Alley xlii, 224
- James, Henry 910, 1128
 ‘The Turn of the Screw’ 911
- James, Marlon, *The Book of Night Women* 53–4
- Jameson, Fredric 145, 431–2, 449, 471, 861–2, 996, 1101–2, 1130
 ‘Third World literature in the era of multinational capitalism’ lvi, 1171–3;
 critiqued 1172–3
see also Eagleton, Terry
- Jandl, Ernst 636
- Janke, Terri, *Butterfly Song* 524
- JanMohamed, Abdul 1101, 1169–70
- Janowitz, Tama, *Slaves of New York* 930
- Japan
 modes of thought, compared with Western 983–4
 Southeast Asian expansion 355
- Jāsim, ‘Azīz al-Sayyid 261–2
Suffering Primrose 277
- Javellana, Stevan, *Without Seeing the Dawn* 368
- al-Jawāhirī, Muḥammad Maḥdī 267
 ‘A Lullaby for the Hungry’ 267
- Jayasinghe, Peter 1029
- Jeffares, A. Norman 1, 1156–7, 1159, 1160
- Jehangir, (Mughal) Emperor 656
- jeli (African bardic figure) 140
- Jelinek, Elfriede 1128
- Jemie, Onwuchekwa *see* Chinweizu
- Jerusalem
 conflicts for possession of 282
 pilgrimage to 60
- Jesuits 83, 495, 655
 reports on missionary work (*relations*) 90, 173
- Jesus of Nazareth 741
- Jewell, Richard 1128–9
- Jewett, J. P. 204
- Jewett, Sarah Orne, *Country of the Pointed Firs* 929
- Jews
 eligibility for French citizenship 1079
 racial/cultural distinction from Negro 1085–6
see also Memmi, Albert
- Jeyaretnam, Philip

- Abraham's Promise* 378
First Loves 376
Raffles Place Ragtime 376
 Jeyifo, Biodun 1019
 Jhabvala, Ruth Prawer 776
Heat and Dust 1136, 1139
 'Jim Crow' laws (US) 895
 al-Jisr, Sheikh Husain 255
 Jit, Krishen 381
 Joaquin, Nick 365, 369, 371
Collected Verse 371
A Portrait of the Artist as Filipino 371
Prose and Poems 371
The Woman Who Had Two Navels 369
 Joe, Rita 489
Poems of Rita Joe 188, 196
 Jogues, Father 173
 John II of Portugal 82
 Johnson, Charles
Middle Passage 57
Oxherding Tale 57
 Johnson, Colin (Mudrooroo) 512, 513, 517,
 518, 523–4, 525
Doctor Wooreddy's Prescription for Enduring the
Ending of the World 523, 745, 1000–1
Doin' Wildcat 523
Long Live Sandawarra 523
Master of the Ghost Dreaming 523
Wild Cat Falling 511, 523
Wildcat Screaming 523
 Johnson, David 781
 Johnson, Eva 531
 Johnson, James Weldon 1108, 1167
 Johnson, Linton Kwesi 229, 588–90, 883–5,
 897
 formal innovativeness 589
 ideological content 589–90
 influence 963, 965, 968
 'De Great Insoreckshan' 589
Dread, Beat and Blood 589, 884
Forces of Victri (LP) 589
 'Inglan Is a Bitch' 589, 884–5
 'It Dread Inna Inglan' 883–4
 'Regge fi May Ayim' 638
Voices of the Living and the Dead 589
 Johnson, Pauline (Tekahionwake) 187,
 500–1
 'The Cattle Thief' 500–1
 'A Cry from an Indian Wife' 195, 501
Flint and Feather 195
Legend of Vancouver 195
 'The Song My Paddle Sings' 500
The White Wampum 195, 500
 Johnson, Randal, and Robert Stam, 'The shape
 of Brazilian cinema in the postmodern age'
 1054, 1060
 Johnson, Samuel, Dr (C18 literary figure) 34
 Johnson, Samuel, Rev (Nigerian clergyman)
 93–4
 Johnson, Uwe 622
 Johnson, Sir William 496
 Johnson, William H. H., *The Horrors of Slavery*
 205
 Johnson, Yvonne *see* Wiebe, Rudy
 Johnston, Basil 193
Indian School Days 198, 505, 510
Ojibway Heritage 505
 Johnston, Wayne, *Colony of Unrequited Dreams*
 187
 Johnstone, Mary 522
 Jolobe, J. J. R. 338
 Jones, D. G. 179
 Jones, Edward P., *The Known World* 54
 Jones, Gayl, *Corregidora* 32, 36, 42, 47–54
 influence 53–4
 music, role of 48, 49–51, 53
 treatment of marital relationships 51–3
 Jones, John 498
 Jones, Joseph 1156
 Jones, Lloyd, *Mister Pip* 478–9, 796–7, 907
 Jones, Peter (Kahkewaquonaby) 498, 500, 509
 Jones, Sir William 419, 658
 (trans.), *Shakuntala* xxx, 658
 Jordan, Neil 564
 Jose I of Spain 13
 Joseph, Vinod George, *Hitchhiker* 753
 Joséphine, Empress (Joséphine de Beauharnais)
 222
 Joshi, Priya 784, 787, 1036
joual (French-Canadian vernacular), literary
 use 183, 184–5, 192
Journal of Commonwealth Literature xlviii, 3,
 1157–9, 1163
 aims 1158–9
 shortage of comparative studies 1161
Journal of Postcolonial Writing 3
 journals 23, 1155–82
 interdisciplinary 1167–8
 postcolonial studies 1179–81
 regional 1162–7
Jouvert: Journal of Postcolonial Studies lx
 Joyce, James xxxv, 36, 559, 560–2, 563, 793,
 853, 926, 1128
 linguistic experimentation 561–2
 postcolonial reworkings 776, 777, 787, 788–9
Dubliners 930

- Joyce, James (cont.)
Finnegans Wake xliii, 561–2
Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man 561
Ulysses xxxix, 561–2, 789, 926
- Judaism 765
- Jules-Rosette, Bennetta, *Black Paris: The African Writer's Landscape* 612
- Julien, Eileen 141
- Jumbam, Kenjo, *The White Man of God* 749
- Junod, Henri-Alexandre, Rev. 85, 92, 94, 690
- Jussawalla, Adil 395, 401, 428
- Kachru, Braj 706, 709–10, 717–18, 721, 727
- Kadalie, Clements 69–70
- Kadare, Ismaël 1141
- Kadir, Abdullah bin Abdul, *Hikayat Abdullah* 110–12
 critiques 110–11
- Kafka, Franz 459, 850, 1128
The Metamorphosis 851
- Kagame, Alexis 96
The Song of the Master of Creation 750
- Kagwa, Sir Apolo 68–9
- Kakkerlak, Kupido 749
- Kala, Advaita, *Almost Single* 1035
- Kalaw, Maximo, *The Filipino Rebel* 367
- Kali for Women 435
- Kali (publishers) 1032
- Kalia, Mamta 399, 400
 'Tribute to Papa' 399
- Kalidas, *Shakuntala* xxv, xxx
- Kalitera, Aubrey, *A Taste of Business* 1015
- Kamal, Daud 403, 404–5, 406
- Kamboureli, Smaro, *Making a Difference: Canadian Multicultural Literature* 193
see also Newman, Shirley
- Kampala Conference of African Writers of English Expression (1962) 151–2, 683
- Kamrūthū village theatre 146
- Kanāfanī, Ghassān xlviii
Men in the Sun 275
- Kandaswamy, Meena 403
- Kane, Cheikh Hamidou 1019
L'Aventure ambiguë (Ambiguous Adventure) xlvii, 607, 755, 1072
- Kani, John 340–1
- Kannada (language) 651, 657
 literature in 394, 653
- Kantan, Naim 193
- Kanthapura* (Rao) 719, 786, 904, 914–17
- Kanwal, J. S. 815
The Morning 824
- Kapesh, An Antane 196
- Kaplan, Amy 899
- Kaplan, Caren 121
- Kapur, Manju, *Difficult Daughters* 445
- Karawiyin University, Fez 686
- Karim, Mohammed 1048
- Karnad, Girish 776
- Karone, Yodi 612
- Kartinyeri, Doreen, and Sue Anderson, *My Ngarrindjeri Calling* 522
- Kashmiri (language) 657
- Katanga, secession from Congo (1960) 629
- Kathigasū, Sybil, *No Dram of Mercy* 362
- Kauanui, J. Kehaulani 822
- Kaunda, Kenneth, *Zambia Shall be Free* xlvii, 115
- Kaushal, Swati, *Piece of Cake* 1034
- Kavanagh, Patrick, *The Great Hunger* 562
- Kavi, V. Venkata, *Madana Gopala Satakam* 659
- Kaye, M. M., *The Far Pavilions* 927
- Kayira, Legson, *Jingala* 746
- Kazantzakis, Nikos, *Zorba the Greek* 271
- Keane, Molly, *Mad Puppetstown* 557
- Kearns, Judith, and Diane McGifford (eds.), *Shakti's Words* 202
- Kee Thuan Chye, 1984: *Here and Now* 381
- Keefer, Janice Kulyk 187
- Keeshig-Tobias, Lenore 506
Bird Talk 199
Emma and the Tree 199
- Keita, Idrissa
 'Am Ende' 642
Aus Afrika 642
Wenn der Wind bläst 642
- Kemal, Mustafa *see* Atatürk
- Kendall, Thomas/Jane 745
- Keneally, Thomas
The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith 465
Schindler's Ark liv, 1137
- Kennedy, Edmund 455
- Kennedy, Eliza 521
- Kennedy, Marnie 522
- Kente, Gibson 1011–12
- Kenya
 independence xlviii, 10, 783
 national identity 115–16
- Kenyatta, Jomo 116, 118, 576, 765
Facing Mount Kenya 689
Kenya: Būriri wa Ngũĩ 689
- Keown, Michelle 538
- Kermode, Frank 796
- Kessas, Ferrudja 610
Beur's Story 611

- Kesteloot, Lilyan 1120
 Keyut, George 406
 Kezilahabi, Euphrase 695
 Rosa Mistika 1012
 The World Is a Chaotic Place 758
 Khadra, Yasmina 609
 Khair, Tabish 397–8
 Filming: a Love Story 874
 Khalique, Harris 406
 Khan, Adib
 Seasonal Adjustments 760–1
 Spiral Road 760–1
 Khan, Hakim (trans.), *Janam Sakhi* 657, 676
 Khan, Ismith, *The Jumbie Bird* 760
 al-Kharrāt, Idwār 278
 Khatibi, Abdelkébir 1077
 Maghreb pluriel lv, 1071, 1102
 Mémoire tatouée 1086–7
 Khazindar, Waleed, *Present Verbs* lvi
 Khodja, S. 1149
 al-Khomeini, Ruhollah, *Ayatollah* lvii, 281, 754–5
 Khūrī, Ilyās
 The Kingdom of Strangers 277–8
 Little Mountain lii
 Kiberd, Declan, *Inventing Ireland: The Literature of the Modern Nation* lx, 560
 Kien Nghi Ha, Nicola Lauré al-Samarai and Sheila Mysorekar, *Re/Visionen: Postkoloniale Perspektiven von People of Color auf Rassismus, Kulturpolitik und Widerstand in Deutschland* 623–4, 634, 639, 644–5
 Kilates, Marne L. 372–3
 Versus 372
 Killingley, Siew-Yue 382
 Kim Puc 201
 Kimbangu, Simon 88–9
 Kimpa Vita, Béatrice 87–8, 103–4
 Kincaid, Jamaica 18, 108, 128–30, 238, 723, 821
 Annie John lv, 54, 128, 129
 At the Bottom of the River 128
 The Autobiography of My Mother 54, 129
 Lucy 128, 129, 784
 Mr Potter 129
 My Brother 129–30
 A Small Place 129, 238
 King, Boston 204
 King, Bruce 396, 397, 600, 976
 King, Colin 105
 King, Martin Luther xlviii, 51
 King, Thomas 198, 492–3, 506 (ed.), *All My Relations* 198
 Dreadful Water Shows Up (as Hartley Goodweather) 198
 Green Grass, Running Water 198, 766
 Medicine River 198
 One Good Story, That One 198
 The Red Power Murders (as Hartley Goodweather) 198
 Truth and Bright Water 198
 King, Wayne 521
King of the Children (1987) 1066
The Kingdom of This World (Carpentier) xlv, 319–20, 837, 841–3, 864
 compared with other magical realist works 847
 conflict with magical realist manifesto 844–6
 preface *see* Carpentier, Alejo: ‘On the marvellous real in America’
 Kingsley, Mary 66–7
 Kingston, Maxine Hong, *The Woman Warrior* 119
 Kinnane, Stephen, *Shadow Lines* 522–3
 Kinsella, John 464, 465–6
 ‘Wheatbelt Gothic or Discovering a Wyeth’ 466
 Kiowa (Native Americans) 120
 Kipling, Rudyard 776, 1044
 Nobel Literature Prize xxxviii
 The Jungle Book xxxvi, 595
 Kim xxxvii, 71, 421, 779
 Life’s Handicap 929
 ‘Miss Youghal’s Sais’ 912
 ‘Outside the Pale’ 912
 Plain Tales from the Hills 929
 ‘The White Man’s Burden’ xxxvii
 Kirby, William, *The Golden Dog: A Legend of Quebec* 177
 Kirpal Singh 374
 Kirsch, Patrick 805
 Kitagawa, Muriel, *This Is My Own* 201
 Kitchener, Lord (calypso singer) 229, 579
 ‘If You’re not White You’re Black’ 961–3
 Kitchener, Lord (soldier/politician) 251, 263–4
 Kiyooka, Roy 187
 Pacific Windows 201
 Klein, A. M. 193
 Kleist, Heinrich von 636
 Kliptown Conference (1955) 339
 Klor de Alva, Jorge 314–15
 Knutson, Susan 189
 Koch, Christopher (C. J.) 4
 Highways to a War 453
 The Year of Living Dangerously 457
 Kogawa, Joy 187
 Obasan 193–4, 201

- Kohl, Helmut 630
 Kolatkar, Arun 395–6, 428
Jejuri 395, 428
 Kolkata (Calcutta) 385–6
 development of printing/journalism 667, 1026
 Kon, Stella, *Emily of Emerald Hill* 380
 Kongo, Kingdom of *see* Congo
 al-Koni, Ibrahim, *The Bleeding of the Stone* 756
 Konkani (language) 669
 Konkle, Maureen 486, 498
 Koomson, Ebow 1015
 Koran *see* Qur'an
 Kosche, Olaf 1046
Kote-tlon (Mali theatrical form) 143, 145
 Kourouma, Ahmadou 608
 Allah n'est pas obligé 614, 756
 The Suns of Independence 1
 Kouyaté, Dani 1056
 Kränzle, Christina 635–6
 Kreisel, Henry 193
 Krishnaswamy, Revathi 659
 (and John C. Hawley, eds.), *The Postcolonial and the Global* 127
 Krishnaswamy, S. 1062
 Kristeva, Julia 890, 891
 Kroetsch, Robert 186
 Completed Field Notes: The Long Poems of Robert Kroetsch 186
 Gone Indian 186
 The Lovely Treachery of Words 186
 The Studhorse Man 186
 What the Crow Said 851, 856
 The Words of My Roaring 186
 Krog, Antjie, *Country of My Skull* 743–4
 Kroller, Eve Marie 38
 Kronik, John 1179
 Krotoa-Eva 331–2
 post-apartheid appropriations of story 331–3
 Kruger, Paul xxxv
 Kubayanda, J. Bekunuru 156
 Kubrick, Stanley 1049
 Kuklick, Henrika 985
 Kulagoe, Celso, 'White Land' 819–20
 Kum'a Ndumbe III, Prince 624–5, 628–30, 639
 biography 628
 Ach Kamerun! Unsere alte deutsche Kolonie ... 629
 Das Fest der Liebe: Die Chance der Jugend 630
 Hitler voulait l'Afrique: les plans secrets pour une Afrique fasciste 628
 Kafra – Biatanga: Tragödie Afrikas 629
 Lumumba II 630
 Was will Bonn in Afrika? Zur Afrikapolitik der Bundesrepublik Deutschland 628
Kunapipi (journal) liii, 3, 1161–2
 Kundera, Milan 605, 850, 868
 Kunene, Mazisi 151
 The Ancestors and the Sacred Mountain: Poems 766
 al-Kūni, Ibrāhim 255–6
 The Bleeding of the Stone 256, 266, 276–7
 Kunte, A. M. 389
 Kuo Pao Koon 380
 The Coffin Is Too Big for the Hole 380
 Mama Looking for her Cat 380
 Kureishi, Hanif 583, 588
 The Black Album 598, 761
 The Buddha of Suburbia 572, 594–5, 784
 Dreaming and Scheming: Reflections on Writing and Politics 596
 cinema 594
 Kureishi, Maki 404, 405
 Kurosawa, Akira 782
 Kuzwayo, Ellen, *Call Me Woman* 116
 Kynpham, Sing Nongkynrih 398
 Kyomuhendo, Goretí 326

 La Guma, Alex 338, 339
 A Walk in the Night xlviii, 1056
 La Mama (activist group) 452, 481
 La Salle, René-Robert Cavelier, Sieur de xxviii
 Labov, William 706
 Lacan, Jacques 1169
 Lacombe, Patrice, *La Terre paternelle* 175
 Ládiípò, Dúró 145–6
 see also Oba Waja (*The King Is Dead*)
 Ladoo, Harold Sonny 904
 No Pain Like This Body 239, 909
 Laferrière, Dany 209, 609, 615
 Cette grenade dans la main du jeune nègre est-elle un arme ou un fruit 209
 La Chair du maître 209
 Le Charme des après-midi sans fin 209
 Comment faire l'amour à un nègre sans se fatiguer 209
 Le Cri des oiseaux fous 209
 Eroshima 209
 Le Goût des jeunes filles 209
 Je suis un écrivain japonais 209
 L'Odeur du café 209
 Pays sans chapeau 209
 Ver le sud 209
 Lagos, colonial culture 143, 683–4
 Lahiri, Jhumpa 3
 Lahore, Maharajah of xxxiv

- Lai, Larissa 187, 191
Salt Fish Girl 201
When Fox Is a Thousand 201
 (and Rita Wong) *Sybil Unrest* 201
- Laing, B. Kojo, *Search Sweet Country* 747
- Lal, P. 393–4
- Lal, Purushottam 1030
- Lalor, James Fintan 558
- Lalshanker, Narmadashankar, *Mari Hakikat* 112
- Lam, Wilfredo 1074
- lamentation, poetry of
 African 748
 Irish 548–9
- Lamilami, Lazarus 521
- Lamming, George 2, 18, 231, 233, 245, 311,
 578, 584, 804, 808
In the Castle of My Skin xlv, 128, 751
The Emigrants 579–80, 581, 583
The Pleasures of Exile xlvii, 73–4, 778–9, 809
Water with Berries 782, 808–9
- Lampmann, Archibald 176
- land
 indigenous relationships with 820
 role in Arab poetry 265–6
see also Aborigines; Maoris
- Landa, Fray Diego de, Bishop 291
- Landau, Paul 1042
- Landon, Letitia Elizabeth 771–2
- Landon, Margaret, *Anna and the King of Siam* 356
- Landow, George 1182
- Landsmann, Anne 349
- Langford Ginibi, Ruby 514, 522
- Langton, Marcia 522
- language (general)
 acquisition, motivations for 712–13
 attitudes 712–13, 718–19
 choice/use 719–22, 918
 as locus of conflict 726
 mixing 711–12, 721–2, 726
 planning 718–19
 variations, sociopolitical significance 708
- languages, local 22–3
 autobiography in 112
 calls for return to 1112
 Caribbean, range of 216–17, 228
 colonists' aloofness from 546–7
 dissociation of national identity from 387
 erosion by colonists 357, 490
 learned/used by missionaries 91, 93, 420,
 494–5, 509
 (problems of) reconciliation with European 302
 typefaces 420, 421–2
 use in film 1050
- Lao She, *Camel Hsiang-tzu* xlii
- Laos xxxvi, 352, 353, 358
 internal discord 355
- La Pérouse, Jean François de Galaup, comte de
 62, 77
- Lapointe, Paul-Marie 183
- Lapouge, Gilles 615
- Lara, Agustín 1052
- Laronde, Michel 610
- Larsen, Neil 853
- las Casas, Bartolomé de 296–7
- Lasker-Schüler, Else 636
- Last Poets 968
- Latin America
 ancient civilizations, impact on modern
 culture 15, 288
 as colonial construct 289
 decolonization 12–16, 303, 314–15
 distinctive forms of postcoloniality 314
 emergence of local elites 304–5
 history, application of postcolonial theory
 288–9, 315
 postcolonial cinema 1045, 1060
 postdictatorial regimes 324
 regional differences 316
 role of supernatural in popular culture
 843–4, 867
- Latin American literature 288–307
 'boom' 852–3, 859–60
 classification 309
 desirability of survival 326–7
 dissociation from Third World mainstream
 311–12
 existence 317–18
 impact of colonialism 292–5
 links with other cultures 313–14
 literary trends 14–16, 318–19
 marginalization 24, 310–12
 nationalistic 304
 nativist movements 325–6
 particularist approach 316
 and postcoloniality 301–3, 309–27, 316–17,
 863
 precolonial 289–92, 306; colonial
 reinterpretations 291–2; modern writers'
 engagement with 322
 short stories 320–3
 state-centredness 295; erosion of 317–18
 US academic studies 312
see also magical realism
- Latorena, Paz, *Desire and Other Stories* 365
- Lattas, Andrew 989
- Lau, Evelyn, *Runaway: Diary of a Street Kid* 201

- Lau Siew Mei, *Playing Madame Mao* 708
 Laurence, Margaret 181, 185–6, 189
 The Diviners 181, 193, 742
 Heart of a Stranger 181
 The Stone Angel 181, 742
 This Side Jordan 181
 The Tomorrow-Tamer 181
 A Tree for Poverty 181
 Lautréamont, Comte de (Isidore Lucien Ducasse) 864–5
 Lavin, Mary 566
 law, compared with poetry 950–9, 977
 similarities/divergences, summarized 959
 Lawford, Josie Ningali, *Ningali* 531
 Lawrence, Bonita 506
 Lawrence, D. H. 994
 Lawrence, T. E. ('Lawrence of Arabia') xxxix
 Seven Pillars of Wisdom 72
 Laye, Camara, *L'Enfant noir (The Dark/African Child)* xlv, 607, 755–6
 Layton, Irving 193
 Lazarus, Neil 1080
 Lé, Linda 609
 Le Clézio, J. M. G. 608, 615, 1092
 Le Fanu, Joseph Sheridan
 'Carmilla' 557
 Uncle Silas 557
 Leach, Edmund 93
 Leacock, Stephen, *Sunshine Sketches* 178
 League of Nations xxxix
 Leahy, David 192
 Leal, Luis 865–6
 Leavis, F. R. 788, 1159
 Leavis, Q. D. 1024
 Lebanon, Israeli occupation 261
Lebor Gabála (anon.) 550
 Leckie, Ross 42
 Lee, Aaron 375
 Lee, Bennett, and Jim Wong-Chu (eds.), *Many-Mouthed Birds: Contemporary Writing by Chinese Canadians* 200
 Lee, Dennis 180–1
 'Cadence, country, silence: writing in colonial space' 180
 Civil Elegies 181
 Lee, John Robert, *Possessions* 750–1
 Lee, Sky 187, 191, 193, 198
 Disappearing Moon Café 200
 Lee Chang-Dong 1048
 Green Fish 1048
 Lee Kok Liang 363, 766
 Death Is a Ceremony 363
 Flowers in the Sky 363, 377
 London Does Not Belong to Me 363
 The Mutes in the Sun 363
 Lee Kuan Yew, *The Singapore Story* 116–17
 Lee Tzu Pheng 374
 'Bukit Timah, Singapore' 374
 'My Country, My People' 374
 Leeds University xlviii, 1, 1145
 1964 Conference 1155–7
 Leghari, Nawab Wali, *Hir-wa-Ranjha* 657, 676
 Leichardt, Ludwig 455
 Lejeune, Philippe 107, 123
 Lemelin, Roger
 Au pied de la pente douce 183
 Les Plouffe 183
 Lenin, Vladimir (V. I. Ulyanov), *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism* xxxix
 Leon X, Pope 81
 Leon-Portilla, Miguel 297
 Leonardo da Vinci, *Mona Lisa* 978
 Leonowens, Anna, *The English Governess at the Siamese Court* 356
 Leopold II of Belgium xxxvi, xxxviii, 64
 Lepage, Robert 185, 192, 735
 Lepanto, Battle of (1571) 300
 Leprohon, Rosanna, *Antoinette de Mirecourt, or Secret Marrying and Secret Sorrowing* 177
Les Soirées Canadiennes (journal) 175
 lesbian writers/themes 190–1, 201, 206–7, 240, 400
 Lesseps, Ferdinand de xxxv
 Lessing, Doris
 Nobel Literature Prize lxi, 3, 1128–9
 The Grass is Singing xlv
 In Pursuit of the English 74, 584, 784
 'Lettered City' 291–2, 306
 Leung Ping-Kwan, 'Writing between Chinese and English' 710
 Lévi-Strauss, Claude 985, 1074
 Tristes tropiques 117–18, 912, 986–7
 Levine, Herbert 878
 Levy, Andrea 583, 1127
 Every Light in the House Burnin' 598
 Never Far from Nowhere 598
 Small Island 599, 737, 1145
 Lévy-Bruhl, Lucien 984, 992
 Li, Victor 465
 Li Ta-chao, *A New Era* xxxix
 liberalism, rejection by black South Africans 341–3
 Liberia xxxiv
 liberty, individual, search for 265–7
 Libya, Italian rule 255

- Lien Chao and Jim Wong-Chu (eds.), *Strike the Wok* 200
Life of Josiah Henson 204
Like Water for Chocolate (1992) 1058
 Liliuokalani, Queen, *Hawaii's Story by Hawaii's Queen* 113
 Lim, Catherine
 Little Ironies 377
 Or Else, the Lightning God 377
 Lim, Christine Suchen
 Fistful of Colours 378, 707
 The Lies that Build a Marriage 378
 Rice Bowl 377–8
 Lim, Janet, *Sold for Silver* 362–3
 Lim, Shirley Geok-Lin 382, 766
 Crossing the Peninsula 382
 Lim Chor Pee 364
 Lim Thean Soo 362, 374
 Ricky Star 376
 Selected Verses 361
 Lim-Wilson, Fatima 382
 Lima, Jose Lezama 323–4
 Paradiso xlix
 Lindfors, Bernth 1165
 Lindo, George 883–4, 901
 link languages 713
Lionheart Gal: Life Stories of Jamaican Women 125–7
 Lionnet, Françoise 128, 810, 824, 832, 1073
 Lisbon Cathedral 871–2
 Lispector, Clarice, *The Hour of the Star* lii
 Lissock, Jean Paul, *Mein Freund der weiße Mann* 641
 literary criticism 708
 postcolonial 777
Literary History of Canada: Canadian Literature in English 179
 Littell, Jonathan 608
 Liu, Lydia 111
 Lively, Penelope, *Moon Tiger* 1141
 Liverpool
 black population 11–12
 racial violence 12
 Livesay, Dorothy 187
 Livingstone, David 63–5
 idealism 64
 Missionary Travels and Researches in South Africa 64
 Liyongo, Fumo 695
 Lizardi, Joaquín de, *The Mangy Parrot* 303–4
 Lloyd, David 789
 Lloyd, Lord 250
 Lloyd George, David 336
 lo Liyong, Taban
 Another Nigger Dead 748
 ‘bless the african coups’ 748
 Locke, Alain 1108, 1109
 Locke, John 806
 Lockwood, Douglas, *I, The Aboriginal* 520
 ‘logo/rhythms’
 defined 219–20
 literary/cultural expressions 226–7, 228–31
 Lohia, Ram Manohar 672–3
 London
 (forced) migrations from 9
 immigrant population 573; police attitudes to 588–9
 natural disasters 8
 periodicals 1027
 Treaty of (1839) xxxiv
 Long, James, Rev. 1026
 Longfellow, Henry Wadsworth, *The Song of Hiawatha* 960
 Loomba, Ania 5, 781
 (and Martin Orkin, eds.), *Postcolonial Shakespeare* 787
 Lopès, Henri 1090
 López, Ana M. 1060, 1062–3
 López y Fuentes, Gregorio, *The Land* xlii
 Lorde, Audre 240, 637
 Loubet, Émile xxxvii
 Louverture, Isaac 222
 L’Ouverture, Toussaint xxxi, 222–4, 240
 literary representations 224
 relevance to anti-colonial movement 222–3, 1070–1
 Love, Robert 223
Love in the Time of Cholera (1985) 1060
 Lovelace, Earl
 The Dragon Can’t Dance liii, 230
 Jestina’s Calypso 230
 Salt 817, 819
 While Gods Are Falling 751
 Lovesey, Oliver 124
 Lovett-Gardiner, Iris 522
 Low, Gail 578–9
 Lowah, Thomas 521
 Loxley, Diana 805, 806
 Lu Wenfu, *The Gourmet* liii
 Lu Xun 1172
 Lubis, Mochtar, *A Road with No End* xlv
 Lucashenko, Melissa 514
 Hard Yards 527–9
 Steam Pigs 527–8
 Lüderitz, Adolf 620
 Ludu U Hla, *The Caged Ones* xlvii

- Lugard, Frederick, *The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa* xl
- Lumbera, Bienvenido 371
- Lumumba, Patrice Émery 629–30, 746, 1090
Congo My Country xlvii
- Lusane, Clarence 621
- Luther, Martin/Lutheranism 740, 843
- Lutuli, Albert 339
Let My People Go xlvii
- Ma Sandar 766
- Maalouf, Amin 615
The Rock of Tanios lix
- Mabanckou, Alain 608, 614–15, 1071
Black Bazar 604, 614
Bleu Blanc Rouge 614
- Mabille, Pierre 864, 1074
- Mabo, Edward Koiki 521
Mabo v State of Queensland 481–2
- Mac an Bhaird, Aodh 549
- Macao lvi, 352
nature of postcoloniality 353
return to China (1999) 355
- MacArthur's Children* (1984) 1066
- Macaulay, Ogendenge 121
- Macaulay, Thomas Babington, 1st Baron 264, 358, 385, 417–18, 420, 656, 660, 662–5, 667, 670, 672, 678, 928, 1026, 1150–1
- MacCabe, Colin 789
- MacDonald, Anne Marie 191
- Macdonald, Sir John A. 499
- Macgoye, Oludhe 1008
- Machado, Pedro Félix 693
- Machado de Assis, Joaquim María 307
- Macherey, Pierre 257
- Machiavelli, Nicolo 995
- MacInnes, Colin 571–2
'A short guide for Jumbles' 571
- MacIvor, Daniel 192
- MacLennan, Hugh 187–8
Barometer Rising 187
Each Man's Son 187–8
Two Solitudes 178–9
- MacLeod, Alistair 188
As Birds Bring Forth the Sun and Other Stories 188
Island 188
The Lost Salt Gift of Blood 188
No Great Mischief 188, 742
- Macmillan, Alexander 1028
- MacNeill, Eoin 553
- Macunaima* (1969) 1057
- Macy, David 1083
- Madagascar xxxvi
missionary presence/records 870–2, 897–8
- Madden, Deirdre, *One By One in the Darkness* 566
- Madden, Richard 306
- Madge, Elliot Walter 771
- Madras *see* Chennai
- Madsen, Deborah 899
- Madubuike, Ihechukwu *see* Chinweizu
- Maeve* (1981) 566
- Maghreb, francophone authors from 609, 698
see also names of individual countries
- al-Maghut, Muhammad
Joy Is Not My Profession lix
- magical realism 14–16, 239, 293, 311, 318, 319–21, 325, 833–61, 927, 1173
agreed definition 834
criticisms 852, 927
debates on 834–5, 848
divergence of theory and practice 844–6
European origins 833, 835–7, 841
extension to inappropriate writers/works 849, 850–1, 865–6
(flaws of) ahistorical approach 837, 848–9, 850, 861, 868
global spread 855–9, 861
historical context, importance of 852
influence in Africa 347–8, 996–9
influence in Australia 529
influence in India 424, 436, 591, 761, 903
influence in Ireland 543
influence in SE Asia 370, 376
Latin American appropriation 837–41
links with Latin American culture 843–4
relationship with film 1039–40
relationship with postcoloniality 833–4, 848–50, 861
relationship with primitivism 863, 995–9
sceptical elements 996–7
theoretical elaborations 840–4, 848
universality 859
- Magnier, Bernard 612–13
- Mahabharata* (traditional Indian epic) 394, 657, 659, 903, 917, 926–7, 931
film adaptations 1048
- Mahany, Habiba, *Je kiffe ma race* 617
- Mahapatra, Jayanta 394–5, 1030
- Mahdism 281
- Mahfūz, Najīb 281–2, 1159
governmental employment 1048
Nobel Literature Prize lviii, 3, 1129, 1133, 1147–8

- temporary abandonment of writing 278–9
Adrift on the Nile 279
Arabian Nights and Days 277
Cairo Modern 255
Cairo Trilogy xlv
Children of the Alley 261
Epic of the Harafish 280–1
Layali Alf Laylah 281
Midaq Alley 17
Rihlat Ibn Fattoumah 281
The Thief and the Dogs 279
- Mahon, Derek 565
- Mahpatra, Jaranta, *A Pain of Rites* lii
- Maia Ferreira, José da Silva 693
- Maillet, Antoine 188
Pélagie-la-Charette 188
La Sagouine 188
- Maillu, David 1012
After 4.30 1012
Benni Kamba 009 in *Operation DXT* 1015
- Mailman, Deborah, and Wesley Enoch, *The 7 Stages of Grieving* 531
- Maimane, Arthur 338
- Mainz, University of 622
- Mair, Charles 176
- Mais, Roger
Brother Man 231
The Hills Were All Joyful Together xlv
- Maji-Maji rebellion (1905–7) 620
- Majzels, Robert 193
- Makdisi, Saree 780
- Makine, Andrei 605
- Makisi* (Zambian theatrical form)
 143, 145
- Makkī, Kāzim, *Safwān al-adīb* 254
- Malabari, B.M. 389
The Indian Eye on English Life 576
- Malaparte, Curzio 836
- Malawi, language/literature 720–1, 1166
- Malay Federation 355
- Malay (language) 357, 380
- Malaya (British colony) 358–9, 360–4
 educational policy 358–9, 360
 Eurasian community 378
- Malayalam (language) 659
- Malaysia 131, 352, 353
 internal discord 355, 362
 Islamic themes in literature 758
 languages 358, 360; of drama 380–1
 linguistic policy 373, 716
 literature/ethnic identity 111–12
 literature in English 373–81
 marginalization of ethnic minorities 374
- Western diaspora 382
- Malcolm X 451
- Malgaonkar, Manohar 1029
The Devil's Wind li
- Malhotra, Dinanath 1029
- Mali, postcolonial cinema 1048
- Malik, Suchita, *Indian Memsahib* 1035
- Malik, Tariq Yazdani 404
- Malinche 295, 332, 778
- Malinowski, Bronislaw 118
- Malkani, Gautam, *Londonstani* 600
- Mallarmé, Stéphane 1074, 1107
- Malouf, David 782
Remembering Babylon 466, 893–5, 897, 902, 993, 994–5
- Malouf (African popular form) 140–1
- Mamani, Abdoulaye, *Sarraounia* 1057
- Mammeri, Mouloud 271
- Man Booker International Prize lxi, 1141
- Man on a Bicycle* (sculpture) 1174–5
- Manalang Gloria, Angela 366–7
Poems 367, 371
- Mandel, Eli 193
- Mandela, Nelson lviii, 109, 330, 338, 1130
 election to presidency 345
 trial/imprisonment 339, 340
Long Walk to Freedom 116
No Easy Walk to Freedom xlviii
- Mandelstam, Osip 850
- Manga Bell, Rudolf Duala 625, 629
- Mangan, James Clarence 558
- Mangua, Charles 1012
Son of Woman 1009, 1012, 1015
A Tail in the Mouth 1012
- Mani, Lata 1177
- Maniam, K. S.
Between Lives 377
The Chord 381
In a Far Country 377, 760
The Return 377
- Manitoba 499
- Manitoba Act (UK 1870) 499
- Manley, Edna 232, 246
- Manley, Michael 125
- Manley, Norman 246
- Mann, Thomas 850
- Mannoni, Octave xlv, 778, 1080, 1085
Prospero and Caliban: The Psychology of Colonization 782, 807
- Manoo-Rahming, Lelawattee 815–16
- Mansfield Park* (1999) 1065
- Manto, Saadat Hasan 762, 905, 1047–8
 ‘Toba Tek Singh’ xlv, 932

- Manuel, Peter 241
 Manuel I of Portugal 293
 Manzano, Juan Francisco, *Autobiography of a Slave* 305, 306–7
 Mao Tse-tung 456
 Problems of Strategy in China's Revolutionary War xlii
 ‘A single spark can start a prairie fire’ xli
 Mao Tun, *Midnight* xlii
 Maori literature 531–4
 autobiographical 537
 beach locations 823
 novels 532–3
 politicization 532
 research protocols 534
 reworking of classic texts 810–11
 violence, depictions of 533, 534
 Maoris
 demography 533
 land ownership rights 469–70, 471; fictional representations 820
 poetry 474–6
 protest movements 470–1
 rebellion (1845) xxxiv
 see also Maori literature
 Mapuche people 300–1
 Maracle, Lee 187, 198–9, 506
 Bent Box 199
 Bobbi Lee: Indian Rebel 195, 199
 Daughters Are Forever 199
 I Am Woman: A Native Perspective on Sociology and Feminism 198–9
 Ravensong 199
 Sojourner's Truth and other stories 199
 Sundogs 199
 Will's Garden 199
 Maran, René 1075, 1109, 1111
 Batouala xl, 1071, 1075
 Marathi (language) 649, 651, 657
 agitation for use of 675
 reading public 653
 regional base 652
 spread 669
 Marchessault, Jovette 191, 196
 Comme une enfant de la terre 191
 La Saga des poules mouillées 191
 Triptyque lesbien 191
 Le Voyage magnifique d'Emily Carr 191
 Marcos, Ferdinand 369, 370, 372
 Marcos, Subcommandante
 Shadows of Tender Fury lx
 Marechera, Dambudzo 904
 The House of Hunger liii, 748
 Margaret's Museum (1995) 188
 Marguerite, Victor 262
 Mariátegui, José Carlos 324
 Seven Essays towards an Interpretation of Peruvian Reality xli
 Maritime provinces (Canada) 187–8
 Markandaya, Kamala 904
 Nectar in a Sieve xlv, 752
 The Nowhere Man 586, 933
 Pleasure City 752
 Marlatt, Daphne 187, 189, 190–1, 198
 Ana Historic 190–1
 Taken 191
 Touch to My Tongue 191
 Marley, Bob 228
 Marlyn, John, *Under the Ribs of Death* 185
 Maroons (escaped slaves) 220–2, 240, 242, 1117–18
 fictional portrayals 221, 242
 origins of term 220
 role in Caribbean history 220–1
 Marotholi Travelling Theatre 146
 Marquez-Benitez, Paz
 ‘Dead Stars’ 365
 ‘A Night in the Hills’ 365
 Marrant, John, *Narrative of the Lord's Wonderful Dealings* 204
 marriage, interracial 12
 fictional depictions 909
 in Germany 637
 prohibition 902
 Marshall, John 1044
 Marshall, Paule 224, 231, 236
 Brown Girl, Brownstones 236
 The Chosen Place 230, 236
 Daughters 236
 The Fisher King 236
 Praisesong for the Widow 236
 Marshman, Joshua 665
 Marson, Una 578
 The Moth and the Star 719
 Martel, Yann, *The Life of Pi* lxi
 Martí, José 307
 Martin, Gerald 865, 868
 Martin, S.I. 573
 Martin, Tony 234
 Martin, Violet *see* Sommerville, Edith
 Martinez, Maximiliano Hernández,
 General 867
 Martinique
 articulations of colonial experience 1089–90, 1118, 1120
 departmental status 1084

- postcolonial cinema 1051–2
 postcolonial literature 1090, 1100
 wartime gathering of intellectuals 1074
 Marx, Karl/Marxist theory 697, 795, 1078,
 1091, 1175
The Mask of Zorro (1998) 875
 Mason, A. E. W. 1044
 Mason, Richard, *The World of Suzie Wong* 356
 Masoom, Rahi, *A Village Divided* 762
 Massaquoi, Hans
 *Destined to Witness: Growing up Black in Nazi
 Germany* 637
 *Hänschen klein, ging allein . . . Meine Weg in die
 neue Welt* 637–8
 Massey, Doreen 872, 877
 Massey Report (Canada 1951) 179
 Masson, André 1074
 masterpiece, defined 793–4
 Masud, Naiyer, *Essence of Camphor* lx
 Mathabane, Mark, *Kaffir Boy* 913
 Mathur, Ashok
 Once Upon an Elephant 203
 The Short, Happy Life of Harry Kumar 203
 Matschulat, Claudio *see* Zé do Rock
 Matshikaza, Todd 338
 Matthew, Gordon 521
 Matthews, Ray 760
 Matthiessen, Peter, *At Play in the Fields of the
 Lord* 986
 Maturin, Charles, *Melmoth the Wanderer* 557,
 910
 Maude, Frederick, General 253
 Maugée, Aristide 1074
 Maugham, W. Somerset 1044
 The Casuarina Tree 356
 On a Chinese Screen 356
 Maupassant, Guy de 774
 Mauritania lii
 Mauritius xxv, xlix
 literature 810
 Mauss, Marcel 86
 Maximin, Daniel 609, 821
 Soufrieres lvi
 May Ayim Award 638–9
 Maya people/culture
 destruction of capital city 292
 destruction of literature 291
 fictional depictions 839, 847–8
 mythic narratives, European reinterpretation
 291–2; *see also* *Popol Vuh*
 oppression in modern Guatemala 122
 Mayamba, Pierre Kembo, *Verlorene Gefühle:
 Leben zwischen zwei Heimat* 641
 Mayne, Seymour 193
 Maynooth Seminary 550–1, 553
 Mayr, Suzette 191, 208
 Mazimpaka, Thomas, *Ein Tutsi im Deutschland*
 641
 al-Māzinī, Ibrāhīm 254
 Ibrāhīm al-Kātib (Ibrahim the Writer) 260
 Qissat Hayāh (A Life Story) 260
 Mazrui, Alamin 691
 Mazuchelli, Nina, *The Indian Alps and How We
 Crossed them* 67
 Mazza, Bob 531
 Mbakop, Hilaire, *Mambé's Heimat: Ein Streifzug
 durch den Alltag Kameruns* 643
 Mbeki, Govan, *South Africa: The Peasants' Revolt*
 xlvi
 Mbeki, Thabo 744
 Mbembe, Achille 5, 85–6
 ‘The banality of power’ 1175, 1176–7
 Mbiti, John 96
 McAlpine, Janice 508
 McArthur, Tom 710
 McCabe, Eugene 564
 McCabe, Patrick 565
 McCarthy, Mary, *The Company She Keeps* 930
 McCarthy, Steven, *Black Angels - Red
 Blood* 525
 McClelland & Stewart (publishers) 505
 McClung, Nellie 185, 189
 McCourt, Edward 185
 McDermott, Dennis 518
 McDonald, Connie Nungulla 522
 McDonald, Peter 791
 McEwan, Ian 1139
 Amsterdam 1139
 Black Dog 1139
 ‘Butterflies’ 906
 The Comfort of Strangers 1139
 McGahan, Andrew
 Praise 468
 The White Earth 465
 McGifford, Diane *see* Kearns, Judith
 McGinness, Joe 521
 McGrane, Bernard 984
 McGregor, Craig 1164
 McGuckian, Medbh 568
 McGuinness, Frank, *Observe the Sons of Ulster
 Marching toward the Somme* 565
 McKay, Claude 224, 234, 247, 939, 964, 991,
 1108, 1111
 Banana Bottom xlii
 McKenna, Clancy 521
 McKenzie, Janet 522

- McLaren, Philip 529
 Sweet Water – Stolen Land 745
 McLean, Alastair 1036
 McLeod, Alan 1, 1156
 McLeod, John 885
 McLeod, Neal 506
 McLucas, Cliff 900
 McPhee, Jack 521
 McQueen, Humphrey 1164
 McWatt, Tessa, *This Body* 239
 Mda, Zakes 346–7
 The Heart of Redness 333, 347, 908, 913, 926
 The Madonna of Excelsior 347
 Ways of Dying 346–7, 914
 Mead, Philip 517–18
Meanyin (journal) xliii, 1163–4, 1167
 Medcraft, Rosalie 522
 Meech Lake Accord (Canada 1990), defeat of 505
 Mehrotra, Arvind Krishna 395, 428–9
 Mehta, Deepa 3
 Mehta, Gita, *A River Sutra* 930
 Mehta, Suketu, *Maximum City* 430
 Melgar, Mariano 304
 Melville, Herman 35, 224
 Billy Budd 1055
 Melville, Pauline 249
 Memmi, Albert xl, 2, 172, 184, 253, 311, 1068–70, 1085, 1087–9, 1090, 1091–2, 1093
 accusations against Arab world 1081
 autobiographical elements in work 1088–9
 biography 1079–80, 1083
 criticisms of Fanon 1088, 1089
 development of political thought 1070, 1080–2
 education 1072
 focus on Jewish identity/experience 1080–2, 1087
 geographic placement 1069
 influence of Fanon 1086
 interviews 1074
 links with Caribbean writers 1082–3
 and ‘moment of arrest’ 1069
 place in postcolonial studies 1078
 À contre-courants (*Against the Tide*) 1080
 The Colonizer and the Colonized xlvii, 1080, 1102, 1104–5
 Désert 1080
 Liberation of the Jew 1080, 1082
 Pillar of Salt 1071, 1072, 1079, 1088
 Portrait of a Jew 1080, 1082
 Racism 1080
 Scorpion 1076, 1080, 1088–9
 Strangers 1079, 1091
 memory, collective, role in poetry 941
 Men of Maize (Asturias) xlv, 15, 320, 846–8
 critical commentary 864–5
 Menchú Tum, Rigoberta, *I, Rigoberta Menchú: An Indian Woman in Guatemala* lv, 122–4
 challenges to authenticity 123–4
 international acclaim/significance 122–3
 mediational structure 123
 Nobel Peace Prize 122–3
 Mendes, Alfred 224
 Pitch Lake xlii
 Mendis, Ranjini 1181–2
 Mendizábal, Horacio 307
 Ménil, René 1074, 1108
 Menon, O Chandu 671
 Menon, Ritu 435
 ‘Mensah, Marjorie’ 1009–10
 Menton, Seymour 859, 862
 Menzies, Robert 449
 Mepin, Daniel, *Die Weissagung der Ahnen* 642
 Mercado, Tununa, *By Night in Chile* 324
 Merchant, Hoshang 397
 Merchant-Ivory films 1065, 1139
 Mérimée, Prosper, *Carmen* 1057
 Merritt, Robert, *The Cake Man* 530
 mestizo people/writings 301–3
 metadiscourse 703
 metafiction, historiographical 933
 Métis people 487
 defined 488
 denial of legal protection 503
 protests at territorial encroachment 499–500
 rights movements 503
 Metropolitan Police *see* London
 Mexico
 film industry 1052–4; dictatorial exploitation 1039, 1045
 independence xxxii, xxxii, 874
 revolution (1910) xxxviii
 Zapatista movement lix
 see also Aztecs
 Meyer, Birgit 1063
 Meyer-Clason, Curt 860
 Mezei, Kathy 189
 Mhac an tSaoi, Máire 554
 Mhlongo, Niq 349
 Michaels, Anne 193
 Micone, Marco 193
 ‘immigration trilogy’ 194

- 'Middle Passage' 34–5, 43, 953
 dream-visions 43–5
Midnight's Children (Rushdie) liii, lix, 3, 423–5,
 590–1, 784, 917–18, 1173
 Booker Prize 1028, 1030, 1131, 1136, 1137
 ideology 431
 influence/significance 424–5, 427, 436, 721,
 763, 903–4, 1033
 optimism 424
 parodic features 931
 postcoloniality, embodiment of 903
 prose style 424
 relationship with magical realism 855,
 856–7, 858
 The Mighty Chalkdust (calypso singer) 229
 The Mighty Gabby (calypso singer) 229
 The Mighty Sparrow (calypso singer) 229
 Mignolo, Walter 312
 migrations 8–10
 forced, of colonized peoples 10–11, 19–20
 from/to Europe, linked causes 9–10
 as instrument of demographic control 9
 inter-island 816
 role in Caribbean culture 233
 Mihardja, Achdiat K., *Atheis* 757
 Miki, Roy 187, 201
 Broken Entries: Race, Subjectivity and Writing
 201
 Mill, John Stuart 284, 661
 On Liberty 250
 Millay, Edna St Vincent 366
 Miller, Alex
 The Ancestor Game 460–2
 Journey to the Stone Country 465
 Miller, Arthur, *The Crucible* 233
 Miller, Christopher L. 1000–1
 Miller, James 521
 Mills, Kenneth 15
 Mills, Sara 67
 Mills & Boon 1031, 1035
 Milner, Anthony 111
 Milroy, David 531
 Milton, John 418
 Paradise Lost 137
 Miluni, Prof. 260
 mimicry 795–6, 918–19
 Minghella, Anthony 3, 1065, 1139–40
 Mingoshi, Charles 1149
 Minh-ha, Trinh T. 1047
 Mintz, Sidney 805, 823
 Miron, Gaston 180, 183–4
 L'Homme raphaëllé 183–4
 'Un long chemin' 183
 Mirritji, Jack 521
 Misipo, Dualla 624–8, 639, 641
 biography 625
 Der Junge aus Duala: Ein Regierungsschüler
 erzählt 625–7
 Korrongo: Das Lied der Waganna 627–8
 Misipo, Ekwé, *Métissages contemporains* 628
 Misra, Jaishree, *Ancient Promises* 725
 missionaries 22, 23, 63–4, 81–103, 195, 818
 ambivalence of role 93, 94–5
 annual reports 173
 in Canada 494–5, 497–9, 503, 509
 Catholic/Protestant, common concerns 86
 changes in perceptions 89–90
 'civilizing mission' 84–6, 94–5, 686–7
 collaboration with colonial administration 86
 collusion in slavery 745
 conversion methods 95, 98, 741–2
 converts, role in mission activities 687
 destruction of local practices/beliefs 86–7,
 98–9
 disruptive influence, modern critiques of 98,
 99, 101–2
 educational role/dominance 96, 621, 690,
 745
 geographical range 83
 hostility towards 87
 influence on new intellectuals 338
 interest in local cultures 90–3, 689;
 paradoxical nature 92–3
 legacy for later cultures 93–5
 Muslim 754
 national origins 82
 photographic records 870–1, 897–8
 postcolonial engagement with 96–103,
 744–50, 971
 printing presses 665–6, 687–8, 1025–6
 relationship of work with colonization 83–6,
 87, 91–2, 100, 742
 shortcomings as commentators 90
 slide/film shows 1043
 spread of European languages 655–6
 writings by 90–6, 112
 see also languages, local
 Mississauga (convert community) 498–9
 Mistral, Gabriela
 Nobel Literature Prize xliii
 Sonnets of Death xxxix
 Mistry, Rohinton 427, 431–2, 1127
 Family Matters 203, 765
 A Fine Balance lx, 203, 908, 1144–5
 Such a Long Journey 203, 1144
 Tales from Firozsha Baag 203, 930

- Mitchel, John 558
Jail Journal 558
The Last Conquest of Ireland (Perhaps) 558
- Mitchell, David, *Pipe Dreams in Ponsonby* 470
- Mitchell, June 821
Amokura 823
- Mitchell, W. J. T. 477
- Mitchell, W. O., *Who Has Seen the Wind* 185
- Mittelholzer, Edgar, *Cortentyne Thunder* xliii
- Mo, Timothy 383, 588
An Insular Possession 383
The Monkey King 383
The Redundancy of Courage lviii, 383
Renegade or Halo2 383
Sour and Sweet 383, 594
- Mo Yan, *Big Breasts and Wide Hips* 855, 857
- Moag, Rodney F. 708–9
- Mobuto Sese Seko Ix
- Moctezuma, Emperor 290
- Modern Indian Poetry in English* (anthology) 1030
- Modern Language Association (MLA)
centennial convention 1179
Commonwealth Group 1156
Postcolonial Studies Group 1178–9
modernity, concept of 109–10, 292–3
colonialism as ‘underside’ of 296
and Indian literature 438–9
- Modisane, Bloke 338, 339
- Mofolo, Thomas Mokupu 338
Chaka xli, 692, 693, 701, 921
Moeti wa Bochabela (Traveller to the East) 693
Pitseng (In the Pot) 693
- Mohamed, Said Ahmed 695
Darkness Within Light 758
- Mohamet, Sake Dean, *The Travels of Dean*
Mohamet 576
- Mohanty, Chandra Talpade
‘Under Western eyes: feminist scholarship
and colonial discourse’ lvii, 1177–8
- Mohanty, Gopinath, *Paraja* xliii
- Mohanty, Satra P. 1179
- Mohawk people 487–8, 496
conflict with federal forces (1990) 505
- Moï, Anna 609, 615
- Moir, Martin 661, 663, 677
- Mojares, Resil B., *Origins and Rise of the Filipino*
Novel 367
- Mojica, Monique
Princess Pocahontas and the Blue Spots 197
(and Ric Knowles, eds), *Staging Coyote’s*
Dream: An Anthology of First Nations Drama
in English 197
- Mokae, Gomolemo, *The Secret in My Bosom* 1011
- Mokeddem, Malika 1093
The Forbidden Woman 756
- Momaday, N. Scott
House Made of Dawn 195
The Way to Rainy Mountain 120
‘moment of arrest’ theory 1068–9, 1071
- Momie, Roland 1090
- Mondlane, Eduardo, *The Struggle for*
Mozambique 1
- Monénembo, Thierno 608, 1071
L’Ainé des orphelins 614
- Mongia, Sunanda 930
- Mongo-Mboussa, Boniface 606
- Monroe Doctrine xxxii
- Monsoon Wedding (2001) 414
- Montague, John, *The Rough Field* 564
- Montalvo, Juan 307
- Montero, Mayra, *In the Palm of Darkness* 820–1
- Montesquieu, Charles-Louis de Secondat,
baron de, *Lettres persanes* 1073
- Montgomery, L. M., *Anne of Green Gables* 177–8
- Moodie, Susanna 66, 189
Roughing It in the Bush 113, 174
- Mookerjee, Dhan Gopal 1028
Gay-Neck 1028
- Mooney, James 120
- Moore, Brian, *Black Robe* 565, 744
- Moore, David Chioni 27, 1179
- Moore, Lorrie, *Self-Help* 930
- Moore, Thomas 558, 771–2
‘The Harp of Ireland’ 772
- Moore-Gilbert, Bart 5, 1176–7
Postcolonial Life-Writing 108
- Moorhouse, Frank
‘The American Poet’s Visit’ 452–3
The Americans, Baby 452–3
- Mootoo, Shani 191, 193, 203–4
Cereus Blooms at Night 204
He Drown She in the Sea 204
Out on Main Street and Other Stories 204
- Morales, Dom 396, 397, 428–9
- Morales, Mario Roberto 838
- Moraña, Mabel, and Carlos Jáuregui (eds),
Colonialidad y crítica en América Latina 313
- Morant Bay Rebellion (Jamaica, 1865) 232
- Mordecai, Martin 230
- Mordecai, Pamela 206, 230
The True Blue of Islands 249
- More, Hannah 574
- More, Sir Thomas, *Utopia* 805–6, 910–11
- Moreiras, Alberto 312, 323
- Morel, E. D., *The Congo Slave State* xxxvii

- Moreno, Antonio 1053–4
 Moreno, Carlos Martinez, *The Wall* xlviii
 Moreno, Gabriel García, General 867
 Moreton, Romaine 514, 519
 Moretti, Franco 777, 793–4
 Morey, Kelly-Ana 534
 Morgan, Ronald 521
 Morgan, Sally 522, 531
 My Place 522, 523
 Morocco xxxviii, lii, 251
 Sultan of 59
 Morris, Meaghan 447
 Morris, Paula 534
 Morrison, Toni 34, 48, 887
 Nobel Literature Prize lix, 1128, 1129
 Beloved 34, 53, 855, 857
 The Bluest Eye 914
 Playing in the Dark 871
 Morrissey, Mary, *Mother of Pearl* 566
 Moses, Daniel David 197, 490, 506
 Almighty Voice and His Wife 197
 Coyote City 197
 Delicate Bodies 196
 The Indian Medicine Shows 197
 The White Line 196
 Mosionier, Beatrice Culleton 506
 In Search of April Raintree 197
 Moss, John 179
 Mosteghānemī, Ahlām
 Memory in the Flesh 271–2
 Nadjma 271
Mother of 1084 (1974) 1057–8
 Motsisi, Casey 338
 mouflon, symbolism in Arab literature 276–7
 Mountjoy, Lord xxv, 16
 Moyano, Daniel, *The Devil's Trill* lii
 Moyne, E. J. 5, 1179
 Mpahlele, Es'kia 338, 339, 1167
 Down Second Avenue xlvii, 743
 Mpashi, Stephen A., *The Catholic Priests Arrive among the Bemba* 750
 Mpe, Phaswame 349
 Mpoyi-Batu, Thomas, *La re-production* 749
 Mphayi, Samuel Edward Krune 338, 693
 Mtshali, Mbuyiseni 341
 Muddupalani (dancer) 678
 Muddimbe, Valentin Y. 92
 Entre les eaux (Between Tides) 96–7, 101–2, 749
 The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge lvii
 Shaba deux 101
 Mudrooroo *see* Johnson, Colin
 Muecke, Stephen 449
 Mufti, Aamir 780–1
 Mughal Empire xxiv, xxvi
 linguistic policy 651, 657
 relations with Britain/East India Company 656, 661–2
 Mugo, Micere Githae *see* Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o
 Muhammad, the Prophet 753, 754, 757
 Muhammad 'Abdu, Shaykh 250
 Muḥammad 'Alī Pasha xxxi, xxxiii, 250, 252
 Muḥammad Reza Shah Pahlavi of Iran 281
 Mühleisen, S., *Creole Discourse* 711
 Mukasa, Ham 68–9
 Mukherjee, Bharati
 Darkness 202
 Jasmine 909
 The Tiger's Daughter 202
 Wife 202
 Mukherjee, Meenakshi 424–5, 439–40, 679, 786–7
 Mukhlis, Anand Ram 676
 Mulago, Vincent 95–6
 Muldoon, Paul 568
 Meeting the British 565
 Mullens, Joseph 83
 Mulroney, Brian 206
 multiculturalism 192–4, 1162
 in Australia 457, 459
 in UK, prospects for 598–9, 600–1
 Mumbai (Bombay)
 development of printing/journalism 667
 fictional depictions 432–3
 ‘mumbo-jumbo’, origins/application of term 63
 Mungoshi, Charles, *Waiting for the Rain* 748
 Munif, 'Abd al-Rahmān
 City of Salt lv
 East of the Mediterranean 275
 Munonye, John, *The Only Son* 746
 Munro, Alice 190
 Man Booker International Prize lxi
 Friend of My Youth 190
 Lives of Girls and Women 190, 930
 Munro, Morndi 521
 Murieta, Joaquín 875, 879
 Murphet, Richard 481
 Murphy, David *see* Forsdick, Charles
 Murphy, Laura T. 57
 Murphy, Pat 566
 Murray, Les A. 742
 Murthy, Anantha 776
 Murugan (Tamil deity) 974–7
 Mūsā, Salāmāh 256
 museum exhibits 870–1

- music
 in Caribbean culture 228–30; *see also*
 calypso
 military 228
 role in Indian/Nigerian cinema 1062
 (symbolic) significance in fictional works 48,
 49–51, 53
see also song
 Muslims *see* Islam
 Mutabaruka 229, 968
 Mutahi, Wahomi 1008, 1012
 Mutis, Álvaro, *The Snow of the Admiral* lvi
 Mutran, Khalil, *Diwan* xliv
 al-Muwaylihi, Muḥammad 255
 Mwanga, King, of Buganda 88
 Mwangbundu, Osija, *Veneer of Love* 748, 1012
 Mwangi, Meja 1008, 1012
Kill Me Quick 1016
My Beautiful Laundrette (1985) lvi, 594
 Myanmar 352, 353, 358
 independence 355
 Myrtvedt, Olav 871
 Mysorekar, Sheila *see* Kien Nghi Ha
 myth
 definition/role in popular culture 147
 intertextual treatments 926–8
see also under names of regions/peoples
- Nabokov, Vladimir 850
 Nagar, Richa 125–6, 127
 Nagarkar, Kiran, *The Cuckold* 434
 Nagra, Daljit 406
 Nahuatl people/language, surviving accounts of
 conquest 297–8
 Naidu, Sarojini 391, 428, 776
 Naipaul, Shiva 11
 Naipaul, V. S. 2, 11, 18, 73, 74–5, 238, 311, 578,
 584, 776, 784–5, 787, 904, 918, 928–9
 Islamic criticisms 1134–5
 Nobel Literature Prize lx, 3, 1127, 1129,
 1133–5, 1151; controversiality of choice
 1133–5
 rejection of Caribbean culture 215–16, 817
Among the Believers: An Islamic Journey 763,
 1134–5
An Area of Darkness 75, 1153
A Bend in the River 779, 931
Beyond Belief: Islamic Excursions among the
Converted Peoples 763, 1133, 1134–5
The Enigma of Arrival 784–5
Finding the Center 238
Guerrillas 775
Half a Life 238
A House for Mr Biswas xlvii, 238, 784
In a Free State li, 1136
India: A Million Mutinies Now 1153
India: A Wounded Civilisation 75, 1153
The Loss of El Dorado 75
The Middle Passage 75, 238
The Mimic Man xlix, 580, 784
The Mystic Masseur 238, 784
 Nair, Chandran 374
 Nair, Mira 414, 1065
 Nair, Rukmini Bhaya 402
 Nair, Supriya 1166
 Najm, Ahmad Fuād 266
 Nakasa, Nat 338, 339
 Nallino, Carlo Alfonso, Prof. 260
 Nam Le, *The Boat* 462–4, 469
 ideological presuppositions 463–4
 self-reflexivity 463
 Nambisan, Vijay 397, 398
 Namibia lviii
 Namjoshi, Suniti 400
 Nandan, Satendra P. 815
The Wounded Sea 760
 Nandi, Miriam 923
 Nanking, Treaty of (1842) xxxiv, 8
 Nannup, Alice 522
 ‘Nanny’ (Jamaican popular leader)
 221–2, 242
Nanook of the North (1922) 1044
 Nanton, Philip 578
 Naoum, Jussuf 631, 633
 Napoleon I, Emperor xxxi, 10, 13, 113, 222,
 549, 842
 invasion of Egypt 16, 17, 250, 252,
 253, 262
 Narayan, Jayaprakash, *Why Socialism* xlii
 Narayan, R. K. 426–7, 720, 786, 904, 1164
The Bachelor of Arts xlii
The English Teacher 725
 Malgudi novels 765
Swami and Friends 752, 1028
 Nardal, Paulette 1108–9
 narrative strategies/techniques 906–28
 first-person plural narration 913–17
 function 905–6
 listed 906–7, 931–2
 story-within-story 930
see also frame narratives
 Nassar, Raduan, *Lavouara arcaica* 323
 Nasser, Gamal Abdel xlvii
The Philosophy of the Revolution 258
 Nasta, Susheila 576, 1161, 1162
 Nastaliq (Persian script) 421

- Natal
 foundation of republic xxxiv
 grant of self-governance xxxvi
 nation, concept of 21
 in Islamic discourse 283
 National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) xxxviii
 National Black Theatre of Australia 530
 national identity, suppression of 1101–2
 national literature, distinguished from other types 790–1
 nationalism
 autobiographical narratives 113, 122
 and language choice 720
 Native Americans
 agreements with settlers xxviii
 Native Americans, autobiographical narratives 119–20
 Natives Land Act (SA 1913) 330, 336–7
 nature, poetic treatments of 42–4, 266
see also Walcott, Derek
 Navis, Ali Akbar, *The Collapse of Our Small Mosque* 757
 Nawaz, Shuja 404
 Naylor, Gloria
Bailey's Cafe 929
The Women of Brewster Place 929
 Ndawo, Henry Masila, *uHambo lukaGqoboka* 694
 Ndebele, Njabulo 344–5
Fools and Other Stories lv, 1056
 Ndoda, David, *In Days Gone By* 750
 Ndosi, Noah K., *Echos der Erinnerung* 641
 Nebrija, Antonio de 290
 Negri, Antonio 1131
 Negritude xli, 226, 625, 640–1, 700, 747, 1100–23
 articulation of anti-colonial feelings 1103–4
 coining of term 989–91, 1110
 construction of power 1103–5
 criticisms 865, 1090–1, 1122–3, 1132
 defined 1100
 dual (competing) interpretations 1105–6, 1110–15
 engagement with new modes of thought 1105
 genesis 1100–1, 1108–10
 increasing militancy 1084–5
 influences 1111
 inversion of colonialist principles 1114–15
 inversion of Western primitivism 989–93
 limitations 1120–3
 linguistic accomplishments 1123
 linguistic/imperial background 1094–5
 poetic expressions 938–9, 961–2, 1083–7
 reinforcement of popular prejudices 1120–1
 successors 1123
 theoretical articulations 1116–17, 1118–20
The Negro World (journal) 223
 Nehru, Jawaharlal 392, 427, 429, 431–2, 438, 672, 675
 education 69
 linguistic policy 674, 679–80
An Autobiography xlii, 69, 114–15, 121–2
The Discovery of India xliii
 ‘Tryst with Destiny’ speech xlv, 439
 Nehru, Kamal 114–15
 Neidjie, Bill 521
 Nelligan, Émile 176
 Nelson, Horatio 129
 Nemade, Balachandra 396
 neo-colonialism 446–7, 477, 1040
see also United States
 neo-primitivism *see* ‘strategic primitivism’
 Neogy, Rajat xlvii
 Nepal, poetry 409
 Nepveu, Pierre 194
 Neruda, Pablo 560
 Nobel Literature Prize l, 3
 20 *Love Poems and a Song of Despair* xl
Canto général xlv
 Nerval, Gérard de 60
 Netherlands, colonial conquests/conflicts xxv, xxvi–xxvii, xxx, xxxii, 6–7, 8, 354, 740
 linguistic policy 357
see also South Africa
 Neto, Agostinho, *Sacred Hope* lii
 Nettleford, Rex 245
Neue Sachlichkeit *see* Post-Expressionism
 Neustadt International Prize for Literature l, 1127, 1132, 1141–4
 Neville, A. O. 524
 New, W. H. 185
Land Sliding 185
 New Age movements 765
 New Canadian Library (McClelland & Stewart) 179
 New Criticism 1159, 1165
 New Deal Federal Writers’ Project 127
 New East India Company *see* East India Company
 ‘new English(es)’
 calls for 704–5
 ‘circle model’ 709–10
 criticisms of terminology 704

- 'new English(es)' (cont.)
 development of studies 707–8
 'deviationist' terminology 706, 709
 diachronic/synchronic models 708–13
 emergence in localized forms 714–15
 heterogeneity 710
 influence of Classical canon 714
 languages mixture 711–12
 'life-cycle' 708–9
 'rhizome model' 714
 taxonomic models 709–10
 'tree model' 709, 714
 vertical models 710–12
New Literary History (journal) 1168
 New Macmillan Writers' Prize for Africa 1127, 1147
 New Zealand
 anti-Vietnam protests 470
 colonization xxxiv
 demography 533
 Dominion status xxxviii, 446
 'neo-colonial' culture 446
 publishing industry 446
 treatment of native title 469–70; compared with Australia 469, 470
 see also Maori literature; Maoris; New Zealand literature
 New Zealand literature 471–9
 formal characteristics 448–9
 national identity, moves to establish 446
 new dynamic (1960s/70s) 447–8
 postcoloniality 471–2
 religious themes 742–3, 744–5
 split between Maori and Pakeha 471–2, 477–8
 see also Maori literature
 Newby, Eric 71, 72
 A Short Walk in the Hindu Kush 71
 Newell, Mike 1060
 Newfoundland, political/literary history 187
 Newland, Courttia
 The Scholar 598
 Society Within 598
 Newman, Judie 775, 894
 The Ballistic Bard 775
 Newman, Shirley, and Smaro Kamboureli (eds.), *A Mazing Space: Canadian Women Writing* 189
 news stories
 conversion into popular fiction 1009–10
 relationship with postcolonial poetry 978
 newspapers
 in Africa 683–4, 691, 692–3, 694–5; bilingual editions 683; space for new writers 1007–11; surveillance 1011
 in India 1032; in local languages 666–7
 popularity of travel narratives 64
 Newton, Huey 450–1
 Newton, John 34
 Nezahualcoyotl, Lord of Texcoco 291, 298, 876
 Ng Yi-Sheng 375
 (ed.), *SQ21: Singapore Queers in the 21st Century* 127
 Nga Tamatoa (Maori protest movement) 471
 Ngabidj, Grant 521
 Ngangom, Robin 398
 NGOs (non-governmental organizations) 125–6
 critiqued 126
 Ngubiah, Stephen, *A Curse from God* 749
 Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o 151, 169, 699, 700, 750, 776, 904, 905, 1012, 1016, 1122, 1162, 1164
 choice of language 720, 724, 1163
 imprisonment 124
 Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature lvi, 683, 700, 702
 Detained 124
 The German Ideology 697–8
 A Grain of Wheat xlix, 160, 914
 'Imperialism of language' 703, 726
 Matigari ma njirungi lviii, 750
 Petals of Blood liii
 The River Between 160, 748, 765
 Weep Not, Child 746
 Wizard of the Crow 750
 (and Micere Githae Mugo), *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* 783
 (and Ngũgĩ wa Mirii), *I Will Marry When I Want* 146
 see also Caitani Mutharabaini; *Devil on the Cross*
 Ní Chonail, Eibhlín Dubh, *Caoineadh Airt Uí Laoghaire* 548
 Ní Dhomhnaill, Nuala 555, 568
 Ní Dhuibhne, Éilís 555
 Nicholas V, Pope 81
 Nichols, Grace 588, 813
 'Epilogue' 593
 The Fat Black Woman's Poems 593
 i is a long-memoried woman lv
 Nicol, Mike 349
 Nietzsche, Friedrich 992
 Niger, Republic of 137
 Nigeria xxxvii, xxxix, 640
 civil war (1968–70) l, 1166

- diasporic UK community 586–7
 languages 722, 732
see also ‘Nollywood’; Yoruba
- Le Nigog* (journal) 176
- Nihalani, Govind 1057–8
- Nile, search for source of 64
- Nimrod (activist group) 452
- Nindethana Theatre Company 530
- Nini, Soraya 610
Ils disent que je suis une beurette ... 611
- Niven, Alastair 1157–8, 1161
- Nixon, Rob 779, 782
- Njami, Simon, *African Gigolo* 612
- Njogu, Kimani 1149
- Nkashama, Pius Ngandu, *La Mort faite homme* 746
- Nkosi, Lewis 130, 338, 339
Mating Birds 904, 909
- Nkrumah, Kwame 69, 116, 118
Ghana: The Autobiography of Kwame Nkrumah xlvī, 69, 115, 121–2
Neo-Colonialism: the Last Stage of Imperialism xlviii
- Nobel, Alfred 1128, 1133
- Nobel Prize for Literature 1127–35, 1143
 associations with political dissidence 1129–30
 (attempted) redressing of bias 1128–9, 1130, 1131
 criticisms 1130
 establishment xxxvii
 gender bias 1128–9
 geographical bias 1128
 globality, as criterion 1132–3
 omissions 1128
- ‘Noble Savage,’ evocations of 30
- Nobleza gaucha* (1915) 1045
- Nolan, Emer 789
- Nolan, Yvette 506
- ‘Nollywood’ (Nigerian cinema) 1060–3
 academic disdain 1061–2
 contribution to postcolonial development 1061
 global elements/appeal 1063
 local outlook/aesthetics 1062–3
 output/audience 1061
 share of national employment 1061
- Noma Award for Publishing in Africa liii, 1127, 1148–9
 admission criteria 1148–9
 winners 1149
- Non-Aligned Movement (India) 434
- Nongqawuse (Xhosa ‘prophetess’) 332–3
 post-apartheid appropriations of story 332–3
- normativity, intellectual trend towards 716–19
- ‘Northwest rebellion’ (Canada 1885) 499
 literary evocations 501
- Northern Ireland
 imposition of direct rule li
 Peace Agreement (1998) lx
 ‘Troubles’ 564–5, 567; cultural responses 564–5
- Nortje, Arthur 339
- Nova Scotia 9, 207–8
- Novalis (Friedrich Freiherr von Hardenburg) 836
- novel(s)
 autobiographical 114, 128–30
 compared with poetry 943–7, 977, 978
 inspired by travel writing 60–1, 65–6
 postcolonial deployment 928–9
 privileging as transgeneric 978
 reinforcement of popular prejudice 61 *see also* *names of countries/regions/cultures*
- Ntshiga, Norman 341
- Ntshona, Winston 340–1
- nudity, role in depictions of ‘natives’ 294, 296
- Nugent, Lady Maria 37, 231, 597, 956–7
- Nūrī, ‘Abd al-Malik 275
- Nurse, Donna Bailey (ed.), *Revival* 205
- Nuttall, Sarah, and Carli Coetzee, *Negotiating the Past: The Making of Memory in South Africa* 108
- Nwapa, Flora, *Efuru* xlix, 160, 747
- Nxumalo, Henry 338
- Nyerere, Julius K., *Ujamaa: Essays on Socialism* xlix
- Nzekwu, Onour, *Blade among the Boys* 746
- Ó Bruadair, Dáibhi 548
- Ó Cadhain, Máirtín 554
Cré na Cille 562
- Ó Cléirigh, Michéal 549–50, 552, 555
Annála Ríochta na hÉireann 549–50
- Ó Conaire, Pádraic 554
- O Guarani* (1916) 1048
- O hIfearnáin, Liam Dall 549
- Ó Rathaille, Aogán 548, 549
- Ó Riordáin, Seán 554
- Ó Searchaigh, Cathal 555
- O Suilleabháin, Eoghan Rua 549
- Oasis* (2002) 1048
- Oates, Joyce Carol, *Crossing the Border* 930
- Oba Waja (The King Is Dead)* (Ládiipó) 146–51

- Oba Waja (The King Is Dead)* (Ládiipò) (cont.)
 English adaptation 148
 speech styles 149–51
 obeah 39–40, 231, 242
 Obeso, Candelario 307
 O'Brien, Conor Cruise 560
 O'Brien, Edna 566
 O'Brien, Flann
An Béal Bocht (The Poor Mouth) 562
At Swim-Two-Birds 562
 O'Brien, Kate 566
 O'Brien, Lewis Yerloburka, with Mary-Anne Gale, *And the Clock Struck Thirteen* 522
The Observer (newspaper) 683–4
Obsidian (journal) 1166
 O'Callaghan, Evelyn 37
 Ocampo, Silvina, *Forgotten Journey* 849
 O'Casey, Sean 559
The Plough and the Stars 559
 Occidentalism 923–5
 Occom, Samson 509
 ocean *see* sea
 O'Connell, Daniel 549, 551–3, 555, 567
 O'Connor, Sinéad 567
 October Crisis (Canada 1970) 183–4
 October War (Egypt 1973) 265–6
 Odinga, Oginga, *Not Yet Uhuru* xlix, 115–16
 Qdunjo, J. F. 144
 O'Faolain, Nuala, *Are You Somebody?* 566
 O'Flaherty, Patrick, *The Rock Observed: Studies in the Literature of Newfoundland* 187
 Ogali, Ogali A., *Veronica My Daughter* 1015
 Ògbójú *Ode Ninú Irínmalè* (Fagunwa; trans. Soyinka, *Forest of a Thousand Demons*) 160, 161–3, 692, 694
 catalyst for composition 161
 compared with other works 162–3, 164, 165
 framework story 161–2
 Ogola, George 1008
 Ogot, Grace 160
 'The Green Leaves' 163
 O'Grady, Standish, *History of Ireland: The Heroic Period* 559
 Ògúnmólá, Kólá 146
 Ògúnnidé, Hubert 143–4, 145
Black Forest 144
Bread and Bullet 144
The Garden of Eden and the Throne of God 143–4
Human Parasites 144, 145
Tiger's Empire 144
Worse than Crime 144, 145
 Ogunsola, Isola 146
 O'Hagan, Howard 187
 Ojaide, Tanure, and Tijan M. Sallah, *The New African Poetry: An Anthology* 155–6
 Oji, Chima, *Unter die Deutschen gefallen* 640
 Ojibway people 487–8
 Christianization 497–9
 Oka crisis (Canada, 1990) 199
 Okai, Atukwei 156
 Okigbo, Christopher 144–5, 151, 158–9, 746, 940
 biography 943
 religious imagery 969–70
 'Dance of the Painted Maidens' 145
 'Easter Sequence' 746
 'Elegy for Slit-Drum' 158, 159
Labyrinths li, 145
 'Lament of the Masks' 145, 158–9
Path of Thunder: Poems Prophesying War 145, 159
 'Silences' 746
see also 'Fragments out of the Deluge'
 Okonkon, Susan 577
 Okri, Ben 3, 886, 913, 1148, 1151
see also The Famished Road
The Old Gringo (1989) 1060
 Olisah, Sunday Okenwa, *Money Hard to Get but Easy to Spend* 1014
 Olivella, Manuel Zapata 315
 Olivier, Émile 209
La Brulerie 209
La Discorde aux cent voix 209
Mère-Solitude 209
Passages 209
Paysage de l'aveugle 209
Les Urnes scellées 209
 Omar, Kaleem 404
 Omeros (Walcott) lviii, 32, 34–6, 41–7, 227–8, 793, 813
 Christian themes 750
 epic elements 42, 44–5, 47
 names, explanation/significance 45–6
 re-staging of capture experience 46–7, 56
 theme of alienation from homeland 45, 46
 treatment of father/son relationship 44–6
 treatment of women 41–2, 54
 Omotoso, Kole, *Just Before Dawn* 783
Once Were Warriors (1994) 533
 Ondaatje, Michael 187, 202–3
Anil's Ghost 203
The Collected Works of Billy the Kid 202
Coming Through Slaughter 202
In the Skin of a Lion 194, 202
see also The English Patient

- One Hundred Years of Solitude* (García Márquez)
 xlix, 320–1, 852–61, 867, 998
 cultural/literary significance 855–9, 867
 genesis 853–4
 influences 849
 ironic elements 997
 opening 858
 other writers' comments on 860–1
 publication/reception 852–3, 859–60
- Ong, Charlson
Banyaga 370
An Embarrassment of Riches 370
- Onitsha market literature (Nigeria) 1008, 1014
 links with film 1062
- Ontario, fiction set in 178
- Onuora, Oku 883, 884
- Oodgeroo Noonuccal *see* Walker, Kath
- opera, Canadian 207
- Opera Jawa* (2006) 1066
- Opitz, May/Sylvia *see* Ayim, May
- Opium Wars 8
- orality/oral narratives
 admissibility as evidence 119
 and African literature 137, 139, 155–7,
 159–60, 348; breadth of mutual influence
 140–1; diasporic 638–9; differing uses
 148–51, 162–3
 and Canadian indigenous culture 198–9,
 489–92, 507
 and Caribbean literature 228–9
 contextual analysis 141–2
 definitions 141–2
 impact on postcolonial poetry 959–60
 and Indian vernaculars 422
 and Latin American literature 317, 318
 role in African culture, differing views of
 139–40
 as textual/dramatic performance 141
- Orange Prize 1145
- Orange River colony xxxviii
- Ordiz, Javier 1053
- Orientalism 7, 259, 390
 academic teachings 260, 1167–8
 as British policy in India 417, 419, 661–2
 informing of colonial fiction 907
 parodied 273
 postcolonial perpetuation 908, 922–3, 927
- oriki* ('heavy' words) 158–9
- Orkin, Martin *see* Loomba, Ania
- Ortega y Gasset, José 841
- Orthodox Church 740
- Ortiz, Fernando 338, 805, 823, 1057, 1095
- Ortiz, Simon J. 507
- Orwell, George 1044
 1984 381
Burmese Days xlii, 356, 917
- O'Shane, Pat 522
- Ostenso, Martha 192
Wild Geese 185
- Osundare, Niyi 961
- Other, European constructions of 7, 63, 64–5,
 984–5
 as inversion of Western-ness 984
 literary interrogations 891, 892, 893–4, 895
 satirical representations 61
- Otto, Rudolf 764
- Otto Suhr Institute 628
- Ottoman Empire
 conflict with colonial powers 251–2
 control of Arab regions 251
 disintegration 252
 legacy 253, 284
 loss of territories to colonial powers 251
- Otunkpa* (Nigerian theatrical form) 143, 145
- Ouellette, Fernand 183
- Ouologuem, Yambo 608
Bound to Violence 755, 999–1001
- Ousmane, Sembene 694–5
- Ovid, *Metamorphoses* xxvi
- Oviedo, Fernández de 294
- Owen, Wilfred 967
- Owens, Jesse 626
- Owenson, Sydney 557
- Oxford Bookstore 1034
- Oxford Companion to New Zealand Literature* 472
- Oxford Literary Review* 1168
- Oyono, Ferdinand Léopold
Houseboy 749, 1072, 1086
The Old Man and the Medal 749
- Özdamar, Emine Sevgi 632, 643
Die Brücke vom goldenen Horn 632
Das Leben ist eine Karawanserai 632
Seltsame Sterne starren zur Erde 632
- Pacific Islands
 'creolization,' problems of terminology
 821–2
 island/voyage narratives 813–14, 819–20
 mixed-race writers 822
- Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower
 Niger* (District Commissioner's report) 988
- Padamji, Baba 928
- Padhi, Bibhu 397
- Padmore, George 224, 576
Pan Africanism or Communism? xlv
- Page, P. K. 187

- Pais, Arthur J. 782
- Pakistan lx, lvii, xlv, 385, 544
 creation (1947) 392, 762; *see also* Partition
 Indian/transnational poets' links with 391, 401
 Islamic narratives 762–3
 Islamic state 415
 languages 653, 669
 poetry 403–6
 prose fiction 433–4
- Palcy, Euzhan 1051–2, 1072
- Palestine, League of Nations mandate xl
see also PLO
- Pali (language) 650
- palimpsest(s)
 defined 869
 and genre 901
 literary examples 876–80, 882, 891–3, 896–7
 metaphoric use 869–70
 mode of operation 872–3
 and postcoloniality 873–4
 preservation of inner layers 872–3
 relationship with hybridity 872
- Palmer, Alan 916
- Palmer, Patricia 547
- Pamuk, Orhan, Nobel Literature Prize lxi
- pan-Africanism 232, 450
- Pan-American Congress (Panama, 1826) xxxiii
- pan-Americanism 14
- Panama, independence xxxii
- Panama Canal xxxv
- Pang, Alvin 375
- Paor, Louis de 517, 555
- Papastergiadis, Nikos 880
- Papertalk-Green, Charmaine 519
- Papineau, Louis-Joseph 174
- Papua New Guinea, Bougainvillean secession 478–9
- Paquet, Sandra Pouchet 128
- 'paracolonialism' 485, 492–4, 505–6
- Paraguay, independence xxxi
- Parakrama, Arjuna 706
- Paris
 Colonial Exposition (1931) 1101
 experiences of racism 1084, 1088
 gatherings of black intellectuals 1108–10
 International Conference of Black Writers and Artists (1956) xlv1, 606, 848
 Peace of (1763) 171–2
 sociocultural tensions (1920s) 1109
 Treaty of (1898) xxxvii
- 'Parisianism' 612–13
- Park, Mungo 62–3
- Parker, David 127–8
- Parliamentary Act (India 1967) 674–5
- Parnell, Charles Stewart 555, 556, 559, 561
- parody 905, 931
 double-edged nature 1001
 and neo-primitivism 999–1001
 politics of 1000
- Parra, Nicanor, *Poems and Antipoems* xlv
- Parrinder, Patrick 784–5
- Parry, Benita 345, 349, 1171
 'Problems in current theories of colonial discourse' lvi
- Parthasarathy, R. 393, 394, 721, 941, 976
- Partis pris* (journal) 184–5
- Partition (of India, 1947) xlv, 16, 20, 392, 413, 415–16, 422, 433–4, 1047
 linguistic implications 651
 narratives 435, 762–3
- Pascoe, Bruce 529
Earth 524
Ocean 524
- Pasternak, Boris 1130
- pastoral genre, Australian evocations 462, 464–5, 467
- Patel, Sardar Vallabhbhai 674, 675
- Patel, Tara 400
- Pater, Walter 978
- Patil, Amruta, *Kari* 1036
- Paton, Alan 342
Cry, the Beloved Country xlv, 342, 743, 1056–7
- Patricot, Aymeric, *Azima la rouge* 617
- Paul, St 741
- Paul VI, Pope 88
- Pauwels, Heidi 1045, 1062
- Paz, Octavio 310, 317, 318, 327
 Nobel Literature Prize lviii, 3
Labyrinth of Solitude xlv
Sunstone xlv1
- p'Bitek, Okot 151, 156–7, 939, 940, 969, 977
 subversion of Christian imagery 971–2
 'Clean Woman' 971
 'Hunchback' 971
see also *Song of Lawino: A Lament*
- Pearse, Patrick 554
- Pearson, Karl, *The Grammar of Science* 984–5
- Pearson, Mike 900
 (and Michael Shanks), *Theatre/Archaeology* 869
- Pearson, Noel 538
- Pechey, Graham 346, 349
- Pedro IV of Portugal 88
- Peel, John 95
- Peer, Basharat 432
- Peeradina, Saleem 395
- Una pelea Cubana contra los demonios* (1972) 1057

- Pell, Kelton 531
 Pelletier, Wilfred 196
 No Foreign Land 195
 Pemjore, Dorji 409
 Penfold, Merimeri 476
 Penguin African Writing Prize lxi
 Penguin India 1030–1, 1035, 1037
 Penn, William xxviii
 Pennsylvania State College 1
 Pennycook, Alastair 706
 ‘people of colour’, application of term 623,
 624, 1165
 Pepetela, *Mayombe* lv
 Pepper, Philip 521
 Perera, Padma, ‘The Schoolmaster’ 914
 Peri Rossi, Cristina, *The Ship of Fools* lv
 Peries, Lester James 1051
 periodization, problematical nature (in Aus/
 NZ) 446, 447
 Perkins, Charles 451–2, 521
 Perse, Saint-John (Alexis Saint-Léger) 227, 244
 Anabase 244
 Persian (language), use in India 651, 660, 677
 dismissal 663
 history 652, 655, 656–7
 influence 657, 669
 lexicons 676
 Western support for retention 661
 Persky, Stan 192
 Peru 316
 independence xxxiii
 rebellions against Spanish rule xxx
 Spanish conquest xxiv; indigenous accounts
 of 302–3
 Pétain, Philippe 1074
 Peters, Carl 620
 Peters, Lenrie, *The Second Round* 747
 Peterson, Bhekizizwe 1056
 Peterson, Oscar 208
 Petrone, Penny 490, 498, 504
 Phelps, Anthony 208
 Philip, Marlene NourbeSe 205, 237–8, 941,
 947–53, 977–8
 Frontiers 205
 A Genealogy of Resistance 205, 237
 Harriet’s Daughter 205
 Looking for Livingstone 205
 ‘A piece of land surrounded’ 816–17
 She Tries Her Tongue, Her Silence Softly Breaks
 205, 237, 712
 Showing Grit 205
 see also ‘Discourse on the Logic of Language’;
 Zong!
 Philippines 352
 bilingual writers 364
 Chinese community 370
 demand for independence xxxvii
 diasporic writings in US 381–2
 grant of independence xlii, 355
 indigenous fiction 367–8
 Institute of National Language 368
 languages 358, 360, 362, 368, 712
 literature in English (before 1946) 364–8
 literature in English (post-independence)
 368–73
 political history (post-independence) 368–9
 religions 353
 Spanish occupation xxiv, 13, 352–3, 357–8
 University 364–5
 US occupation 352–3, 358, 364–5
 Phillips, Caryl 236–7, 572, 588, 596–8, 599, 600
 biographical background 596
 Crossing the River 33–4, 596–7; critiques 34
 A Distant Shore 597–8, 1144
 The European Tribe 76–7, 236
 The Final Passage 596, 784
 Foreigners 33–4
 Higher Ground 57, 237
 The Nature of Blood 33–4, 237
 A New World Order 572
 Playing Away (screenplay) 596
 A State of Independence lvi, 237
 see also *Cambridge*
 Phillips, Edward 192
 Phillips, Mike, *A Shadow of Myself* 600
 Phillipson, Robert 706–7
 Phukan, Anandaram Dhekiyal 667
 Picasso, Pablo 1074
 Guernica 946
 ‘pidgin’ linguistic forms
 administrative use 357
 as literary language 154, 722
 use in popular entertainments 138
 as varieties of English/full languages 710
 Pietz, William 6, 1179
 Pigafetta, Antonio 7
 Piglia, Ricardo, *Artificial Respiration* lv
 pilgrimages 59–60
 Pilkington (Gaminara), Doris 522, 523
 Caprice: A Stockman’s Daughter 524
 Pillai, Raymond C., *The Celebration: A Collection*
 of *Short Stories* 760
 Pilon, Jean-Guy 183
 Pineau, Gisèle 609
 Pinochet, Augusto 867
 Pinto, Benito Teixeira xxv

- Pizarro, Francisco xxiv
 Pizarro, Gonzalo xxiv
 Plaatje, Solomon T. 335, 336–8, 688–9
 Boer War Diary xxxvii
 Mhudi xli, 160–1, 162–3, 336–7, 689
 Native Life in South Africa 336–7, 689
 Plácido (Gabriel de la Concepción) 306
 plagues, migrations inspired by 8
 Plains of Abraham, Battle of (1759) 171–2, 174
 plantation, as space of action/change 823–4
 plantation economies 18
 impact on modern race relations 18
 Plassey, Battle of (1757) 654–5, 1025
 after-effects 656
 Plato 792
Playing Away (1987) 596
Playing With Fire (Sangtin collective) 125–6, 127
 PLO (Palestine Liberation Organization) lix
 plot structure 907–9
 Plymouth Colony xxvi
 Poe, Edgar Allan 557, 929
 Polar, Antonio Cornejo 310
 Pollock, Sheldon 653
 Polo, Marco 59, 83, 843
 polygamy, missionaries' moves to abolish 86–7
 Pompidou, Georges 1108
 Poniatowska, Elena, *Until We Meet Again* l
 Pontiac, Chief 174, 195
The Poor Christ of Bomba (Betí) xlví, 92
 banned by Catholic Church 100
 critiques of missionary work 95, 96–7,
 99–100, 102–3, 749
Popol Vuh (Mayan creation story) 15, 291–2
 influence on later fiction/culture 847,
 864–5
 Spanish translation 292, 838, 862
 Popoola, Olumide 638–9
 (ed.) *Talking Home: Heimat aus unserer eigenen*
 Feder 638
 'undercurrents' 638–9
 popular culture 22
 adoption of postcolonial literary works 3
 branding 1024
 division from literary 1026
 mainstream criticisms 1024
 overlap with literary 1023
 prejudices, mirroring in fictional works 61
 studies 1023–5; focus on readership 1023–4
 see also African popular literature; Indian
 popular culture
 Porrúa, Paco 859
 Porter, A. N. 9
 ports, demographic changes 11–12
 Portugal
 conflicts over colonial possessions xxvii
 French invasion (1807) xxxi
 loss of colonies 303, 314–15
 New World conquests xxiii, xxv, 6, 81–2, 87,
 289
 South-East Asian colonies 354
 Portuguese (language) 357
 Post-Expressionism 835–6
 'postapartheid' literature/culture 330–1, 345–9
 challenges to validity of concept 345
 diversity 349
 problems of interpretation 345–6
 postcolonial film
 choice of language 1050
 collaboration with literature 1045–6
 constraints 1047–8, 1054
 defined 1039
 filmmakers' administrative work 1048
 filmmakers' literary backgrounds 1046–7
 governmental support/sponsorship 1041,
 1054
 as means to social change 1041
 nationalist 1041–2, 1045
 reasons for choice to work in 1046–7
 use of traditional material 1050–1
 see also adaptations
 postcolonial film adaptations 1049–58
 critiques of colonialism 1054–8
 preservation function 1050–4
 reworkings 1054
 self-critical function 1056–7
 postcolonial literature
 academic studies 3–4
 characteristic features 412–13, 906
 collective/individual significance 933
 commodification 1152
 contribution to global literature 932–3
 controversies 4
 criticism 777
 definition/scope 6, 22–3, 171–2, 256–62, 446,
 621–2, 1070
 development of own traditions 455–7, 461–2
 dialogue 917–19
 framing narratives 912–13
 history 1–3, 414–15
 impact of non-literary events 21
 (implicit) geographical hierarchy 24, 24–5,
 447; linked to colonial oppression 25
 international marketing 1127
 multiple histories 20–1
 nomenclature 1
 relationship with film 1039–40, 1045–8

- relationship with postcolonial history 414–15
- thematic approach to study 24
- treatments of time/space 919–21
- 'we' narrative mode 913–17
- see also genres; narrative strategies; postcolonial poetry
- postcolonial poetry 938–78
 - compared with law 950–9, 977
 - compared with novel 943–7, 977, 978
 - decolonization model 938–9; limitations 939–40
 - defined 938
 - disaggregation into subgenres 978
 - distinctive features 942–3, 945–7
 - hybridization model 940; drawbacks 940–1
 - musical settings 961
 - relationship with news discourse 978
 - relationship with prayer 969–77
 - relationship with song 959–69, 977
 - relationship with theory 947–50, 977–8
 - role in self-definition 941–2
 - themes 941–2, 959
 - transgeneric qualities 978
 - treatment of linguistic issues 941
- postcolonial studies 1058–9, 1155, 1178–82
 - history 1102–3
 - interdisciplinarity 1181
 - journals 1179–81
 - literary syllabus 1019
 - new publishing technologies 1181–2
 - origin 1102
 - websites 1182
- Postcolonial Studies* (journal) 1167, 1179–81
- Postcolonial Text* (journal) lxi, 1181–2
- postcoloniality
 - absence from academic consciousness 472
 - broad approach 331
 - debate on value of concept 127
 - definition/history of usage 4–6, 107, 313, 873, 1039, 1179
 - differing experiences of 122
 - German studies/interpretations 622–4
 - ideological appropriation of term 623–4
 - informing of Western commentaries 139
 - persistence as referent 778
 - problems of terminology 622–3, 705
 - problems of theory 288–9, 309, 313–14, 330–1, 624, 1019, 1170–1
 - widening of range of study 131
 - see also postcolonial literature
- postmodernism 277–9, 363, 635, 901, 903–4, 913, 925
 - relationship with postcolonialism 1173–5
- poststructuralism 950, 1002
- Poudel, Lekh Nath 409
- Poulin, Jacques 185
 - Volkswagen Blues* 194–5
- Pound, Ezra 391, 793, 940, 966, 975, 985
- Poundmaker, Chief 195, 499–500
- Pour une littérature-monde* (essay collection) 614–15
- Powell, Erica 115
- Powell, Malea 493
- power/inequality, (sociolinguistic) discourse of 703, 707
- Powers, Richard 925
- Prabhu, Anjali 880–1
- prairie writing (Canada) 185–6
 - black 208
- Prakash, Gyan 794, 795
- Prakrit (language) 650
 - translations from 395
- Prasad, G. J. V. 397, 398
- Pratchett, Terry 1036
- Prator, Clifford H. 716
- Pratt, Marie Louise 686
 - Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* lix
 - 'In the neocolony' 777–8
- prayer, relationship with postcolonial poetry
 - 969–77
 - non-Christian 972–7
 - rejection/satirization 971–2
- 'Prayers to Lord Murugan' (Ramanujan) 974–7
 - line endings 975–6
 - use of irony 975–7
- Premchand, Munshi 426
 - The Gift of a Cow* xlii
- Prescott, William H.
 - History of the Conquest of Mexico* xxxiv
 - History of the Conquest of Peru* xxxiv
- Price, Richard 220, 823
- Price-Mars, Jean 1108, 1112
- Prichard, Katherine Susannah, *Coonardoo* 449
- Prieto, René 847
- primitivism 982–1003, 1173–4
 - as corrective to modernist malaise 985
 - elegiac approach 986–7
 - negative (nineteenth-century) approach 984–5
 - postcolonial reconfigurings 987–8, 989
 - problematic relationship with postcoloniality 982–3
 - rejection 988–9

- primitivism (cont.)
 Western/postcolonial uses, contrasted 983
see also magical realism; 'strategic primitivism'
- Prince, Mary 231–2, 576
- Prinsep, H.T. 678
- printing *see* India
- prison writings 124, 278
- Pritam, Amrita, *Messages* xlvii
- prizes, literary 3, 23, 1071, 1127–52
 drawbacks 1151–2
 narrowing of awareness 1151–2
 rewarding of the already successful 1143–4, 1151
- Probyn-Rapsey, Fiona 523
- productivity *see* economic basis of colonialism
- progress, Western ideology of 984–5
- protest novel 904
- Proust, Marcel 1128
- Prowse, D.W., *A History of Newfoundland* 187
- Public Culture* (journal) 1168
- publishing, new technologies 1181–2
see also Indian publishing industry
- Puenzo, Luis 1060
- Puig, Manuel, *The Kiss of the Spider Woman* lii
- Pulitzer Prize 1137–8
- Punic script 685
- Punjabi (language) 657, 669
 impact of Partition 651–2
 reading public 653
- Purcell, Leah, and Scot Rankin, *Box the Pony* 531
- Pynchon, Thomas 925
Gravity's Rainbow 925
- Qabbani, Nizar
 'Comments on the Notebook of Decadence' 1
On Entering the Sea lx
- Qadir, Riaz 404
- al-Qa'id, Yūsuf, *War in the Land of Egypt* 265–6
- qasida* (Arab verse form) 141
- Qāsim, 'Abd al-Ḥakīm 261–2
- Qitsaulik, Rachel A. 506
- Quarterly Review* 416, 417, 1024
- Quayson, Ato 5, 94, 822, 850, 857–8, 887, 988, 996–7, 998, 999, 1070, 1172–3
 (and David Goldberg), *Relocating Postcolonialism* 1171
- Quebec *see* French Canada; French Canadian literature
- Quebec Act (Canada 1774) 174
- Quechua (language) 324, 325
- Queen's University, Belfast 1182
- Queneau, Raymond 459
- 'Qui fait la France?' (manifesto) 615–16
- 'Quiet Revolution' 182
- Quirk, Randolph 706, 716
- Qu'ran
 cited in postcolonial poetry 972
 English translations 774
- Qutb, Sayyid, *Tifl min al-qaryah* (*A Child from the Village*) 260, 284
- Rabassa, Gregory 860
- Rabemananjara, Jacques 702
- race/racial issues
 colonial hierarchy 14
 and diasporas 20
 discrimination, moves against xliii
 impact on postcolonial studies 25
 segregation of native populations
 by 18
 violence, in European cities 12
see also apartheid; sexual relations, interracial;
 UK immigrant community, discrimination
 against
- Rachedi, Mabrouk, *Le Poids d'une âme* 617
- Racine, Jean 1074
- racism, defined 1103–4
- Radical History Review* (journal) 1166
- Rafat, Taufiq 403–4, 406
- Raffles, Stamford 110–11
- Rafiq, Fauzia (ed.), *Aurat Durbar: Writing by South Asian Women* 202
- Raharimanana, Jean-Luc V. 615
- Rahimi, Atiq 1071
- Rahman, Tariq 404
- railways, building of 10
- Raj, Rizio Yohannan 403
- The Raj Quartet* (TV) 1139
- Raj Rao, R. 397
- Raja Harishchandra* (1913) 1048
- Rajan, Rajeswari Sunder 777, 789
- Rajaratnam, S. 360–1
- Rajashree, *Trust Me* 1035
- Raleigh, Walter 60
- Rama, Ángel 14–15, 291, 310, 318, 324
- Ramaka, Joseph Gai 1055–6
- Ramanujan, A. K. 394, 403, 428–9, 776, 940, 941, 972, 1030
Collected Poems lx
 'Drafts' 950
 'Elements of Composition' 950
 'On the Death of a Poem' 958–9
see also 'Prayers to Lord Murugan'
- Ramaswami, Sumathy 680

- Ramayana – the Legend of Prince Rama* (1992) 1066
- Ramayana* (traditional Indian epic) 659, 917, 926
TV/film adaptations 1051, 1066
- Ramazani, Jahan 168
- Ramchand, Kenneth 232
- Ramirez, Sergio, *To Bury Our Fathers* liii
- Rampolokeng, Lesego 349, 968–9
Horns for Hondo 968–9
- Ramusio, Giovanni Battista 172–3
- Ranasinghe, Anne 407
- Ranger, Terence 109
- Rankin, Scot *see* Purcell, Leah
- Rao, Raja 426–7, 437, 719, 722, 776, 1142
On the Ganga Ghat 930
The Serpent and the Rope 905
see also *Kanthapura*
- rap poetry 965–9
origins/influences 968–9
- rape (of slaves)
autobiographical treatments 36–7
fictional treatments 34, 39, 40, 48, 52
- Rashid, Fawziyyah, *Transformation of the Knight* 279
- Rastafarianism 230–1, 245
- Ravenscroft, Arthur 1157–8, 1160
- Ravvin, Norman 192–3
- Rawick, George (ed.), *The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography* 127
- Ray, Nabin Chandra 667
- Raza, Hima 405
- Razane, Mohamed, *Dit violent* 617
- Re/Visionen: Postkoloniale Perspektiven von People of Color* *see* Kien Nghi Ha
- Read, James 748–9
- Reading, Lord xl
- realist fiction
African 159–60
French Canadian 183
Indian 422–4, 425–7; naïve 433; reworking of conventions 427–8, 431–2, 433, 436–7
rejection 1174
Russian 937
Southeast Asian 376, 378
UK immigrant 583–4, 904
see also magical realism; social realism
- Reassemblage* (1982) 1047
- Redbird, Duke 196
- Reddy, Meenakshi Madhavan, *You Are Here* 1034
- Reed-Gilbert, Kerry 519
- Reeve, Winnifred Eaton (Onoto Watana) 200
- Reformation 740, 741
- Refus Global* (Quebec artists' manifesto) 182, 183
- Reid, V. S. (Vic)
Nanny-Town 222
New Day xlv, 232
Sixty-Five 232
- Reindorf, Carl Christian 93, 94
- religion 23, 739–66
in African popular literature 1016
centrality to colonial/imperial history 764
persecution in grounds of 8
in primitive societies 86–7
studies 739–40
Western resurgence 764–5
see also Catholic Church; Christianity; Islam; missionaries; prayer
- Renaud, Jacques 184–5
Le Cassé 185
- Research in African Literature* (journal) 1, 108, 1163, 1164–6, 1167
breadth of scope 1165–6
comparative focus 1166
- resignification, strategy of 989–91
- Retamar, Roberto Fernández 808
'Caliban' li, 233, 781–2
'reverse colonization' 604–5
- Revue du monde noir* (periodical) 1109
- Rexroth, Kenneth 452–3
- Reyes, Alfonso 850
- Reynolds, G. M. W. 1036
- Rhodes, Cecil 334, 335, 336
- Rhodesia xxxvi
decision on future lii
Unilateral Declaration of Independence (1965) xlviii
see also Zimbabwe
- Rhys, Jean 18, 218, 234, 247, 249, 527, 773, 776, 793, 1162
Good Morning, Midnight 234
Voyage in the Dark 234, 576
see also *Wide Sargasso Sea*
- Riboud, Barbara Chase, *The President's Daughter* 57
- Ricci, Matteo 83
- Richards, David Adams 188
- Richards, Thomas 779
- Richardson, D. L., Capt. 1027
- Richardson, John, *Wacousta* 174
- Richler, Mordecai 193
- Richmond, Marion, and Linda Hutcheon (eds.), *Other Solitudes* 193
- Ricks, Christopher 793
- Rickward, Edgell 1028
- Ricoeur, Paul 21–2

- Ricou, Laurie 185
 Riĕā, Shaykh Muḥammad 254–5
 Riegel, Christian, and Herb Wylie (eds.),
A Sense of Place 185
 Riel, Louis 181, 186, 188, 499
 Riley, Joan 588
 Rilke, Rainer Maria 178
 Rimbaud, Arthur 844, 1107
 Ringuet (Philippe Panneton), *Trente Arpents* 176
 Rio de Janeiro, French colony at xxiv, xxix
 Riocci, Nino 193
 ritual, as source for drama 231
 Rive, Richard 338
 rivers, place in Indian imagination 434–5
 Rizal, José 357, 367, 369
El Filibusterismo 357
Noli me tangere 357
 Roa Bastos, Augusto, *I the Supreme* lii
 road, as literary topos 165–6
 road novels 465
 Robben Island 340–1
 Robbins, Bruce 129, 784
 Roberts, Aldwin *see* Kitchener, Lord (calypso singer)
 Roberts, Charles G.D. 176, 187, 211
 Roberts, Peter 228
 Roberts, Shaaban 695
 Robin, Régine 193
La Québécoise 194
 Robinson, Eden 492, 506
Blood Sports 199
Monkey Beach 199, 510
Traplines 199
 Robinson, G. A. 1000
 Robinson, Harry 187, 198
 Robinson, Mary 567
 Robinson, Scott 450
Robinson Crusoe (Defoe) xxix, 61, 233, 242, 264, 778, 802, 804, 806, 807, 810–11, 823, 892
 Rodney, Walter, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* li
 Rodó, José Enrique, *Ariel* xxxvii, 319
 Rodriguez, Richard 874, 895
 Roh, Franz 833, 835–6, 837, 841
Geschichte der deutschen Kunst 836
Nach-Expressionismus 835
 The Rolling Stones 591
roman du terroir, genre of 175–6, 177
 Romano, Giovanni Francesco 87
 romanticism, German 658, 836
 Romero, Maria G. 364
 Roodt, Darrell James 1056–7
 Roosevelt, Franklin D. xliii
 Rosca, Ninotchka, *State of War* 370
 Rose, Lionel 521
 Rosello, Mireille 1116
 Ross, Sinclair, *As for Me and My House* 185, 190
 Rothenstein, William 1028
 Rotor, Arturo 365
The Wound and the Scar 365
 Rouane, Houda, *Pieds-blancs* 617
 Roughsey, Dick 521
 Roughsey, Elsie (Labumore) 522
 Roumain, Jacques 961
Masters of the Dew xliii, 820–1
 Rousseau, Jean-Jacques 284, 1072
Confessions 260
 Rowell, Charles 1167
 Roy, André 192
 Roy, Arundhati 3, 427, 436, 723–4, 776, 787, 903, 1151
The God of Small Things lx, 435, 437, 752–3, 908, 1136
 Roy, Gabrielle 188, 191
Bonheur d'occasion 183
La Route d'Altamont 186
Rue Deschambault 186
 Roy, M.N., *India in Transition* xl
 Roy, Rammohun, Raja 385, 427, 667, 677
 Royal African Company xxvii
 Royal Geographical Society 64
 Royal Society 60
 Rozema, Patricia 1065
 Rubens, Antoine, Maître 105
 Rubusana, Walter B. 693
Zemk' inkomo magwalandini 693
 Rudder, David 229
Rue Cases-Nègres (Sugar Cane Alley) (1983) 1051–2, 1072
 Ruffo, Armand Garnet 506
Grey Owl: The Mystery of Archie Belaney 196
 Ruhe, Ernestpeter *see* Hornung, Alfred
 Rui, Manuel, *Yes Comrade!* liii
 Rule, Jane, *Desert of the Heart* 191
 Rulfo, Juan 324, 858
Pedro Paramo xlvii, 320, 323, 849–50
 Rumi, Jalal ad-Din Muhammad 926–7
 Rupa (publishers) 1029, 1032–3
 al-Ruṣāfi, Ma'rūf 254, 269
Diwan xlv
 Rushdie, Salman lviii, xlv, 398, 414, 427, 428, 429, 431–2, 433, 436, 437, 440, 590–3, 714, 776, 787, 860–1, 868, 913, 927, 930, 1127, 1144
 Booker Prize nominations 1136, 1139, 1151

- influence 593–4, 595
 use of parody 931
The Enchantress of Florence 434, 763, 1136
The Ground Beneath her Feet 1136
Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism
 1981–1991 lviii, 591
The Moor's Last Sigh 431, 434, 763, 1136
The Satanic Verses lvii, 431, 591–2, 593–4, 603,
 754–5, 761, 856, 1136
Shalimar the Clown 763, 1136
Shame 855, 912, 931, 1136
 (ed.), *The Vintage Book of Indian Writing*
 649–50, 653, 675, 1150
 see also *Midnight's Children*
- Ruskin, John 237
 Russell, Lynette, *A Little Bird Told Me: Family
 Secrets* 523
 Russia, expansionism xxxvii
 Rutherford, Anna 1161
 Rwanda, genocide (1994) lix
 Ryam, Thomté, *Banlieue noire* 617
 Ryga, George, *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe*
 187, 196
- Saakana, Amon Saba (ed.), *The Colonial Legacy in
 Caribbean Literature* 1122
 Sa'at, Alfian 364, 375
The Corridor 376
 Sabato, Ernesto, *The Tunnel* xliii
 al-Sabur, Sala 'Abd, *Journey at Night* 1
 Sachs, Albie 344–5, 349
 Sachs, Nelly 1129
 Sādat, Anwar 276
 al-Sa'dāwī, Nawāl 260–1
 Sadeek, Sheik, *Song of the Sugar Canes* 760
 Sadiq, Nazneen
Camels Can Make You Homesick 761
Ice Bangles 203
 Sagar, Ramanand 1051
 Sagar, Gabriel, *Le Grand voyage du pays des
 Hurons* 494–5
 Sahagún, Bernardino de 294
 Sahay, Raghuvir 781
 Sahgal, Noyantara 427
Rich Like Us lv, 909, 912, 913
 Sahitya Akademi Award xlv, 1127, 1149–51
 Sa'id, 'Alī Aḥmad see Adūnis
 Said, Edward 4, 6, 7, 48, 312, 560, 777, 789, 794,
 807, 924, 939, 1179
Culture and Imperialism lix, 72, 780, 938
Orientalism liii, 4, 60, 938, 1102, 1167–8,
 1180; critiques 1168–9
Out of Place 108
- 'Reflections on Exile' 780
 see also Eagleton, Terry
 Sainte-Marie Among the Hurons (mission) 495
 Sakai, Naoki 983–4, 1001–2
 Sakamoto, Kerri 193
The Electrical Field 202
One Million Hearts 202
 Saladin 282
 Salanga, Alfredo Navarro 372
 Saldívar, José David 899
 Ṣālih, Ṭayyib, see *Season of Migration to
 the North*
 Salkey, Andrew 75, 578
Escape to an Autumn Pavement 580
Georgetown Journal 74–5
Havana Journal 74–5
The Late Emancipation of Jerry Stoker 1
A Quality of Violence 239, 751
 Sallah, Tijan M. see Ojaide, Tanure
 Salleh, Muhammad Haji 373
 Salman, Sheikh 255
 Salverson, Laura Goodman 192
Confessions of an Immigrant Daughter 185
The Viking Heart 185
 Sama, Balakrishna 409
 al-Samarai, Nicola Lauré see Kien Nghi Ha
 Samb, D. 1149
 Samkange, Stanlake J.W.T., *The Mourned One*
 746
Sammy and Rosie Get Laid (1987) 594
 Samuelson, Meg 331–2
 San Martín, José de 14
 San people 1044
 Sanadhya, Totaram, *My Twenty-One Years in the
 Fiji Islands* 824
 Sancho, Ignatius, *Letters of the Late Ignatius
 Sancho, an African* 575, 600
 Sandhu, Sukhdev 575
 Sandys, George xxvi
 Sangari, Kumkum, 'The politics of the possible'
 1173, 1174
 Sangster, Charles, *The St Lawrence and the
 Saguenay, and other poems* 176
 Sangtin collective 125–6
 Sankore University (Mali) 686
 Sannazzaro, Jacopo, 'De partu virginis' xxiv
 Sansal, Boualem 609, 615
 Sanskrit 650, 657–60
 dismissal 663
 history 652, 655
 scholarship 658–60
 translations from 658
 Western support for retention 661

- Sant, Indira, *The Snakeskin and Other Poems* lii
Santa (1931) 1052–4, 1058
 Santana, Antonio López de, General 867
 Santángel, Luis de 293
 Santiago, Silviano 323
 Santiago Vázquez, José 886
 Santillana, Prof. 260
 Santo Domingo, independence xxxii
 see also Haitian Revolution
 Santos, Bienvenido N. 365, 369
 Brother, My Brother 381–2
 Distances: In Time 371
 The Villa Magdalena 382
 The Volcano 382
 The Wounded Stag 371
 You Lovely People 381–2
 Sarah, Robyn 193
 Sarang, Vilas 715
 Sarduy, Severo 323–4
 Gestures xlviii
 Sarlo, Beatriz 310–11, 312–13
 Sarmiento, Domingo Faustino 304–5
 Facundo, Civilization and Barbarism 305, 319
 Saro-Wiwa, Ken 904
 Pita Dumbrok's Prison 931
 Prisoners of Jebs 931
 Soza Boy: A Novel in Rotten English lv, 919
 Sarraounia (1986) 1057
 Sarraut, Albert, *The Economic Development of the French Colonies* xl
 Sarsfield, Mairuth, *No Crystal Stair* 208
 Sartre, Jean-Paul 184, 257, 274–5, 1078, 1079, 1083, 1087, 1091, 1092, 1131
 Anti-Semite and Jew 1081, 1085
 Black Orpheus xlv, 1078
sataka (Telugu verse form) 659
 satire 931
 Sattthianadhan, Krupabai 1027
 Saguna 112
 Saukampee (Nahathaway Indian) 173
 Savard, Félix-Antoine, *Ménard, Maître Draveur* 176
 Sawyerr, T. J. 1007
 al-Sayyāb, Badr Shākir 257
 ‘The Arab Maghrib’ 269, 270
 ‘The Blind Whore’ 269
 ‘Canticle of the Rain’ 269
 Withered Fingers xliii
 Schäfer, Jürgen 714
 Schaffer, Kay, and Sidonie Smith, *Human Rights and Narrated Lives* 128
 Schami, Rafik 631, 633
 Schech, Susanne 4
 schizoglossia 715–16, 723–4, 725
 Schlegel, August Wilhelm von xxxiii
 Schneider, E. W. 709
 Scholtz, A. H. M. 349
 Schreiner, Olive 335–6
 The Story of an African Farm xxxvi, 335
 Trooper Peter Halket of Mashonaland 335–6
 Schwarz, Roberto 311
 Misplaced Ideas: Essays on Brazilian Culture lix
 Schwarz-Bart, Simone 249
 The Bridge of Beyond li
 Ti Jean l'horizon (Between Two Worlds) 609, 1090
 science fiction 239
 Scofield, Gregory 506
 Scola, Ettore 1059
 Scotland, Union with England (1707) xxix
 Scott, David 224, 238, 240–1
 Scott, D. C. 176
 Scott, Dennis 231, 245, 246–7
 Scott, Gail 189
 Scott, Kim 514, 525
 Benang 524, 525
 True Country 525
 (and Hazel Brown), *Kayang and Me* 522–3, 525
 Scott, Lawrence, *Aelred's Sin* 751
 Scott, Paul
 The Jewel in the Crown xlix, 927
 The Raj Quartet xlviii, 1139
 Staying On 1136
 Scott, Sir Walter 174, 175, 337, 557, 771–2
 sea, significance/imagery of 42–4, 434, 803–4, 811–16, 1090–1
The Sea and Poison (1986) 1066
Sea Venture, wreck of 574
 Sealy, Allan, *The Trotter-Nama* 784
 Sealy, Joe 208
 seamen, non-white 11–12
 requests to return home with white wives 12
 Sears, Djanet
 The Adventures of a Black Girl in Search of God 207
 Harlem Duet 207
 (ed.), *Testifyin': Contemporary African Canadian Drama* 205, 207
Season of Migration to the North (Sālih) I, 17, 263–4, 272–4, 755, 774–5, 779–81, 784, 894
 characterization 274
 Sebbar, Leïla 610, 1093
 La Seine était rouge, Paris Octobre 1961 610
 Shérazade, 17 ans, brune, frisée, les yeux verts 610

- 'secularization thesis' 764
 Segalen, Victor 1092-3
 A Lapse of Memory 1093
Sejarah Melayu (Malay Annals, traditional) 377
 Sekese, Azariele M. 693
 Selkirk, Alexander 61
 Selvadurai, Shyam
 Cinnamon Gardens 192, 203
 Funny Boy lix, 192, 203
 (ed.), *Story Wallah! A Celebration of South Asian Fiction* 202
 Selvon, Sam 235, 578, 584, 721, 804, 1162
 'The Cricket Match' 226
 The Housing Lark 235, 761
 An Island Is a World 817, 819
 The Lonely Londoners xlii, 74, 235, 580, 581-3, 586, 724, 933
 Moses Ascending 235, 586, 761
 Moses Migrating 235
 Sembene, Ousmane
 cinema 1046-7; choice of language 1050
 Le Docker noir 607, 1046
 God's Bits of Wood xlvii, 160, 756
 Seme, Pixley 69
 Semitic scripts 685
 Sen, Amartya, *Argumentative Indian* 431
 Senegal 1100, 1131
 cinema 1046-8, 1055-6
 Senesi, Mauro, 'The Giraffe' 914
 Senghor, Lamine, *La Violation d'un pays* 606
 Senghor, Léopold Sédar xli, 159, 169, 247, 560, 696, 747, 938-9, 961, 989-90, 991-2, 1084
 early life/education 1106, 1107-8, 1111-12
 interpretation of Negritude 1105-6, 1111-15, 1120-1; focus on race 1112-13, 1114-15
 Nobel candidacy 1131
 principal themes 1112
 racial/cultural heritage 1113
 role in Negritude movement 1100, 1108, 1110
 Chants d'ombre 606
 (ed.), *Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie nègre et malgache de langue française* xlv, 1112
 Hosties noires 606, 1112
 'Nuit de Sine' 140, 939
 'Prayer for Peace' 747
 'Snow upon Paris' 747
 Senior, Olive 206, 821
 Discerner of Hearts 206
 Encyclopedia of Jamaican Heritage 206
 Gardening in the Tropics 206, 249
 Over the Roofs of the World 206
 Shell 206
 Şenocak, Zafer 632
 Atlas der tropischen Deutschland 632
 Der Errotomane 632
 Gefährliche Verwandtschaft 632
 Das Land hinter dem Buchstaben 632
 Der Mann im Unterhemd 632
 Die Prärie 632
 War Hitler Araber? 632
 Zungenentfernung: Berichte aus der Quarantänestation 632
 Sepamla, Sipho 341
Septem horae canonicae (anon., 1514) xxiii
 September 11 attacks lx, 600, 1015, 1133-4, 1143
 Serampore Mission Press 665-6
 Serote, Mongane Wally 341, 723, 1149
 To Every Birth Its Blood liv
 Seth, Vikram 396-7, 398, 427, 431-2, 776, 787, 1030, 1150
 An Equal Music 910, 918-19
 The Golden Gate 397, 437
 From Heaven Lake: Travels through Sinkiang and Tibet 76, 430
 A Suitable Boy lix, 431, 433, 725-6, 909-10, 922, 1144
 Sethi, Robbie, *The Bride Wore Black* 930
 settler colonies 18-19, 446-7
 assimilation vs annihilation policies 19
 attitude to mother country 19
 conflicts with native population 332-3
 diasporic communities 20
 enclave/segregationist approach 19
 interbreeding with native population 19
 place in postcolonial studies 447, 493
 relations with native population 171
 relations with other settlers 171
 women's role/accounts 66, 174
 see also autobiography
 Seven Years War (1756-63) xxix, 8, 742
 sexual relations, interracial 19, 956
 fictional depictions 909
 prohibition 347, 902
 Seymour, A. J. 232, 246
 al-Shabbī, Abū al-Qāsim 267
 Shadbolt, Maurice 447
 Shadd, Mary Ann 204
 Shah, Idries, *Adventures, Facts and Fantasies of Darkest England* 76
 Shah, Ryhaan, *A Silent Life* 760
 Shah Jahan, (Mughal) Emperor xxvi

- Shahab, Qudratullah, 'Ya Khuda' 762–3
 Shakespeare, William xxiv–xxv, xxxiii, 60, 409,
 418, 724, 776, 781–2
 adaptations for Indian stage/screen 776
 film adaptations 1049
 translations into African languages 691
 The Comedy of Errors 689
 Hamlet 810, 961
 Julius Caesar 689
 King Lear 780
 Macbeth 781, 782, 810
 Othello 207, 780, 782, 810
 Romeo and Juliet 777–8, 1009
 see also *The Tempest*
 Shammass, Anton, *Arbascues* lvi
 Shamsie, Kamila, *Salt and Saffron* 762
 Shanawdithit ('Nancy April') 187
 Sharabi, Hisham 254
 Sharma, Poonam, *All Eyes On Her* 1035
 Sharpe, Jenny 980–1
 Sharples, Pita, 'The Space Invaders Machine'
 474–5
 Sharrad, Paul 38
 al-Shārūnī, Yūsuf 275
 Shasrawi, Abd al-Rahman, *The Earth* xlv
 Shaw, George Bernard 776, 1144
 Shawqi, Ahmad 267, 269
 Diwan xli
 al-Shaykh, Ḥanān, *The Story of Zahra* 266
 Shelley, Mary, *Frankenstein* 467, 910
 Shelley, Percy Bysshe 771, 959
 Shelley, Rex
 People of the Pear Tree 378
 The Shrimp People 378
 Sher Shah, Emperor xxiv
 Sheridan, Jim 564
 Sherlock, Philip, and Hazel Bennett, *The Story of
 the Jamaican People* 230
 Shetty, Manmohar 397
 al-Shibibi, Shaykh Muḥammad Bāqir 263
 Shields, Carol 186, 190
 Larry's Party 190
 The Stone Diaries 190
 Unless 190
 Shi'ism 277
 Shikatani, Gerry, and David Aylward (eds),
 *Paper Doors: An Anthology of Japanese
 Canadian Poetry* 201
 Shimazaki, Aki 202
 Shiv Sena (Hindu extremist party) 675
 Shivaprasad, Raja 667
 Shivdasani, Menka 400, 402
 Shoemaker, Adam 514, 517
 Shohat, Ella 1049, 1182–3
 Sholokov, Mikhail 774
 short stories 929–30
 cycles 929–30
 Shrishti (publishers) 1032
 Shroff, Satis 409
 Sia, *le rêve du python* (2001) 1056
 Siburapha, *Behind the Painting* xlii
 Siddiq, Muhammad 17
 Sidhwa, Bapsi 723
 Cracking India lvii
 The Crow Eaters 765
 Ice Candy Man 766
 Siemerling, Winfried 192
 Sienkiewicz, Henryk 774
 Sierra Leone 9
 Signs (journal) 1166
 Silgado, Melanie 400–1
 'For Father on the Shelf' 401
 Silvera, Makeda 191, 206
 Sim, Katherine 356
 Simon, Bruce 49, 52
 Simon, Claude 1130
 Simon, Ella 521
 Simon, Sherry 192
 Sinavaiana-Gabbard, Caroline 813
 Sinclair, Upton 774
 Sindhi (language) 657
 impact of Partition 651
 Singapore 352, 353, 355
 economy 353
 Housing Development Board 376
 internal discord 355
 languages 359, 360, 718, 719, 724
 linguistic policy 373
 literature in English 373–81
 new poetry 375
 public/private dichotomy 374–5
 social transformations 376
 theatre 379–80
 University 361
 Singer, Isaac Bashevis liii
 Singh, Jyotsna 781
 Singh, Khushwant, *Train to Pakistan* 433, 766
 Singh, Richa 125–6
 Sinn Féin xxxviii, 556
 Sir Syed see Ahmed Khan
 Siskind, Mariano 15
 Sissoko, Cheick Oumar 1045–6, 1048
 Sistren collective (Jamaica) 125, 128
 Sita Sings the Blues (2008) 1066
 Sitaramayya, Pattabhi 674, 675
 Sivanandan, A. 588

- When Memory Dies* lx
- Sixth Kaffir War (1834–5) xxxiii
- Sixtus IV, Pope 81
- Skármeta, Antonio, *I Dreamt the Snow Was Burning* lii
- SLA (Second Language Acquisition) theory 717
- Slattery, Luke 467
- slave narratives (autobiographical) 22, 23, 36, 67–8, 112
- of Canadian escapees 204–5
- Caribbean 231–2
- compilations 127
- constraints 34–5
- influence on later writers 575–6
- UK publication 574–6
- slave narratives (fictional) 30–54, 57, 207, 596–7
- Brazilian setting, compared with American 48
- Latin American 305–7
- ‘neo-slave narratives’ 57
- slave trade
- (fictionalized) critiques 30, 111
- restrictions/prohibitions xxxi, xxxi, xxxv, 142, 745
- slavery
- abolition 11, 16, 174, 745, 888–9; calls for 552, 574, 951
- documentation, master-dominated 33–5
- identification with colonialism 315
- justifications 30–1, 1114
- survival into postcolonial period 315
- see also slave trade; slaves
- slaves
- cultural recollections, informing present day 51–3
- escape to Caribbean 220–2
- import to England 573
- importation to South Africa 329, 759
- intellectual abilities 222–3
- linguistic constraints 947, 949
- murder for insurance purposes 237–8, 951–3
- rebellions xxx–xxxi, xxxiv, 221, 305, 306; see also Haitian Revolution
- see also slave narratives (autobiographical); slave narratives (fictional)
- Slemon, Stephen 171, 529, 855–6
- Slipperjack, Ruby, *Honor the Sun* 197–8
- Shundog Millionaire* (2009) 443
- Sly and the Family Stone 967
- Smallwood, Joe 187
- Smallwood, Thomas 204
- Smart, Patricia 189
- Smiles, Samuel 114
- Smith, A. M. J. (ed.), *New Provinces* 177, 179
- Smith, Celia/Charles 521
- Smith, Ian 746, 748
- Smith, Mikey 229
- Smith, Shirley 521
- Smith, Sidonie, and Julia Watson, *De/Colonizing the Subject: The Politics of Gender in Women’s Autobiography* 108, 128
- see also Schaffer, Kay
- Smith, Wilbur 1011
- Smith, William Ramsay 511–12
- Smith, Zadie 599, 1127
- The Autograph Man* 1145
- On Beauty* 787, 1145
- White Teeth* lx, 598–9, 761, 784, 787, 919, 1145
- Smythe, Thomas 547
- Snead, James 920
- So Be It* (2001) 1055–6
- Soares de Souza, Gabriel 294
- Socé, Ousmane 1107
- Mirage de Paris* 606–7
- ‘Social Darwinism’ 541–2, 690
- social realism 436
- compared with magical realism 848
- Social Text* (journal) 1166, 1168, 1171–2
- Society for the Suppression of Obscenity in India 1026
- sociolinguistics 706, 707–8, 712, 714–15, 717–18, 735
- literary application 713, 715, 719–26, 728
- Soga, Tiyo 338, 688, 693
- Solway, David 193
- Solzhenitsyn, Aleksandr 1130
- Somalia, civil war (1991–) lvii
- Somerville, Margaret 522
- Sommerville, Edith, and Violet Martin, *The Real Charlotte* 557
- Somtow, S. P. 383
- Dragon’s Fin Soup* 383
- Jasmine Nights* 383
- song, relationship with poetry 959–69, 977
- Song of Lawino: A Lament* (p’Bitek) 748, 947, 960
- religious imagery 971–2
- Songhay people/culture 138–9
- Sophocles, *Antigone* 341
- Soriano, Osvaldo
- A Funny Dirty Little War* liv
- Soudah, Wadi 633
- SouEIF, Ahdaf 756–7
- The Map of Love* 264, 757

- South Africa
 Asian/Islamic community 759
 cinema 1041, 1056–7
 clashes of British and Dutch settlers
 xxxiii–xxxiv, 19, 329, 333–4
 Dutch settlement xxvii, xxxiii–xxxiv
 emergence of black intellectualism 338
 English-speaking settler culture 335
 independent African churches 89
 National Film and Video Foundation 1041,
 1056
 Nationalist Party 689–91
 political history 330–1
 post-apartheid elections lix, 109
 riots (2008) 698–9
 role in British Empire 335
 segregationist policies 330
 settlements/migrations 329
 textured quality of postcoloniality 329, 334
 Truth and Reconciliation Commission 743–4
 Union of, establishment xxxviii
see also apartheid regime
- South African literature
 black 329, 338–40, 1011
 diversity 329
 drama 340–1
 impact of Black Consciousness Movement
 340–5
 poetry 341
 religious, local-language 91
 religious themes 743–4
 role of local languages 348
- South Asian literature
 Christian themes 752–3
 Hindu themes 765–6
 intertextuality 926–8
 Islamic themes 758–9
 transnational writings/themes 434
see also South Asian poetry
- South Asian poetry 385–410
 common heritage 385
 pre-independence 385–91; criticisms 390
 prognosis 410
 themes 941
see also Bangladesh; Indian poetry; Pakistan
- South Asian Review* 1167
- Southeast Asia
 cultural diversity 352, 353–4
 decline of European languages 357–8
 decolonization 353, 355, 448
 definition 352
 economy/ies 353–4
 European colonization 354–5
 Islamic community 760
 Japanese occupation 355
 religions 353, 765–6
 spread of European languages 356–60
 trading relations 354
see also English (language); Southeast Asian
 literature
- Southeast Asian literature
 autobiography 362–3
 claustrophobia of settings 378–9
 colonial period 355–6
 disaporic 381–2
 drama 363–4, 367, 370–1, 379–81
 Islamic themes 757–8
 minoritarian 382–3
 multi-ethnic settings/themes 376–8
 poetry 361–2, 366–7, 370–6
 prose fiction 376–9
 short stories 362, 365–6, 376
- Southerne, Thomas, *Oroonoko* 30
- Sow Fall, Aminata, *The Beggars' Strike* liv, 756
- Şowande, Şobşwale, *Iwe Ekini Şobş* 694
- Soweto Poets 341
- Soyinka, Wole 151, 696, 698, 719, 858, 935,
 961, 1123, 1142, 1159
 arrest/imprisonment 1129
 biography 1129
 criticisms 1130, 1132, 1135
 Nobel Literature Prize lvi, 3, 1127, 1129–33,
 1147–8, 1149; significance of choice 1131–2
Aké: The Years of Childhood 120–1
Forest of a Thousand Demons (translation) 160,
 161–3 (*see also* ÒgbójúOde Nínú Irínmalè)
Idanre, and other Poems xlix
The Interpreters 747
Myth, Literature and the African World lii,
 168
 'Neo-Tarzanism: the poetics of pseudo-
 tradition' 1132
Ogun Abibiman 941
The Road xlviii
Season of Anomy 747
The Strong Breed 1055–6
see also *Death and the King's Horseman*
- space-making, colonial 16–20, 25
 and cinema 1040, 1049
 manipulation of relations between local
 groups 16–17
 nature/functions 16–17
 postcolonial appropriation 1095
- Spain
 Colonial Office xxiii
 colonial rebellions 14

- conflicts over colonial possessions xxix, xxvii–xxviii
 expulsion of Arabs/Jews 7, 16
 harshness of colonial rule: protests from own side 296–7; *see also* ‘Black Legend’
 linguistic policy 290–1, 357, 547
 loss of colonies lii, xxxi–xxxii, xxxvii, 12–16, 303, 314–15
 New World conquests xxiii–xxiv, 6–7, 289, 544–5, 874; personified stagings 299
 Republic, proclamation of xxxv
 Southeast Asian colonies 354
 weakening of position in Europe 13
 ‘Spanglish’ 712
 Sparks, Allister 345
 Spencer, Herbert 284
 On Education 250
 Spenser, Edmund, *A View of the Present State of Ireland* 545–6, 547
 Spivak, Gayatri 4, 5, 6, 97, 311, 314, 428, 783, 794, 795, 796, 833–5, 989, 1001, 1086, 1179
 ‘Can the subaltern speak?’ 1176–7
 The Postcolonial Critic lviii
 Sri Aurobindo *see* Ghose, (Sri) Aurobindo
 Sri Lanka 392
 internal strife, literary impact 407–8
 languages 653
 poetry 406–8
 postcolonial cinema 1051
 see also Ceylon
 Srivastava, Atima, *Looking for Maya* 598
 St John, Bruce, ‘Cricket’ 226
 St Omer, Garth 235
 Stam, Robert 1042, 1060
 see also Johnson, Randal
 Stanley, Henry Morton 64–5, 70, 76
 Stanzel, Franz K. 911
 Stead, C. K. 477
 Smith’s Dream 472, 473
 Walking Westward 470
 Steckley, John L. 509
 Stedman, John Gabriel 236
 steel band music 216, 241
 Steele, Shelby, *White Guilt* 538
 Steinbeck, John 774
 The Pastures of Heaven 929
 Tortilla Flat 929
 Steinhauer, Henry Bird 498
 Stendhal (Marie-Henri Bayle) 774
 Stephansson, Stephan 187
 Stephens, James, *The Crock of Gold* 559
 Stephens, Thomas, Fr 655–6
 stereotyping (of colonized peoples) 355–6, 907, 921–3
 inversion 923–5
 reinforcement by Negritude movement 1120–1
 retention/subversion in Indian fiction 922–3
 see also ‘civilizing mission’; infantilization;
 Ireland
 Sterne, Laurence 575
 Tristram Shandy 931
 Stevenson, Robert (film director) 1044
 Stevenson, Robert Louis (writer) 65, 776
 Stewart, George 1–2
 Still, William, *The Underground Railroad* 205
 Stimpson, Catherine 1179
 Stocking, George, Jr 985
 Stoker, Bram, *Dracula* 557
 Stoll, David 123
 Stoller, Paul 137–9, 150–1
 Stow, Randolph, *To the Islands* 744
 Stowe, Harriet Beecher, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* xxxiv, 30, 204
Straits Chinese Magazine 360
 Straits Settlements 8, 110–11
 ‘strategic primitivism’
 ‘bad faith’ problem 1002
 compensatory nature 1002–3
 defined 983, 989
 engagement with vanished spaces 994–5
 inversion strategy 989–93, 999
 limitations 1001–3
 magical strategy 995–9
 parodic strategy 999–1001
 problems posed by 983–4
 risk of reaffirmation of stereotypes 1001–2
 schema of configuration 983–4
 self-primitivizing 989
 utopian strategy 993–5
 Stree (publishers) 1032
 Strongman, Luke 1136–7
 Stuart, Francis, *Redemption* 562
 Sturm, J. C. 531–2
 subaltern studies 1175–8
 Subaltern Studies series liv
 Subedi, Abhi 409
 sublime, treatments of 922–3
 Subramani
 Duaka Puraan 824
 ‘Gone Bush’ 815
 Subramaniam, Arundhati 403
 Sudan
 British evacuation xxxvi, xxxvi
 postcolonial literature 263–4

- Sudan (cont.)
 proclamation of independence xlvii
 revolt against British rule 251
- Sudham, Pira
The Force of Karma 382–3
Monsoon Country 382–3
- Suez Canal xxxv, xxxvi, xlvii
- Sufism 264, 268–9, 763–4
- Sugars, Cynthia 171
- Suharto, President 131
- Suhrawardy, Shahid 391, 404
Essays in Verse 391
- Sui Sin Far *see* Eaton, Edith
- Sulaiman, Huzir, *Atomic Jaya* 381
- Suleman, Ramadan 1056
- Suleri, Sara 774, 776
Meatless Days 107, 930
 ‘Woman skin deep: feminism and the postcolonial condition’ 1177, 1178
- Sullivan, Jack 521
- Sullivan, Robert 813
- Sun City 65
The Sun Dancin’ (collection of life stories) 522
- Sunico, Ramon C. 372–3
- Suong Thu Huong, *Paradise of the Blind* lvii
- supernatural, postcolonial treatments of
 927–8
see also Aborigines; Latin America; magical realism; uncanny
- Supple, Tim 3
- Surendran, C. P. 397
- Suri, Chinnaya 667
- Surrealism 1074
 influence on magical realism 840, 842
 influence on Negritude movement 1111
 magical realist critiques/disengagement 844, 865
- Süskind, Patrick, *Perfume* 852
- Sutherland, Bruce 1, 1156
- Sutherland, John 177
- Sutherland, Ronald 179
- Suzack, Cheryl 506
- Svit, Brina 615
- Swahili 154, 685–6, 691, 713, 758–9
 literary traditions 695–6
- Swan, Susan, *The Biggest Modern Woman in the World* 190
- Swanzy, Henry 578
- Swaziland xxxvi
- Swift, Jonathan, *Gulliver’s Travels* xxix, 61, 925
- Syal, Meera 583
Anita and Me 598
Life Isn’t All Ha Ha Hee Hee 598
- Sykes, Roberta (Bobbi) 451, 513, 517, 521
- Symonds, Scott 192
- Synge, John Millington 559, 560
Deirdre of the Sorrows 559
The Playboy of the Western World 559
- Syria xxxiii
 conflict with France (1919) xl
- Szyborska, Wislawa 1128
- Tadjer, Akli, *Bel-Avenir* 617
- Tagalog (language) 368
- Tagore, Rabindranath 390–1, 406, 425, 430, 560, 774, 776
 Nobel Literature Prize xxxix, 390, 1028, 1128
Chaturanga 409
Gitanjali 390, 1028
Home and the World xxxviii
Nationalism xxxix
- Tahir, Athar 404
- Tahir, Ibrahim, *The Last Imam* 755
- Tahiti xxxv
- al-Tahtāwī, Rifā’a Rāfi’ 253
- Taine, Hippolyte 284
- Taiwé, Kolyang Dina, . . . *dann ist das Herz verwundet: Eine Begegnung der Kulturen* 641
- al-Takarli, Fu’ād 275
Gladnesses and Pains 260
The Long Way Back 283–4
- Taliban lx
- Tamahori, Lee 533
- Tamil (language) 650
 devotional poetry 974–7
 reading public 653
 writings in 393, 402–3
- Tamil (people)
 depictions of life 407–8
 protests at national use of Hindi 674–5, 680
- Tāmir, Zakariyyah 275
- Tan Hwee Hwee
Foreign Bodies 378–9
Mammon Inc. 378–9
- Tanganyika xxxvi
 independence xlvii
see also Tanzania
- Tanner, Alain 1059
- Tansi, Sony Labou 1090
The Antipeople lv
- Tanzania xlviii, 10
 banned popular fiction 1012
 linguistic policy 716
- Taqi, Mir Muhammad, *Zikr-I Mir* 109
- Tara (publishers) 1032

- Taracena, Arturo 123
 Tash Aw, *The Harmony Silk Factory* 382
 Tasso, Torquato, 'Gerusalemme liberata' xxv
 Taufiq, Suleman 631, 633
 Taussig, Michael 851–2, 998–9
 Tavernier, Bertrand 1059
 Tawada, Yoko 635–6, 643
 Talisman 636
 Übersetzungen 636
 Wo Europa anfängt 636
 Tawake, Sandra 477–8
 Taylor, Alf 514, 518
 Long Time Now 530
 Taylor, Drew Hayden 197, 506
 The Bootlegger Blues 197
 Education Is Our Right 197
 Only Drunks and Children Tell the Truth 197
 Someday 197
 Toronto at Dreamer's Rock 197
 Taylor, James O. 187
 Taylor, Patrick 1121
 Tchak, Sami
 Filles de Mexico 614
 Hermína 614
 Le Paradis des chiots 614
 Te Ao Hou (journal) 531–2
 tea-meetings (Caribbean) 229, 245
 Teaiwa, Teresia Kieuea 813, 822
 Searching for Nei Nim'anoa 814
 Teasdale, Sara 366
 Tecumseh, Chief 195
 Tekin, Latife, *Dear Shameless Death* 855, 857
 television, in Africa 694
 Telugu (language) 652, 657, 659
 Tempels, Placide, Father 86, 94–5, 105
The Tempest (Shakespeare) 35, 97, 233, 574,
 778–9, 781–2, 802, 804, 806, 807–11,
 823, 892
 Temple, John, *The Irish Rebellion* 546
 temporality, dislocations of 323–4, 436–7,
 919–20
 Tennyson, Alfred, Lord, 'Timbuctoo' xxxiii
 Teno, Jean-Marie 1046
 Tent Embassy (Australia 1972) 451–2,
 470, 530
 Terada, Rei 46
 'Terra Australis Incognita', search for 61–2
terra nullius, concept of 806
 see also Australia
 Tertullian 81
 Thackeray, Bal 675
 Thackeray, Raj 649, 650, 675
 Thaiday, Willie 521
 Thailand 352, 353
 languages 358, 359
 minoritarian writing 382–3
 Tham, Claire
 Fascist Rock 376
 Saving the Rainforest 376
 Tham, Hilary 382
 Thaman, Konai Helu 821
 Tharoor, Shashi 903, 913, 927
 The Great Indian Novel 784, 903,
 927, 930
 Tharu, Susie 678
 Thatcher, Margaret 595
 Thayil, Jeet 397, 437
 These Errors Are Correct 435
 Thelwell, Michael, *The Harder They Come* liv
 Themba, Can 338
 Théoret, France
 Nous parlerons comme on écrit 191–2
 Une voix pour Odile 191–2
 theory, relationship of poetry to 947–50,
 977–8
 Theresa, Mother 82–3
 Thesiger, Wilfred 71–2
 Arabian Sands 71
 The Marsh Arabs 71
 Thieme, John 807
 (ed.), *Arnold Anthology of Post-Colonial
 Literature in English* 24
Things Fall Apart (Achebe) xlvii, 3, 159–60, 682,
 1141
 academic status 1019
 anti-primitivist message 988–9
 comparisons with other works 99, 161,
 165–6, 943–7, 978
 critiques of missionary work 95, 96–9, 102–3,
 747
 religious/folkloric imagery 944–5
 sales figures 1160
 treatments of time/space 920, 921
 Third Cinema Movement 1045
 Thomas, Audrey 187, 190
 Intertidal Life 190
 Thomas, D. M., *The White Hotel* 854
 Thomas, Dylan 793
 Thomas, I. B. 1008
 Thomas, Isaac Babalola, *Segilola, Eleyinyu
 Ege* 694
 Thomas, Nigel 206
 Behind the Face of Winter 208
 Thompson, David 173
 Thompson, Thomas Elias, Rev., *The African
 Trade for Negro Slaves, Shewn to be Consistent*

- with *Principles of Humanity, and with the Laws of Revealed Religion* 745
- The Thousand and One Nights* 277
- Thrasher, Anthony Apakark, *Thrasher ... Skid Row Eskimo* 510
- Throne of Blood* (1957) 782
- Thumboo, Edwin 361, 373–4
- ‘For Peter Wee’ 361
- Rib of Earth* 361
- ‘tidialectics’ 803, 804, 816, 828
- Tieck, Dorothea xxxiii
- Tieck, Ludwig xxxiii
- Tiempo, Edilberto 370
- Tiempo, Edith 370, 372
- The Tracks of Babylon and Other Poems* 372
- Tiffin, Helen *see* Ashcroft, Bill
- Tilak, Bal Gangadhar 427
- Tilib, Hasan, *Āyat Jim* 268
- Timbuctoo, annexation by Morocco xxv
- Timor-Leste 352, 353, 355
- tirailleurs* (African troops), role in French army 10
- Tirunal, Kartika, Maharajah of Travancore 659
- Tituba (Salem slave) 233
- Tizón, Héctor, *The Man Who Came to a Village* lvii
- Tlatelolco (Nahuatl city) 297–8
- Tod, James, *Annals and Antiquities of Rajast’han* 386
- Todd, Richard 1145
- Toer, Pramodya Ananta, *The Buru Quartet* liii, 757–8
- Tolstoy, Leo 774, 850, 1128
- Toomer, Jean 1108
- Torabully, Khal 804, 816, 831
- Tordesillas, Treaty of (1494) xxiii
- Torgovnick, Marianna 987
- Torres, Antonio, *The Land* lii
- Torres, Emmanuel 372
- Torres Strait Islanders 513
- Toure, K. 1149
- tourist brochures 921
- Tovar, Lupita 1053–4
- Toyin, Falola 94
- Toynbee, Arnold J. 262
- Traba, Marta, *Rites of Summer* xlix
- Traill, Catherine Parr 66, 189
- The Backwoods of Canada* 174
- transculturation 324–5, 338, 1095
- Transition Magazine: An International Review* xlvii
- translations, by original authors 715
- see also* Bible; names of languages
- transnationalism 238
- Transvaal, foundation of republic xxxv, xxxviii
- Tranter, John 466
- Urban Myths: 210 Poems* 466
- Traoré, Sayouba, *Loin de mon village, c’est la brousse* 614
- travel narratives 7, 22, 23, 58–77, 112–13, 172–3, 910–11
- blending of fact and fiction 59
- Caribbean 74–6
- by the colonized 67–70
- emergence as major genre 70–3
- of high colonial period 63–5
- ideological problems 77
- ignorance of readers 59
- Indian 430
- ‘insider/outsider’ status, treatment of 71–2, 76
- Irish 542–3
- ‘lies’, permissibility of 72–3
- medieval/Renaissance 58–60
- modern scholars’ focus on 60
- (notionally) objective/scientific approach 62–3
- parodied 931
- popular accounts (C18) 61–2
- and popular fiction 65–6
- postcolonial 73–7, 636, 909; political/economic critiques 76–7
- reinforcement of popular stereotypes 62–3, 71–2, 911; satirized 76
- by women 66–7
- The Travels of Sir John Mandeville* (anon.) 60
- Tremblay, Michel 192
- Les Belles-Soeurs* 185, 192, 196
- Chroniques du Plateau-Mont-Royal* 742
- La Duchesse de Langeais* 192
- Hosanna* 192
- Trevelyan, Charles 417, 670
- On the Education of the People of India* 416, 417, 667–8
- Trevor, William, *The Story of Lucy Gault* 558
- Trinidad
- popular culture 229–30, 245, 961
- Yoruba community 216
- Trinity College, Dublin 548
- Tripathi, Goverdhanram 671
- Tripathi, Suryakant ‘Nirala’, *The Earthly Knowledge* xlii
- Tripoli xxix
- Tristan, Flora 307
- Trivedi, Harish 439–40, 781
- Troni, Alfredo, *Nga Mutiri* 693
- Trouillot, Michel-Rolph 316, 987
- Trudeau, Pierre Elliott 183–4, 193, 504

- Tsiolkas, Christos
Dead Europe 468–9
Loaded 468
- Tsonga (language), Bible translations 92
- Tucker, Margaret 521
- Tukaram, Saint 395–6
- Tunisia 251
- Tupac Amaru II 14
- Ṭūqān, Fadwā
The Horseman and the Night 1
A Mountainous Journey: A Poet's Autobiography
 261, 280
- Tuqan, Ibrahim, *Diwan* xliii
- Turcotte, Gerry 493
- Turgenev, Ivan 774
- Turkey
 emigrant population/writings *see* German
 literature; Germany
 proclamation of republic xl
- Turner, Cathy 882–3, 886, 900
- Turner, Graeme 1164
- Turner, J. M. W. 237
- Turner, Stephen 471–2
- Turner, Victor 168
- Tutu, Desmond, Archbishop 345, 743–4
- Tutuola, Amos 719, 858
Ajayi and his Inherited Poverty 747
The Palm-Wine Drinkard xlv, 170, 747, 1019
The Wild Hunter in the Bush of Ghosts 692
- Tuwahre, Hone, *No Ordinary Sun* 531
- Twain, Mark, *The Adventures of Huckleberry
 Finn* 917
- Two Thousand Seasons* (Armah) 909, 913, 914,
 916
 treatments of time/space 919–21
- Ty-Casper, Linda
Dream Eden 370
The Peninsulars 369–70
- Tylor, E. B. 984
- Tynes, Maxine 193
 'Africville Spirit' 208
- Tyrewala, Altaaf, *No God in Sight* 432–3
- U-Carmen eKhayelitsa* (2005) 1057
- U Win Pe 766
- Uddanta Martanda* (Hindi newspaper) 667
- Uganda xxxvi, 326, 1166
 Christian martyrdom 88
 independence xlvii, 10
 postcolonial poetry 960
- UK immigrant community
 accounts of experiences 579–87, 904
 adoption of 'British' values 581
- Caribbean 234–5
 discrimination against 579, 585, 588, 589–90,
 600; institutionalisation 595
- Indian 406
 'journey to illusion' 578, 579–81, 582, 773,
 808–9, 933, 965
 Southeast Asian 381
 urban communities 576–8
see also 'black Britain'
- UK postcolonial literature 576, 578–601
 defined 573
 innovativeness 582–3
 'not belonging,' sense of 572–3, 581
 second-generation 587–96
 visions for future 585, 587
- ul Islam, Mazhar, *The Season of Love, Bitter
 Almonds and Delayed Rains* 763
- 'Umar, Muḥammad 255
- Umavijani, Montri 382
- Unaipon, David 511–12
Leaves of Memory 520
*Legendary Tales of the Australian
 Aborigines* 512
My Life 520
- uncanny, encounters with 892–7
- UNIA (United Negro Improvement
 Association) 223
- United Democratic Front (SA) 344
- United Irishmen, 1798 rebellion 540–1, 551
 consequences 555
- United Kingdom
 class distinctions, critiqued 69–70
 colonial annexations xxxi, xxxvi, 251, 333–4,
 354, 740
 colonial leaders/writers educated in 69–70,
 389, 396, 576
 colonial policy 10–11, 536, 547; linguistic 728
 colonized peoples' accounts 68–70, 73–4,
 573–6
 conflicts with native populations 332–3
 cross-cultural history 573–4, 596–7
 cultural impact of colonialism 574
 Dominions Office xli
 immigration policy xlix
 indirect rule in colonies 68
 intellectual trends 716
 Islamic community/literature 761–2
 Migrants Liaison Service 577
 postwar economic conditions 577
see also England; India; Ireland; Northern
 Ireland; Scotland; UK immigrant
 community; UK postcolonial literature;
names of specific colonies/treaties/conflicts etc.

- United Nations
condemnation of apartheid xlvii
- United States
annexation of Hawaii 113
black literature 47–54, 959–60
Caribbean diaspora 234–5
censorship xxxix
Civil Rights movement 450–1, 502, 516, 631
Commonwealth literature studies 1156–7
Constitution xxx
cultural imperialism 449, 468, 1040,
1059–64; challenges to 1060–3
Deep South, black writing 1166
election (2008) 902
formation 8
hostility to, in contemporary discourse 924
Latin American studies 312
moves against slave trade xxxi
moves to curtail immigration xxxix
neo-imperialism (political/military) 447, 448,
1058–9, 1063–4
occupation of Philippines *see under*
Philippines
popular culture, imitations 1011
Puritanism 937
racial laws/reforms xliii, 895, 902
relations with Britain xxxi, xxxiv
relations with Germany xliii
relations with USSR liii
restrictions on foreign film screenings 1059;
European protests 1059
short story, development of genre
929–30
Southeast Asian diaspora 381–2
territorial expansion xxxii, xxxix, 496, 497,
874
visitors' accounts 74
war with Spain (1898) xxxvii, 13
withdrawal from Philippines 355, 368–9
see also American Revolution; Native
Americans; Vietnam War
- universities
in colonial Africa 687
funding cuts (1980s) 1161
Islamic 686
- University of the West Indies 225–6, 246
- Unsworth, Barry, *Sacred Hunger* 34, 1139
- Untouchable* (Anand) xlii, 422–5, 904
narrative technique 905, 919
optimism 424
plot structure 907
prose style 424
publication history 1028
religious themes 752
- Urdu (language) 657
evolution 651, 668–70
official recognition 670
prayers 972
reading public 653
writings in 404, 405–6, 421–2
- Uruguay, independence xxxii–xxxiii
- Uslar Pietri, Arturo 833, 835, 837–41, 863
The Creation of the New World lix
Godos, insurgentes y visionarios 837–8, 839–40,
844, 863–4
The Literature and Men of Venezuela 840–1
'Rain' 838, 862
The Red Lances 838
- U'Tam'si, Felix Tchicaya 749
Épitomé 749
Le Mauvais Sang 749
- utilitarianism 663–4, 715, 721
- Utrecht, Treaty of (1713) xxix
- Valdés, Mario J. 21–2
- Valente, Fernando 841
- Valenzuela, Luisa, *The Lizard's Tail* lv
- Valéry, Paul 862, 1107
- Vallejo, César 324, 560
- Van Camp, Richard 506
- van den Berg, Rosemary 522
- van der Kemp, J. T. 748–9
- van der Kroef, Justus M. 5, 1179
- van Herk, Aritha 186, 190
No Fixed Address 186
Places far from Ellesmere 186
The Tent Peg 186
- van Meerhof, Eva *see* Krotoa-Eva
- van Meerhof, Pieter 331
- van Niekerk, Marlene 349
- van Riebeeck, Jan 331
- van Toorn, Penny 511
- Vanderhaeghe, Guy 186
The Englishman's Boy 186
Vanity Fair (2004) 1065
- Varastah, Siyalkoti Mal 676
- Vargas Llosa, Mario 903
The Green House xlix
The Storyteller 993, 995
The Time of the Hero xlviii
- Vasco da Gama xxv
- Vasconcelos, José, *The Cosmic Race* xli, 874
- Vasconcelos, Simão de 294
- Vassanji, Moyo G. 11, 193, 203, 759
The Assassin's Song 763–4
The Book of Secrets 203, 759

- The Gunny Sack* lviii, 203, 759
The In-Between World of Vikram Lall 203
No New Land 203, 761
Uhuru Street 203, 759, 930
 (ed.), *A Meeting of Streams* 202
 Vatican Council 90
 Vaz Diaz, Selma 888
 Vazquez Rial, Horacio, *Triste's History* lvi
 Vendler, Helen 4
 Venezuela, (struggle for) independence
 xxxii–xxxiii, xxxiii, 838
 Venice, colonial possessions xxviii
 Vergès, Françoise 825
 Vergès, Paul 1075
 Verlaine, Paul 1107
 Verma, Marthanda 671
 Verma, Nirmal, *The Crows of Deliverance* lv
 Verma, Shrikant, *Magadh* lvi
 vernacular(s) *see* capitalism; India; languages
 (local)
 Verne, Jules, *The Mysterious Island* 807
 Vernon, Karina 208
 Versailles Conference/Treaty (1919) xxxix, 251,
 262–3, 621
 Versi, Ahmed 1135
 Verwoerd, Hendrik 691
 Viajayan, O. V. 776
 Short Stories liii
Vice Versa (journal) 194
 Victoria, Queen 68, 176
 Victorian Aborigines Advancement League 451
 Victorian literature, influence/deconstruction
 465
 video, emergence in popular culture 695
 Vidyasagar, Isvarchandra 667
 Vieira, José Luandino, *The Real Life of Domingos*
 Xavier lii
 Vietnam 352
 independence xlv, 355
 internal discord 355
 languages 358
 religions 353
 Vietnam War 21, 448–9, 621–2
 impact on Australian/NZ literature 449–50,
 452–5, 456–7, 469, 470–1, 472–4
 protest movement 449–50, 470, 1164
 withdrawal of troops 457
 Vieux, Marie 249
 Vigneault, Gilles 185
 Vikas (publishers) 1029, 1032
 Vilakazi, B. Wallet 151–5, 156–7, 169, 338
 choice of language 152–4, 684
 Amal Ezulu (*Zulu Horizons*) 153
 'Inkelenkele YakwaXhosa' (The Xhosa
 Calamity) 153
Inkondlo kaZulu (*Zulu Songs*) 152–3
 'Phezu Kwethuna LikaShaka' (The Grave of
 Shaka) 153
 'UShaka KaSenzangakhona' (Shaka, Son of
 Senzangakhona) 153
 Villa, José García 366
 Footnote to Youth 366
 Have Come, Am Here 366
 Poems by Dovegion 366
 Selected Poems and New 366, 371
 Volume Two 366
 Villemaire, Yolande 192
 Virahsawmy, Dev 804
 Toufann: A Mauritian Fantasy 810, 824
 Viray, Manuel E. 372
 Virchow, Rudolf 626
 Virgil (P. Vergilius Maro), *Aeneid* 300, 790
 Virginia xxvi
 Visram, Rosina 573
 Viswanathan, Gauri 419, 671
 'vital force,' Bantu belief in 95
 Vivekananda, Swami 390, 427
 Vizenor, Gerald 485, 493
 Vladislavić, Ivan 349
 The Folly lix
 The Restless Supermarket 348–9
 Voltaire (François-Marie Arouet) 1072–3
 Candide 1072, 1088
 voodoo 40
 Vyathit, Kedar Man 409
 Waberi, Abdourahman A. 609–10, 615,
 1094
 Aux États-Unis d'Afrique 614, 1071, 1094
 Transit 614
 Wachtel, Eleanor 792
 Wachtel, Nathan 297
 Wah, Fred 186, 200
 Waipuldanya 520
 Waitangi, Treaty of (1840) 469–71, 532,
 533–4
 Article II 471, 474
 infringements 471
 Walcott, Derek 18, 227–8, 244, 245, 246–7,
 719, 776, 792, 821, 897, 935, 940, 961,
 1095
 Christian themes 750
 commentary on Caribbean culture 215
 (comments on) racial heritage 941–2
 critiques 4
 influences 227, 234

- Walcott, Derek (cont.)
 Nobel Literature Prize lix, 3, 1129, 1133, 1151
 reworking of island stereotypes 808, 809
 themes of nature/sea 42–4, 803, 804, 811, 813, 814
 ‘Air’ 42
Another Life 121, 128, 750
Collected Poems lvi
Dream on Monkey Mountain 223
 ‘A Far Cry from Africa’ 809, 962
 ‘The Gulf’ 42
Henri Christophe 223
 ‘Homage to Gregorias’ 817
 ‘The Muse of History’ 792–3
Omeros *see Omeros* (main entry)
Pantomime 230, 233
 ‘The Schooner *Flight*’ 43–4
 ‘The Sea is History’ 42–3, 811
Selected Poems 244
The Star Apple Kingdom 32, 42–4
 ‘What the Twilight Says’ 223
- Walder, Dennis (ed.), *Post-Colonial Literatures in English: History, Language, Theory* 24
- Wali, Obiajunwa 683, 696–7
- A Walk in the Night* (1998) 1056
- Walker, Alice, *Meridian* 909
- Walker, Della 522
- Walker, Denis 451
- Walker, Kath (Oodgeroo Noonuccal) 512, 515–16, 521, 522, 535
 ‘Aboriginal Charter of Rights’ 515
Dawn Is At Hand 515, 517
My People 515
We Are Going 511, 515, 516
- Walker, Keith 1116
- Wallace, Edgar 1044
- Walley, Richard 531
- Walsh, William 1145
- Wang Gungwu, *Pulse* 361, 362
- Wangusa, Timothy, *Upon this Mountain* 748
- Wanjala, Chris 1011, 1012
- ‘War on Terror’ (2001–?) 1063–4
- Ward, Frederick, *Riverlisp* 208
- Ward, Glenyse 522
- Ward, Samuel Ringold 204
- Ward, William 665
- Wardhaugh, Robert 185
- Warland, Betsy 198
- Warner, Earl 231, 776
- Warner-Lewis, Maureen, *Guinea’s Other Sons* 216
- Warnes, Christopher 836, 851, 856–7, 865
- Warren, Colin John, *When the Going Gets Tough* 1017
- wars of religion 544
- Wasafiri* (journal) lv, 3, 108, 1161–2
- Watana, Onoto *see* Reeve, Winifred Eaton
- water closets, in Indian literature 422–4
- Watson, Julia *see* Smith, Sidonie
- Watson, Sam Wagan 514, 518–19
The Kadaitcha Song 525–7
- Watson, Sheila 187
- Watson, Tim 1156, 1157
- Watt, F. W. 1160
- Wattar, Tahir, *The Earthquake* 755
- Wauchope, Isaac 693
- Wagh, Evelyn 1044
Black Mischief xlii
- Weaver, Jace 489
- Webb, Phyllis 187
- Webber, Sabra 140–1
- Webster, Noah 718
- Wedde, Ian 473–6
 (ed.), *The Penguin Book of New Zealand Verse* 474–6
 ‘refrain ha ha’ 473–4
- Weinrich, Harald 631
- Weller, Archie 512
The Day of the Dog 525
Goin’ Home 525
Land of the Golden Clouds 525
- Wells, Ida B. 336
- Welty, Eudora, *The Golden Apples* 929
- Wendat people (Canada)
 language, missionaries’ involvement with 495, 509
 relations with settlers 494–5
- Wendt, Albert 477, 813–14, 822
 ‘Inside us the dead’ 814
Leaves of the Banyan Tree liv
Ola 814
- Wenzel, Jennifer 130
- Wernicke, Carl 950
- West, Ida 522
- West Germany
 postwar economic conditions 630–1
 support for neo-colonial regimes 621–2
- West Indies *see* Caribbean
- Western literature, impact of postcolonial on 22, 23
see also canon
- Westminster
 Statute of (1931) 171
 Treaty of (1654) xxvii
- Wevers, Lydia 533

- Wharton, Herb 529
 Wheatley, Phillis xxx
 Wheeler, Jordan, *Brothers in Arms* 199
 White, Hayden 38
 White, Patrick 458–9
 Nobel Literature Prize li
 Riders in the Chariot 742–3
 Voss 455–6
 Whitlam, Gough 457
 Whitlock, Gillian, *The Intimate Empire* 108
 Whitman, Walt 367, 452, 560
 ‘I Hear America Singing’ 878
 ‘Song of Myself’ 877
 Wickramasinghe, Martin 766
 The Changing Countryside 1051
 Wickremesinha, Sunetha 406–7
 Wickwire, Wendy 198
 Wicomb, Zoë 349
 Playing in the Light 743–4
 Widdowson, Frances, and Albert Howard,
 Disrobing the Aboriginal Industry 509
Wide Sargasso Sea (film, 1966) 1060
Wide Sargasso Sea (Rhys) xlix, 54, 231, 233, 774,
 779, 809–10, 879, 887–92, 896, 897
 film adaptation, depoliticization 1060
 fire, as leitmotif 889, 890–1
 generic conflicts 888–90
 historical background 888–9
 mirrors, as leitmotif 889, 890–1
 renaming of central character 888
 studies 887
 treatment of identity 890
 Wideman, John Edgar, *Damballah* 929
 Wiebe, Rudy 186
 A Discovery of Strangers 742
 The First and Vital Candle 744
 The Scorched-Wood People 186
 The Temptations of Big Bear 186
 (and Yvonne Johnson), *Stolen Life: The Journey*
 of a Cree Woman 197
 Wijeratne, Kamala 408
 Wijesinha, Rajiva 407
 Wikramasinha, Lakdasa 407
 Wilberforce, William 745
 ‘wild savagery,’ European views/fictionalized
 treatments 38–9
 Wilde, Oscar 389
 The Picture of Dorian Gray 557
 Wilding, Michael 453
 Wilkes, Richard, *Bulmurn* 524
 Wilkins, Charles 658
 Williams, Eric 224
 Capitalism and Slavery xliii
 Williams, Patrick, and Laura Chrisman,
 Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory
 (A Reader) 5
 Williams, Raymond 464
 Williams, Sherley Anne, *Dessa Rose* 53
 Willinsky, John 1181–2
 Empire of Words: The Reign of the OED 562
 Willis, Jane, *Geniesh: An Indian Girlhood* 195
 Willmot, Eric
 Below the Line 529
 Pemuhwauy 524
 Wills, William John 455
 Wilson, Daniel 176
 Wilson, Ethel 187
 Wilson, George O’Brien 956
 Wilson, R. R. 529
 Wilson, Woodrow xxxix
 Winch, Tara June 514
 Swallow the Air 530
 Wineera Pere, Vernice, *Mahanga* 531
 Winful, E. A. 694
 Winkramasinha 733
 Winter, Michael, *The Big Why* 187
 Winthrop, John xxvi
 Winton, Tim, *Cloudstreet* 457
 Wiseman, Adele 193
 The Sacrifice 185
 Wishart, John 1028
 Wisker, Gina 1051
 Wodehouse, P. G. 1036
 women
 autobiographical fiction 128–30
 collectives 124–7
 colonised territories personified as 921–2
 enslaved, fictional depictions 37–42, 48–54
 European, representations in postcolonial
 literature 279–80
 explorations, in Victorian era 67
 identity under colonial rule 1085, 1093–4
 in island narratives 809–10
 legalized discrimination against 502
 literary prizes 1128–9, 1145
 nationalist autobiographies 116
 non-white, migrations to UK 12
 as protagonists 905, 909
 sexist attitudes to, critiqued 486–7
 sexualized violence against 526; *see also*
 rape
 social constraints 31, 126, 957–8; escape
 from 66
 studies of postcolonial situation 1177–8
 travels/travel writings 66–7; empowerment
 through 66–7

- women (cont.)
 treatments in African/Islamic literature 756–7
 victimization 283–4
 in war situations 266–7
 writers: Australian Aborigine 519, 521–3,
 524–5, 527–9; Bangladeshi 405; Canadian
 188–92, 205–7; Caribbean 239–40, 249;
 Indian 393, 398–403, 435; Irish 566–7;
 Southeast Asian 362–3, 365, 366–7; UK
 immigrant 584–6
- Wong, Rita
Forage 201
Monkeypuzzle 201
- Wong-Chu, Jim, *Chinatown Ghosts* 200
see also Lee, Bennett; Lien Chao
- Wong Phui Nam 361–2, 373–4
Toccata on Ochre Sheaves 361
- Wood, Sir Charles 664, 670
- Wood, Marcus 34
- Woodcock, George 179
Northern Spring 185
- Woolf, Leonard 1036
- Woolf, Virginia 853, 1128
Mrs Dalloway 905
- Wooton, Charles 12
- Wordsworth, William 341, 924
Daffodils 129
The Prelude 128
- World Bank 435
- ‘World Englishes’ 705
- World War I xxxix, 621, 625
 aftermath 12
 deployment of colonial troops 10
 impact on primitivist thinking 985
- World War II xlii
 deployment of colonial troops 74
- Wormen, Lavina 205
- Wortley Montagu, Lady Mary 284
- Wright, Alexis
Carpentaria 529, 537–8
Plains of Promise 524, 527
- Wright, Judith 514
 ‘Fire Sermon’ 453–4
Shadow 453–5
 ‘Two Sides of a Story’ 455
- Wright, Michelle 637
- Wright, Richard, *Twelve Thousand Black Voices*
 914
- Writers’ Workshop of Calcutta 1030
- Wyile, Herb *see* Riegel, Christian
- Wylie, Elinor 366
- Wynter, Sylvia 249, 810
- Wyss, Johann David, *Swiss Family Robinson* 805–6
- Xala* (1973) 1047–8
- Xaquixaguane, battle of (1548) xxiv
- Xavier, François 83
- Xhosa (language), Bible translations 688
- Xhosa (people)
 ‘cattle-killing’ incident 332–3; modern
 reworkings 332–3
 conflicts with settlers 332–3
- Ximénez, Francisco 291–2
- Xu Xi 723
 ‘Writing the literature of non-denial’ 705,
 708
- Yabes, Leopold Y. 365
- Yācīne, Kāteb 269–70, 271, 1074, 1083
Nedjma 1076
- Yahp, Beth, *The Crocodile Fury* 382
- Yap, Arthur 374, 766
- Yaspal, ‘A Holy War’ 762
- Yate, William 745
- Yeadan, David 95
- Yeats, William Butler xl, 158, 168, 228, 391,
 559–60, 562, 563, 793, 939, 940, 1028
 (alleged) fascist leanings 560
 debates as to postcolonial standing 560
 ‘Celtic Twilight’ poetry 559
 Cuchulain poems/plays 559
 (ed.), *The Oxford Book of Modern Verse* 978
The Words upon the Window-Pane 557
 (and Augusta Gregory), *The Countess Cathleen*
 559
- Yee, Paul 187
Bamboo 200
The Bone Collector’s Son 200
Breakaway 200
The Curses of Third Uncle 200
Dead Man’s Gold and other stories 200
Ghost Train 200
Tales from Gold Mountain 200
- Yellin, Jean Fagan 53
- Yeo, Robert 364, 374
The Adventures of Holden Hong 376
Singapore trilogy 379
- Ying Chen 201
Un enfant à ma porte 201
Immobile 201
L’Ingratitude 201
Les Lettres chinoises 201
Le Mangeur 201
La Mémoire de l’eau 201
Quatre mille marches 201
Querelle d’un squelette avec son double 201
- Yirrkalā Bark petition (Australia 1963) 512, 530

- Yoda (publishers) 1032
 Yong Shu Hoong 375
 Yoruba (language/culture)
 (autobiographical) depictions of culture
 120–1, 161
 cinema 1062
 orthography, debates on 688
 religious writings 93–4
 role of mass media 695
 survival in Trinidad 216
 travelling theatre 143–4
 Young, David, and Keith Hollaman (eds.),
 Magical Realist Fiction: An Anthology 850–1
 Young, Robert 5, 894, 1180
 Colonial Desire 1102
 Postcolonialism 938
 White Mythologies lviii, 1102
 Yourcenar, Marguerite 1128, 1131
 Youssef, Saadi, *Songs Not for Others* xlv
 Yuson, Alfred A. 372–3
 Dream of Knives 373
 Great Philippine Jungle Energy Café 370
 Sea Serpent 373

 Zaghlūl, Fathī 255
 Zaghlūl, Sa'd 262–3
 al-Zahawī, Jamīl Ṣidqī 254
 Zaimoğlu, Feridun, *Kanak Sprak* 632
 Zaire lx
 see also Democratic Republic of the Congo
 Zambia xlviii
 Zamon, General xxxix
 Zamora, Lois Parkinson 851, 868
 Zanzibar xlviii
 abolition of slave trade xxxv
 colonial annexations/handovers xxiii, xxxvi
 Zapatista movement (Mexico) lix
 Zastoupil, Lynn 661, 663, 677

 al-Zayyāt, Aḥmad Hasan 259–60
 al-Zayyat, Latifah 280
 Zé do Rock (Claudio Matschulat) 634–5
 postcoloniality 635
 Deutsch gutt sonst Geld zuruck 634–5
 Fom winde ferfeelt 634
 UFO in der Küche 634
 Zeinab (1930) 1048
 Zemmouri, Estevanico/Mustafa 301
 Zephaniah, Benjamin 589
 Zimbabwe
 cinema 1046–7
 independence liv
 see also Rhodesia
 Ziyād, Tāriq B. 272
 Žižek, Slavoj, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*
 787–8
 Zobel, Joseph, *Rue Cases-Nègres (Black-Shack Alley)* 1051–2, 1072
 Zola, Émile 1073
 Zöllner, Abini, *Schokoladenkind: Meine Familie und andere Wunder* 638
 Zong! (Philip) 205, 237–8, 951–3, 959
 #24 951–2
 deployment of legal text 951–2,
 958, 977
 murder, vocabulary of 952
 structure 952–3
 Zoroastrianism 765
 Zubaan (publishers) 1032
 Zulu (language)
 newspapers 684
 poetry 152–3
 translation of Christian materials 688
 Zulu War (1879–81) xxxv
 Zulueta y da Costa, Rafael, *Like the Molave* 367