Kunapipi is a biannual arts magazine with special but not exclusive emphasis on the new literatures written in English. It aims to fulfil the requirements T.S. Eliot believed a journal should have: to introduce the work of new or little known writers of talent, to provide critical evaluation of the work of living authors, both famous and unknown, and to be truly international. It publishes creative material and criticism. Articles and reviews on related historical and sociological topics plus film will also be included as well as graphics and photographs.

The editor invites creative and scholarly contributions. The editorial board does not necessarily endorse any political views expressed by its contributors. Manuscripts should be double-spaced with notes gathered at the end, and should conform to the Harvard (author-date) system. Submissions should be in the form of a Word or Rich Text Format file sent by email attachment to acollett@uow.edu.au. Image files should be high resolution tif format and submitted on compact disc if larger than 1mb. Please include a short biography, address and email contact.

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All correspondence (manuscripts, inquiries, subscriptions) should be sent to:
Dr. Anne Collett
Editor — KUNAPIPI
English Literatures Program
University of Wollongong
Wollongong NSW 2522
Australia

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Tribute to Anna

Sonja Bahn
Jeanne Delbaere
Zeny Giles
Bernard Hickey
Paul Love
Hena Maes-Jelinek
Paul Sharrad
Chris Tiffin
Adi Wimmer

Isabel Carrera
Helen Gilbert
Gareth Griffiths
Dorothy Jones
Russell McDougall
Jamie Scott
Jennifer Strauss
Helen Tiffin

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European Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies

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*Kunapipi* refers to the Australian Aboriginal myth of the Rainbow Serpent which is the symbol of both creativity and regeneration. The journal’s emblem is to be found on an Aboriginal shield from the Roper River area of the Northern Territory of Australia.
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EDITORIAL

This special, and last, issue of Kunapipi is a celebration of Helen Tiffin’s contribution to the field of postcolonial studies. ‘Contribution’ is perhaps not the most appropriate word, as she has shaped and reshaped what that field is, how close or how far flung, how fenced or connected, how productive, how influential. Her most recognised and most quoted publication is the book she wrote with Bill Ashcroft and Gareth Griffiths, *The Empire Writes Back: Post-colonial Literatures, Theory and Practice* (Routledge 1989). The book was reprinted 3 times, a new edition issued in 1994, a revised edition in 2002, and it has been translated into Japanese, Korean, Chinese and Arabic. Most recently, she has published a book on *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environment* (Routledge 2010) with Graham Huggan, and *The Wild Man from Borneo: A Cultural History of the Orangutan* is forthcoming this year from the University of Hawaii, co-authored with Helen Gilbert and Robert Cribb. What is evident already, and in contradistinction to the 70-plus articles and book chapters she has published solo on a huge range of postcolonial authors and topics, is the degree to which Helen works collaboratively, and the impact she has upon her fellow researchers — whether colleagues or students. In recognition of her contribution to and eminence in the field, Helen was elected a Fellow of the Australian Academy of the Humanities in 2009.

Acknowledged as the ‘most respected teacher’ in the English Department of the University of Queensland in 1987, and a recipient of a University-wide Award for Excellence in Postgraduate teaching in 2000 and 2001, Helen is the best of teachers. By this I mean that her academic achievements are never an endpoint in themselves, nor a barrier to learning from others. A BA(Hons) awarded by the University of Queensland, Australia, in 1968, followed by an MA and PhD from Queen’s University, Canada, in the 1970s, has been supplemented and indeed complemented with a BSc as recently as 1990 (again from the University of Queensland). For this achievement, among others, I am a little jealous for I began study at the University of Queensland in Science and Arts but chose the sole study of English Literature over Biology at the end of First Year. I am just one of many scholars who have contributed to this issue who was taught by Helen. It was Helen who introduced me to the intellectual excitement of postcolonial literatures in the
second year of my degree. She opened my eyes to the politics of poetics; and it was Helen who examined my MA thesis on Caribbean poet and historian, Kamau Brathwaite, and thus set me on the road of academia and the study of Caribbean literature, and poetry in particular — a pursuit (and a livelihood) that continues to give me great pleasure.

Ah poetry… Many are the conferences in which Helen and I have bemoaned yet another pedantic paper on Derek Walcott, and yet, at least on one occasion, I recall a paper on Walcott that made us sit up in our seats and engage in excited discussion. Helen is well-known for sticking-points, opinions that seem unshakeable, and yet, they can be shaken if given sufficient stimulus — you just have to prove yourself a valiant (and determined) opponent, with something worth saying, said well! To be with Helen in a seminar room is always to be rewarded with the razor-sharp question that goes to the heart of things. Memories of stimulating conversations, a good laugh and good times with Helen are set against picture-postcard backgrounds (most recently of Malta, Venice, Istanbul, Nicosia) and a cast of characters — good friends from the Caribbean, Denmark, Canada, Belgium, UK, Spain, South Africa, Australia. There are too many friends, countries, occasions to mention, but clearly we have been the lucky generation to have such freedom of the world in which to meet and mingle. I hope to see Helen at the next Association for Commonwealth Literature and Languages Studies conference — this year in St. Lucia; I am sure papers on Walcott will be much in evidence, and of course, the poetry readings will be de rigueur.

I don’t know what it was that nudged me toward a celebration of Helen’s work in *Kunapipi*, but it is most fitting, particularly given this issue of *Kunapipi* will be the last. Founded by Anna Rutherford in 1979, and edited by her until her death in 2001, *Kunapipi* began life in close association with EACLALS (the European branch of the Association for Commonwealth Literature and Languages Studies). In 2002 Helen was invited to deliver the first Anna Rutherford Memorial Lecture at the triennial EACLALS conference in Copenhagen. It is sad to bring *Kunapipi* to a close, but times have changed — production of a print journal, particularly one renowned for its beautiful covers and sometimes lavish illustration between the covers, has become enormously expensive, as is the postage from Australia to
everywhere in the world. It seems to me too that the field of postcolonial studies has shifted quite substantially, away from something relatively discrete and focussed (despite its enormous geographical spread) to something diverse, and if not fractured, then certainly multiple. I could embrace a Whitman approach (‘I am large, I contain multitudes’\(^1\)) but I feel the time has come to bow out with dignity and grace, leaving the field open to new ideas and younger generations, to new forms of publication and dissemination.

The contributors to this volume are a who’s who in the field of postcolonial literatures, from its pioneering days through its various shifts and its most recent forays into eco-criticism and animal rights. Many of the contributors have been previously published in *Kunapipi*. Helen not only appears as an author in *Kunapipi*, her photographic work has also featured on two covers (the special issue on Birds and the Focus on Science issue), so it seems fitting that the last issue of *Kunapipi*, one dedicated to her scholarship, should also feature her visual work on the cover — this time a painting of a parrot, a flurry of brilliance. This work is particularly apt given Helen’s parrot qualities (captured in the portrait of Helen, painted by Heather Thompson, a fellow artist in the Lord Howe Island painting group to which Helen belongs). A participant in and commentator on (post)colonial affairs, the parrot is a native of sub/tropical is/lands. The parrot is clever, convivial, colourful, and capable of giving you a good sharp peck. She will sit on your shoulder and offer witty asides; a comrade of pirates she might be, but no pet. So I will close this editorial with a parrot poem for Helen:

Mother Parrot’s Advice to her Children\(^2\)

Never get up till the sun gets up,
Or the mists will give you a cold,
And a parrot whose lungs have once been touched
Will never live to be old.
Never eat plums that are not quite ripe,
For perhaps they will give you a pain:
And never dispute what the hornbill says,
Or you’ll never dispute again.
Never despise the power of speech:
Learn every word as it comes,
For this is the pride of the parrot race,
That it speaks in a thousand tongues.
Never stay up when the sun goes down,
But sleep in your own home bed,
And if you’ve been good, as a parrot should,
You will dream that your tail is red.

NOTES

\(^1\) Walt Whitman, *Song of Myself*, verse 51, line 8, online, http://www.daypoems.net/plainpoems/1900.html.

\(^2\) The poem can be found all over the web but authorship is nowhere attributed. It is most often labelled, ‘from Ganda, Angola; translated by A.K. Nyabongo’.
PAUL SHARRAD

The Sorrows of Young Randolph: Nature/Culture and Colonialism in Stow’s Fiction

Helen Tiffin has worked consistently around the possibilities of dismantling the structures and habits of thought of colonialism. In doing so, she has investigated possibilities of counter-formations: to literary canons, to the assumptions underlying canons (1993), to history and its narrative modes (1983), and to colonialis discourses (1987). As her work has progressed, the demolition job on prejudicial boundaries between self and other has shifted direction from place to race to gender and thence to examining the boundaries between humans and nature, people and animals (2001). Throughout, her literary focus has been consistently on the Caribbean, but she has also analysed aspects of the Australian writer, Randolph Stow, notably Tourmaline (1978) and Visitants (1981). Her interest at the time was in texts that worked to undo Eurocentric colonialism, but if she revisited his work now, she might well look at how Stow’s work shows connections between post/colonial cultures and problematic relations between humans and nature. What follows is a sketch of a reading.

Stow gave a paper called ‘Wilderness and Garden’ at a Commonwealth Literature conference in Gothenburg in 1982. It tracks European perceptions of Australia as a harsh and hostile land in which ‘Drought, fire, solitude and gloom become the poet’s themes’ (22), and cattle and sheep destroy a fragile ecology. The indigenous population, however, practised fire-stick farming to improve pasture and Stow looks for hints in some colonists (the painter John Glover and the politician William Charles Wentworth) of a possible settler accommodation to a more harmonious relationship with the earth (24). It is this dream of harmony with the land that I want to explore. Critical responses to Stow have tended to move with Commonwealth/ Postcolonial interests to focus on landscape as national identity (Clunies-Ross), on exile (King), on selfhood and alienation (Senn), on cultural difference (Dommergues), on race (Cotter), and on literary intertexts (Beston), but only recently (Fonteyn) has attention turned to how his work engages with nature as both an Other and a habitat.¹

Nature is certainly there in his work, the seasons and flora of Western Australia picked out in early novels as landscape:

Heath grew up the hill, pink and matted, and the smell of it was hot and rough in the strong sunlight. Above the heath little low bushes grew out of the gravel, some bright with yellow flowers, others (the poison bush) the colour of rust. (A Haunted Land 49)
The warbling of the birds, sweet and husky, in the coolness of the late-summer morning; the softened light of April, the play of leaf-shadows on a white wall…

The sun was resting on the flat hills to the east and its slanting light lay across the garden, marking with distinctness every leaf and line. As she watched, two parrots skimmed away from the fig-tree towards the north, and the light on their plumage showed green fire hurtling through the air… (The Bystander 39)

Such lyric realism usually functions as a dramatic screen against which human dramas are enacted. The land as nature, and nature as something one might belong to this side of death is rarely considered, and yet it is infused with an existential longing that is both born of and fuelled by a deeply Romantic sensibility. Nature is read through the eyes of a literary mind. Stow declared that he saw Australia as ‘an enormous symbol’ (Lynch 42) and mapped out his novels as stage productions (Leves 1), so regardless of their descriptive realism, they were always going to be allegories in which nature was never entirely itself. Nonetheless, his fiction consistently evinces a longing to break from such cultural constraints. Caught within Romantic extremes, however, unity with the natural world seems only possible through egotistical domination or nihilistic self-dissolution.

Helen Tiffin notes the colonialist rhetoric of tropical medicine, in which the European body (physical and moral) is threatened with contamination by foreign fevers (Tiffin 1993). She tracks this into Conrad and Stow’s Visitants (as does Diana Brydon), but the ideas are to be found as well in the very early works. Summer and fever, cows, dogs, mosquitoes (83), snakes (96) and the sun, can all infect us, reducing us to our bodies, and our bodies to the dictates of the microbe. In the first novel, The Haunted Land, the Irish patriarch Maguire torments his angrily devoted children because he fears a legacy of family madness (176), and this is displaced into irrational hostility towards the idiot child of his station housekeeper. In full gothic mode, Stow presents this figure as a threat requiring radical control to maintain the difference between the animal world and the humans who work in it:

in that enclosure Adelaide saw something move.

It was a man and animal, a creature lying on its side on the floor and scratching itself with long fingernails. Its hair was long, but combed, its face was covered with a thick black down; its hands and arms were those of an ape, thick and strong, covered with tough black hair. Lying on the floor, it scratched itself — dressed in a clean shirt and bright blue overalls.

She could not move. For a long time she could not speak for the horror of this thing on the floor…

The creature on the floor stirred like a wakened cat and jumped up on all fours, stared at them with the narrow slanting eyes of a wolf. (55)

When the tormented boy escapes his cage, he kills Maguire’s pet dog, and, wrestling with the station-owner’s son, is shot dead (211–12). The attempt to separate nature from culture fails, however, as the educated son is also killed in the mêlée.
Maguire’s daughter, Anne, goes alone to Malin Pool in the heat of summer and, luxuriating in the cool water, infused with sentimentality absorbed from romantic literature and the desires of her burgeoning womanhood, she allows one of the station Aborigines to have sex with her. As she does so, her 1901 white conditioning that ‘Niggers aren’t people’ enters her mind, and she is immediately beset with guilt and feelings of being corrupted (73, 78, 161). The crossing of the racial barrier and transgression of codes of virginal gentility in women is linked to crossing from culture to nature. Her brother kills and buries the offending Aboriginal man as though he is one of the station’s beasts (80), and Anne’s rigorous policing of her secret parallels the incarceration of the human animal, Tommy Cross, and her brother’s own later romance and death. She adopts a tough attitude and takes on men’s clothing (74, 83), but only when drenched in the natural world of rainstorms or absorbed in picking wildflowers does she feel ‘clean’ again (99, 179, 235). The strict maintenance of colonial cultural boundaries and taboos is undone by that culture’s own romantic investment in nature and its countervailing economic power-base in farming. When they plough the paddocks after the rains, the muddy Maguire men take on the appearance of ‘niggers’, but even then they carry whips and stamp on centipedes (101).3

The settler can respond to the beauty of nature, but it is Australian nature softened into a European cultivated landscape:

More rain came, weeks of alternate sun and showers. Walking in the paddocks one could see little specks of green in the dead grass, the miniature double leaves of a new plant rising. And presently the green spread, the specks came together, and now the whole earth was covered with life.

Malin hills softened like waves, grew misty with the green softness of early winter…
In every corner of the plover-haunted land the earth grew gentle and yielded itself to birth. (103)

In ironic counterpoint to her bookishness, Anne (herself a blend of Jane Eyre and perhaps Lyndall from Olive Schreiner’s *Story of a South African Farm*) is more attuned to the uncultivated natural world, but is conscious of her turning it into a cultural gesture, ‘rather poetic, almost a rite of spring, to be throwing flowers to primitive spirits’ (180), and has to learn through her encounter with a fox cub, that she must leave nature to be nature and not possess it as something in which to find release from her human struggles (182). Stow encounters Anne’s problem as his own: he cannot express the other (nature) without recourse to the culture (both European colonial and literary) that distances him from it.

In Andrew Maguire’s desperate grieving for his passionate young wife, Elizabeth, there is a clear echo of Heathcliff and Cathy’s undying infatuation.4 But if the romantic passions of *Wuthering Heights* pull everything down to where closeness to the soil permits positive rebirth, the white settler farming frontier, while yearning for such a romance of union with nature, is constantly frustrated by its very romantic longing, itself a cultural imposition on an unresponsive
environment. It only works when that environment is transformed briefly into a European greenness (Delrez 43). But green cannot supply a sustaining symbol other than one of natural cycles of change imported from British culture: as Andrew Lynch observes, ‘The lushness of the Green Man evaporates in the parched Australian landscape of Stow’s poem [‘A Fancy for his Death’]’, where, like the self-sacrificial innocent at the end of *The Bystander*, a body merges into the soil under the sign of fire and sun (Lynch 45–46). Culture seems constantly pulled down towards Nature, whether that be the outdoors world of heat and dust, or inner biological nature. And nature seems to provide little hope of rebirth.

The pool at Malin, however, left to itself, is a place of quiet and natural harmony:

the wide water and the white gums, and this was true changelessness... The shade of the gumtrees was cool there and the rushes moved gently in the hot breeze. Somewhere a mullet jumped; a wild duck flapped low across the water. Peacefully the wind ruffled a wild hibiscus, mirroring its pale mauve flowers in the pool. (10)

It is when humans intrude that disharmony occurs. At the start of *A Haunted Land*, Adelaide, now an older woman, revisits the station homestead and her troubled past. As she gets closer to the house, nature becomes illusory and conflicted. By the cemetery eucalypts ‘like some strange exotic fruit trees, heavy with great white flowers’ are stripped as a flock of white cockatoos screams away; around the house gums are mixed with olives and oleanders; the house itself is overrun with climbing rose and surrounded by ‘dead weeds, which in a more fertile season had been white daisies and cosmos’ (10–11). Andrew Maguire, after the death of his wife (who seems an elemental creature of natural energy), leaves the gardens to grow wild and buries himself in drink and ‘the book room’ — the station office-cum-library. Culture provides him no solace, however, and he lashes out at everything. His sensible daughter seeks to understand and exonerate him, but the novel makes him such an isolated powerful personality that there is no explanation or salvation: he is at best a creature of history and genes, something of a force of nature that is also unnatural. Adelaide gives up analysis, preferring to keep her father as a cultic mystery (131) and we are left repeating the same questions of cause and effect that interpreter Osana asks in *Visitants* (182), ending up with ‘who made Andrew Maguire’? It is a question similar to Blake’s about the tiger, and there is no answer that absolves Maguire of his sins outside of Romantic conceptions of the Byronic devil-hero.

In *The Bystander*, the social world is more central than the natural environment, but the consoling cycles of nature and the conflict with that world continue. Keithy, an intellectually limited young man, is kept in a protective state of childhood innocence that is associated with nature: he keeps a menagerie of animals and wanders through the landscape, puzzling over the strange ways of plants, insects (183) and of the people around him. Keithy is not a total nature-lover: he does see his animals as possessions and regularly traps rabbits, but his natural affections
lead him into conflict with social convention. Culture, in fact, orphans him (his mother takes his father away to Britain; his minder rejects his advances; the movies and marriage deprive him of both his minder and his best friend; his car results in the death of his favourite dog) and he can only find contentment in a self-sacrificial ordeal by fire that reunites him with nature. In that moment, the station-owner protagonist is seized by a sublime vision of the glorious beauty and destruction around him. There is a suggestion (somewhat curtailed by the relentless male bonding of the book) that Keithy’s self-sacrificial proof of his love will prompt a new life for others, though without him, they will likely continue to be at odds with each other and their surroundings.

Aboriginal culture is the one site at which nature becomes acculturated, but in his two early works at least, Stow is unable to make much connection to indigenous views. His station owners refer to indigenous people as ‘boongs’ and ‘niggers’ when they are mentioned at all. To The Islands, therefore, marks a significant step towards finding some accommodation with the environment by setting white characters in closer and more sympathetic contact with Aboriginal people on a northern mission. Here the boundaries between nature and culture, human and animal are blurred: old, thin Aboriginal women walk like cranes (12), other Aboriginals have a bird-like grace (100) and lizards invade the church (18), a flight of ducks is like a stringed instrument (113).

The temptations and delusions of romantic sympathy are depicted in nurse Helen. She expresses disgust at her white skin and wants to be brown like the old Aboriginal people she is sentimentally attached to. Heriot, another of Stow’s crusty old patriarchs, goes a step further, lamenting his human nature and seeking to lose himself in the wilderness. But the natural wilderness is either already enculturated with Aboriginal dreaming presences alien to him, or it is completely other to all human attempts at connection. In either case, self-loathing and misanthropy are no basis for realising oneness. At best, they lead to self-emptying. Heriot, has spent years literally whipping the mission into shape, and has no illusions about the shortcomings of those around him, black or white. Nonetheless, on the point of retirement and exhausted by his labours, he still yearns for some greater sense of fulfilment. He sees himself as a great red cliff (13) a crumbling ruinous edifice, eroded by age (68), a falling tree (79), and dreams of climbing a cliff to reach an apotheosis of light (132). But he too is kept apart from nature and whatever romantic promise it might hold. If he wants, in moments of sympathy, to preserve the unspoilt beauty of wildlife, his Aboriginal companion wants to shoot it for food (170); if Justin is happy to let hawks hang around until they go off to their own country, Heriot wants him to shoot them for pursuing him (117). Heriot’s anguish is born from ‘the misery of the mind’ (61), from Cartesian splitting of the mind from the body and both from the natural world, so that when the old man comes upon the blessing of a waterhole, he can only respond with a quotation from a Marvell poem (64).
Gradually he learns to submit to ‘the justice of the sky’s occasion’ (73) and to give himself to the country, which confers ‘stillness of mind’ (102), but from an Aboriginal perspective, Heriot is a wind of destruction, mentioning the dead and disturbing the living. Even the land that promises release is itself disturbed by his presence in so far as he represents white intrusion and calls forth memories of the massacre of Aboriginal people by white settlers (105). As a purely natural force, the land is also threatening. It drives all humanity to hunger (118); it hates humans, demanding that they prey on nature and each other (173, 195). Finally the only solution is renunciation and death (153). Short of that end, the ‘mouthless god’ of Aboriginal cave painting (197) or becoming a simple plant (204) seem to be the only saving options, and for the white mind loaded with literary learning these are impossible.

In the remote mining town of Tourmaline, the most positive characters are an old white fossicker and his Aboriginal mate who mostly disappear into the land, digging into it and losing themselves in it. Dave Speed once wanted to become a tree; now he wants to be a rock (86). The rest, with but one (Aboriginal) exception, live on an uncertain faultline between human society and their arid surroundings. Tourmaline, is a town described as existing in a coma, and like the Maguire homestead in *A Haunted Land*, it is isolated and laden with festering tensions as a result.6

The narrator is a superannuated policeman who speaks of ‘our wild garden’ and has intimations of tough wild lilies breaking through the ground before the earliest rains (34). He, however, is a weak shell of former power and unable to bring about new life. The diviner, who inspires a charismatic cult but succeeds only in divining minerals and not the water the town really needs, is another visitant, an ‘obscure, alien’ (45). Like Heriot, and then Cawdor in *Visitants*, he has suicidal tendencies. Self-emptying is also advocated by Tom Spring, the town’s storekeeper, but in a more positive way. He talks of becoming a stream, a rock, but as part of a flow of energies that can change the limits of circumstance (187). Water carves rock, makes soil, and causes the garden to grow; it also sustains human life. Water is neutral, an agent only by being a vehicle for cosmic forces: it can create, but can also destroy. Tourmaline, however, appears to be disconnected from any kind of water supply apart from imported beer. Its relationship to rock is one of material exploitation. Only Agnes, an old Aboriginal woman links rock and rain, Aboriginal lore and Christian ritual, human and plant (by watering the oleander with her urine), and plant and culture (by arranging the oleander flowers on the church altar alongside magic rain stones).

Kerry Leves makes much of the pharmakon (poison-cure) ambivalence of the oleander, a bush that figures in both *A Haunted Land* and *Tourmaline*. Its toxic qualities are not dwelt on in the novels, but its invasive potential is. Malin station lines its driveway with oleanders and olives marking off orderly white cultivation, but two generations later, the homestead is collapsing and the
avenue trees have run wild and almost block the road (The Bystander 38, 51). The homestead, too, is under attack from the very plants that once indicated domestic order. Climbing roses have overrun one side of the house and threaten to pull it down (11). The abandoned original home at Old Malin is crumbling under a cover of bougainvillea (50). The European dynastic family collapses under the weight of its own introduced plants, its own culture of domination, leaving only nostalgia and unease (50). For Adelaide in The Haunted Land, the oleander marks “the death season” (219); only old Agnes in Tourmaline can conceive of some syncretic harmony in which colonial and native, human and plant can coexist productively. Stow’s problem is that, like Heriot, he cannot relate Christianity to the land and has no access to Aboriginal understanding, or refuses to romanticise their connection to the land because they too are human. Unable to see the land for what it is of itself, he has to resort in Tourmaline to another cultural system and import Taoist symbolism, another kind of ‘oleander’ of ambiguous effect.

Russell McDougall considers that in the end ‘the town — and the text — appear to unravel into cultural absence, into wordlessness, decomposition, in the direction of Nature rather than Culture. On the other hand, at the end, we are in a very literal sense back at the beginning … so that the paradigmatic opposition of Nature and Culture seems itself called into question’ (425). Here, perhaps, is the point of connection to the later emergence of an ecocritical vision: ‘the widest definition of the subject of ecocriticism is the study of the relationship of the human and the non-human, throughout human cultural history and entailing critical analysis of the term “human” itself’ (Garrard 5).

Like the first two novels, The Merry-go-round in the Sea recreates nineteen forties and fifties (Western) Australian consciousness of life still being elsewhere. There can be a love of the land amongst rural settlers, but once one has any cultural aspirations, the land itself cannot supply intellectual/emotional attachment. Rob Coram as a child perhaps offers better promise of harmony with his world than the disillusioned Heriot or the fallen adults of Tourmaline, but Rob is a young Werther, another bystander looking on at the land and the world. Except for moments of childhood when the unreflective mind allows animal physicality a sensory rapture of sounds and smells and textures, his romantic sensibility languishes or rages in its sense of exile (124–25) or is suspended in an equally animal-like brutality: as Rob says to one of his rural playmates, ‘Were’ always killing things’ (232). The land is there as resource or backdrop, not as soul: giving oneself to it results in brutish bare life, violence and death. There is a longing for connection to the land, but the nature-culture divide cannot be genuinely crossed because again it is always read either as tragedy or gothic through a veil of cultural text (Shakespeare, Jacobean revenge plays, medieval folklore, Dante, Villon, the Bible, Alcuin, Xenophon, Baudelaire, Poe), and meaning can only be invested in it via artifice (Tiffin 1978; Riem; Beston).
Stow, like Heriot wryly boasting and lamenting his erudition (Beston 169, 175–76), makes this into a bleak vision of human exile akin to Coetzee’s early work, where we are alienated from the world (in particular the Australian natural world) by language (Riem 517), by the mind, and — historically deprived of Derrida’s more worldly acceptance of this — only mysticism can supply transcendental union. In the end, Stow goes to England where nature is culture — green men, winter solstice, natural magic, landscape painting, family history — (Delrez 42–43); Australia is abandoned as unapproachable or consuming, and, to the romantic ego of the Australian colonialist, so is Papua New Guinea.

Visitants is fundamentally a social, human centred, story, but it continues the theme of alienation. In a different, tropical island setting, it reproduces the ghost towns and ruined homesteads of the previous novels, bringing into full relief apocalypse and sterility in ‘the wastelands of the imperial imagination’ (Delrez 36). In To the Islands Heriot opts to ‘pull down the world’ of mission culture and flee into the bush — it’s another cargo cult cleansing that tries to ‘forestall ruin by embracing ruin’ (To the Islands 43). Here again is the pharmakon motif, the Taoist paradox, but still in its negative aspect. In Visitants, Cawdor imagines his own body dissolving into atoms that mingle with the star matter of the cosmos (179), and culture, in the form of a musical composition devolving back into nature under the force of its own ‘troppo agitato’ momentum (46). The internal combustion engine of empire, the machinery of romantic egotism, grinds itself into dust; it is a despairing redemptive kenosis that might be aligned with some Gaia view of the dispensability of the human race in the greater scheme of things, but which, in literary terms appears to be a bleaker vision of our inability to get beyond our cultural and biological prisons — in particular, to get beyond the yearning and self-destructive disillusion of a Werther-like sense of separation from an idealised other.

In something akin to Naipaul’s settling into the English landscape in The Enigma of Arrival, Stow wrote his fictive persona out of its colonial frontier-induced crisis and into new surroundings in his ancestral homeland of East England. There he is free to observe nature in close detail and in immediate corporeal sensation, free of symbolic over-load. Consider the opening page of The Girl Green as Elderflower:

Through his window to the right the old unpruned apple tree which had gathered wreaths of snow in its mossy twigs was being shocked free of them by the spurts of little dun birds. The two rising fields behind, one pasture and one plough, were today unbroken by any tussock or ridge of conker-coloured earth, and lay so uniformly white and unshadowed that it seemed they must be uniformly level. In the distance, across the river, a line of bare poplars on a ridge was caught in an odd spotlight of sun, and stood out against the heavy sky with an unEnglish sharpness, shining through air from which all moisture had frozen and fallen. (3)

Such direct rendition of belonging in the natural world is made possible by the safe position of the observing outsider, for whom it is landscape, albeit a landscape
he is increasingly part of. It is also framed by the fact that for the anglo-colonial returnee, English nature is experienced as cultural: the reader is reminded that the picturesque nature of the first quotation is ‘Constable country’ (141) and when Clare walks his friend Perry across country to his cottage:

Out of the sky, invisible, a bird was singing. It brought to Clare a memory of Malkin, a chirruping, a lilting a celebration. The English countryside, he reflected, was so insistently literary. As if following this thought, Perry murmured, ‘Hark, hark, the lark’. He twisted about on the stile, and looking at the far bold flag, added: ‘Yes, indeed: happy birthday, Shakespeare’. (72)

The natural world is also the world of folklore, but unlike the Australian outback or the alien Papuan setting of Visitants, the uncanny can be countenanced and the violence in nature accommodated. A dog attacks and consumes a pheasant, but Clare is undismayed, accepting it as ‘the way of the green god’ (68), and present reality is infused with past tales of foundlings and sprites and wild men. The nature that previously for Stow had been unnaturally gothic is now less romanticised: not totally under human control, but also not an extreme alien limit to one’s being; the nature god of old Britain is ‘neither cruel nor merciful, but dances for joy at the variousness of everything that is’ (127) and Clare can settle into his new-old world.

Greg Garrard selects the work of John Clare as his focus for explicating ecocritical approaches to literature, showing how he avoids some of the sentimental view of nature of Wordsworth but is nonetheless caught in an ‘artifice of innocence’ that rests in his reliance on language and its play of regional specificity as simulating closeness to the ‘real’ natural world in a move towards being able to ‘think fragility’ (44–48). Stow is certainly good at thinking human fragility, but without Val Plumwood, Garrard and others to supply the concepts, he can only work his own way intuitively towards seeing fragility as something other than falling tragically short of romantic fullness. That is until the world he inhabits is aligned with a cultural history in which the romantic is endemic in the landscape, and only then can he accept fragility as a way forward for humane living in relation to ourselves and nature.

Elizabeth Perkins comments on the struggle between the active and the contemplative in Stow’s work, the former being destructive but necessary and the latter ideal but nihilistic in effect. She concludes, ‘perhaps the greatest aesthetic interest in Stow’s belief in a quiescent and silent yielding to the movement of the cosmos lies in the realization that for creative artists, such passive mergence with nature is almost impossible’ (31). Perhaps, too, for the white Australian generally, such a merging of nature and culture is a dream only to be realised in conflicted action and imposed allegory. Whatever the possibilities, it would seem that renouncing the European inheritance of literary romanticism is a prerequisite for any meaningful ecological vision, at least in Australia.
This takes us back to Helen Tiffin’s progression from analyses of textual colonisation to ecocritical endeavours. There is an underlying continuity in such a shift of interest in that at base, the ecocritical problem is the same as the postcolonial one: the inability to deal with difference. Romanticism uses nature to supply human experiences of rapture or terror in a process of othering (as wild) and packaging (as landscape, as picturesque), but it will not let nature be itself. Ecological balance seems to suggest a mutual recognition and set of dialogic interchanges of collective benefit, but at the same time it involves its component parts being more or less part of the same system. The problem for eco/poco criticism arises when the parts of the entire system function within their own machineries that operate as opposed if not mutually exclusive categories (nature-culture/ human-nonhuman). The goal of the ecocritically aware writer, then, might be to envision, as Patrick Murphy does, a dialogic difference in which negotiating a sustainable non-exploitative cohabitation occurs as an exploration of our ‘interanimating relationships’ in a planetary ecosystem (193–94) that neither co-opts the other into being one’s own servant or foil, nor pushes it out into a remote and impossibly space of pure alterity. Jhan Hochman adds to this, suggesting that cultural studies should not only seek to ‘know’ nature but also grant it its ‘privacy’ as ‘unromanticised difference’ (190–92) — something which Stow perhaps was struggling to do.

NOTES

1 Stow himself suggests such an approach: ‘it’s just the natural world I’m interested in… I’m interested in nature, in botany, geology, and so on’ (‘Mostly Private Letters’ interview with John Beston, 1975, qtd in Hassall 354).

2 David Fonteyn attempts to make a case for reading Tourmaline as a text with ecological import but concedes that it needs to be read allegorically to discover that potential and he has to work with the ambiguities of symbol (fire as destructive ground clearing for new growth 10) to posit a universalist archetype of the cycle of natural life. Kerry Leves also inspects use of nature (flowers) in the early fiction to show ambivalence and breaks in uniformity of meaning/ reading, but again, the flower as part of nature is subsumed by the texts’ use of flowers as literary symbols, often located in poetry and song, as Baudelaire’s Les Fleurs du Mal in the ‘Keys to the Kingdom’ nursery rhyme in A Haunted Land, with its ‘basket of sweet flowers’ at its centre figuring the dead Christ awaiting resurrection (Stow 1965 251–52; Leves 3, 7).

3 In ‘Unjust Relations’, Tiffin makes the connection between the way white settlers spoke of and treated Aborigines and their relation to animals and nature (39).

4 There is even a more civilised if stuffy nearby station, Koolabye, akin to Thrushcross Grange, and Heathcliff is mentioned in an early Stow essay, ‘Raw Material’ (Hassall 406).

5 Stow knew French so I do not think it beyond probability, perhaps more so because the story came to him as a Lorca-style ballad in a dream (Bennett 59), that the town/
stone encapsulates the name of the setting of his first novel: we are given a (re) tour of Malin(e). And Malin is a malign world.

7 Leves notes the associations of ‘fleurs du mal’ and their wild, weedy aspect, as well as their link to cemeteries, so that the oleander suggests the malign but ultimately sterile and self-destructive influence of colonial invasion (7).

8 The popularity of this novel and its more individualised outlook leads me to forego detailed discussion of it here, although its view of violence out there in the wide world connects it to other novels. Stow’s final book, The Suburbs of Hell, which again I am not going to include in my analysis here, takes its origins from Western Australia in more recent times, but is a murder mystery based on a medieval morality tale and perhaps the Decameron, framed by a range of quotations from Jacobean revenge tragedies and Titus Andronicus. It opens and closes with scenes of natural delight (as though nature alone offers any prospect of harmonious pleasure) but otherwise there is no central interest in the nature/culture problematic as there is in Stow’s other books. It is as though he resolved the matter in The Girl Green as Elderflower.

9 This and other aspects of my reading follow some of Martin Leer’s interpretations, both in relation to the Romantic sensibility in Stow’s work and to his recourse to symbols to configure the land.

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In her remarkable 2001 book, *Advocacy After Bhopal: Environmentalism, Disaster, New Global Orders*, Kim Fortun meditates on the challenges, both ethnographic and political, of addressing the aftermath of the 1984 explosion of the Union Carbide factory in Bhopal, India. The complex magnitude of the disaster, which killed as many as 10,000 people instantly, sickening up to 60,000, a large number of whom ended up dying in the ensuing decades, encompasses a long and uncertain timeframe, and a vast range of scales, reaching, as Rob Nixon notes ‘from the cellular to the transnational, the corporeal to the global corporate’ (444). There are related problems of agency and of epistemology, both legal and scientific. As Fortun notes, Bhopal is

> a disaster that has persisted, and operated cumulatively, drawing in a spectrum of issues that can’t be contained by old blueprints for social change. The ‘people’ cannot represent themselves in the rehabilitation effort. Nor can the state stand in as guardian. Technoscience must be condemned, while it is relied on. Legality must be pursued, while acknowledged as an insufficient remedy. (xvii)

These issues combine to create a series of contradictions or double binds, which determine the framework for Fortun’s work as an anthropologist and as an advocate. She reflects, somewhat unexpectedly:

> The most important challenge was aesthetic. Advocacy within disaster — particularly against the law — called for a change in what I valued and experienced as good. Virtue had to be gauged in terms of resilience, rather than in terms of principled uprightness. Being well versed *in* the world became much more important than having an intellectual hold *on* the world. (5)

Fortun’s use of the word ‘resilience’ is interesting. A concept that has come increasingly to the fore in the field of environmental studies, it makes an uncommon appearance here in the contexts of ethics and politics and, more unusual still, aesthetics. My objective in this essay is to explore further the idea of resilience as a way into the tangled net of global ecology in which Bhopal is caught. Working from the premise, underlined by Fortun, that its complexities are not just material and political but also discursive and even aesthetic, I use Indra Sinha’s 2007 Booker-nominated novel, *Animal’s People*, as a way of considering the usefulness and limitations of resilience for understanding and addressing global environmental justice problems within a postcolonial literary framework.
Resilience is generally understood in ecology as a system’s capacity to retain its basic function and structure in the face of disturbance (Walker & Salt xiii). A resilient system is not one that maintains a stable state in the face of external challenges; rather, it is one that subsists by undergoing constant processes of change and adaptation. Key to resilience science is the recognition that living systems shift between periods of growth and conservation, and release and reorganisation. During these latter phases, which happen much more quickly, linkages are broken and new ones formed, order is replaced by ‘uncertainty, novelty, and experimentation’ (Walker & Salt, 82). So there’s incessant movement between building up and conserving and breaking down. But complicating matters further is the multi-scalar nature of systems, what ecologist Buzz Holling calls ‘panarchy’, (Holling et al 89) such that each system contains, and is nested within other systems. Each of these layers has its own cycles which, in a resilient system, work more or less independently, creating a kind of looseness that serves as a buffer for the larger system. A key point is that there is a negative correlation between efficiency and resilience. If we try to optimise a system’s functioning, suppressing unwanted or apparently unnecessary processes with the aim of enhancing a particular desirable variable, the system becomes tighter and less resilient, more susceptible to suffering catastrophic breakdown in the face of disturbance. There is a crucial contradiction here between integrity and dissolution: the more a thing remains resolutely itself, the more fragile it becomes. On the other hand, for resilience to signify anything at all, there must be some fundamental consistency of being or activity; some meaning must persist over time. Another contradiction is that, while the resolution of problems depends on communication, efficient communication, in which a restricted range of universally legible signals move in predetermined directions through established channels, homogenises difference. It narrows the range of expressions and responses, making the system more vulnerable to unexpected shocks.

So a really crucial part of resilience theory is that life subsists through tensions, at every level of human and natural systems, between predictability and chaos, accumulation, preservation and breakdown, and there is a critical line between the sustainable function of these processes and the threat of total destruction. The risk of the latter is greatly increased by forms of instrumentalist management, whose aggressive suppression of redundancy, in the form of inefficient, apparently unproductive, strange or merely unknown parts of the system, destroys precisely those elements that enable the system to respond creatively when unexpected disturbances occur — as they inevitably, increasingly, do.

Resilience is a productive concept to think with in postcolonial environmental studies for a number of reasons, including its recognition of multiple scales and temporalities, and its acknowledgment of the interdependence of human and natural systems. Particularly critical for my purposes is the capacity it has to engage the tension that runs through both environmental and postcolonial criticism between
stability and change. What I mean by this is that, as politically inflected forms of critique, postcolonialism and ecocriticism have these interesting opposing — I think fundamentally irreconcilable — impulses towards conservation and resistance. These impulses converge around the issue of environmental justice, in which a concern with protecting health and conserving traditional natural-cultural lifeways coexists with an imperative to justice, in which the exploitative relations of business-as-usual, including the concentration of power that masquerades under the name of democracy, can only be undone through the disruption of the regimes that protect those relations, by elements that were previously disenfranchised by them.

Resilience theory invites us to consider how that essentially political work might be conceived in natural terms. In pursuing this connection, I am drawing on the arguments made by scholars such as Bruno Latour, Bruce Braun, and Isabelle Stengers, that nature is in fact political — that’s not ‘nature’ in scare quotes, as in ‘nature’ is just a political construction, but nature, human and non-human entities and processes, operates politically. Politicality, by the same token, is natural. I use the admittedly awkward term ‘politicality’ in support of the distinction made by French philosopher Jacques Rancière between what he terms ‘politics’ — which refers to the hierarchical power relations that prescribe everyday policies and procedures, or, as Rancière puts it, ‘all the activities which create order by distributing places, names, functions’ (Rancière 1994 173) and ‘the political’, which is always disruptive, consisting of a refusal to conform to assigned placements and the emergence of what remained unlawful or invisible in the existing order. Politics, in Rancière’s formulation, has an aesthetic function, in the sense that it involves a particular ‘partition’ or ‘distribution of the sensible’ (2004 13), which determines what is perceptible and intelligible. Political activity disturbs this distribution; it ‘makes visible what had no business being seen, and makes heard a discourse where once there was only place for noise’ (Rancière 1995 33). The political occurs as an interruption of normal politics; it institutes a break in the order of things, releasing energy, bringing new things into sight, creating space for the oppressed to flourish. This movement is arguably not just analogous to the adaptive cycles of resilience but integral to them. In what follows I explore the theme of resilience in Sinha’s novel as a way of imagining possibilities of subsisting through and past disaster. As a work of fiction, Animal’s People offers a fruitful site to work through what Fortun describes as the aesthetic challenge of the Bhopal disaster, and Rancière’s concept of political aesthetics. The novel works both thematically and formally to offer, not a vision of post-Bhopal restoration, but a transformation of the terms of the disaster’s intelligibility

Animal’s People is set in the imaginary Indian city of Khaufpur, nineteen years after a chemical leak from a factory owned by a US corporation identified only as ‘the Kampani’. Narrated by Animal, so-called because the scoliosis that occurred as a result of the chemicals forces him to walk on all fours, the novel documents the Khaufpuris’ quest for justice and the alleviation of their suffering. Their
struggles occur against, or rather through a backdrop of confounding complexity that mirrors the situation of Bhopal. First are the multiple, non-linear temporalities of the disaster — what Rob Nixon terms its ‘slow violence’ — which exceed the categories of science and law, through which health and justice are to be delivered. The privations of poverty compound the effect of toxicity. A Khaufpuri doctor cynically observes: ‘those poor people never had a chance. If it had not been the factory it would have been cholera, TB, exhaustion, hunger. They would have died anyway’ (153). The non-linearity and uncertainty of cumulative effects confound the efforts of victims to seek legal redress.

The multi-scalar level of the disaster also challenges articulation, let alone remediation. It is simultaneously an ongoing medical emergency, an environmental disaster effecting organisms, species and their eco-systems, a scientific problem, and a technology failure (or a ‘normal accident’ to use the language of technological risk-management [Perrow]). The factory manufactured pesticides, an important plank in the Green Revolution that industrialised food production in India: ‘You told us you were making medicine for the fields’, as one character puts it; ‘You were making poisons to kill insects, but you killed us instead’ (306) — a great example of the reverberating consequences of anti-resilience science and development policy. The disaster is also a symptom of the legal and political dilemmas produced in the wake of globalisation, in which the imperative of international justice jostles against the demands of national sovereignty and economic development. So the complex layering of scales has a fundamentally political component that determines what kind of knowledge and action are possible, at what level and to what effect. A significant difficulty is that even the best approaches to the problem will inevitably fail to address key parts of it, will impose order at the expense of irreducible differences, will foreclose on uncertainty and unpredictability in a way that compromises both sustainability and justice. Focusing on just one of these dilemmas in relation to Bhopal, Fortun argues:

Disaster demanded a legal response. But it was also beyond the scope of legal remedy — not only because the injuries suffered by gas victims could never be adequately categorized, much less compensated, but also because of the law’s way of being lawful (through adjudication and thus the reduction of dissenting arguments into a single judgment). The law demands generalization. The Bhopal disaster calls for such generalization, but it also calls for something more. (42)

Animal’s People’ illuminates the demand for ‘something more’ in the particularities of Animal’s story, which confound the generalisations on which the institutions of both law and care operate.

A key tension in the novel centres on the arrival of Elli, an American doctor who comes to set up a free clinic in Khaufpur for the Kampani’s victims. Given the urgent need for care, Elli is baffled when no one comes to the clinic. The Khaufpuri believe — wrongly as it turns out — that Elli has been hired by the Kampani to collect medical data in order to disprove their claims for compensation.
In part it is a failure of understanding: Elli exasperatedly points out that the kind of comprehensive study that could produce that kind of data could not possibly be produced by a single doctor in the three months before the company is scheduled to appear in court. But it is also a dilemma of another sort, experienced viscerally by the Khaufpuri people who are dying, literally, to have their suffering alleviated: Elli’s promise to fix, restore and recover what has been broken, operates within a system whose smooth, ordered functioning has always worked not by helping but by excluding them. In the face of this knowledge, the political activist, Zafar, is quite rationally suspicious of the timing of the clinic’s establishment before an important court date, and organises a boycott. When it appears that the Kampani will once again avoid prosecution by striking a deal, Zafar goes on a hunger strike — invoking and then subverting, publicly, shockingly, the objective of health and life preservation that to Elli are paramount.

Zafar’s approach is more radical, certainly more political, at least on the surface of it, than Elli’s: what both their efforts have in common is an appeal to existing systems of order, for restoration to and recognition within it for those who have been left out. For all his revolutionary energy, Zafar operates within a hierarchical system, albeit an unofficial one, in which his education and political credentials grant him authority. On this basis, his supporters dismiss Animal’s intuition of Elli’s good intentions, telling him ‘Animal, you are special we all know it, but some things are just important to trust to feelings’ (111), and ‘Leave those decisions to people who know more’ (194). The assumption that Animal does not know is based on his obscurity and unintelligibility, an otherness for which his name stands as a convenient, but untidy, shorthand. Animal’s ambiguous status emerges most clearly in the words Elli shouts in frustration at the inhabitants of the Nutcracker (the slum where Animal lives): ‘Animal’s People! I don’t fucking understand you!’ (177).

Elli’s lack of understanding (which she finally admits here) extends, Animal reminds us throughout the novel, to his readers, addressed throughout as ‘Eyes’. The possibility of engagement — the kind that would allow the inhabitants of the Nutcracker, animals and people, to flourish — is thwarted by discourses of (Western) humanism, shot through with prurient fascination with the suffering bodies of the constitutively excluded. Given this impasse, it is highly significant, first, that animal opts in the end not to have the operation that would allow him to walk on two legs — that is, he chooses to remain an animal — and second, that it is Animal who mediates between Elli and his people, between Khaufpur and the West, as representative and as translator. That he is not ‘really’ an animal is pointedly not relevant: Animal’s predicament highlights with excruciating specificity Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin’s argument that ‘embodiment is an historical accident rather than a biological necessity’ (Huggan & Tiffin 207). However it is an accident whose meaning and outcome, whose forms of remediation, are determined to a large degree by the discourse — scientific,
philosophical, literary, journalistic, philanthropic — of humanism. This discourse — the discourse that the readers inevitably inhabit in our reading of the novel — proscribes Animal’s speech. And yet it is Animal who must be heard for the reader to make sense of things.

A couple of things to recall about resilience: life-sustaining change, when it occurs, emerges from the edge of the system, and it occurs through the displacement of established networks with novel forms of communication and unexpected conjunctions. Animal’s struggle to trust Elli is one of many of these connections that arise in the novel, frequently defying understanding but, as Pablo Mukherjee observes in his recent essay on the novel, offering ‘proof of Zafar’s dictum that a struggle based on love is stronger than one based on hope’ (230). Hope is singular and forward-looking, as implied in Elli’s philosophy that ‘the world is made of promises’. Love, by contrast, comes without guarantees; it is chaotic, non-linear, and relational. It resonates with, maybe even precipitates, political transformation (as opposed to politics). In its incendiary, metamorphosing power, it counters and buffers the destructive forces of capitalism and chemistry unleashed on the fateful night, but it is similarly uncontainable.

So I am arguing that the novel is concerned with the fine line between destructive and redemptive change, and with the complex character of resilience, which rests on the seemingly irreconcilable imperatives of conservation and release, recovery and dissolution. These tensions are evident not just at the level of theme, but also in the form of the narrative itself, and the way it is inflected by its peculiar narrator, Animal, who embodies, more clearly than any other narrator could, the dilemma of the subaltern, part of the ‘silenced majority’ (Tiffin xiv) who is forced to find ways to be recognised by a system whose very existence is premised on his exclusion. The reader is reminded of this fact by the Editor’s Notes, which explain that the story has been transcribed without revision, according to an agreement Animal made with a journalist, from a series of tapes translated from Hindi to English. This claim is contradicted by Animal, who boasts that he destroyed the original tapes, and also by the Editorial Notes themselves, which conclude by telling us: ‘Some tapes contain long sections in which there is no speech, only sounds such as bicycle bells, birds, snatches of music and in one case several minutes of sustained and inexplicable laughter. A glossary has been provided’. The incongruous juxtaposition of the Notes’ references to bicycle bells and laughter and the presence of a glossary speak to the contrary impulses, in Animal’s story, towards the uncontainable truth — that which has no place in the prevailing ‘distribution of the sensible’, to use Rancière’s phrase — and intelligibility. In its effort to express these contradictory imperatives without attempting to resolve them, Animal’s People does not just describe but it also arguably contributes to the resilience of an environment defined, in Pablo Mukherjee’s terrific phrase, as ‘a network composed of agents who must share labor and information in order to survive’ (230).
Having talked about the usefulness of resilience for thinking through post-Bhopal ecology, some caveats are in order. Like all biological metaphors, resilience has migrated quickly to the realm of popular and academic social theory, where it is deployed to legitimate a neoliberal ideology that finds its most aggressive expression in what Naomi Klein has termed disaster capitalism: the idea that out of catastrophe arises a fantastic diversity of investment opportunities, or, in a slightly different vein, an abdication of care for human and non-human others in favour of a vague belief in the capacity of everything to self-correct, or in the acceptability and inevitability of inequality which allows one to talk about the resilience of those who suffer.\(^5\)

The final lines of *Animal's People* offer an equivocal gloss on the value of resilience in the struggle to dismantle systems of power: ‘All things pass, but the poor remain. We are the people of the Apokalis. Tomorrow there will be more of us’. *Animal’s* words call us to the resilience and creativity of the disenfranchised, but, to paraphrase Kim Fortun: ‘[they] also [call] for something more’ (42). As the concept of resilience begins to gain currency in a range of discourses, from ecology to health and social policy, it is important not to allow it to overshadow other values such as care and advocacy for the unresilient, and the quest for social and environmental justice. And while environmental science offers a wealth of ideas about how to promote resilience, we need to ask more questions about where — in what systems, relationships, institutions, processes — we should try to promote resilience, and to what ends. The US military is currently engaged in a $125 million dollar program to create more resilient soldiers (Rendon). Without discounting the value of finding ways to reduce the effects of PTSD, this project demands critique for two reasons: first, it represents the deployment of resilience-focused resources and communication in the interests of the already powerful. Second, and by extension, it represents an extraordinarily narrow view of resilience, one as likely to worsen conditions for human and other animals as it is to improve it: grafting principles of ecology onto the Manichean shell of colonialism, it legitimates the destruction of those populations deemed to be liabilities to the resilience of the neoliberal world ‘system’, in the process smoothing the pathway to reverberating catastrophe.

So while I share Fortun’s sense that we need to gauge virtue in terms of resilience, it is important always to think about context, to ask, as Daniel Coleman puts it when we talk about resilience ‘of whom/what or for whom/what?’ Discourses of science, medicine and law are vital in asking these questions but so is literature, particularly postcolonial literature, which has always understood resilience politically, in terms of a redistribution of the material and the sensible.

\(^{\text{NOTES}}\)

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2 A forest ecosystem, for example, comprises multiple scales: the cellular level of a leaf, a tree, a stand of trees, and a forest each exists in reciprocal relation to the logging industry and other human and non-human networks.

3 See Ashcroft for a useful discussion of the centrality of transformation to postcolonial cultures which flourish through a combination of conservation, resistance and becoming.

4 The affiliation of love and politics has been extensively articulated by Alain Badiou. See also Davis & Sarlin’s interview with Berlant and Hardt for a discussion of the different ways recent critical theory mobilises love in the name of revolutionary justice.

5 I have discussed the use of resilience within neoliberal discourse in more detail elsewhere (See O’Brien). See also Walker and Cooper.

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Coleman, Daniel 2012, email correspondence, 11th May.


Tenzing Norgay’s Four Flags

It is 11.30 a.m. on May 29th, 1953; and though Europe now lies dormant in post-war exhaustion, although global decolonisation from the once great European empires is proving itself everywhere to be an unstoppable force, the paradigmatic moment in British imperial self-representation is about to go down. Two men stand roped together on top of the world’s highest mountain. The first is a beekeeper from New Zealand: a citizen of the old, white Commonwealth of nations. The second proves a little more difficult to define. Ethnically, he identifies himself as a ‘Sherpa’ — by which he means in part that he comes from Mongolian background, via Tibet. Nationally, because born in Nepal but now living in Darjeeling, he calls himself Nepali, but sometimes Indian, and sometimes Nepali-Indian. Linguistically, he identifies Sherpa as his mother tongue — this language derives from Tibetan. His everyday language is Nepali. Because his work takes him across linguistically diverse mountain communities, he also speaks Hindi-Urdu, Garwahi, Punjabi, Sikkimese, Yalmo, Pasthu, and Chitrali. And because he works for explorers and mountaineers who come to the Himalayan regions from different European nations, he has a working capacity in English, French, German and Italian. To put this in numbers: he speaks eight languages with some competence, functions in four others, identifies in various ways with three separate nations. In a book that will be written two years later by an admiring American author, based on interviews carried on through an interpreter — *Man of Everest: The Autobiography of TENZING (Told to James Ramsey Ullman)*, and the source-book for all of Tenzing’s ‘first-person’ statements I quote in this paper — this second man on the mountain will nevertheless define himself as ‘unlettered’ (Ullman 23). For Tenzing Norgay cannot read. Sherpa, he explains, has not a written form.

The first man, Edmund Hillary, pulls out a Retina camera he has stored under his clothing, to keep it from freezing. His momentarily bare hands bring the camera up to his eye, adjust the focus, frame the field of vision. Tenzing, the object of this compositional moment, unfurls four flags that he has tied together by string and wrapped around the handle of his ice-axe. He holds his ice-axe high in the air, and the four flags flutter. A shutter is about to fall. The paramount moment in British imperial self-fashioning is literally about to take place.

* * * * *

My project here¹ is to locate a kind of momentary agency within that framed, and then ventriloquised, object of photographic capture. It should go without
saying that the imperial archive does not simply provide evidence of how Empire’s Others might have spoken otherwise. Postcolonial scholarship has largely abandoned subaltern historiography’s search for the mind of the Other in the documentary trailings of the imperial Self (see Chaturvedi); and even had it not, the methodology that informs this paper falls well short of that bold, and hopeful, academic endeavour. My title is meant to echo, though in windy conditions, G.T. Stewart’s resonant essay ‘Tenzing’s Two Wrist-Watches’, which sets out clearly the imperial history that leads up to this moment of achievement. My argument is that certain kinds of postcolonial representation — however precariously they might find themselves standing upon the terrain of intentionality; however dependent they might remain upon a later close reading — also should make history. And so it is with Tenzing’s summit flags.

A century and a half of concerted imperial effort leads progressively towards this moment of unfurling. Forty-five years of laboured measurement through the Great Trigonometric Survey of India have contributed to ‘the British discovery’, in 1847, of the world’s highest mountain — one known elsewhere, already, as Chomolungma to the Nepalese, Sagarmatha to Tibetans (see Bilham, Edney, Krakauer). Another decade of internal squabbling within the British Royal Geographical Society has ratified the imperial decision to name this high mountain after an administrative agent in British India: Surveyor-General George Everest. Mountaineering itself has had to invent itself as a social practice — and this took place in Britain, in the 1850s, as a codified, professional, middle-class, club-based, rigorously masculinist activity which brought together the competing social discourses of athleticism, science, and Romanticism (see Hansen 1996; Robbins, 591–96). For this moment of photographic capture to happen, mountaineering has had to locate and deploy a vast structure of technological dependencies: ice tools, climbing boots, even the railways that will bring English climbers to the European Alps in the holiday season (Hansen 1996), and to have finessed prosthetic dependency into a discourse of natural, free-standing, individual heroic achievement. And more: mountaineering has had to construct the tourist infrastructure that will provide mountaineers with pack animals, porters, hostels, guidebooks, and local mountaineering guides, who now regularly plan the climbing routes, organise the support teams of animals and men, put up the expedition tents, cook the camp meals, and then professionally lead amateur enthusiasts upwards to the summits of other peoples’ mountains, so that those amateurs can claim, through their access to writing in the first person, those summit achievements as their own mountaineering ‘first ascents’.

And if this were not enough: the Himalayan region itself has needed to be redefined into a terrain for nationalist competition. Situated as it is on the border zone between two European empires, the region is now charged with metaphor: it is a playing field for espionage in what Rudyard Kipling termed, in Kim, the ‘Great Game’. Thomas Richards’ book on The Imperial Archive explores just
how overwritten this territory has become within the larger, and anxious, project of imperial symbolic management. An entire discourse of mountaineering nationalism has to have arisen, consolidated, and then globalised itself into the Himalayan mountains: this now plays out as a twentieth-century version of the same organising logic that informed the late nineteenth-century’s Scramble for Africa. Within mountaineering nationalism’s Scramble for Altitude, Annapurna is now designated as a French mountain. Nanga Parbat goes to post-war Germany. K2 is claimed by the Italians. All such gestures of ownership, of course, are subject to challenge, and one reads a certain desperation in the ways in which British officials claim Mount Everest as symbolic British terrain. ‘[T]he English being the first mountaineering race in the world’, writes Lord Curzon, in his speech to the Alpine Club in 1909, ‘an Englishman ought to be the first on top’ (Unsworth 18). ‘It would be a national humiliation’, writes Sir Percy Cox, a quarter-century later, ‘were the final ascent [of Everest] to be allowed to pass to the nationals of any other country by reason of any slackening of interest on our part’ (Conefrey xi–xii).

Mountaineering’s Great Game necessitates social re-engineering on the sidelines. A heterogeneous group of Himalayan peoples, some of whose males are sometimes called ‘Sherpas’ (the same name as the language group) have been semiotically repositioned out of their local context — inhabitants of Tibet who migrated into eastern Nepal — into a taxonomic category now defined by its labour. The new signified for the term ‘Sherpa’ is this quasi-caste of men who will perform the work of high-altitude portering for European exploration in the Himalayan mountains.

Over the past thirty years, British climbers have made seven attempts on Mount Everest, these from the north, through Tibet. But Tibet has just experienced a political revolution, and British climbers are no longer welcome. Nepal, however, has also experienced a political revolution and now European mountaineers are suddenly permitted to approach Mount Everest from the south. Alarmingly, though, Nepal has proven itself deaf to Britain’s discursive claims to symbolic ownership of Everest and in 1952 has given its Mount Everest climbing permit to the Swiss. And a Swiss team has come within 250 vertical metres of reaching the top. One of the two men from that team almost to achieve the summit is a former ‘high-altitude porter’ from three previous British attempts on Everest in the 1930s, a Canadian attempt in the 1940s, and a Swiss attempt earlier that same year, now designated by the Swiss a full expedition member: the ‘Sherpa’ Tenzing Norgay. He comes down to lower altitudes with practical, experience-based knowledge of a new, and viable, climbing route to the summit.

Gone, in the panic of competition, is the 1920 Royal Geographical Society’s resolution that all members of any British Everest expedition ‘be British subjects, and that no applications for the co-operation of non-British subjects be entertained’ (Unsworth 23). It is a race against the Swiss. The 1953 British attempt on Mount Everest is fashioned as a full-on siege, including 350 indigenous porters, 35 ‘high-
altitude Sherpas’, seven English climbing team members, two New Zealander team members, and one non-British team climber: Tenzing Norgay. To accommodate this changed principle for climbing team composition, the 1953 Mount Everest Expedition now must be named something other than simply ‘British’. The new name — insufficient at the level of full inclusiveness, though no-one at the time seems to be troubled by this — is the British and Commonwealth Everest Expedition.

On May 28th, 1953, two English climbers try for the summit, and fail. The expedition’s ‘A’ team gives way to the bee-keeper and ‘Sherpa’ team, and the next day, that teamsummits. This, at last, is the moment of absolute completion: the conquest of mountaineering nationalism’s most cherished object of desire, the capture of the ultimate summit photo. And so Tenzing unfurls his summit flags.

And here is the conundrum that will later trouble this celebratory moment of British mountaineering triumph. Both summit teams, the English first rope and the Commonwealth/Sherpa second team, have been given two flags to be used in the planned summit photo: a Union Jack, and below that, the flag of the United Nations. But before the expedition leaves Kathmandu, other nations have made unofficial gifts of their national flags to various individuals within the climbing party, and Tenzing Norgay has added to his ice axe two new flags of his own choosing: Nepal’s flag, for this is the nation of his birthplace, and one of the homes of Chomolungma; and India’s flag, for this is the national flag of the city in which he now lives. It is a small act of wilfulness from an ‘unlettered’ expedition employee, pragmatically made climbing-team citizen, about to turn imperial exemplar. And yet it will mark a seismic shift in mountaineering representations: the apex and the end of Empire. By what modality of social identification can these national citizens — of New Zealand and Nepal/India — manifest British imperial presence on the rooftop of the world? What is this form of group-member self-presentation — this ‘Commonwealth’ but then elided principle for the making of inclusions — for which there is no single summit flag?

This is the shot seen round the world: a Nepali-Indian, high-altitude Sherpa representing British, late-imperial, mountaineering paramountcy. News of this moment will be strategically timed to arrive back in London just as crowds are lining the streets to celebrate Coronation Day celebrations for Elizabeth II, the new Queen of the United Kingdom and Head of the Commonwealth of Nations (see Morris), and the English press will mobilise this coincidence of significatory overload as evidence — at last! — of genuine imperial restoration: ‘Crowning Glory!’ reads one headline. ‘A great coronation gift for the queen.’ ‘A brilliant jewel in the Queen’s diadem’. ‘A new Elizabethan age!’ (Hansen 2001 57; Illustrated London News 1). ‘Seldom since Francis Drake brought the Golden Hind to anchor in Plymouth Sound,’ will claim a Times editorial, ‘has a British explorer offered to his Sovereign such a tribute of glory as Colonel John Hunt and his men are able to lay at the feet of Queen Elizabeth for her Coronation Day’
Reproduced with permission of the Royal Geographic Society.
(Stewart 170). ‘The qualities displayed by Drake and Raleigh are triumphantly present in the Britain of today’, will claim another report. ‘We, the British, got there first!’ (Hansen 2001 57).

For the human figure at the photographic centre of this late-imperial celebration, however, the really hard part of climbing Mount Everest is only now about to begin. One general principle in mountaineering circles warns that the real danger in any climb attends the descent, and not the ascent. A second holds that you cannot stay long upon a mountain top when you are also standing atmospherically in what high-altitude mountaineers like to call ‘the death zone’. A third general principle is that members of an unguided climbing rope are understood to be climbing equals — members of what the French climber Gaston Rébuffat, in romantically androcentric fashion, has called ‘the brotherhood of the rope’ (Rébuffat 196). Although a photographic image of Tenzing in triumph can, by this convention, represent equally the triumph shared by all members of the climbing expedition, Hillary included, mountaineering nationalism and late-imperial rejuvenation enforce a narrative logic of their own — and in that world of symbolic management, the separable parts within mountaineering’s brotherhood cannot equally be weighted. Social contradiction will pass down, and always to the lowest common denominator. After the shutter falls, for Tenzing it is all downhill.

Sir Edmund Hillary — for he is soon after knighted — will write his account of the Everest triumph in two versions: as a chapter in expedition leader Sir John Hunt’s monograph The Conquest of Everest, and then in revised form in his own memoir, entitled High Adventure. In each version he will assert — though in the second with a qualifier (shown in italics) — that the summit photograph of Britain’s mountaineering conquest depicted Tenzing, and not himself, as achieving individual because Tenzing lacked the technological skill required to make him a subject, and not an object, of representation. ‘I didn’t worry about getting Tenzing to take a photograph of me’, Hillary writes. ‘As far as I knew he had never taken a photograph before and the summit of Everest was hardly the place to show him how’ (Hillary 233). George Medal winner Tenzing Norgay, in the ‘autobiography’, will assert a differing distribution of technological competences: ‘I motioned to Hillary that I would now take his picture. But for some reason he shook his head; he did not want it’ (266).

James Morris, the Times reporter assigned to the climb, will write a self-congratulatory memoir entitled Coronation Everest, explaining in detail how he cleverly stage-managed the timing of the news of this achievement, so that the story of ultimate British mountaineering triumph would reach London before everywhere else, and exactly on the day of Elizabeth’s coronation. As the front cover on the paperback edition of his memoir puts it, it is ‘the scoop that crowned the Queen’. Tenzing’s ‘autobiography’ will assert a differing understanding of what this specific stage-managing of information might mean. ‘For the British’, Tenzing ‘writes’, ‘the timing was perfect, and there was a wonderful celebration.
But for many Easterners it was quite the opposite, for they did not receive the news until a day later — and then from the other side of the world. This was true even for King Tribhuvana of Nepal, in whose country Everest stood’ (Ullman 273).

Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru will honour Tenzing with a sinecure, prompting Nepali claims of national betrayal. Nepali crowds will celebrate Tenzing as the first person to have set foot atop Mount Everest — not Hillary — which will prompt the British to bray out their complaint of nationalist betrayal against Tenzing. Tenzing’s ‘autobiography’ will defend him: ‘They put answers in my mouth and made me sign papers I could not read’ (Ullman 278). In a press conference in Kathmandu, the British expedition leader will assert that Tenzing was but an ‘aide’ on the mountain, that Hillary did all the lead climbing, that in fact Tenzing ‘wasn’t technically even a very good climber’ (Ullman 281). To ameliorate fractured relations, Hillary will author a joint Hillary-Tenzing statement to the press, stating: ‘we reached the top almost together’ (Ullman 282).

‘Almost’ is a meaningful qualifier here, for it goes without saying within the principle of ‘the brotherhood of the rope’ that a roped-in team that climbs together summits together, not in sequence. In his ‘autobiography’ Tenzing will provide a double answer to this semiotic finesse in the Hillary ‘joint’ statement. First, he will claim full and equal position within the brotherhood principle for mountaineering representation: ‘Who got there first? … It is a foolish question. The answer means nothing’ (Ullman 263). But brotherhood equality cannot in itself mean everything in this time of narrative overload, and so in his ‘autobiography’ Tenzing will modify — or more accurately, multiply — his rebuttal. It is not the principle of the mountaineering brotherhood that organises the final truth claim, ‘Tenzing’s’ document will suggest. Instead, it is the absolute logic of the mountain itself: ‘[I]t is not for my own sake that I give [this answer],’ he ‘writes’. Nor is it for Hillary’s. It is for the sake of Everest… We went on slowly, steadily. And then we were there. Hillary stepped on top first. And I stepped up after him’ (Ullman 263).

Years later, Tenzing’s son Jamling Norgay will write that what Tenzing really desired, in allowing this egregious admission to be published in the ‘autobiography’, was the direct subordination of nationalist and imperial-resurgence insistences on meaning to a higher principle for mountaineering representation.

[M]y father told me that he made this concession … to relieve the mountain and mountaineering from a growing political legacy… It was his final offering of respect for a mountain that he knew could never be conquered. Indeed, to claim that one had conquered it would be arrogant, if not sacrilegious. Humans are granted no more than an audience with Everest’s summit, and then only rarely and for brief moments.

(Norgay 272)

Perhaps it is in the space between Tenzing’s two strategic answers that a kind of subaltern human agency might be said to have found a voice.

The crux climbing move on Everest’s south col route from Nepal is a forty foot mixed ice and rock crack now known as the ‘Hillary step’. Hillary’s memoir
will tell of how he managed the difficult lead climbing through the rock crack, and then pulled Tenzing Norgay up behind him:

I cramponed backwards up the crack … as Tenzing paid out the rope. Finally I reached over the top of the rock and dragged myself … onto a wide ledge… I took a firm stance and signalled to Tenzing to come on up. As I heaved hard on the rope Tenzing wriggled his way up the crack and finally collapsed exhausted at the top like a giant fish when it has just been hauled from the sea after a terrible struggle. (Hillary 204)

Tenzing’s document will tell a different story of how the team climbed through this, one that again asserts a difficult dual emplacement: within the discourse of the mountaineering brotherhood, but alongside a postcolonial insistence on a right to voice dissent:

I have heard plenty about that ‘fish’, and I admit do not like it… [N]o one pulled or hauled me up the gap. I climbed it myself, just as Hillary had done; and if he was protecting me with the rope while I was doing it, this was no more than I had done for him. … Hillary is my friend. He is a fine climber and a fine man, and I am proud to have gone with him to the top of Everest. But I do feel that in his story of our final climb he is not quite fair to me: that all the way through he indicates that when things went well it was his doing, and when things when badly it was mine. For this is simply not true. Nowhere do I make the suggestion that I could have climbed Everest by myself; and I do not think Hillary should suggest that he could have, or that I could not have done it without his help. All the way up and down we helped, and were helped by, each other — and that was the way it should be. But we were not leader and led. We were partners. (Ullman 261–62)

And so it is with Tenzing’s flags. In this present moment of difficult self-positioning — at the rising climax to a grand narrative of a belated imperial achievement, before the inevitable descent into petit récit and an over-written life — those flags flutter in hierarchic series, top to bottom, smallest to largest unequal partners in the power to represent. I read them in their collectivity as a sign of a social identification that reaches at once backwards towards a discourse of mountaineering’s brotherhood-based partnership among equals, and there seeks inclusion, and as a forward-looking gesture towards an unflagging — and unflaggable — desire for representational difference. ‘It is the indeterminacy of meaning’, Homi Bhabha writes in another context, ‘[that] produces an … “abyssal overlapping”, of too much meaning and a certain meaninglessness’ (Bhabha 334). Later, Tenzing will consider the fluttering signs of indeterminate human agency that inhabit this wild moment of significatory self-presentation. Or so it may be gathered from the document that speaks through his name. ‘On Everest’, the ‘autobiography’ will say for him, ‘I was not thinking about politics. If I had been, I suppose I would have put the Indian or Nepalese flag highest… As it is, I am glad that the U.N. flag was on top. For I like to think that our victory was not only for ourselves — not only for our own nations — but for all men everywhere’ (Ullman 266).
There can be no one flag for the complex order of identifications that this human figure momentarily inhabits — roped-in, posing, masked — beneath the triumphant ice axe. There is no simple designation for this postcolonial way of being in the world. My argument is that the intrinsic difficulty in Tenzing’s gesture remains, for today’s socially dominant peoples, a mountain we have yet to summit. We persist within another capture, but capable of reading signs like these of a future in which genuine cross-cultural reciprocity and partnership can at last find continuance, a future in which social identifications beyond the frame of settled identities and their designations can themselves find place. For now, there can only be too many triumphant summit flags. Or maybe not enough.

NOTES

1 A festschrift, claims Wikipedia, can sometimes serve ‘as a convenient place in which those who are invited to contribute find a permanent resting place for their otherwise unpublishable … papers’. I hope not to have fulfilled that dire definition here. I thank Anne Collett for her very handsome invitation to publish in this collection: Kunapipi is a foundational journal for postcolonial thought, the site of my first academic publication, and in this volume it celebrates one of postcolonial scholarship’s most persistently vibrant intellects, and one of my dearest friends.

This paper has followed a long approach route. It is in part an extension of an argument made in my Anna Rutherford Lecture, given at the 2007 ACLALS Triennial conference, and sponsored by the European Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies. Until her death in 2001, Anna Rutherford was one of only two people to have attended every ACLALS Triennial conference — ongoing since 1968. The other stalwart is Helen Tiffin, who continues that tradition of persistence. A later version of this paper was given to the graduates of the M.A. in English and Cultural Studies at the University of Mauritius, in 2010. I thank my great intellectual mentors, and my many interlocutors.

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Tenzing Norgay’s Four Flags


Caribbean literature records the disillusionment with the reality of political independence that followed the failure of the West Indies Federation, and indicted the confederacy of dunces largely responsible. Peter Abraham’s *This Island Now*, V.S. Naipaul’s *The Mimic Men*, Oonya Kempadoo’s *Buxton Spice* and Caryl Phillips’s *A State of Independence*, among others, have excoriated both colonial and national political machinations that divide states and the region on the grounds of race, class and ideological differences. I want to attend, however, to a more positive vision which cautiously raises hopes for the prospects of Caribbean citizens to actually achieve a state of independence, or as Erna Brodber puts it in *The Rainmaker’s Mistake*, entry into ‘the Free’ (2007 150). This process, however, takes place far outside the realm of organised politics: specifically, the realm of Spirit. The writing of Erna Brodber and Kei Miller envisions Caribbean people accessing epistemological resources of their own cultural fashioning, resources which properly harnessed admit the possibility of growth, transcendence and fulfilment beyond the strictly material realm. In both, the liberation of the individual is linked with that of the community and imagines achievement of a real confederation.

Miller’s poetry, like that of Edward Baugh, Olive Senior and Mark McWatt, is infused with love for his difficult place and people. His clear-eyed yet sacramental songs and testimonies are as moving as the verses of Lorna Goodison and Derek Walcott. Anger at injustice and deep concern for social reform are tempered by compassion for the humble and the wounded, and the possibility of renewal also informs his lyrical prose. What reviewers consistently note in his writing is the influence (in language, tone and subject) of religion: for example, ‘*A Light Song of Light* (2010) contains praise songs set in a biblical landscape divided by darkness and light’ (Proctor online). Miller explains the genesis of this collection: ‘I wondered how in the midst of so much darkness could we possibly sing. And I wondered what it would sound like — this song of light, and how could you right [sic] an intelligent, rigorous poetry like that, that dared to be hopeful’ (Choi online).
Daring to hope is difficult for many Caribbean writers, given a history of catastrophe and the economic degradation and social violence faced by so many in the region. Yet Miller, like Goodison, evokes the possibility of happy endings, no matter how qualified, and despite the record of brutality, still imagines the reclamation of community. Critics remark on his troubling stories which probe painful subjects ‘in a way that is strangely uplifting’ (The Scotsman online). Long accustomed to writing that highlights inequities and injustice in Caribbean postcolonial contexts, critics sometimes struggle to frame the ‘gentler’, brighter vision which might be plotted from Samuel Selvon through Erna Brodber and Olive Senior to Mark McWatt, and of course to Earl Lovelace with his unwavering faith in the redemptive potential of Caribbean culture. And here is my problem: how to talk about terms like faith and redemption in contemporary, socially engaged, postmodernist Caribbean fiction without coming across as an unrealistic romantic or a born-again proselyte? How to admit the realm of Spirit into literary analysis?

Certainly, the deployment of African-Caribbean religious faith in resistance struggles has been recognised in popular as well as historical and literary discourse. Paule Marshall’s Praisesong for the Widow (1984) and Erna Brodber’s Myal (1988) are but two instances of many; and there are countless examples from blues, gospel and reggae music. On the other hand, the complicity of religious practices with intolerance, self-righteous marginalisation/persecution of others, and reactionary conservative politics is a constant in Caribbean literature. Miller recognises this:

religion — at least in Jamaica and in particular Christianity — can be a pretty goddamned dangerous thing. It teaches people how to hate other people. It supplies every bigot with the right rhetoric to defend his hatreds, his intolerances, and his superiority- — and then calls all of these things ‘righteousness’. I write against that. (Laughlin online)

Still, analysis of Miller’s narratives is often couched in religious terminology. Evil manifests in his literary worlds (cruelty, brutality and callousness) but so do epiphanies of enlightenment, compassion, faith in human goodness and simple joy in the world. That said, as a writer who also functions within the academy, he admits that the concept of Spirit embarrasses many who teach and write about Caribbean literature. The difficulty lies in how to render this epistemology in the language of literary criticism: in ‘academic discussion of metaphysical things, we are often tempted to tuck “the Spirit” within quotation marks’, he notes, ‘a way to insert scepticism into the discourse’ (Miller 2011a 450). Discussing religious experience in Erna Brodber’s fiction, Curdella Forbes also observes that spiritual concerns are out of place in the rationalist, intellectual tradition within which literary and critical analysis belongs. Brodber’s achievement, she argues, is the insertion of ‘an alternative vocabulary, rooted in Caribbean religious tradition, into Caribbean literary discourse’ (2007 17).
The twenty-first century began with catastrophe and fear of catastrophe. An apocalyptic feel to the millennium and obsessive media coverage of natural and terrorist disasters since then have contributed, undoubtedly, to a resurgence of evangelical fundamentalism in the Caribbean. This kind of reactionary religious resurgence is worrying, accompanied as it is with the exploitative capitalist ethos of some new religious leaders and lay preachers who feel impelled to denounce ‘sinfulness’ in the media as the cause of social and economic problems. Again, Miller’s fiction registers this unease:

In Jamaica, church was a part of everything… People waited for the latest preacher in the way that another might wait for the next big song… On almost every corner there was a pulpit and every preacherman preaches like he was trying to win votes… And so, on the island, it became easy to preach hate and call it love. Easy to tell people who they should spit on. Who they should turn their eyes away from. Who was not their neighbour instead of who was. (Miller 2008 202)

Interestingly, the link between politician and preacher here underscores their common roles in fragmenting communities for their own ends. Against this travesty of religion, I posit something more elusive, which I have been calling Spirit. It surfaces in Miller’s stories which foreground the power of vulnerable, frightened people to take a leap of faith in love as redemptive, compassion as transcendence, even in the face of dread societies. Crucially, he does this — as do Brodber, Lovelace, Senior and Goodison — by extending the spiritual realm to spaces outside the Church. This apprehension of Spirit, often eluding the parameters of organised religion, informs Toni Morrison’s ‘discredited knowledges’, or epistemologies which eschew rationalist discourse (342). Their value is rarely recognised. So Adamine in The Last Warner Woman is aware that:

Whatever white man believe in with all his heart — that thing name religion; whatever black woman believe in, that name superstition. What white man go to on Sunday, that thing name church; but what black woman go to name cult. (Miller 2010a, 95)

Brodber’s Louisiana also asserts that ‘there are more ways of knowing than are accessible to the five senses’ (1994 4). For both writers, fiction engages with injustice and the desperate situations in which many Caribbean people live, yet imaginatively transcends this social reality through faith that their lives, individual and together, are worthy of celebration.

Miller’s balancing act is evident from his first collection, Fear of Stones. For example, ‘Sound Like a Gunshot’ and ‘The Fear of Stones’ starkly depict forcible subordination (especially of children and women) as perverting emotional growth and perpetuating a legacy of cruelty and violence. Yet in these tales, faith and love trump intolerance and brutality. So spirit and social justice are intimately connected in Miller’s discourse. He suggests why prophets and seers and Warner Women figure in his writing: because there is a link between writer and prophet. ‘That’s what I believe prophets do. They extend genuine love towards those amongst us who catch hell. What Cornel West calls for is a kind of radical and
ever-expanding empathy. It’s something I feel called to as well’ (Miller 2011b online). Occasionally anger surfaces: using Scripture to justify discrimination against men (and women) of one’s own people who choose to perform gender roles differently, he feels, violates the Second Commandment: ‘a genuine love and a willingness to celebrate his being and his right to that being’ (2011b online). In his work Old Testament retribution is redeemed by New Testament faith, hope and charity.

Forbes claims that ‘Spirit’ in Erna Brodber’s *Louisiana* ‘indicates both a fundamentally spiritualist worldview, and the groundedness of that spiritualism in a specifically religious interpretation’ (2007 8). I want to move away from a specifically ‘religious’ context, however, and attempt to yoke together concepts of immanence, and spiritualism/spirituality — what Forbes names ‘Caribbean metaphysics’ (2007 6) and Walcott calls ‘the numinous’ (40). A useful catchall term occurs in Dianne Stewart’s *Three Eyes for the Journey*: ‘Jamaican sociologist of religion Leonard Barrett describes this African sensibility most cogently with the term “soul force”’ (18). I want to appropriate ‘soul force’ (recognition of forces beyond the rational and material world which have the power to transform human emotions) for literary practice, the kind of redemption through words that Brathwaite refers to as ‘liberation of the voice’ (49). Just as art has the power to move, I argue that Brodber’s and Miller’s writing functions as a kind of ‘working in the Spirit’, albeit a most definitely embodied spirit. Mr Writer Man in *The Last Warner Woman* makes this explicit: ‘The Warner People is still here, Mama. We is still here. Seers. Prophets… But things is different now. We take the pencils down from behind our ears and now we is writing. We been writing one whole heap of books’ (2010a 243). And for both, I suggest, the goal of this writing is not only to give people back their forgotten (hi)stories (which is what Mr Writer Man does for Adamine, and Ella/ *Louisiana* does for the seamen in New Orleans), but to bear testament to the potential of Caribbean people to overcome individual challenges and through empathy to build a sustainable society.

Brodber’s *Louisiana* closes with the amanuensis claiming the story as ‘a community tale. We made it happen’ (161). This is true of all Brodber’s novels. Her narrative strategies, like Miller’s, insist on the affirmation of connections, of interrelatedness. Hence textual structure models her ideal social structure, in that all the players of the cultural mosaic have a role to play and voices to contribute. ‘The centering of community is a very noticeable aspect of Brodber’s paradigm’ observes Forbes; Spirit serves ‘as a cohesive, relational force’ (2007 16). Jacqui Alexander might have been in conversation with Brodber and Miller when she argues for the urgent need to recognise ‘the deep knowing that we are interdependent — neither separate nor autonomous. As human beings, we have a sacred connection to one another, and this is why enforced separations wreak havoc on our Souls. There is great danger, then, in living lives of segregation’ (282).
Evelyn O’Callaghan

Brodber plots emancipation in spiritual terms: in *Louisiana*, Ella is told that ‘[e]nough of her line had been wasted in battle… [and] she should take a new approach to fighting’ (1994 155). This new approach involves drawing on ‘soul force’ as a liberating Caribbean diarescia epistemology in the service of healing. For as Stewart discovers, ‘Obeah, Myal, Revival Zion, Kumina, Rastafari, and other African diasporic religions share common religious foci that appear to be African-derived and that emphasise healing, well-being, and the integration and affirmation of purposeful life experience’ (12). With Miller, Brodber’s writing takes for granted ‘alternative’ belief systems such as spirit possession, Obeah, Myal and other forms of Caribbean ‘higher science’/healing practices. As Helen Tiffin argues, Brodber’s work refuses acceptance of all closed narratives (racial, economic, religious or political). Postcolonial reconstitution takes many forms, including a revolutionary metaphysics articulated in her fiction. The ‘traffic between the spiritual and the material, the dead and the living’ in Brodber’s writing, notes Forbes, ‘is neither metaphor nor belief system but commonsensical, everyday fact … [and is] the basis for social transformation’ (2009 1). Hence Myal’s espousal of a community of healers who draw on knowledge and rituals outside of conventional Western cosmology as a way of reading the world. They practice and promote their own cultural truth claims in the project of healing both individual and group. There is no mystical obfuscation of alternative epistemologies in Brodber’s fantastical narratives, or Miller’s either. For Brodber, Forbes points out, the spiritual is localised and ‘grounded in material specifics’ (2007 11); ‘the spiritual legacy is right here at our fingertips, within reach — it does not have to be excavated from a distant past — it is even now in the making’ (14). In other words, it is being written. The emphasis on the literal rather than metaphorical nature of Brodber’s spirit world is well taken. But I prefer to read the account of redemption as Ella/Louisiana tapping into a culturally specific, historicised, shared cosmology that perceives immanence along the lines of Glissant’s ‘relentless striving to create a “We” from the disjointed “I’s”’ (Dash 134). I grope toward articulating Spirit in the work of both writers, but in humanist rather than religious terminology.

Brodber and Miller, I suggest, insist on recognising the power of Caribbean people to transcend dehumanising contexts and to manifest the sacred in multiple forms of creative expression: the pan-man in Port of Spain or dance hall diva in Kingston who are transformed during their performance no less than the women with upraised arms and closed eyes swaying in a wooden church in Bridgetown. Materialist concerns matter to their characters, but so do spiritual epiphanies which inspire compassion and empathy, inclusiveness and community. In closing, I revisit Walcott’s reference to the Caribbean poet’s ‘awe of the numinous’ (40). Caribbean literary employment of spirit work/ ‘soul force’ seems to me to fulfil multiple meanings of the numinous: textuality in the service of liberation and healing; evoking immanence in the everyday; constructing ethical concerns that
drive community connectedness. The work of Brodber and Miller testifies to these interconnected aspects of the numinous. Brodber has made it clear that her writing has activist intentions, and Miller believes in ‘the ability of art to, at once, be politically engaged, sound a lament for the desperate situation that Caribbean subjects often live in, and transcend this secular reality to move toward a spiritual place of celebration’ (2011a 455). Their writings appropriate ‘soul force’ in the service of crucial Caribbean projects: healing trauma and building viable communities. Surely, in dark times like these, we need such illumination:

A light song of light is not sung
in the light; what would be the point?
A light song of light swells up in dark
times, in wolf time and night time,
in knuckle and blood times; it hums
a small tune in daytime, but saves
its full voice for the midnight

(Miller 2010b 11)

Still healthily suspicious of proselytising evangelists, I welcome a literary vision that transcends cynical despair and finds the sacred in the mundane. Such sentiments inform Brodber’s fiction and the poetry of Walcott and Goodison. And now the work of Kei Miller, who is also, I think, engaged in the literary project of ‘importing “light” to people who were trapped in darkness’ (Miller 2011a 451).

WORKS CITED
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Stephen Gray

ALL I’M SAYING

All that I’m saying is
   to be wanted is better than
   to want,
when on the beach I tread
   on shiny bluebottles
   they pop
like our used old condoms,
   all washed up and I think
   of you.
Ezekiel said, ‘Wherever the river
   flows there will be
   more life’.
So the golden splash on tiles
   of your latest grapple
   reminds.
The desert rain frog may live
   in its foggy dunes
   waterless,
those grouchy fledglings
   feeding have yet to be
   in the pink,
the surfzone throws shark’s eggs
   like mermaid’s purses
   ashore,
kelp trumpets at my swimmer’s
   itch, due to spores of
   jellyfish,
but all I’m saying is how
   I was all on the rocks
   before you.
You’re my every dawn and
   after the latest sexy burst
   calm sea.
Now you have me down to quoting
as I tramp the rivermouth
God’s word.

but I’m grateful He should ever
have devised one such as
bold you,

whose hearty needs do outweigh
— before expiry date —
my own.

Navigators reached Cape Voltas
meaning where to turn or rather
return.

This is where the continent’s
bloody flow meets salty
backwash,

rendering desire and all its
long held together wholeness
undone.

Brought to bursting I sag safely,
in the holding arms of your
desire,

best to be wanted by
the one you really love and
give in.
MARCO POLO DESCRIBES THE GIRAFFE

What piebald beauty, sloped like a hill!
So tall in front, three paces from the ground;
yet behind only one! Small head swivels.
Pretty sight! Never done harm to anyone.
ELAND

 Warned by one baboon bark from the cliffside
 before you intruded and the seed-eating cheep-cheeps
 that will not cease till up the valley your
 blue shirt is departed, we are watching
 you watching us — three eland; no, five:
 yes, the one bull and his cows, the tribe —
 like a cavewall frieze, ashy dewlap
 into beige, mudstone into quartzite,
 with manganese dioxide for flicking tails.
 Standing head-on’s harder for arrows and bullets
 to find, for defence two horns. Mostly we graze,
 while Bad Boyz’ rattling bakkie of peaches or
 shiny 4x4s, littering GPS, flash by on the loop.
 Then regurgitate and cud, O booted unrimed poet
 of the last day. Remember you too, like us, soon will be
gone.
PLINY’S TALE OF THE DOLPHIN-BOY

In Hippo west of Carthage, under the Pax Romana (he wrote), took place this true story for poets: where the village folk of fishers of the lagoon fed from inland wadis and red hills before desert, where the palms and olives provide, their lads ventured through surf competing into swell, when one curly-headed (unlike Arion) unnamed befriended this striped idle of a dolphin, rode into myth upon its back, sporting in vampish curls and doubling round and tumbling, transported for the tide. This harvester of sun and salt when the tide was full made rendezvous, taming his cetaceous heavy-breather, giving vaulting exhibitions for the tourists crowding the dunes. This exemplary bond. Once the boy retired from waving and tumbling, his shiny mount fell flat upon the shore in pursuit, must be rolled back by the bottlenose and fin into its foamy element. For this spectacle too many assembled: instead of lopping dates or pressing olives, the colony had swimming exhibitions now, the fish-haul down productivity decreased. Of course the tourist potential of spas and dolphinaria would keep the cash local, but where the scattered tribesmen gather they talk of their own ranges turned to plantations and factories. So Octavius Avitus came, poured scented oil on the beloved fish in the slop … and for days it slithered about, Pliny says, ‘listless and dejected’. Then died, belly up. ‘I can imagine how sadly you’ll lament this ending and adorn my true story.’ We need never add how the boy was flogged and flayed, the frontier-troops searched house to house for shiny mammal memorabilia, while the governor’s name was marbled out on half the Atlas Mountains to overlook his subjects, nor why across the rippled reach of a tranquil eve, when the sun just stays there refusing to go down, and you cup your briny hands, emit that gargley call the region amplifies and transmits,
the dolphins continue their passage regardless,  
have learnt their lesson and they don’t reply.  
But still the boy who sat the dorsal of his  
oceanic masterpiece peers out, while stringing figs  
into boxes at the packery; now he only bellydances  
in his sleep. ‘This fable was heard on good authority:  
make of it what you will, as I have done.’  
An archaeologist should give you all the market price  
of citizens who solidly eat while millions slave.  
But Pliny did not have to hammer out quite why  
it hurts when beauty’s killed and liberty constrained.
The origin of this essay lies in two commentary pieces I read in *The Guardian* newspaper. Hugo Young was a *Guardian* commentator to his fingertips: well-informed, judicious, capable of seeing all sides of the argument. Which meant that for most of the time, as far as I was concerned, he was frustratingly moderate in his opinions, an archetypal liberal, which made this particular piece very striking. Young knew he was dying of cancer and that his column on 16th September 2003 would be the last one he wrote. He chose to write about the relationship between Britain and the USA, and the final words of the column, the final words he would write — so the written equivalent of the deathbed quotation — asked what would become of our country now it was ‘in abject thrall to Bush and his gang’. Then in August 2005, the historian Timothy Garton Ash offered this comparison:

> If you want to know what London was like in 1905, come to Washington in 2005. Imperial gravitas and massive self-importance. That sense of being the centre of the world, and of needing to know what happens in every corner of the world because you might be called on — or at least feel called upon — to intervene there. Hyperpower. Top dog. And yet, gnawing away beneath the surface, the nagging fear that your global supremacy is not half so secure as you would wish. As Joseph Chamberlain, the British colonial secretary, put it in 1902: ‘The weary Titan staggers under the too vast orb of his fate’.

‘The weary Titan’ rang a bell, though I needed to look it up. ‘Abject thrall’ had stayed in my mind and took a little more tracking down, although I suspect that Young was only unconsciously aware, if at all, of the phrase’s appearance in Edmund Spenser’s ‘Hymne of Heavenly Love’ (‘Out of the bosome of eternall blisse / In which he reigned with his glorious syre, / He downe descended, like a demisse / And abject thrall, in fleshes fraile attyre’), appropriate as that quotation might have been, if satirically intended, given the very publicly manifested Christian faith of George W. Bush and Tony Blair. But when did the ‘abject thrall’ that Young was talking about begin and what might explain it? US-British relationships are obviously long and complicated, and this essay doesn’t offer a fully-informed historical answer, but it is certainly the case that the relationship shifted dramatically around the end of the nineteenth century, arguably assuming then the form it still takes more than a hundred years later. Interestingly, much of the discussion about that shift took place as public poetry.

* * * * *
WAR OVER THE VENEZUELAN BORDER

Given the history of the last century, it always takes an effort to remember that there was serious talk of war between the USA and Britain in 1895, improbably enough over the border between Venezuela and British Guiana. This had been a long-running dispute — indeed it still is a dispute between Venezuela and now independent Guyana. Eventually Venezuela sought US support. Although no US national interests were involved, Grover Cleveland’s administration invoked the Monroe Doctrine to suggest that arbitration was in order. It did so via a memorandum to the British government delivered in July 1895 by Richard Olney, which has perhaps never been given its full due as announcing — as much in tone as in substance — the US determination to change the global order:

The United States is practically sovereign on this continent, and its fiat is law upon the subjects to which it confines its interposition. Why? It is not because of the pure friendship or good-will felt for it. It is not simply by reason of its high character as a civilized state, nor because wisdom and justice and equity are the invariable characteristics of the dealings of the United States. It is because, in addition to other grounds, its infinite resources, combined with its isolated position, render it master of the situation and practically invulnerable as against any or all other powers.

(Curtis 284)

Five years later, Theodore Roosevelt would famously define his foreign policy as ‘Speak softly and carry a big stick’. If you were going to speak as loudly as Olney, it was even more important that your stick was big enough to back up your words. It’s sometimes forgotten that it was Britain which first felt the threat of that stick. With good reason Cleveland referred to his Secretary of State’s words as ‘Olney’s twenty-inch gun’ (qtd in Dennis 23).

The British Prime Minister, Lord Salisbury, took two months to reply before pointedly refuting Olney’s arguments, but soon accepting arbitration. The USA was not interested in Venezuela’s territorial claims — in fact the arbitration committee largely accepted the British case. It was interested in asserting its own right to control the American continent, as Cleveland’s aggressive message to Congress in December 1895 made abundantly clear.

Alarmed by the tone of US language, such dignitaries as the Prince of Wales, the Duke of York, and the Archbishop of London published a series of peace messages in British and US newspapers in January 1896. A poetic appeal was also published by William Watson in sonnet form:

O towering Daughter, Titan of the West,
Behind a thousand leagues of foam secure;
Thou toward whom our inmost heart is pure
Of ill intent: although thou threatenest
With most unfilial hand thy mother’s breast,
Not for one breathing-space may Earth endure
The thought of War’s intolerable cure
For such vague pains as vex to-day thy rest!
But if thou hast more strength than thou canst spend
In tasks of Peace, and find’st her yoke too tame,
Help us to smite the cruel, to befriend
The succourless, and put the false to shame.
So shall the ages laud thee, and thy name
Be lovely among nations to the end.

The intertextual relationships here are quite complex. When Britain seemed at threat from France in 1852, Tennyson had addressed the ‘Gigantic daughter of the West’: ‘We know thee most, we love thee best, / For art thou not of British blood?’; though, when called on militarily, the British offspring become male: ‘Arise, our strong Atlantic sons, / When war against our freedom springs!’ Watson’s phrase ‘towering daughter’ to refer to the USA is in the same vein as Tennyson, but probably picks up the phrase from a poem by Oliver Wendell Holmes, the Anglophile New Englander, written on the dedication of the Shakespeare Fountain at Stratford-on-Avon in 1887, a poem which ends with a conventional elegy to the familial relationship between the two countries:

Land of our fathers, ocean makes us two,
But heart to heart is true!
Proud is your towering daughter in the West,
Yet in her burning life-blood reign confest
Her mother’s pulses beating in her breast.
This holy fount, whose rills from heaven descend,
Its gracious drops shall lend,—
Both foreheads bathed in that baptismal dew,
And love make one the old home and the new!

‘Towering daughter’ may sound slightly threatening; and the fact that the fountain had been paid for by George C. Childs, millionaire Philadelphian publisher, perhaps spoke to changing times in which the mother country’s national institutions needed financial support from wealthy daughters to survive. Nonetheless, maternal pieties are observed here, and Holmes celebrates the common fount which bathes both foreheads.

In Watson’s poem, the USA is still the daughter, still in that genealogically secondary position, able to be chided for her unfilial threat to the imperial mother. But at the same time she is also ‘Titan of the West’, another poetic reference, this time to Matthew Arnold’s world-weary characterisation of England in his 1867 poem, ‘Heine’s Grave’. Remembering Heine’s criticism of England, Arnold had written:

So thou arraign’st her, her foe;
So we arraign her, her sons.

Yes, we arraign her! but she,
The weary Titan, with deaf
Ears, and labour-dimm’d eyes,
Regarding neither to right
Nor left, goes passively by,
Staggering on to her goal;
Bearing on shoulders immense,
Atlanteän, the load,
Wellnigh not to be borne,
Of the too vast orb of her fate.

That Arnoldian reference to the ‘weary Titan’ would also be picked up by Joseph Chamberlain in a well-known exchange with Sir Wilfrid Laurier at the 1902 Colonial Conference. To Laurier’s challenge, ‘If you want our aid [the aid of the colonies], call us to your councils,’ Chamberlain would reply:

Gentlemen, we do want your aid. We do require your assistance in the administration of the vast Empire which is yours as well as ours. The weary Titan staggers under the too vast orb of its fate. We have borne the burden for many years. We think it time that our children should assist us to support it, and whenever you make the request to us, be very sure that we shall hasten gladly to call you to our councils. (Amery 421)

In this case, the familial metaphor can survive because Chamberlain is addressing the Empire and Britain can still see itself as the mother country — even though Chamberlain neutralises Britain’s gender in his quotation from Arnold: now the too vast orb of its fate, where Arnold had ‘her fate’. Chamberlain’s biographer notes that although the proceedings of the 1902 Colonial Conference were never published, he draws from a 197-page verbatim record for his version of the speech, so it’s telling that almost all references to it, including Timothy Garton Ash’s, write of ‘his fate’.

Watson’s reference is rather different. The USA may still be a daughter, but she is also herself a Titan. Once the unfilial threat has been contained by the remark that the Earth itself would not endure the thought of war, the poem can proceed to find tasks for the surplus energies of this new Titan: smiting the cruel and putting the false to shame. In the same month Watson’s poem appeared, British politicians were hastening to recalibrate the familial relationship in the face of US sword-rattling. Arthur Balfour stressed that the very idea of war with the United States carried with it some of the unnatural horror of a civil war (Dugdale vol. I 226); Joseph Chamberlain said such war would be an absurdity as well as a crime, indeed a fratricidal strife (Neale xvii). None of this language was particularly reassuring given that the potential antagonist had in the not too distant past launched itself into fratricidal slaughter on an unprecedented scale. However, conflict was never really likely because, despite the terms of Salisbury’s response to Olney, British strategy was ‘solidly one of concession to the United States’ (Campbell 1960 26). By February 1896 the Queen, the government, and the opposition were falling over each other to accept the Monroe Doctrine and the right of the USA to appoint a boundary commission. This was not the response of a benevolent mother towards a petulant daughter, or of a brother to an estranged brother, nor even of one Titan towards a sister Titan. This was already abject thrall, even if it was an abjection thought bearable because the new world power was in some sense ‘ours’ — and I’ll come back to the significance of that possessive pronoun.
As if to underline the ritual nature of this transition, Britain had to undergo two further humiliations at the hands of the USA during this decade. The second — and most significant — concerned the replacement of the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty which tied US hands when it came to building and fortifying the isthmian canal, soon to be cut across Central America. Again, after several years of negotiation, Britain simply accepted US terms. The new factor here, driving US interests, was Theodore Roosevelt, first as Governor of New York, then as Vice President and President. Building on Olney’s example, Roosevelt perfected the art of diplomacy based on taking a stance of moral righteousness and not shifting from it. The third bone of contention was the Canadian border with Alaska, an issue of some moment after the gold rush of 1897–99. In the end, a rigged commission was established to give the USA the result it wanted and Britain a relatively dignified retreat. Canada was not pleased.

AMERICANISM

The ideology of Americanism had originally been concerned to defend the continent from the condescension of the self-defined Old World, as represented by thinkers such as Buffon and Hegel. Thomas Jefferson himself had played an important role here, as had South American figures such as Andrés Bello and Simón Bolívar, and the hugely influential European scientist, Alexander von Humboldt. However, as the nineteenth century progressed, US Americanism increasingly became an ideology based on the supposed moral and political superiority of the Anglo-Saxon peoples, distanced equally from the dying cultures of old Europe and the turbulent world of Latin America. The first watchword of this ideology was ‘manifest destiny’, a term originally dating from the 1840s, but repopularised through the writings of one of the most prolific and widely-read nineteenth-century US historians, John Fiske, whose lecture of that title was the centrepiece of a series he delivered at London’s Royal Institution in 1880: ‘In the deepest and widest sense, our American history … descends in unbroken continuity from the days when stout Arminius in the forests of northern Germany successfully defied the might of imperial Rome’. This was the destiny of a people variously called English, Teuton, Anglo-Saxon, or Aryan (Fiske 7, 151). As another popular writer, Josiah Strong, put it in 1891:

> It seems to me that God, with infinite wisdom and skill, is training the Anglo-Saxon race for an hour sure to come in the world’s future… If I read not amiss, this powerful race will move down upon Mexico, down upon Central and South America, out upon the islands of the sea, over upon Africa and beyond. And can anyone doubt that the result of this competition of races will be the ‘survival of the fittest’? (213–14).

The strategist for these US global ambitions was Captain Alfred Thayer Mahan, a naval historian who became a close associate of Roosevelt’s, and a writer whose theories of cultural conflict still find their neo-conservative echoes today. His key text is The Interest of America in Sea Power, Present and Future, published in 1897, which collected essays published during the 1890s. Decrepit
as it was by 1898, the attraction of the remnants of Spanish Empire to the USA lay in Spain’s original circumnavigatory ambitions, which had led to the acquisition of territories on a tropical belt around the world. That Central American canal would soon complete the process initiated by Suez, and the USA would be able to establish for itself a world-wide commercial network supported by coaling stations across the Pacific—Hawaiii, Midway, Wake, Guam, Manila. The coaling stations Mahan argued for have become refuelling stations for B52s, but that circumnavigatory belt is still crucial, with additional links provided by client states such as Britain, as with the removal of the inhabitants of the island of Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean now a military island base crucial for the bombing of both Iraq and Afghanistan.

Mahan had always judged the Caribbean to be essential for the development of US sea power, and Cuba to be the most desirable of the ‘island fortresses’, as he called them. In a memorandum he wrote on behalf of the Naval War Board in August 1898, Mahan mentioned Guantánamo Bay, along with a couple of other Cuban bays, saying ‘When Cuba becomes independent, the United States should acquire, as a naval measure, one of these ports, with a portion of adjacent territory’ (1975, II, 588). In fact, just before Mahan wrote those words, Guantánamo Bay had become the very first place in Cuba to see a US attack when Marines landed there in June 1898 to prepare the way for the full-scale US assault on Santiago which followed later that summer and which more or less ended the USA’s short war with Spain.

The USA invaded Cuba to prevent Cuban independence, but the causus belli — the 1898 equivalent of Iraq’s weapons of mass destruction — was the explosion on board the US ship, the *Maine*, in Havana harbour on the evening of 18th February, which killed 266 out of the 355 crew on board. The newspapers were in no doubt that Spain was to blame: ‘Remember the Maine, to Hell with Spain’ became the popular slogan. Roosevelt needed no inquiry to determine the cause of the explosion: ‘The *Maine* was sunk by an act of dirty treachery on the part of the Spaniards I believe’ (1951 775).

The vision shared by Roosevelt and Mahan of how the USA could benefit from the dismemberment of what remained of the Spanish Empire had three significant outcomes: the buildings of the isthmian canal, which Roosevelt ensured by giving military support to Panama; the establishment of a US naval base at Guantánamo Bay, which had been a non-negotiable element in the Platt Amendment by which Roosevelt gave Cuba its ‘independence’; and Roosevelt’s Great White Fleet, sent round the world in 1907. Spain and Britain had announced their global ambitions through the circumnavigations of Magellan and Drake. Roosevelt would do the same for the USA, paying courtesy visits so that potential enemies could get a good view of US sea power. The Great White Fleet: the ships were indeed white, a poetical echo can also be heard in its name. Published in February 1899, Rudyard Kipling’s poem, ‘The White Man’s Burden’, had appeared at a critical moment
just two days before the US Senate ratified the Treaty of Paris that officially ended the Spanish-American War, ceded Puerto Rico, Guam, and the Philippines to the United States, and placed Cuba under US control.

**THE NARRATIVE OF CONSOLATION**

Once the new power relationship between the USA and Britain had been established, a new narrative could be allowed to paper over the cracks, to provide at least a fig leaf to cover the new British thrall. The first opportunity for such a narrative had come with the destruction of the *Maine*: the incident awoke British sympathy and support, whereas newspapers in Spain, Portugal, France, and Italy viewed the coming war as one between the Latin and the Anglo-Saxon races and refused to support the USA. The USA found to its surprise that in Britain, of all places, its cries of moral indignation were endorsed (Campbell 1960 154–55; Seed). From the British point of view the Spanish-American war could only do good by revealing the ‘real’ sentiments of continental Europe towards the United States. In the past, the argument ran, when the USA and Britain had come into conflict, France, Germany, and Russia had been able to display a spurious friendship to the United States which was really no more than hostility to Britain. Now continental hostility to the USA would show itself, and Britain’s real friendship shine the brighter by contrast. This is exactly what happened. There was US recognition that the countries were — as a cartoon in the *Minneapolis Journal* had it (‘Bart’) — ‘better friends than they used to be’. And when there was talk of a Latin military alliance against the USA, the same newspaper was confident enough of British military support to risk the headline which gives this essay its title: Remember the Mane (24 May 1898) (fig. 1).

The great poetic expression of Atlantic rapprochement was ‘A Voice from the West’, written by the new British poet laureate, Alfred Austin, who was thought more politically reliable than his rival William Watson. The poem was published simultaneously in the London *Times* and the *New York Herald* at the end of March 1898:

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What is the voice I hear
On the wind of the Western Sea?
Sentinel, listen, from out Cape Clear
And say what the voice may be.
"'Tis a proud free people calling loud to a people
proud and free.

'And it says to them: 'Kinsmen, hail!
We severed have been too long.
Now let us have done with a worn-out tale —
The tale of an ancient Wrong;
And our friendship last long as Love doth last,
and be stronger than Death is strong.'
```
Answer them, 'Sons of the self-same race,
And blood of the self-same clan,
Let us speak with each other face to face
And answer as man to man;
And loyally love and trust each other as none but
free men can.

'So fling them out to the breeze,
Shamrock, Thistle, and Rose!
And the Star-Spangled Banner unfurl with these,
A message to friends and foes,
Wherever the sails of peace are seen and wherever
the war-wind blows.

'A message to bond and thrall to wake:
For wherever we come, we twain,
The throne of the tyrant shall rock and quake,
And this menace be void and vain;
For you are lords of a strong, young land, and
we are lords of the main.'

Yes, this is the voice on the bluff March gale:
‘We severed have been too long;
But now we have done with a worn-out tale,
The tale of an ancient Wrong;
And our friendship shall last long as Love doth last,
and be stronger than Death is strong!’

The most striking aspect of Austin’s poem is that rather than speaking for Britain and addressing the USA, the poet feels the need to ventriloquise the voice from the west, from across the Atlantic, addressing the British as kinsmen and affirming a friendship stronger than death: a sentiment which once had been articulated, if not in quite such strong terms, by Oliver Wendell Holmes, but which now needs to be imagined precisely because those terms are no longer being heard. To that imagined voice, the poet responds in kind as an equal: ‘For you are lords of a strong land and we are lords of the main’. Nothing now about mothers and daughters — just the affirmation of a desired equality which the previous three years had proved totally illusory. Austin was, understandably, a much parodied poet, and in May 1898 the British *Review of Reviews* published a full-length parody, of which this is one stanza:

For wherever we come, we twain
The machine gun shall bellow of Jesus,
And the Bible preach gin and gain,
For our greed and gospel’s the same.
And if we’ve made an end of the Redskin,
so have you of his Maori kin. (qtd in Reuter 76–77)

Throughout the summer months of 1898, there were insistent British calls for Anglo-American unity. In May, during a famous speech in Birmingham, reported on the front page of the *New York Times* (14 May 1898), Joseph Chamberlain called for ‘permanent amity with our kinsmen across the Atlantic’ and went so far as to say that war would be cheaply purchased if it allowed the Stars and Stripes and the Union Jack ‘to wave together over an Anglo-Saxon alliance’. Articles from *The Spectator* in the same month capture the tone of British press coverage of the war: ‘We rejoice in the efficiency of the American representative of our race [Dewey at Manila], because we believe that, failing the Anglo-Saxon, the wronged of the world will find no defender...’. This is not a tactical alliance: Britain has bought into the US idea of foreign policy as a moral crusade. It is ‘our’ victory too, because the USA is the representative of the race, even if British military activity in this case was precisely zero:

We think America will keep the Philippines, and we heartily hope it. She will govern them well enough, much better than any Power except ourselves, and we have more
of the world’s surface than we can well manage… The envy we excite is already too
great… It would be a relief if another English-speaking Power would take up a portion
of our task, and in taking it, perform the duty of repaying something to the world
which yields her such advantages. The ‘weary Titan’, in fact, needs an ally while
traversing ‘the too vast orb of his fate’ [changed again to ‘his’], and the only ally whose
aspirations, ideas, and language are like his own is the great American people.
(qtd in Campbell 1960 152)

The ‘weary Titan’ appears again; but none of the users of Arnold’s lines actually
echoed his deep pessimism about what England had become. Instead, we are
offered different versions of how the load might be shared. Chamberlain looked
to the children of the Empire; like William Watson earlier, The Spectator looks
here to the USA, the eldest child, now so thoroughly grown up that it had to be
talked of as a ‘cousin’, a carefully calculated degree of relationship, vaguely
equal but with enough distance for some negotiation to be necessary. But whereas
for Chamberlain the burden was to be shared, and for The Spectator the USA
would be an ally on a journey across the orb, it would take Kipling’s poem to echo
Arnold’s sense of a burden which Britain would lay down in order for another
‘white race’ to take it up. Here, finally, was Britain recognising that the USA
would finally have to outgrow its position as ‘daughter’ or ‘son’ or assume its
‘manhood’ in order to deal with ‘Your new caught sullen peoples / Half-devil and
half-child’.

One of the reasons for Anglo-Saxonism’s power as an ideology was that
it covered several possibilities. At its widest it was identical with a Teutonism
which included the spread of Germanic-speaking peoples over northern Europe
and then North America. But that idea had little appeal in either Britain or the
USA when Germany itself became a potentially hostile state. In the second half
of the nineteenth century racial ideas had usually emphasised either blood or
culture. However, what became particularly important at the turn of the century
was language (Martellone). Of the three great British imperial ideologists from
the second half of the nineteenth century — James Anthony Froude, John Robert
Seeley, and Charles Dilke — it was Dilke who came closest to embracing the
replacement of an imperial vision with an English-speaking vision. Indeed, he
seems to have been responsible for the growing popularity of the term ‘English-
speaking’. But, predictably, even Dilke could not envisage the changing nature of
the relationship between English-speaking people. As he put it in 1868:

America is becoming, not English merely, but world-embracing in the variety of its
type; and, as the English element has given language and history to that land, America
offers the English race the moral directorship of the globe, by ruling mankind through
Saxon institutions and the English tongue. Through America, England is speaking to
the world. (224)

Britain might fancy itself as a ventriloquist but Roosevelt was nobody’s dummy,
though he himself actively promoted Dilke’s title-phrase: the first volume of his
historical epic, The Winning of the West, is called ‘The Spread of the English-
Speaking Peoples’, a phrase later adopted and enshrined in Winston Churchill’s four-volume *History of the English-Speaking Peoples*, which celebrated the race in precisely Rooseveltian terms after the Second World War. There had been a move to use linguistic commonality as the basis of a political federation (Kennedy), but the USA has never shown any inclination in this direction, however much a certain strain of conservative British political thought continues to dwell on the importance of language (Roberts).

**THE SUMMER OF LOVE**

During that summer of Anglo-Saxon love in 1898, US newspapers reported unprecedented displays of the Stars and Stripes in London on 4th July 1898, just after the fall of Santiago (*New York Times*, 5 July 1898). The Annual Dinner of the American Society was especially well attended by eminent Englishmen. The chairman toasted the Queen in a speech which had as its keynote, the *New York Times* reported, Whittier’s line, ‘We bow the heart if not the knee,’ which was widely seen — as in that same newspaper report — as expressing this renewed sense of US appreciation for the mother country. Given that the sentiment was tumultuously applauded in London, the English guests might not have recalled that John Greenleaf Whittier’s 1862 poem, from which the chairman’s line is adapted, is actually a savage indictment of British support for the South during the US civil war:

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We bowed the heart, if not the knee,
To England’s Queen, God bless her
We praised you when your slaves went free
We seek to unchain ours. Will ye
Join hands with the oppressor?
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More in sorrow than in anger, Whittier recalls the common race: ‘O Englishmen! — in hope and creed, // In blood and tongue our brothers!

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‘Thicker than water,’ in one rill
Through centuries of story
Our Saxon blood has flowed, and still
We share with you its good and ill,
The shadow and the glory.
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On the British side of the Atlantic, however, commentators were much more inclined to remember the phrase that Whittier had probably been the first to put into a poem. ‘Thicker than water’ sounds like an old saying, although the *OED’s* first reference to it is from an 1815 Walter Scott novel. But the phrase had become particularly popular just before Whittier wrote his poem because of an incident in China when a US naval captain had ignored his orders to maintain strict neutrality by coming to the aid of a British warship in danger of being sunk by Chinese guns. When questioned as to why he had disobeyed his orders, his only response was: ‘Blood is thicker than water’ (Hitchens 98). And from then on, that became the catchphrase of proponents of Anglo-Saxon unity, rising to a crescendo at the
end of the century. It was referred to by the New York editor, Whitelaw Reid, in a toast to Queen Victoria at her 1897 Diamond Jubilee in London (Kramer 1327–28) and by Justin McCarthy in an essay on British responses to the Spanish-American War. When Joseph Chamberlain had to defend his Birmingham speech in favour of Anglo-American unity in the House of Commons, he raised the possibility ‘that Anglo-Saxon liberty and Anglo-Saxon interests may hereafter be menaced by a great combination of other Powers.’ If they were, ‘whether it be America or whether it be England that is menaced, I hope that blood will be found to be thicker than water’ (Garvin 303). And when Jennie Jerome launched her luxurious journal, The Anglo-Saxon Review, in 1895, her son Winston Churchill scrawled a draft advert for it featuring the phrase (Gilbert 34).

THE AMERICAN CENTURY

As the new century dawned, the only half-way realistic assessment of the new Anglo-American relationship was produced by W.T. Stead in his The Americanisation of the World, or The Trend of the Twentieth Century. With a picture of Theodore Roosevelt as frontispiece, the book argued for the merging of the British Empire into the English-speaking United States of the World. Stead was prepared to make the best of what was evidently a bad job. He spoke against the ‘insular patriotism of our nation’, and in favour of ‘the broader patriotism of the race’ (5). After all, he argued, ‘Whatever they [the Americans] do, all goes to the credit of the family’ (7). However — in a telling analogy, which would not have gone down well with a largely anti-semitic British ruling class — ‘the American may stand to the Briton as Christianity stands to Judaism’ (7).

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Art, Power and Aesthetics: A Discussion of Ablade Glover’s Township Paintings

In this essay I want to discuss art as a power discourse, and I want to discuss it by asking a particular question of a particular group of paintings. How can some art critics maintain that the Ghanaian painter Ablade Glover’s paintings of market scenes are a provocation whilst others see them as inauthentic and others again admire them for their aesthetic value?

Ablade Glover (b. 1934, Accra, Ghana) has studied in Ghana, England and America where he received his Doctorate in 1974. He was Professor and Dean of the College of Art at the University of Science and Technology, Kumasi, Ghana until 1994. In 1993 he established the Artists’ Alliance Gallery in Accra which quickly became the centre for modern Ghanaian art. Centrally placed, Professor Glover has divided his time between art education and the at-times fierce discussions of the place and role of modern Ghanaian art, and creative work. Starting in the 1960s he has exhibited widely in Africa, America and Europe, including a large number of solo exhibitions. In 2008 he was part of the exhibition *Visions and Dreams*, Tasneem Gallery, Barcelona, and in 2009 he had a solo exhibition at the October Gallery, London.

The power discourse in question is the contest between Africa and the West for cultural hegemony, expressed in terms of aesthetics. What are the criteria for judging what is good or bad, primitive or modern, beautiful or ugly, important or unimportant in art? The reason why this discussion seems to me to be important is that it is not just reflexive, it has a strong influence on the development of modern art in Africa. Modern African art forms are not free in the sense that that they can ignore or avoid this hegemonic struggle. It could be objected that no art form is — and that is undoubtedly true — but the African situation is exacerbated by the rupture of natural development caused by the colonial incursion and by the continued inequality of power. The colonising powers brought with them firm ideas about the meaning and aesthetic principles of art which differed and at times clashed with those of indigenous art (Maruska Svašek 1997). Not only indigenous art, but indigenous culture found itself subjected to a view of itself as primitive, backwards and so on. McEvilley explains this in a very Said-inspired analysis. "In the colonial periods objects made in non-Western cultures were brought back to the West, not just as booty, but as evidence. They were understood ... as proof of the superiority of the colonialists; that was the point of calling the colonized cultures “primitive”" (Svašek qtd in MacClancey). The opposition to this view
predates political movement for independence in West Africa (Casely Hayford) and it fuelled the cultural nationalism which was an important component of the political movements that eventually won independence in Ghana as well as in the rest of the British colonies in Africa. This meant that culture, not just as an abstract idea, but in all its manifestations as sculpture, mask, dance, decoration, music and orature was a contested site. Rupture and denigration forced artists on the other side of the colonial void into a dialogue with their traditions, not with a view to having a fruitful interchange with that tradition, but with a view to refuting Western allegations of primitivism. The outside (Western) scorn forced the African artists into a defence of their tradition which made a natural development of new art forms difficult. These allegations were in fact clothed in paternalistic concerns for preserving the original and — in the view of the early colonial art teachers — unchanging tradition of African art, centred on fetish objects associated with ‘primitive’ religion and a pre-Enlightenment world view that was perceived as Africa’s special gift and contribution to world culture. This enforced dialogue with the past, whether carried out in sculpture and paintings or in literature, is an essential part of the various political movements such as Negritude or Pan Africanism or the ideological construct of ‘The African Personality’, all of which agitated first for political independence, and after that for equality on the international market of cultural values. In this way Western attitudes to African traditional art have a direct bearing on the direction of modern African art in Ghana. The terms in which the West criticised traditional African art became the terms, or concepts around which the modern African artists’ interaction with their tradition took place: In terms of aesthetics, it centred on discussions/debates or quarrels about the relative merit of realism and abstraction and about the value of individual, unique works of art as opposed to works adhering to a tradition; in terms of meaning the discussion centred on the division of values between art as cult objects and therefore applied versus fine arts. With regard to the role of the African artist in society, on the one hand there is a tension between the role of guardian and upholder of traditional values, partly carried over from tradition, and the need for positive portrayal of traditional society stemming from solidarity with the movement of cultural nationalism; and on the other hand political protest or a desire to belong to an international community of artists without any obligations to represent African culture. Ironically, this last stance — the desire to be modern — is seriously threatened by the firm Western view that only traditional, tribal art is authentic African art, and since the main market for African art is still in the West the economic inequality is still an important factor.

This interaction with the past took (and still takes) place, not just in words and writing, but in actual art works (paintings, sculptures), and as I have maintained that the actual art work is partly shaped by an opposition to the European attitude to traditional African art I shall start my investigation into the status of Glover’s paintings of market scenes by outlining the development of the Western attitudes to traditional African art.
The idea that African art is primitive builds on the idea that realism in art is superior to nonrealism or abstraction and that fine arts is superior to applied art. The first distinction has its origin in the Renaissance and later Neo-classicism in which the Greek classical ideal in sculpture, which is realistic and aesthetically pleasing in scope, is held up as the ideal art form. It was considered superior to medieval art which is both non-realistic and — in the case of icons — applied art, as the icons, like some traditional African art, had religious efficacy. The non-realism of medieval painting was perceived as a lack; these artists had not yet learnt the art of perspective or the effects of light. They painted as they did because they did not know any better. When this criterion for value judgment was applied to African art at the first moment of the European colonisation in late eighteenth and early twentieth centuries, it suffered the same fate: it was considered primitive, with connotations of childishness.

This view obviously suffered a blow in the 1920s when French painters, among them Picasso, discovered African art and emulated it in the development of Cubism. This gave wide exposure to certain types of African art, particularly certain types of masks, like those of the Fang from Gabon or the Baulé from The Ivory Coast, and it created a greater understanding of the aesthetics of African art, at least among art connoisseurs. However, it also froze African art in a supposedly immutable traditional mould to fit the supposedly immutable prehistoric essence.
of African-ness, as the exoticism of its difference proved a commercial success. Ironically, the very aspect which had appalled the Victorian missionaries — that is, the religious function of the art, what they referred to as fetishism — became part of the attraction of this art to a wider European public. It conjures up a world lost to the modern, secular mind, but apparently still yearned for. This attention to the religious aspect of traditional art in art books produced for a European market is well illustrated by Elsy Leuzinger in her book, *The Art of Black Africa from 1972*.

Leuzinger first situates herself very carefully in terms of European traditions of art appreciation: ‘We no longer measure art by the Greek ideal of beauty, or by the degree to which it is true to life. The first thing we look for today is the expression of spiritual ideas in artistically convincing form. From the very first, African artists have fulfilled this requirement to an astonishing extent’ (5). Leuzinger’s text shows solidarity with African art against the allegations of primitiveness, ugliness, childishness or obscenity of early Western descriptions. She sees the African artist as trying to ‘create something spiritual, something transcendent’ (5). ‘Africans create their art largely as an instrument by which to make contact with supernatural forces … they create a sculpture which serves as a medium giving access to the spirit world: the figures of ancestors and spirits, masks and other cult objects’ (9–10). On the vexed question of individual creativity versus religiously inspired demands for conformity to type she wavers. On the one hand, sculptures have to ‘follow all the regulations exactly, and must be so beautiful that they please the spirit and invite him to make his dwelling in the figure’ (10); but on the other hand the artist is not ‘hindered by religious pressure and standard forms from varying and enriching his work by his own imaginative creation and from influencing the existing style. Every work is a unique creation and yet it departs only a little from the conceptions and feelings of his tribe’ (14). On the question of the role of the artist, Leuzinger emphasises the special and spiritual nature of that role: The artist (who is always a man):

retreats into solitude and devotes himself with undivided concentration to his work. He has to observe a series of ordinances and taboos, for it is dangerous to have anything to do with spirits, and it is important for a wood carver to adopt a conciliatory attitude to the soul of the felled tree. The whole work is accompanied by sacrifices and incantations. (14)

This description closely resembles Soyinka’s treatment of the artist Demoke in his play written for the independence celebration in Nigeria, 1960, *A Dance of the Forrest*, and my point is not that this is not true, but rather that it is a deliberate choice that does very conveniently vindicate both the religious tenet and the desire for individual creativity of the Western demands on African art.

The truth is more likely to be partial and to vary locally, and knowledge about the exact nature of this is gained through detailed studies of individual cultures. Daniel J. Crowley’s investigation into the aesthetics of the art of the Chokwe is
an example of such a study. He found that: ‘Although these masks are obviously connected with traditional Chokwe religious concepts, they are not now considered to be representations of ancestors…’ (321). Also, new masks were preferred to old ones which were considered old-fashioned, and bright colours obtained from modern means preferred to dull ones. He also arrives at the somewhat surprising conclusion that ‘religious art among the Chokwe is crude since it need function only magically, and not aesthetically. But the secular objects used on religio- secular occasions are carefully executed because the prestige of a chief, a village, a dancer or a carver is determined by them’ (326). Individual creativity is not restrained by religious demands, and the distinction between applied and fine arts seems meaningless to the Chokwe. They have ornamental carvings of snakes and birds in their homes, and when asked whether these small sculptures had symbolic value they denied this and instead asked the interviewer: ‘This is what we make for ourselves. What do you like (in your homes)?’ (325). This does seem like a very goal-directed set of findings, aimed at de-mythologising traditional African art and it forms a stark contrast to Leuzinger’s view.

A way of bypassing this division between sacred and profane roles of African art is to discuss it purely in terms of style, using the language of European concepts of art. This is the approach taken by William Fagg and Margaret Plass in their book *African Sculpture*. They argue that: ‘Since these categories are those in which we are accustomed to think about the more familiar kinds of art, the attempt to use them in the very different conditions of African art may help us to free ourselves from the preconceptions which we unconsciously harbour about the exotic arts’ (5). They start their investigation by quoting Cezanne’s dictum, ‘You must see in nature the cylinder, the sphere and the cone’, and following that advice, they deliberately ignore geographical location and tribal affiliation and proceed to discuss sculpture and masks in terms of categories in European art. (Here cubism and expressionism are seen to form the most obvious parallels.) European artists like Picasso, Brancusi and Moore function as reference points, and classical terms, like caryatids (for the figures supporting headrests) are used. Apart from cubism, abstraction, surrealism and the gothic are isolated as styles, and the book makes a special point of emphasising the presence of realism in African sculpture. This stylistic approach is carefully surrounded by caveats: ‘if we find convergences of form, however striking, between tribal and modern art, we must not assume any identity of purpose, inspiration or real content’ (41); and the anti-evolutionary purpose of taking this a-historical stance is spelled out on the last page of the book. Quoting Leon Underwood that ‘technological advances in the history of mankind have always been followed by equally great developments in art’, Fagg & Plass predict that if new movements in art are to follow new advances in Western technology ‘it seems likely that the new ground will be found to have been reconnoitred long before by the intuitive artists of the tribal world’ (158).
Despite their widely different approaches, Leuzinger and Fagg & Plass (and many more writers of African art-books who follow in their footsteps) are united in their efforts to rescue traditional African art from the allegations of primitiveness by variously asserting that the artists did master realism, that idols and fetishes were, in fact, considered expressions of faith, that there was scope for individual creativity and that the artistic quality stood up to the best of European art. So far, so good; but there is another point on which they agree: Modern African art is not really African. Leuzinger is worried about the tourist market which ‘has caused many artists to decline into routine and careless work and to put vapid novelties on the market’ (13). Fagg & Plass’s objections are more ideological in scope: ‘we are not concerned here with “contemporary” African art, which for all its merits is an extension of European art by a kind of voluntary cultural colonialism’ (6). A culmination of this approach was the exhibition, *Magiciens de la Terre*, Paris, May 1989. A main feature of this exhibition was the Ghanaian wayside artist Kane Kwei’s coffins, shaped like animals, vegetables, airplanes or cars.

With friends like these how did contemporary — without inverted commas — African art emerge? One answer to that question is that it emerged both as a result of, and as a response to, colonialism. Colonialism forced Western modernity on African societies and in the process threatened, altered or destroyed the fabric of traditional society. Concepts like nationalism and individualism became issues around which new discussions formed, spurred by the Western-style education system. The resulting tension is most clearly expressed in the culture-clash theme in the emerging English language literature produced by the Western educated elite in the British colonies, particularly in Nigeria where Chinua Achebe’s second novel, *No Longer at Ease* (1960), set the pattern for a long list of culture-clash novels. If one accepts the idea that art forms as well as the content expressed through those forms both influence and are influenced by the current cultural environment, an altered world picture will demand to be discussed and reflected in new art forms which can interact in an active way with the society of which they form a part.

Formal art school training through the colonial education system started in the ’50s in large city centres in West Africa like Lagos, Accra and Freetown, and it was run by white expatriate teachers who taught European art and concepts of value. An important aspect of this, and therefore a site of contention was the value of originality and uniqueness, the one-of-a-kind approach as opposed to traditional forms in which emulation is an important aspect. A well known dictum during the ’60s, the East African artist Elimu Njau’s sentence, ‘Copying puts God to sleep’ (Kasfir 130), shows how eagerly this idea was taken up and also how provocative it was vis-a-vis traditional practices. A distinction appeared in the art world between university educated, individualistic and experimenting artists and wayside artists who learned to copy master moulds and sold to tourists. As their art was, and is, closer to the traditional art forms that Westerners desire, they
were, and are, a greater commercial success. Kane Kwei’s coffins are a much desired mixture between charming artistic naivety and quaint traditional customs of burying people in coffins associated with their character, job or wishes.

The ‘60s were a watershed in colonised Africa; it was the decade of independence, optimism and cultural nationalism in its various forms (negritude, cultural pride, a general mood of self assertion). This brought with it a rejection of the European cultural models which the political elite had learned through the education system. When Okot p’Bitek, the Ugandan poet, took over as Director of the National Theatre in Kampala in 1967 he promptly replaced the British council grand piano with a drum post driven into the ground outside, and announced: ‘Our national instrument is not the piano — tinkle-tinkle-tinkle — but the drum — boom-boom-boom’ (Kasfir 166). Neo-colonialism, national culture, the African personality, and pan-africanism were concepts debated and painted during the ‘60s, but there were other trends as well. The theme of culture clash and the artist as a child of two worlds, trying to find a way of combining those two worlds, preferably in a unique way, took over when the promise of independence started to go sour. In the ’80s and ’90s the wayside artists with their less radical adaptations of traditional material were still seen as the true representatives of Africanness, and the academy-educated artists ran the risk of being considered sellouts. In response, some of them have turned to more explicitly Western forms and styles, demanding to be looked at as international painters, in their own right, not representatives of Africa.

This is a very general outline of trends, and there were, and are, of course a variety of local variations. The painter on whom this essay focuses, Ablade Glover, is Ghanaian, and in order to be able to answer the question of how his paintings could be considered a political statement I shall now turn to the Ghanaian development.

The first secondary school with a specialised art department was Achimota college, established in 1920 in the Gold Coast Colony and moved to Kumasi as The Academy of Arts in 1951. The art teaching at the Academy reflected a paradox in the English attitude to Africans. On the one hand they despised African culture and tried to civilise Africans, but on the other hand they wanted to preserve that culture, or at least the artistic expression of it in as unchanged a form as possible. This rested on the belief that African art (sculpture) was a timeless, unchanged leftover from the dawn of mankind, floating up to the surface of history to offer them a glimpse of their own beginnings which they had left safely behind. So in 1931 a traditional sculptor and Osei Bonsu, the master carver of the Ashantehene were appointed, and the students were encouraged to learn the patterns of traditional sculptures and masks. This clashed with their reality which was shaped by modern life in a big city, and an opposition grew between students and teachers. This development partook in the more general movement of individualising art, but it also had some local variations.
Already in the early ’50s some artists such as Amon Kotei, Kofi Atubam and Saka Acquaye started to fight the myth of static, primitive tradition, and the means they chose was European realism. Their reasons for this choice narrowly reflect, or deflect European prejudices:

The prejudice was that the Ghanaian is not fit, capable or that it is not African art to do anything that is realistic. Let us change this prejudice and prove that the colour of our skin has nothing to do with acquisition of knowledge which is power. (Kotei qtd in MacClancy, 5)

This is the sort of reasoning which in literature produced the ‘write back’ genre. It turns the colonial category on its head, but it does not question the category as such. When attached to the theme of nationalism, which demands glorification, or at least very positive versions of the national life, this produced idyllic paintings of village life, excluding any modern intrusion, like big cities or modern buildings. Ironically this realistic style, which started as a reaction to European prejudices, pleased the tourist market, and it was soon taken over by the wayside painters who mass produced it and sold it at markets and in airports. In the prevailing mood of cultural self assertion they painted durbars, chiefs, musicians and dancers, village women fetching water, sunsets behind palm trees and straw huts. This genre is still lucrative and therefore it is still produced. This should not obscure the fact that at

Fig. 3: ‘Night’.
its inception it was an important move into self conscious reflection and rejection of stereotypes. The power relations of aesthetics are exceptionally naked here.

Starting at the same time (early ’50s) and running parallel with this movement was another movement, reacting against the same stereotyping, but choosing another way. The artists of this movement rejected Western styles and sought inspiration in abstract forms of traditional art. This fitted in well with the cultural nationalism of early independence. In the words of one of the artists, Ampofo: ‘Nkrumah was behind me. My work meant a step in the direction of a further development of a typical African identity’ (8). The result of this ideological stance was an abstract neo-traditional genre in which the painter takes his starting point in traditional forms, (masks, swords, ornamental patterns) but develops abstract, cubist like patterns from them. This style is also still produced today.

What these two schools had in common was an exclusive concern with the past and with country life, and to a certain extent they also shared the romanticised version of the past. It was these aspects that the next wave of painters objected to, and here, finally, Glover turns up. He studied painting in the late ’60s at the Kumasi School of Fine Arts of which he later became the director. Here, he and co-student, Ato Delaquis, who later on taught at the Kumasi School of Fine Arts, broke another myth, the myth of the romantic African past by starting to paint pictures of present day city life. This sounds innocuous enough, but in the circumstances it was not. They faced charges of not being African enough, and they resented the implication that modernity would make Africa less African. This complexity of thought is still hotly debated. Glover expresses his view of the African-ness of his paintings in the following way.

It is sad. I keep telling my students and everybody I meet that it is sad to make a conscious effort to do something called an African painting… I think it is wrong to make something African, because there is nothing like African. The African is me, so if what comes out of me cannot be taken as African then what is African?

(MacClancy 14)

Glover’s question is rhetorical, of course, and his is a strong voice in the debate about what constitutes modern African art, maintaining his right to choose whatever style or medium he wants. A close analysis of his painting ‘Night’ (fig. 3) might help to tease out the various positions in the debate and allow for a tentative opinion, based on the painting (which can be taken to represent a large number of Glover’s paintings).

Before undertaking this, however, it is important to be reminded of the position of the reader/viewer/critic.

He [the reader] insinuates into another person’s text the ruses of pleasure and appropriation: he poaches on it, is transported into it, pluralises himself in it like the internal rumblings of one’s body… This mutation makes the text habitable, like a rented apartment. It transforms another person’s property into a space borrowed for a moment by a transient. Renters make comparable changes in an apartment they furnish with their acts and memories; as do speakers, in the language into which they insert
both the messages of their native tongue, and, through their accent, through their own ‘turns of phrase’, etc. their own history. (de Certeau xxi)

Although English is not my native tongue the Western discourse of analysing visual images is the discourse I am schooled in. I am familiar with the language, the cultural institutions, the history, and the practices of what is considered ‘high culture’, exemplified by the academic analysis of visual images. It is from the position of occupier of a rented apartment that the following analysis is carried out.

Looked at close up, the oil on canvas painting ‘Night’ consists of a number of daubs of paint, applied unevenly with a palette knife. The slabs are larger and more thickly applied at the bottom half of the painting and become gradually smaller and less distinct towards the top. There is almost a three-dimensional aspect to the bottom half of the picture, as the surface is deliberately left very uneven. If the painting is held up against the light it will shine through the canvas where the layer of paint is thin or absent. The colour scheme is muted, and the night atmosphere is created by shades of blue and green, but mostly by the addition of white, creating an atmosphere of moonlit reflections. There is no moon in the painting, in fact there is no recognisable representation, but an abstract surface of seemingly random slabs of paint. The colour scheme, on the other hand is representational, as it strongly suggests a moonlit night. The bold application of paint, the abstraction and the addition to this of an emotional, reflective mood place the painting in the tradition of Abstract Expressionism. (Jackson Pollock comes to mind.) The critic David Anfam explains, ‘[a] common

Fig. 4: Ambrogio Laurenzetti, ‘City by the Sea’.
goal was perceived to be the mystery, violence and spontaneity associated with the modern experience on all its levels’ (79), and this placing of the painting in a modern, mainly American tradition carries with it assumptions (in the Western viewer) of the thoughts and desires of that tradition. In the case of Glover this makes sense, as he, like the Abstract Expressionists, paints on a background of violence and suffering (in their case Pearl Harbour and the Cold War) and in his case (slavery, colonialism, exploitation, poverty), and he, like them, insists on focusing on the modern experience, in his case city life.

If one takes some steps backwards and looks at the painting from a distance it acquires a new dimension: a perspective of a foreground, a middle ground and a background, receding to an infinite point, but not meeting a horizon. The perspective is that of an aeroplane, dipping its wing and turning in the air above a city. This moment offers a brief glimpse of the city underneath, tilted and suddenly close on the down side and far away or invisible on the up side. (Hence no horizon.) On a night flight one would see the bright lights of the city, but in Glover’s painting one sees the light of the moon, reflected off the corrugated iron roofs of an African township. This brings to mind the European genre of cityscapes, or Vedute, as they were called in the 18th century in Venice, and painted by Canaletto, among others. The first true cityscape in art history is considered to be Ambrogio Laurenzetti’s painting ‘City by the Sea’ from ca. 1335 (fig. 4). It has the same dizzying view from above as Glover’s painting, avoiding, like him, the complete bird’s eye view. In his case, perhaps it was because the bird’s-eye view had not yet been experienced. The genre has been used, and made famous by artists as different as Vermeer, Pissarro, Chagall and Mondrian, each of them using the motif to express the tenets of their various philosophies and ways of painting. Read through this genre, Glover joins an illustrious tradition, wholly Western, and following that tradition he uses it to express his particular concerns through his particular sensibility which is embedded in his African experience.

Another way of inhabiting the rented room is to ask the owner, or maker, what he thinks about it, or what his intentions with it are. Here it makes sense to include not just one of Glover’s paintings, but the whole oeuvre. Glover paints, not cityscapes, but townscapes. This is an important distinction, as cities in Africa, planned and with a well-defined administrative, military and political centre are a colonial invention. This is not what Glover paints. These colonial centres attracted a vast number of people living in villages in the rural areas; they went there for work, adventure, ‘the bright lights’, or to escape social constrictions in the village. They settled around the centre, in townships, or slums, mainly built by themselves and (dis)organised in a haphazard way, very contrary to the colonial attempts at creating orderly, European-type cities. It is these African townships that Glover paints. A particular motif of his is market scenes which are viewed from the same perspective as the townscapes and appear as a ‘sub-genre’ within the townscapes genre. Those paintings are in bright, bold red, yellow or blue colours, and they
include crowds of people, seen as matchstick figures, massed into narrow streets and filling up large squares. They vibrate with colour and movement, exuding an excess of energy and a sense of urgency, but they also communicate a sense of familiarity, a solidarity with a scene which is exotic to European viewers, but with which Glover is totally at home. The markets are worked and controlled by market women, and Glover explains that women are an important motif for him, and that: ‘These women carried my imagination to the market — which I like to think of as a culture within a culture… I believe the political, economic, and social climate of the nation is determined at the market’ (website). This celebration of the power and attraction of markets in townships surrounding cities is a strong voice in the advocacy of African agency. It celebrates the imagination and ingenuity of the township — slum inhabitants to resist the imposed order. In de Certeau’s words, ‘They made something else out of them; they subverted them from within, not by rejecting them or transforming them (though that occurred as well), but by many different ways of using them in the service of rules, customs or convictions foreign to the colonization which they could not escape’ (de Certeau 32)

Glover’s townships and crowded market scenes celebrate the closeness and haphazardness of township architecture; the slabs of paint in ‘Night’ face in all different directions and form no discernible pattern, except to indicate that here space is transformed into place. These places, and their inhabitants ‘circulate, come and go, overflow and drift over an imposed terrain, like the snowy waves of the sea slipping in among the rocks and defiles of an established order’ (de Certeau 34). There are at least two strong objections to this view of slum areas and their organic movements, and to Glover’s paintings of the same. One has to do with the cityscape vision from above, and the other, related to this, is an allegation of slum romanticism.

The criticism of the choice of a bird’s-eye point of view centres on the notion that the remote, overall view has the characteristics of an ordering, all powerful, empirical or panoptic view of the subject, which from that angle becomes a subject in more than one sense. It stems from a desire to create order, survey and govern. This of course is most obvious in military maps and sociological surveys. An example of the latter is Charles Booth’s famous map of London (fig. 5), which is a scientific calculation of the rate and location of poverty in the slums. The red areas indicate middle class, well-to-do people, and the black areas indicate the ‘lowest class, semi-criminal’. The intention is to create an objective, scientific image which can then be used for a variety of purposes, according to the viewer’s background, inclination, moral standing or professional needs. Booth, of course, used it in his attempts to alleviate poverty, and his text Life and Labour of the People (1889), is considered to be the founding text of British sociology, particularly in the areas of social statistics and community studies. There can, however, be no question about the desire to penetrate into dark recesses of a dangerous place from a safe distance, with the aim of subjecting it to scientific objectivity and, ultimately, to alter it.
It was not in fact unusual to compare the slums of the East End of London with Africa, as the title of the book by another philanthropist, the founder of the Salvation Army, General Booth indicates: *In Darkest England* (1890) alluding to the common usage ‘in darkest Africa’ and making a strong political point (Rose 212–214).

This view is very far from Glover’s. For a start the oblique angle, the dipped wing, avoids the survey vision of the bird’s-eye point of view. Glover says about his townscapes that they ‘have a philosophical note to them — I often wonder what might be happening under those roofs: loving, living, hating, killing, stealing, etc. — if only those roofs could be lifted — the revelation could be devastating’; and about his market scenes he says ‘I love markets… I adore the hustle and bustle of towns’ (website). This view, and the resulting paintings, are not the view of an observer, but of a participant. It is the insider view of someone who likes the society he is painting, and who is not attempting to change it; in fact, he celebrates it. The townscape genre is particularly suited to celebrate ‘hustle and bustle’, and the abstract expressionism’s bold use of vivid colours and seemingly random and extravagant application of paint lends itself to the depiction of movement and urgency, township, or (Western city) excitement. Glover uses these Western
forms to celebrate what he obviously knows intimately and loves in his own environment. It is this which places him in the vulnerable position where he is liable to be attacked from both the Africanist and the European side. On the one hand, he is seen as a sell-out of African traditional artistic traditions; and on the other hand he falls into the Western view that ‘there is no African modern art. If it is modern then it is not African’. This is the view of most Western buyers of African art but despite this prevailing view when — unlike many other modern African painters — Glover’s paintings sell at high prices ($2,500–$7,900) in the Western art market I think it is a matter of aesthetics.

If one takes the view that aesthetic value is culture-specific and not universal, Glover’s townscapes may be seen to conform to the aesthetic values of paintings in the West: they are both surprising and pleasing to the eye schooled in impressionist and expressionist aesthetics. On the level of interpretation they offer the possibility to dwell on that and not have to be confronted with the squalor of the townships/slums and the concomitant accusations of colonialist guilt.

But they do also offer the opportunity to celebrate the difference between African and Western ways of life, portrayed by an insider who sees the values of that life, despite its disadvantages and victim position in the world today. Glover can also be seen to move the African townships from marginalised exotica to the centre of a vibrant, valuable and important location. In this way they can be seen as an iconological representation in non-representational form of an African way of life.

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Feminist and postcolonial critics have, for some two decades, been questioning the concept of ‘home’ and the ideological uses to which its preferred meanings have been put in contexts of nation- or community-building. Their questions are prompted by the increasing mobility of populations and the concomitant multicultural composition of societies. Considering the fictional versions of ‘home’ in world literatures in English, Rosemary Marangoly George has argued that ‘home’ ‘immediately connotes the private sphere of patriarchal hierarchy, gendered self-identity, shelter, comfort, nurture and protection’ (1) and that to meet this ideological requirement ‘the notion of home is built on a pattern of select inclusions and exclusions. Home is a way of establishing difference. Homes and home-countries are exclusive’ (2). Belonging, a sense of being at home, is ‘maintained by bonds of love, fear, power, desire and control’ (9) and so, particularly in contexts of imperialism or nationalism, ‘[i]magining a home is as political an act as imagining a nation’ (6). In complementary debate, two articles by feminist critics discuss the reconsideration of ‘home’ undertaken by Minnie Bruce Pratt in her autobiographical essay ‘Identity: Skin Blood Heart’ (1984). In the earlier one, Chandra Mohanty and Biddy Martin, writing in the light of their very different personal histories and homes, point out that Pratt’s narrative challenges ‘the essential relation between blood, skin, heart, home and identity … without dismissing the power and appeal of those connections’ (200) and, in the context of her southern white home in the 1950s, without exempting herself from its structures of privilege and oppression (204). In the other article, Caren Kaplan gives weight to the moment when Pratt ‘transgresses the boundaries of her culture’ (193) by declaring her lesbianism and, as a result, loses custody of her children and the support of her parents. Kaplan focuses on this moment because, as a result of her ‘rude awakening’ (193), Pratt chooses not to retreat into conformity but to deconstruct in her daily life the security and status offered by ‘home’ that she had once taken for granted.

In an argument which brings this re-thinking of ‘home’ to bear on South African stories of the transition to democracy and nationhood, Meg Samuelson has suggested that ‘[t]he metaphor of the nation as Home suggests a concomitant image of the national polity as family’ (199). She shows that a gendered ideology of home and nation has been reinforced in the creation of important women icons, such as Sarah Bartmann¹, but has also been questioned in several novels.
written during the process of national re-building. Like George, she draws out the disturbing ‘continuities and complicities between the colonial past and the national present’ (93), and, in order to expose the implications of the family metaphor, she draws attention to the ‘textual recognition of the uncanny — which renders the familial unit unfamiliar’ (198). She locates the uncanny in Njabulo S. Ndebele’s novel, The Cry of Winnie Mandela (2003), which, she argues, is built on an inner tension between two stories: ‘One aims to free women from the burden of waiting in the home, and the other longs for a home that, it seems, only women can provide’ (212).

Guided by this discussion, and particularly by the criticism that ‘home’ is likely to be constructed on ‘difference’ and to be a basis for a privileging ideology of selfhood, I will take matters back a few decades in South Africa to Hilda Bernstein’s autobiographical account of the Rivonia Trial of 1963–64. Taking the debate back in time allows exploration of an idea and practice of ‘home’ during a time when the concept had not yet, or at least not for all South Africans, solidified into an exclusionary idea of nationhood.

In the Rivonia Trial, Hilda Bernstein’s husband, Rusty (Lionel), was among those accused of conspiring to overthrow the apartheid state by violent means, a charge which carried the death penalty. Published in 1989, some twenty-five years after the trial, his acquittal and their escape from South Africa, The World that was Ours states the trial’s importance: for ‘the first time since the State of Emergency of 1960 and the banning of the ANC, the whole story of black oppression and black struggle and aspirations was told through the testimony of Mandela and his fellow accused’ (1989 ix). For the Bernstein family the trial was preceded by Rusty’s house arrest, Hilda’s banning and the constant presence of the secret police who invaded their private space at will. It was a time ‘when it seemed as though the ground was no longer firm beneath our feet’ (1989 vii). Bernstein’s reason for telling her experience of state intimidation is so that ‘people outside our country … may understand the total situation through the impact of events on one family. It is therefore a personal and subjective story’ (1989 viii).

The trial itself occupies most of the narrative, but in the first few chapters and the last Bernstein’s focus is also on the crucial context for their work: their home. While her narrative consciously states that ‘home’ provided the security and stability from which to oppose the apartheid regime and charts the relentless destruction of that ‘home’ by the regime, Bernstein also attends to the conflicted nature of ‘home’ in South Africa. Her account of her home thus has three components. The first is her picture of the home she has lost by the time of the opening events of the narrative, and which exists only as an ideal. Her picture includes the garden surrounding the house:

The house was living, all summer long it breathed and murmured with people and sound; all doors were open, it was as though there were no doors, just squares of light through which people passed from one activity to another. Summer lasted from the end
of one winter until the beginning of the next. Even in winter the front door was not locked, only closed on colder days. Sometimes we forgot to lock it at night. Frances practicing the piano, Patrick fiddling with his guitar, the radio, the record-player, the typewriter, the kitchen sounds, the drum of the washing machine; and most of all, people — people coming to swim, to talk, to borrow books; the children’s friends at all ages and stages; people who never rang the bell or knocked, but called a greeting as they came in. (1989 14)

From this open, welcoming, fluid space her home has been changed by Rusty’s house arrest and by the constant and deliberately intrusive presence of a police surveillance team, into a closed, defensive, exclusionary and vulnerable place. She writes an elegy for ‘the beautiful and splendid world which at this time is not ours’ (1989 99). Now

[our pattern of living had become muted, played in a minor key. Strange Saturday nights, once the occasion for relaxation, Saturday nights, when friends came to our home, or we went to theirs.

Quiet house, quiet garden. Beyond the closed door the sound of the sprinkler turning round and round to water the flowers. In the room we played records. The music swells out beyond the walls, to drown the sound of police cars coming down the street.

Curiously quiet Sundays, the pool deserted except for the children. A blaze of summer heat, apricots torn off by torrential rain and hail, rotting in their hundreds under the trees where friends once filled their baskets with the fruit... [It was] a drying up of noise and life, as though under a great iron hand. (1989 41–42)

In the third component of her picture of ‘home’, the lost ideal and the new reality of ‘home’ both stand in contrast to the conditions under which the country’s workers, among them her black friends and comrades, lived in the city’s locations (as the townships were then called). With their uniform rows and rows of tiny brick buildings, they were, she says, ‘a sort of fungus-growth... cancerous cells, spreading outwards in all directions, endlessly repeating themselves over the treeless slopes of the high veld’ (1989 18–19). Once it had been possible for her to visit these townships at will, but now she and her family have to fight ‘to hold on to even a single thread of contact between the suburb and the location, lest we too should become guilty of complicity in imposing the ghetto life of segregation on our fellow-men’ (1989 19). Their effort was to prevent ‘difference’ and privilege from defining ‘home’. Using another metaphor of light and water, Bernstein reflects that South Africa is like ‘a mirror with two sides’ and that the legally enforced segregation with its starkly contrasting conditions has created ‘the dark pool into which you must peer constantly to realize the strange and changing scenes it reflects’ (1989 19). She knows that besides the drab uniformity that they imposed, occupancy of these matchbox houses was precarious for black workers; ownership was out of the question, and the right to rent and live in them could be withdrawn at any moment by the government or city council — for example, if the occupants were considered politically dangerous. Theirs were homes of ‘necessity’ not of ‘choice’ (Ndebele 2003 72); even the degree of refuge that her
beleaguered house could offer Bernstein and her family had been made a white privilege that was denied to black people.³

Bernstein begins and ends her narrative on a strong note of domesticity. In the opening build-up to Rusty’s arrest, she is in the kitchen watching the winter sun setting as she prepares supper and waits for her husband:

He had to be home by half-past six every evening. He had to be within confines of house and garden by six-thirty, not being permitted to leave again until six-thirty the next morning. There was even something of a secure feeling about this twelve-hour house arrest, because the children knew their father would always be home in the evening. Whatever I might be doing, however many times I was out, Dad would always be there now. He had been under the restrictions of house arrest for nine months. (1989 1)⁴

The penultimate sentence indicates that hers is not an imprisoning domesticity; she leads a life of considerable independence and now registers an ironic appreciation of Rusty’s being compelled to be the figure of security for the children. On the other hand, Bernstein’s choice of opening scene with its indication of shared family routines indicates that ‘home’ is the personal resource that she will pit against the state’s aggression. For her and her comrades, ‘home’ needed to signify the primary locus of preferred identity and, for their visitors, to be a place where racial difference did not matter, a place of safety where thoughts and ideas could be freely exchanged and where a desired future for the country could be envisaged.⁵

Despite her attempts to live her ideal, however, a paradox of exclusion from a putatively inclusive home runs through Bernstein’s narrative because all visitors would have been carefully screened before being admitted to their home. The Communist Party was banned in South Africa in 1950, thirteen years before Bernstein’s narrative begins; membership was illegal and this prohibition was not lifted until 1990. When the ban was imposed, the Bernsteins were instrumental in reshaping the party as an underground organisation. People were now individually recruited, membership had to be a closely guarded secret, and members were not supposed to know the identity of anyone outside their small unit. Jean Middleton, for example, has recorded how troubling she found it to be unable to tell her colleagues and friends at the school where she taught why she had to refuse their invitations — usually because she had a cell meeting to attend (1998 12, 20). This is a matter to which Bernstein gives little specific utterance, partly because at the time she was writing she still had to avoid endangering her surviving comrades in South Africa, and partly because any admission of screening entry to her home would undermine its being metonymic of the open society for which she and her husband worked as political activists. Her omission means that Bernstein’s language remains largely free of the ambiguities of inclusion and exclusion contained in ‘home’ to which George and other critics of the ideology point, but, try as she might, her narrative cannot fully hide the fact that the state’s attack on her home compelled her family to adopt some of the precautionary secrecy that
would damage their ideal. In the psychotic world of apartheid the very exercise of openness pulls the home into the public realm, blurring from within, as well as from without, the ideal of openness that Bernstein needed to maintain.

The difference between an exclusive and an inclusive home is not absolute or rigid. Bernstein records that initially the family had coped with Rusty’s house arrest by forming new routines around its terms, although they were ‘muted’ (41) in the face of a constant police presence. Other families in their situation also adapted: Gillian Slovo writes that regular police raids became ‘part of our new normality’ (Slovo 55). On the other hand, the large but well defined circle of friends who moved through the fluid pools of light in Bernstein’s home used among themselves a code name: ‘over the phone and in conversation, comrades began to refer to the party as ‘The Family’… [It] was a way of misleading those who were listening in but also a recognition of how many of the members felt. The party was their home’ (Frankel 58). Furthermore, Bernstein presents resistance to the state’s clampdown as an entirely personal matter:

we were both under so many bans … that for us all political activity had become illegal… to comply with such restrictions would have required us to abandon all active opposition to apartheid. We were incapable of such renunciation and never even considered it. (1989 2)

The pronouns refer only to husband and wife, not to the party. Again, this is presumably because at the time she was writing, she could not imply that the Party had survived in any form. All this indicates that an element of protective secrecy, the comrades’ response to the state’s aggression, actually played into the state’s intentions. Their ideal of an open home had, paradoxically, to be abandoned in favour of a closed, exclusive practice, in order that they might maintain a trace of the open, unfettered relationships with black people in which they believed.

The ideal of openness which Bernstein celebrates in her images of light and liquid is jeopardised. The ambiguities of inclusion and exclusion are imposed from without when Rusty is put under house arrest, imprisoned in his home and having to be his own ‘gaoler’ (Joseph 123), and secrecy is evident when he did not tell his wife where he was going on the day of his arrest. As Bernstein says, ‘it had become axiomatic that the less you knew the safer you were’ (2). But once practised, secrecy could damage from within. It affected their relationships with children who were sometimes too young to understand its necessity. Slovo has written of her experience as a ten-year-old: ‘As the stakes got higher, secrecy drifted over every section of our lives’ (58), and Bernstein writes of her older son: ‘How much he understood of what we were doing, how much he accepted, how much he resented or hated could not be judged. He had become incapable of communication and wrapped in his own world of groping and dissatisfaction’ (1989 5). Frankel writes more specifically: ‘the fact that Hilda had not told him [of his father’s arrest] first, became another entry in [his] catalogue of grievances’ (143). Thus, damage from within cannot be seen as an inadvertent or
unacknowledged irony; husband and wife must have felt the painful knowledge that their preferred meanings of ‘home’ were being overturned. Bernstein admits as much, but only implicitly, in her imagery for the pre-dawn hammering on the door that heralded a police raid or arrest, or both. At such moments, she says, ‘The personal/domestic and the public/political, two facets of our lives that had existed side by side for so long, were now fused together, sand grains coalesced into a solid lump of glass’ (1989 vii).

This fusion of her metaphors of light and liquid into something ‘solid’ is the nearest Bernstein comes to an explicit exploration of what is happening to ‘home’, except for her recounting (but not exploring) a dream in which her home is rendered uncanny, the same and yet suddenly and terrifyingly unfamiliar:

I sleep one night, then I am awake, lying in bed in the intense darkness. It is so dark that not even a faint light seeps in from the street lamp beyond the hedge, between the drawn curtains. I turn for the reassurance of my bell-push light — it is not there, all darkness, the small glowing circle has gone. I stretch my hand to switch on the bedside light. I press the switch but no light comes, all darkness.

Then I feel panic and climb out of bed and press the light-switch next to the door. Darkness, no light. And then through the house, room by room, I turn on every switch and not one light goes on, none of them are working […] Darkness that can never be penetrated, dark in my home, dark in the world outside, dark in my heart.

It is not fear I feel but awful sadness and somehow I crawl back and I am lying in bed and crying. My eyes are closed, my own tears forcing their way through closed lids seem to wake me. I open them with effort. The light-switch glows dimly and steadily. I try the bedlamp — it works. (1989 65–66)

Against the terrible subversion of meaning and belief half admitted in this dream, she tries outwardly to sustain to the end of her narrative the non-contradictory lost ideal of ‘home’ as both a safe haven and an open, non-exclusionary locus of selfhood. She writes of her house as having been alive: ‘the house had been the very centre and heartbeat of my daily existence, the shell surrounding that living organism, my family’ (256–57), and, when Rusty is arrested at Lilliesleaf, she writes metonymically of the family’s dismay: ‘The house is in mourning’ (60). As the state prepares fresh charges against her and she knows that her own arrest is imminent, she cannot bear to leave her home despite the advice of family and friends. Finally, the arrival of the police at the front door forces her to flee precipitously through the back, leaving the washing machine turning and the pressure cooker hissing. From that moment, she writes, ‘I am wholly cut off from the very roots of my existence, my home, my children, my husband, my friends, my work’ (263). She is emptied of her sense of self to the extent that, a few days later and still in hiding, when she risks climbing a hill overlooking her house and sees the signs of a family life that she dare not re-enter, she feels that she ‘was like a ghost, invisible and lonely, but still drawn irresistibly to the world of life’ (256).

The Bernsteins managed to escape South Africa and to work for their objectives from elsewhere, but not so most people. Once the majority of political opponents
had been forced into exile, it was not until the formation of the United Democratic Front in the 1980s (the time when Bernstein was writing) that a mass movement for change could again be energised. And it is at this point in history that nationhood really enters the ideology that encompasses ‘home’ in South Africa.

Although a negotiated settlement brought nominal freedom, justice and equality to South Africa in the 1990s, the destruction of ‘home’ and the resultant ambiguities that Bernstein’s writing reveals continues to operate in the present, with terrible consequences. As Ndebele has written, it seems that: ‘the fluid boundaries between state-induced behaviour and personal volition so destroyed the sense of both personal and public morality that there was nothing left in the end but self-perpetuating violence without transcendent goals’ (Ndebele 1996 29). In his essay Ndebele asks how personal and public morality may be restored and suggests that the intimacies of home life (impossible under conditions of, for example, migratory labour which continue unchecked for most mine-workers in South Africa today) is what could ‘sustain public life because … they infuse into it the values of honour, integrity, compassion, intelligence, and creativity… This is the discovery of personal and social meaning through the pains and joys of belonging, participating, trusting and just feeling at home’ (1996 29). But after this optimism for the future, the idea of achieving intimacy at home in the present is less hopefully presented in his novel, The Cry of Winnie Mandela.8 Not one of his five women characters/personae who travel together on the roads of South Africa has known an effectively functioning married home, and so the creation or recovery of intimacy seems impossible in their lives. The novel concludes with the appearance of the faithful Penelope, and her apology for ‘the burden of unconditional fidelity’ (2003 120) that her example in legend has placed on women.

Bernstein’s memoir shows that her home was one way of organising and sustaining equal and open human relationships for as long as its component factors could be held in balance both from within and without. When the balance was shifted, ‘home’ became unstable and the ambiguities of exclusion and inclusion came into play. Her ‘home’ was rendered vulnerable in a particular political context and is not a model for all times and contexts and does not suggest that ‘home’ is necessarily and always doomed from within. The state which defeated her ‘home’ in the 1960s has gone, although societal problems are severe so that, while Ndebele’s novel cannot be, as it reflects on the past, hopeful about a restoration of the balance that was available at that time (founded on a gendered hierarchy as it usually was), what he hopes for the future in his essay — new intimacies of home life guiding citizens to a sense of public morality — has a muted presence in the novel. One of his women reflects that perhaps the significance of recent events is ‘telling us to earn our freedom through the conscious embracing of uncertainty and contradiction’ (2003 71), and Penelope departs saying that she will search out ‘new ways of experiencing relationships wherever they emerge’ (2003 120).
NOTES

1. Sara (Sartjie) Baartman, a young Khoi woman, was taken to Europe in 1810 and put on display, in a cage, as ‘The Hottentot Venus’. She was seen as an ethnological curiosity and after her death her body was preserved at the Musée de l’Homme in Paris. For South Africans she came to symbolise the hostility of European thought to colonised women who were depicted as aberrantly sexual. Her remains were finally returned to South Africa in 2002.

2. Hilda Bernstein was born in London in 1915. Her father immigrated to England from Odessa around 1900 and during the First World War changed his surname from Schwartz to Watts. ‘Hilda Watts moved to Johannesburg in 1932, married Lionel [Rusty] Bernstein in 1941, and — besides bringing up four children — became active in radical politics. She was elected to the Johannesburg City Council in 1943, the only communist ever elected to public office on a whites-only vote in that city. Campaigning for the rights of black people and women, she was arrested on several occasions — for instance, in 1946 for assisting African mineworkers on strike.’ (Simons 263). In A Life of One’s Own (2002), Bernstein has published her father’s letters written between 1925 and 1932 when he was again in Russia on official business and unable to return to England.

3. Bernstein’s knowledge of the precariousness of black peoples’ hold in the townships may be why she does not indicate whether she and her husband owned the house and land that meant so much to her. Neither she nor her colleague Helen Joseph in her autobiography, Side by Side (1986), suggest that ‘home’ and a sense of belonging was dependent on the ownership of private property.

4. The further restrictions were that Rusty Bernstein was confined to home over weekends and on public holidays; forbidden to have visitors at all or to communicate with any listed person (that is, one named by the state as dangerous) except his wife; forbidden to contribute in any way to a publication; barred from townships and factories; confined to Johannesburg. He had to report each day to the central Johannesburg police station in Marshall Square.

5. Clingman has written in similar terms about the Fischer household, and particularly the swimming pool where ‘the scandal of varied skins immersed in the same lazy water would simply be forgotten. There … a new kind of South Africa could be represented… It became its own kind of enchanted domain’ (221). Such a swimming pool also plays an important part in the early sequences of Burger’s Daughter (1980) by Nadine Gordimer.

6. Bernstein’s nightmare matches the description of house arrest given by Helen Vlachos, a Greek newspaper owner and publisher during the Colonels’ junta in the 1960s: ‘one easily imagines prison … [b]ut house arrest, in your own home … brings to mind that special kind of nightmare … [in which] you believe yourself awake, and you decide to perform a simple, familiar act, open a door, or lift the telephone receiver, and you find it impossible. An invisible force, a sort of woolly paralysis, is holding you back, and soon terror creeps in and you try to cry out and call for help but again you cannot make yourself heard: and eventually you wake up all wrapped up in a muffled agony’ (15).

7. Lilliesleaf was the farm on the outskirts of Johannesburg used as headquarters by the newly formed armed wing, Umkhonto we Sizwe. The others arrested there were Denis Goldberg, Bob Hepple, Ahmed Kathrada, Govan Mbeki, Raymond Mhlaba and Walter Sisulu. Arthur and Hazel Goldreich were arrested when they returned to Lilliesleaf later that afternoon. Elias Motsoaledi and Andrew Mlangeni were arrested later, as was Jimmy Kantor. Nelson Mandela was brought from Robben Island to face charges
Only Rusty Bernstein was acquitted; the others were sentenced to life imprisonment (Bernstein 1989 233–42).


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‘Even if they were to leave Europe’: Frankenstein in Tasmania

Since the early nineteenth century, Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* has served as a narrative model for those writing of science and ambition. For example, a contemporary journalist trying to explain the *modus operandi* of biologist and science entrepreneur J. Craig Venter, who was involved in the first sequencing of the human genome and was leader of the first team to create a cell with a synthetic genome, turned to the protagonist of Shelley’s 1818 novel as a point of reference for a description of his subject:

If only Victor Frankenstein had some media savvy, he might have been J. Craig Venter. Rather than living in dread of his appalling creature, he could have assembled a panel of bioethicists and theologians to bless it, applied for a Swiss government grant to research it, and hired an investment bank to explore an initial public offering — FrankenCell Inc. — to exploit the results of his research. (Mooney online)

Amidst modern interest in scientific debates around the creation of life, the constant citation of Shelley’s novel is not difficult to explain. Less explicable is why two modern Australian fictions about the themes central to *Frankenstein* — science, ambition and the creation of life — Rose Michael’s *The Asking Game* (2006/2007), and Julia Leigh’s *The Hunter* (1999), should turn to the story of an Australian animal generally believed to be extinct: the thylacine. The thylacine, which looks a little like a stocky greyhound with a large head and jaws, and a striped back, is colloquially and erroneously known as the ‘Tasmanian tiger’ (being neither exclusive to Tasmania nor a tiger).

*Frankenstein* provides the frame for my reading of ‘The Origins of the Monster Dogs’, one of two short stories embedded in Michael’s novel *The Asking Game*, and of Julia Leigh’s much better known novel *The Hunter*, which has subsequently been made into a feature film. *The Hunter* focuses on the search by a man known as ‘M’ (but in the last line of the book as Martin David), who has a contract from an unnamed biotech company to obtain the genetic material of a thylacine. M seems to have made a lot of money for the company, probably by obtaining genetic materials without scruple. At the end of the novel, M shoots what the reader must presume to be the last living thylacine (although the novel is set in the present). What is noticeable is the protagonist’s lack of reflection on the ethics of executing the tiger for science and profit (something changed in the film, which has a less pessimistic ending). Contrastingly, *The Asking Game*, which is set in a not-to-distant future, is focused on ethical reflection about cloning. A young
woman detective from Sydney is given an assignment in central Australia, which becomes a mission to explore her own (genetic) past. ‘The Origin of the Monster Dogs’ has similar themes to the novel within which it appears, but describes a scientist, called only ‘the professor’, who dreams of cloning the thylacine. Both Michael’s short story and Leigh’s novel, then, although they are concerned with the ambition to create life, work against the backdrop of the well-known story, at least in Australia, of the extinction of the thylacine.

Although the remains of thylacines have been found on the Australian mainland, the destruction of the animal as a species is associated with the island state of Tasmania. To speak of extinction and Tasmania is to evoke two colonialist narratives: the extermination of the thylacine, and the genocide of Tasmanian Aborigines. As Elizabeth Leane implies, these defunctive narratives reference each other in a way that is more than analogical: Tasmania as a place becomes signature of and shorthand for massacre within modern Australian history. This occurs also in relation to stories about science — not only Frankenstein, but Robert Louis Stevenson’s ‘The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde’. In both of these cases, the name of the scientist gripped by hubris — Victor Frankenstein and Henry Jekyll — has come to stand in for the quasi-human creation which embodies their evil: Frankenstein’s monster, and Mr Hyde. This cross-referencing and displacement, by which a name becomes shorthand for a violent history, is part of the splintering and recreation of these fictions within popular and professional cultures. As Nicola Marks contends, the literary narratives operate in complex ways as templates for describing scientific research (as the example of the description of J. Craig Venter signals) — and, I might add, historical events.

Shelley is astute in portraying scholarly ambition, which she attributes not only to Frankenstein but to the listener to whom he tells his story, the polar explorer Walton. The moral is shown when Walton boasts naively to Victor, how gladly I would sacrifice my fortune, my existence, my every hope to the furtherance of my enterprize. One man’s life or death were but a small price to pay for the acquirement of the knowledge which I sought, for the dominion I should acquire and transmit over the elemental foes of our race. As I spoke, a dark gloom spread over my listener’s countenance. (77)

Although Victor recoils from Walton’s declaration, the novel works to demonstrate that he himself has been entrapped by this feeling. Indeed, Victor does not stop his ‘research’ until he decides to renge on a commitment to make a companion for the monster he has manufactured from materials found in abattoirs and mortuaries. In a story in which characters seem constantly to rush into danger, Victor finally pauses to reflect. It is the creation of the female at which he baulks, because:

she might become ten thousand times more malignant than her mate, and delight, for its own sake, in murder and wretchedness. He had sworn to quit the neighbourhood of man, and hide himself in deserts; but she had not; and she, who in all probability was
to become a thinking and reasoning animal, might refuse to comply with a compact made before her creation… (210)

Even if they were to leave Europe, and inhabit the deserts of the new world, yet one of the first results of those sympathies for which the daemon thirsted would be children, and a race of devils would be propagated upon the earth who might make the very existence of the species of man a condition precarious and full of terror… I shuddered to think that future ages might curse me as their pest, whose selfishness had not hesitated to buy its own peace, at the price, perhaps, of the existence of the whole human race. (210–11)

I want to note three points about these comments: first, Victor’s suggestion that the female might be ‘ten thousand times more malignant than her mate’; second, his anxiety that the two creatures will procreate; and third, that his decision not to make the female is attributed to the possibility that should he obey the monster’s request, he might destroy the human race. Taken together, these signal that whilst the story seems to hinge on a kind of exposé of the horrors of creation, the greater horror that outstrips even Frankenstein’s ambition (but not his imagination) lies in procreation and extinction: the usurping of the achievements of science by the female monster, and the annihilation of the human race. What comes to be at stake in ‘making life’ is the ‘fate of the race’: this is the counter-narrative to stories of the destruction of indigenous races which organise colonial cultures. The narrative of ambition references loss and failure; the narrative of male conquest of the ‘secret of life’ references, whilst erasing the capacity (usually female) for reproduction. It is these counterweights within the Frankenstein story that seem to connect with, even to inspire, the modern Australian texts.

‘The origin of the Monster Dogs’ opens with the female scientist, announcing to the press that it will be possible to clone the thylacine. A journalist asks:

‘Some people say bringing back the Tassie Tiger is tantamount to playing God. What do you say to that, Professor? What would you say to them?’

‘We played God’, comes the careful reply, words slipping between thin lips so the journos have to lean in to catch them, ‘when we wiped out the species’.

Ah, they sigh in satisfaction at the soundbite and smile, at their interviewee and each other, as their flashes light up the professor’s face like the first flush of excitement. (45)

By foregrounding her gender, the identity of ‘scientist’ seems to be put into the background, and indeed this is the intention of her fellow researchers in asking her to face the press. ‘You do it, her colleagues had insisted, you tell them; it’s so much less monstrous coming from a woman’ (45). The assertion itself is ‘monstrous’ precisely because it implies, self-servingly, that these colleagues see a ‘natural’ connection between the reproductive capacities of the woman and her professional achievements — a congruity normally denied in narratives about women in science (see Keller 1985; 1995; 2010). Another delusion of congruity appears when the professor’s colleagues marvel at the similarity between the thylacine’s DNA and that of humans. The professor, by contrast, knows her
creatures are different, as she also understands the ways in which the stories of the thylacine become the devices through which she is able to represent her own work to herself (see Marks).

In the brilliantly reconstructed double helix she’d seen a creature not of this world; an ancient alien. She doesn’t come here often, but when she does that’s what she thinks: they are just as I imagined them. You are just as I imagined. It’s almost as though she’s invented them, through her dreaming as much as through the lab work and the never-ending trials. (Michael 47; second emphasis added)

Like Victor Frankenstein’s, the professor’s efforts to create life have been successful; nine years later, the time in which the story is set, she is about to set her ‘monster dogs’ free. But her efforts at creation have failed in two ways. First, they do not gain public support, and second, although the professor has managed to create ‘not one … not two, but many … A litter. A batch. A pack’ (48), the joeys are all female. They cannot reproduce and so life that is the product of scientific ambition comes again to signify death:

If only you could breed, she asks — pleads — again, thinking of all the species they’ve tried and the messy evidence of their more successful failures. Better not to think of that. ‘Why can’t — why won’t you breed?’ … Doomed to die, they are all doomed to die. The experiment is over before it’s even begun. Do they hunt alone? In packs? Do they ambush their prey or run them down? No one will ever know. The politicians might be haggling over maps, discussing sanctuaries and release schedules, but she knows what they’ll decide in the end. The world doesn’t want her wolves. The world’s never wanted these wolves. (48)

We can contrast this glumness not only with the frisson of the fictive press conference to announce the potential of cloning, but with the mood of Mike Archer, a scientist who directed an actual Australian Museum project to clone the thylacine. Archer claimed that ‘a population of thylacines could be resurrected and reintroduced into the wild’, and dreamed of the consequence: ‘To actually reverse extinction, even if it is just this one special instance, would be the biological equivalent of the first walk on the moon’ (Owen-Brown online). In contrast to this ecstatic vision, Michael’s grim account ties the story of cloning back to loathing of the tiger, manifested in the orgy of shooting and trapping that caused extinction.

Gender difference is also central to Leigh’s The Hunter. M, who disguises his hunt as academic research, becomes increasingly obsessed in his search for the ‘tiger’, who early on is identified as female. He imagines his prey as part lover, part emissary: ‘Is her eternal wandering a form of punishment? Perhaps she has come to make amends’ (118). This mix of the religious, the reproductive and the scientific is made explicit as M explores a cave being used by the tiger. He finds a ‘first treasure’, some hairs, and then ‘hidden in a far corner and illuminated by torchlight — his second treasure is so alarmingly beautiful that he touches it as he would the Holy Grail or his own first child’ (159). The second treasure is the skeleton of a joey:
M trails a finger over the curved lumpy spine, then he lies down on the ground in a mirror position, eye to eye with the skull, and imagines for a second that he, too, will rot in this cave. In years to come, decades later, an intrepid explorer will find the skeletons and ponder the relationship between the two. (160)

After this intimate somatic mimicry of the tiger corpse, M resumes his hunt for the living thylacine. Both alone, hungry, nervous, human and thylacine seem at once double and couple, leading M to eroticise the stalking: ‘Yes’, he thinks, ‘he is romancing his prey’, ‘But no, enough, he stops himself. This nostalgia for seduction is seductive itself. And it’s delusory. The animal is no woman. He will not win it over with sweet words, wine and roses’ (90). As with Michael’s short story, these moments of reverie signal fantasies of convergence, tiger and scientist, tiger and hunter, prey and predator. At one point M fantasises that the thylacine will turn on him, and he imagines the thrill of being killed: ‘it is possible. If she was crazed, she could lure him into some secret spot and then — from behind, or above — launch herself at his throat, rip it out. Like taking candy from a baby’ (116). The reference to the infant signals the proximity of reproduction and death, the entwining of the pleasures of terror and theft, consumption and consummation, destruction and reproduction.

At the end of the novel, after he has killed, M prepares the tiger’s body for surgical invasion, removing ten samples of blood in a kind of reverse insemination. What is then described is a kind of surgical rape, during which M removes the tiger’s ovaries. His last task is to hide the remains, to preserve the exclusivity of what he has killed to obtain.

Still wearing his rubber gloves he moves his pack away from the carcass (when it became a carcass he isn’t sure, but the bloody gutted thing is no longer a body to him). Next — destroy the evidence, ensure no-one else can access the material. Only he will have it, he will be the only one. Building a pyre with the branches, lifting the limp carcass onto the pyre, he tells himself that he is the only one. This thought grows light in him, incandescent. All the energy of the sun runs through him and into the earth; he is the source of all animation. Petrol-blue flames lick up over the pyre, and burn and burn and burn. And burn, until the focal point of the dirty black smoke could be anything at all. M pours water over the blackened bones, carries them into the scrub and, working up a sweat, buries them deep beneath the ground.

There, now he is the only one. (166–67)

If this scene resembles any one of a number of passages from Frankenstein, including the spectacular appropriation of light and energy, and the ‘final’ scene the reader never sees of the monster’s planned self-immolation, it also signals that curious doubling of monster and maker that we see in Shelley’s novel. But whilst Leigh’s narrative has to this point tended to double M and the tiger, what is presented here is a moment of radical differentiation, a grim reassertion of human prerogative and power over the animal. This power is something Michael critiques when she satirises the journalists’ pleasure in hearing that human beings really can ‘play God’.
Leigh’s *The Hunter* makes a fairly uncomplicated equation between modern bio-industrial capitalism, the destruction of species, and masculinity, whilst echoing the story of genocide. The line ‘There, now he is the only one’ emphasises the contrast between the story of M and that of ‘the last Tasmanian’, Truganini or Trugannana, the woman whose death long authorised the claim that Tasmania had no remaining indigenous inhabitants. What Leigh seems to be signalling is that the ambition to take control of reproduction is entwined with the ambition to destroy; that the preparedness to kill an individual implies a preparedness to annihilate a species; and that Tasmania is a ‘natural’ home for stories of this kind. Perhaps that is why so much of the novel presents the hunter ‘becoming native’, caressing his traps, defeating the landscape, implicitly taking control by killing the ‘tiger’. But in ‘The Origin of the Monster Dogs’, the reproduction of the thylacine by a female scientist is represented as monstrous in very different ways: as a failure to be properly female (having children of the wrong species), and a failure to be a proper scientist (able only to replicate her femaleness). All three stories seem to imply that science can aggrandise the work of creation by placing it against the backdrop of fears about extinction, a situation in which scientist heroes must take over from flawed animals, human or thylacine, the work of making life.

If we read Shelley’s novel as being about ambition, we can commensurately read Victor’s refusal to make the female as a refusal to risk being usurped as the sole creator of a species; and if Victor’s work makes him ‘monstrous’, then part of this monstrosity is his appropriation of the female function, acting as both father and mother: ‘A new species would bless me as its creator and source’, he dreams, ‘many happy and excellent natures would owe their being to me. No father could claim the gratitude of his child so completely as I should deserve theirs’ (102). Better that the species die, than that he risk losing the exclusivity of his power as maker. In a remarkably obverse way, by the end of ‘The Origin of the Monster Dogs’, the female scientist seems to disappear, at which time it is no longer clear whether the thylacine pups are the creation of the scientist, or she theirs. She hunts and haunts the embalmed joey that inspired her work, becoming her own shadow, becoming the thylacine, disappearing into the story:

> All heads turn to the peerless scientist, caught in the flare of their flashes, as though they sense they’re about to see something they’re not meant to watch. Are already seeing something the cameras cannot catch. She seems to be shrinking. Indeed, she’s already become so slight she takes up no more room than her dark slip of a shadow. Slim enough to slink between the bricks. Skinny enough to skulk away. Noticing them no more than anyone ever noticed her, the professor pads towards the original specimen’s century-old prison. She sees her rabid reflection in the imperfect glass and senses that this time she’s haunting its slumber. The Thylacine pup keeps its nose tucked between its paws, its never-to-open eyes closed to the professor’s hungry stare. It seems it’s dreaming her. (49–50)
'Even if they were to leave Europe'

The flashes of the press photographers’ cameras recall the technologies of surveillance described repeatedly in The Hunter. Such an ending makes sense if it is read as emblematic of the tension between reconstitution (revivifying the past) and discovery (making a future) which is inherent in the very notion of reproductive/science, the former term tied to the maternal, the material, the archaic, the latter to the paternal, the ideational, the modern, which claims dominion over all the earth. In asserting this difference, both ‘The Origin of the Monster Dogs’ and Frankenstein feature a decisive moment in which the monstrous feminine is dismembered and discarded. In Frankenstein, the fragments of the female monster’s body are cast into the ocean. In a sense these are textual fragments: parts of a story Victor cannot bear to tell. Frankenstein and ‘The Origin of the Monster Dogs’ show the psychic structures which hold the rational or scientific self in place dissolving in and being dissolved by the ambition to create life, represented here as the desire to produce a different self: not a clone at all, but a new and different form, unimagined by any god.

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NOTES
1 ‘The Origin of the Monster Dogs’ was first published in The MUSE Anthology 2006, by the University of Melbourne Postgraduate Association (see http://www.gsa.unimelb.edu.au/muse2006/index.shtml), and had been winner of the University’s short story prize the same year. This information comes from the frontispiece of The Asking Game (2007), in which the story also appears (Michael 45–50). The complicated generic relationship between the novel and the two short stories within it — the other is titled ‘Ready or Not’ (167–71) — is beyond the scope of this essay.
3 The line ‘but when she does, that’s what she thinks’ echoes a line from Kenneth Slessor’s epic modernist poem ‘Five Bells’: ‘But when you do, that’s what you think’.
4 In fact a poll on the Australian Museum’s website showed 236 voting ‘for’ and 38 ‘against’ (Barbeliuk 1999), while a later count recorded 2492 ‘for’ and 276 ‘against’ (Barbeliuk 2001).
5 For discussions of this trope see Russell McGregor, Imagined Destinies and Patrick Brantlinger, Dark Vanishings. On the tiger, see Robert Paddle.
6 Elsewhere in the novel, nature, personified as female and exemplified as spring, is repeatedly praised (in each of chapters 4, 5, 6, and 7 at 102, 118, 110, 121).
In this sense this essay can be read as a disagreement with Cindy Hendershot’s assertion, made in her reading of the same moments in Mary Shelley’s novel, ‘the female creature becomes conflated with modern science’ (83).

WORKS CITED


I don’t believe in the churches,
of whatever persuasion, 
authorised fantasies
because without them
the miracles they endorse, 
quite frankly, are unfathomable.
But that does not mean
that faith is not
as potent as reason,
nor that the sun, moon, skies
and heavens are not about
illusions, for those of us who live
in hope of better things to come.
But into what labyrinths
of despair does such
optimism lead you, who knows
that what lives also dies.
There’s a whispering as
of silk spinning in
airless spaces which reminds me
both of where and when the poem
eludes the silken womb and when it
so intrigues the swallows in
tomorrow’s garden.
24TH OF DECEMBER

Trinket raindrops are blown across the corrugated iron roof counterpointed inside the shack by the annual playing on radio the day before Christmas of Ralph Vaughan Williams’ *The Lark Ascending* while incongruously as audacious squabbling magpies make their claim to ownership of the weather’s symphony, a curio’s fusion of Tin Can Alley and Handel’s *Messiah* while just as a bush lark sings, the bloody mobile rings.
PENNESHAW PERMUTATIONS

It was here on a blithely breezy afternoon of mid summer that other ghosts closed my eyes, demanding that I see their kinship, their connection with the ghosts of my birth place, to the spirits symphonic in the winds of what could be an admirable death place — you have to ask what good could derive from a fusion of barbarism and heroism, which are the shared archetypes of this island’s excommunicated history, like Van Diemen’s Land, this island too has its unavoidable stain which as we know is a colonial commonplace, a commonplace perversion in the colonial historical record. Wherever there are insular communities, and that’s everywhere, the past is a demonic curse as much as it is a guiding light for similar, no doubt edifying cliches. History’s essential lessons are Never to Forget and Don’t let Memory preach at the Liar’s lectern. Read the shadows and the stained glass icons with equal objectivity, humility and scepticism even if for no other reason than humane pragmatic survival. Before it’s too late, too late.
GARETH GRIFFITHS

Silenced Worlds: Language and Experience in Amitav Ghosh’s
The Hungry Tide

Ghosh’s novel The Hungry Tide is a story about the people of the Sundarbans, the tidal islands at the mouth of the Ganges and how they have survived the continual onslaughts of natural disasters and the equally violent shifting tides of post-independence politics in an area where such forces have had an ongoing and often destructive effect as peoples have been forced to move from their ancestral lands. The novel seeks to link the human stories with the broader story of the ecological and environmental forces that have acted on the region. Throughout Ghosh’s novel language, speech, writing, translation and interpretation are confronted by forms of experience that resist the mediation of language. Experience always refuses to be contained by any single representation, but here it seems often to resist representation entirely, dramatising that not everything can be ‘translated’ between different cultures, let alone between different species. Each of the characters the novel ‘goes behind’ (in Henry James’s telling phrase) Kanai, Piya, Niljiri and Nilima are outsiders to the Sundarban islands, the Bhata Desh or the Tide Country at the mouth of the Gangetic delta of Bengal. The characters they seek to represent, the ‘natives’ (using the term in its literal sense of those born there) of this marginalised world resist the various attempts each of these elite outsider figures makes to represent and define them. In turn, they define themselves only against further and radical forms of difference, the creatures, real and mythic, with whom they share this landscape.

How is this engagement with the limitations of representation signalled in the text? Kanai, the first figure whose point of view the reader shares is a professional translator, grounded in the belief that people can speak and be heard across the differences that separate them. But at crucial moments this confidence is brought down. For example, when Kanai asks Moyna, the ambitious trainee nurse to whom he is attracted, why she married the illiterate crab-fisherman, Fokir. She responds that he would not understand and he reacts angrily:

‘I wouldn’t understand?’ he said sharply. ‘I know five languages; I’ve travelled all over the world. Why wouldn’t I understand?’ ‘She let her āchol drop from her head and gave him a sweet smile. ‘It doesn’t matter how many languages you know,’ she said. ‘You’re not a woman and you don’t know him. You won’t understand.’ (156)
It is Kanai’s simplistic equation of language with experience that her answer reveals. Language has its place, but it is embedded in experience and cannot function as a substitute for it. Later, when Moyna asks Kanai to warn Fokir of the dangers of an entanglement with Piya, she makes clear the nature of language, its role and its limitations. Asked why she cannot explain this to her husband and a stranger can, she tells him:

Because words are just air, Kanai-babu… When the wind blows on the water, you see ripples and waves, but the real river runs beneath, unseen and unheard. You can’t blow on the real river from below, Kanai-babu. Only someone who’s outside can do that, someone like you. (258)

Language is confronted by experience in this way throughout this novel. For the scientist Piya, naming — and the control it seems to offer — is constantly defeated by the complexities of the people and landscape of the Tide Country. Her confidence in scientific definition and her need to understand and classify the world is constantly challenged, and slowly she is forced to accept that she can only ‘witness’ this difference and not know and control it through naming. When Fokir and Tutul take her to the Bon Bibi shrine she is lured away from her usual classificatory role into that of a ‘witness’, an observer, who can never be a full participant.

Piya stood by and watched as Fokir and Tutul performed a little ceremony. First they fetched some leaves and flowers and placed them in front of the images. Then, standing before the shrine, Fokir began to recite some kind of chant, with his head bowed and his hands joined in an attitude of prayer. (152)

Hearing the name ‘Allah’ spoken she wonders if Fokir is Muslim. But thinks he cannot be, as a Muslim would not pray to an image. Her defining mind is puzzled as the event cannot be settled into a fixed and neat category. But then she moves past this need to analyse. ‘But what did it matter either way? She was glad to be there, as a witness to this strange little ritual’ (152).

Even those who have lived their whole lives in the Tide Country, the Calcutta born couple Nirmal and Nilima, remain outside the world they have sought to understand and shape in crucial ways. Nirmal, the revolutionary dreamer and would be poet dismisses the way the boatman, Horen, interprets the narrative of the 17th century Jesuit traveller, Bernier, through his own intimate experience of the Tide Country.

‘Oh!’ cried Horen. ‘I know where this happened: they must have been at Gerafitola.’

‘Rubbish, Horen,’ I said. ‘How could you know such a thing? This happened over three hundred years ago.’

‘But I’ve seen it too,’ Horen protested, ‘and it’s exactly as you describe — a creek, just off a big river. That’s the only place where you can see the moon’s rainbow — it happens when there’s a full moon and a fog. But never mind all that, Saar. Go on with your story.’ (146)
When the Priest and his Portuguese guides are overtaken by a storm Horen interprets this through the Bon Bibi narrative as the result of their having crossed the line that divides the land of Bon Bibi from that of the demon Dokkhin Rai. This mythic interpretation provokes the rationalist Nirmal.

I grew impatient and said, 'Horen! A storm is an atmospheric disturbance: it has neither intention nor motive.'

I had spoken so sharply that he would not disagree with me, although he could not bring himself to agree either. 'As to that Saar,' he said, 'let us leave each other to our beliefs and see what the future holds.' (147)

Horen allows the myth to speak not through assertion but through embracing silence. In similar ways Fokir responds to the demands of the modern translator and language expert Kanai (Nirmal’s nephew and his literary executor, to whom he addresses his revelation after the Marichjhāpi attack) through a similarly powerful silence. Seeking to hire Fokir to accompany Piya on her search for the Irrawaddy dolphins he speaks to him in a hearty way meant to be friendly. But as Piya notes ‘there was no mistaking the condescension in Kanai’s voice as he was speaking to Fokir: ‘it was the kind of tone in which someone might address a dimwitted waiter, at once jocular and hectoring. It didn’t surprise her that Fokir had responded with what was his instinctive mode of defence: silence’ (210).

Each of these outsider characters comes to realise in time that language cannot fully translate let alone replicate the experiential reality of the Tide Country, an experiential reality that is translatable, if at all, only in the evanescent and fluid symbols of oral performance and story, that like the river and its islands are constantly shifting and evolving.

Kanai, like Nirmal, and Piya need to re-vision their conception of language and how it relates to and embodies experience. This is a progressive revision moving from the need to acknowledge the silenced human beings they encounter, to a need to listen to and acknowledge the many other ‘silenced’ entities of the Tide Country. These include all the entities and forces embodied in the myth of the Bon Bibi story, the usually ‘silenced’ worlds of the human, and the non-human, the animals, and the plants that together constitute the world of the Tide Country. For Nirmal the young Fokir becomes the means by which he can articulate his own growing acknowledgement of the power of the land and the voices it contains, which can be heard only if listened to in a receptive silence.

Nirmal takes the young Fokir to the bādh (the tidal dike) and asks him to listen. He hears the sound of the crabs, crabs that are burrowing into the bādh and which will in the end cause it to collapse when the tide flows. How long Saar asks can ‘this frail fence last against these monstrous appetites — the crabs and the tides, the winds and the storms? … Neither angels nor men will hear us and, as for the animals, they won’t hear us either.’

‘Why not, Saar?’

‘Because of what the Poet says, Fokir. Because the animals
‘already know by instinct
We’re not comfortably at home
In our translated world.’ (206)

Acknowledging the animals allows Nirmal to begin to listen to the voices of others, and find his humanity not in its exclusivity and permanence but in its continuity with the transience and transformative processes of the natural world.

Pablo Mukherjee has suggested that the novel engages with the limitations of the ability of elite representation to encompass the reality of the subaltern inhabitants of the Sundarbans. He sees moments such as Kanai’s admission of his inability to translate Fokir’s sung account of the Bon Bibi legend as the moment when he sees himself ‘through other eyes’. A crucial perception of this moment is when Kanai recognises the significance of Fokir’s bringing him to the shrine of Bon Bibi. This is the shrine to which Fokir has previously brought Piya to witness that her dolphins are not only the scientifically named and so controlled species of river dolphins but also and uncontrollably the messengers of the hidden world of Bon Bibi. The shrine represents the endless struggle that underpins the whole natural world, a struggle that requires acceptance of the balance of disaster and triumph, of natural forces that destroy and create at the same time, and that requires human beings to recognise their own limitation and the role these broader forces play in their lives.

Much earlier in the novel this perception has been foreshadowed in Kanai’s childhood exposure to the Bon Bibi play when he learns that Bon Bibi has divided her realm allowing Dokkhin Rai and the forces of destruction a space to coexist.

Bob Bibi was merciful in victory and she decided that one half of the tide country would remain wilderness; this part of the forest she left to Dokkhin Rai and his demon hordes. The rest she claimed for herself, and under her rule this once-forested domain was soon made safe for human settlement. Thus order was brought to the land of eighteen tides, with its two halves, the wild and the sown, being held in careful balance. All was well until human greed intruded to upset this order. (103)

Mukherjee is correct I think in suggesting that the novel asks us to question the universal and see it as needing to be revised through the locality of any action. He is correct too I think in seeing Piya as achieving ‘an understanding of the universal by learning to limit and revise her cosmopolitanism’ (Mukherjee 2006:187). But my own reading of the novel would want to go beyond Mukherjee’s concern to replace older critiques of the universal with a broader definition of what constitutes the human universal. The novel seems to me less concerned with this social revisionary goal, than with examining the concerns that underpin post-humanist theories, which argue that the exclusivity of the very category of the ‘human’ has been used to underpin a distinction from all other living beings that permits the exploitation of the animal world, and the natural resources of the plant world, the forests and the vegetation on which all life on the planet depends.¹ This larger theme is reflected in many places in the novel and each of the characters
moves towards a clearer sense of this interdependence of all life. Nilima’s view that respects all life but which prioritises human lives represents perhaps the basic liberal, humanitarian position from which and against which all the other positions of the ‘outsiders’ are calibrated. But all the views of these ‘outsider’ characters whose inner reflections dominate the narrative are also placed against the broader and more communalist voice of the ‘silenced’ beings of the Tide Country, whose ultimate voice is expressed in the narrative of myth and in their enacted, not stated, connection with the rhythms of the natural world they inhabit and the creatures with whom they share it. Their relationship with that world is not defined by abstracted concepts such as conservation, as for them the natural world is one with which they live in mutual dependency, fishing it and when necessary defending themselves against it. It is this different — but in a way more profound — relationship with the natural that Piya has to accept when she is forced to realise that Fokir is not a projection of her ideal understanding and preserving nature. When she sees the villagers killing the tiger trapped in their animal pen she yells at Kanai: “I’m not going to run off like a coward … If you’re not going to do anything about this, then I will. And Fokir will — I know he will.” (294)

When Fokir joins in the killing of the trapped tiger who has attacked the villagers she is shocked and disappointed since she has assumed that he would share her beliefs. When Fokir offers her his view of the event, that when a tiger comes into a human settlement it wants to die, she refuses to hear it and literally covers her ears. But in short order she realises that her rejection of the villagers viewpoint of the tiger places her in the same camp as the foresters, when she sees the same corrupt guard that she had encountered on her trip to Lusibari on his way to beat and bully and extort bribes from the village for its self-preservative action.

The tiger killing leads to the most explicit discussion of the issue of conservation and its human effects in the novel. Kanai argues that perhaps these conflicts result from ‘people like you who made a push to protect the wildlife here without regard for the human costs’ and people like himself ‘because people like me — Indians of my class that is — have chosen to hide these costs, basically in order to curry favour with their Western patrons. It’s not hard to ignore the people who are dying — after all they are the poorest of the poor’ (301). Piya’s counter, that ‘if we do not respect what was intended — not by you or me — but by nature, by the earth, by the planet that keeps us all alive’ if we ‘[cross] that imaginary line that prevents us from deciding that no other species matters except ourselves… Once we decide we can kill off other species, it’ll be people next — just the kind of people you’re thinking of, people who’re poor and unnoticed’ (301). What are we to make of this debate? Piya encapsulates the argument at the heart of the post-humanist position. It was by assuming that some humans were not really human (for example, black slaves, Jews classed as Untermenschen, that is, subhumans) that their enslavement and killing could be justified. So the category of the human is itself implicated in these genocidal moments of history.
The defence of other species is the defence of all life, including our own. Yet in order to achieve this or to survive an attempt to act on this principal must we necessarily become involved in the kind of compromise that Nilima has lived — dramatised in her visits to the politicians in Delhi and her meetings with the Prime Minister Morarji Desai. In the same way, Piya is saved from the foresters only because Kanai ‘mentioned the names of a few friends and parted with a few notes’ (299). Nirmal (Saar)’s inability to make this compromise — having turned his back on the levers of power — has rendered him and his fellow teachers on their protest boat unable to effect any change in the attitude of the government towards the massacre at Morichjhāpi, and even helpless to save the few people they have taken off when they are ordered to return them or be arrested. So is the novel suggesting that the kind of compromise that Nilima and her foundation represent is the answer? At the end of the novel this is certainly the road that Piya begins to tread when she suggests that although her commitment to conservation is unabated her work should proceed under the banner of the Babadon Trust, with whom it would share its funds. This suggests that now she sees that ‘I don’t want to do the kind of work that places the burden of conservation on those who can least afford it’ (397).

But while this is part of the resolution it seems to me that *The Hungry Tide* asks us to think in larger terms, to consider not only the issue of environmental conservation and how it might be achieved but the issue of how we might begin to understand the diversity of the human not only as a readjustment between different kinds of human societies and values (the rich, the poor, the developed, the undeveloped, the articulate and the silenced) but also as a readjustment of the idea of how the human is defined in itself and how this needs to reflect the broader categories of life across species and even across the idea of the whole interrelated pattern of living forces that constitute the planet. This broader view which brings together the speechless world of the wild and the ultimate sign of cultivation, language and culture, is prefigured in the many moments when the human inhabitants or the visitors to this world of the eighteen tides interact across the boundaries of species and of speech — for example when Nirmal (Saar) sees the dolphins rising around his boat when Kusum takes him to see Bon Bibi’s messengers.

All the time our boat was at that spot, the creatures kept breaking the water around us. What held them there? What made them linger? I could not imagine. Then there came a moment when one of them broke the surface with its head and looked right at me. Now I saw why Kusum found it so hard to believe that these animals were something other than they were. For where she had seen a sign of Bon Bibi, I saw instead the gaze of the Poet. It was as if he were saying to me

*Some mute animal*
*Raising its calm eyes and seeing through us,*
*And through us. This is destiny…* (235)
This is Nirmal’s reading but every figure in the novel has a reading that seeks to explain this communication, this conjunction of human and non-human, the intersection of all living things. For Piya, the scientist, it is a series of replicable and describable behavioural patterns that her research will be able to fix and understand. For Kanai it is a moment when the delta, itself is seen as a confluence not only of rivers but of languages and cultures including those species whose ‘language’ is, for the moment, untranslatable to human speech. For Fokir and Kusum it is the message that Bon Bibi represents, the larger pattern of myth in which all figures are inscribed both human, animal, and spirit. For the native inhabitants of the tide country the world of nature and the world of men interpenetrate and survival depends on the balance that Bon Bibi has inscribed in the mythic divided line of the Tide Country, and the actual lines of the tide resisting bādh, lines that are always threatening to be breached by the forces of destruction and greed, whether it is the devouring lust for flesh of Dokkhin Rai, or the desire for power and wealth of modern Indian society, forces that must be held in balance with the natural world. These readings are not reconciled but are rather used to explore the tension that must always ensue when language and human thought seeks to define its boundaries, boundaries that by definition always need to be breached and rebuilt for speech, writing and human consciousness to be realised at all since only in reaching and confronting a boundary is it defined.

Since these issues are posed here in the very form that the text seeks to question and define, language, writing and even in a sense literature and myth as the essence of story and narrative, it is perhaps in the continual referencing of the poet Rilke’s idea of transformation, invoked throughout by Nirmal, that this key issue is posed. Nirmal is both a political animal and a poet. His failure as a revolutionary is also his success as a person who can transcend the brute materialism that allows his revolutionary colleagues, now successful social leaders, to remind him that for true revolutionaries people are to be set below ideology, ‘you can’t make an omelette without breaking eggs’ (192). In defining Nirmal I would suggest Ghosh comes very close to defining the procedures of his own text, not that Nirmal represents Ghosh, but both are the figures in the novel that seek to find a way of writing their experience, even if that writing is always inevitably a failure, lost in the storm of the river, or in the impossible confluence of different languages and experiences. Trying to explain Nirmal to Piya Kanai (the other figure who seeks and fails to find a way of writing experience when he tries to translate Fokir’s oral telling of the Bon Bibi myth) he says that Nirmal loves the poet Rilke for his belief in transformation and that Nirmal was a person ‘who lived through poetry’. As a result, he says, his Marxist belief that the underlying material world shaped everything led him not to celebrate the domination of nature by man and the control of nature by industrialisation but rather to a sense that each thing acts to transform and modify everything else and to be transformed in its turn, As Kanai expresses it:
For him it meant that everything which existed was interconnected: the trees, the sky, the weather, people, poetry, science, nature. He hunted down facts in the way a magpie collects shiny things. Yet when he strung them all together, somehow they became stories — of a kind. (282–83)

This reflects Ghosh’s own story-telling in many ways. Each of the characters speaks for one of these many elements of the world, the articulate, the silent, the living and the great forces of nature that shape their environment. To draw them together the narrative assembles facts then by the power of language transforms them into a single story — of a kind. So the novel simultaneously affirms the failure of language ever fully to encompass experience whilst by its very existence as language asserts the need always to struggle against this limitation. The pessimism that sometimes seems to colour the views of the protagonists as to the failure of language is finally answered in the fact of the novel’s existence, making the novel one that ‘speaks’ for the silenced even while it acknowledges how difficult and partial such speech must always be.

NOTES
1 The literature on posthumanism is now vast but one might perhaps consider the following as some key texts in a complex ongoing debate: Harraway 1991, 2003; Fukuyama 2002; Wolfe 2003a, 2003b; Tiffin and Huggan 2009.

WORKS CITED


The Birds of Edward Lear

Edward Lear is justly famous for his nonsense verse — is there anyone with English as their mother tongue who isn’t familiar with ‘The Owl and the Pussy Cat’? This poem, however, is one of his longer nonsense verses, along with other magnificent examples such as ‘The Pobble Who Has No Toes’. But Lear had other claims to fame, although not in his own lifetime. Most of his life was spent as a landscape painter and traveller throughout what was then known as the ‘Levant’ and in recent times his watercolour landscapes have changed hands at enormous prices — but not, as he had hoped, his oils. Lear first came to prominence as an illustrator of birds, and this essay will concentrate on this aspect of his work. It is possible, as I will argue, that his interest in birds continued to preoccupy him throughout his life and may even be used as a useful indicator of his personal and emotional life.

Edward Lear was born in Holloway, London in 1812, the twentieth child of Jeremiah and Ann. His father had been Master of the Fruiterer’s Company and a Proprietor or Founding Member of the London Stock Exchange. However, Jeremiah Lear fell on hard times, the family split up and Edward, to ease the burden on his mother, was placed in the care of his elder sister Ann. What little education he received came from Ann and another sister Sarah, although Lear stated that he went briefly to school at age 11. He also suffered from epilepsy, which he described as ‘the Demon’, as well as bouts of acute depression, which he called ‘the Morbids’, and weak eyesight.

His sisters, however, did teach him to draw and paint. Their father had owned some good paintings and one of the downstairs rooms was set aside as a painting room. Here the two sisters taught him one of the social accomplishments as they themselves had learnt it — the painting of ‘flowers and butterflies and birds’ (Noakes 22). In 1827 Jeremiah, who was now 70, decided to retire and he moved with his wife and one daughter to Gravesend. No provision was made for Edward and he was forced to fend for himself, although under the care of Ann, who had inherited a small annuity from her grandmother. From the age of 15, then, Lear was forced to earn a living, which he did by making and selling small drawings. He described these as ‘uncommon queer shop-sketches’ (such as coloured prints, screens, fans and even medical drawings for hospitals and doctors) (Noakes 29). His skill developed to the stage where he became an accomplished illustrator, especially of birds and animals at the London Zoo. How did this come about? The Zoological Society’s archives indicate that ‘he was given permission to make
drawings of parrots belonging to the Society… This was a privilege granted to anyone who wished for it and signified very little’ (Reade 10). Some light is thrown on this vague remark about working for the Zoological Society, by a book entitled *The Gardens of the Zoological Society Delineated*, produced under the supervision of E.T. Bennett, Secretary of the Society, and printed at the Chiswick Press in 1830–31. In one vignette, a wood-engraving of the Red and Yellow Macaws, Lear’s monogram is evident. He also worked with Prideaux Selby and later with Selby and Jardine on their *Illustrations of Ornithology* and this proved ‘a fortunate apprenticeship, for it taught Lear to be bold and imaginative in his work’ (Noakes 30). He now had the skill and confidence to try a book of his own. He prepared lithographic plates from the drawings and sketches he made of the parrots at the zoo and he planned to publish these in fourteen folios for subscribers. The first two folios were ready on 1st November 1830 and the next day he was nominated as an Associate of the Linnean Society. He was only 18!

Since Lear had had no formal training as an artist and certainly not as an engraver he decided to use a new technique — lithography. The process of lithography was invented by Alois Senefelder in Prague in 1798. He visited London in 1801 and Charles Joseph Hullmandel became interested in the new process. Hullmandel demonstrated the lithographic technique in 1818 in his book, *Twenty-four Views of Italy.* A translation of Senefelder’s *Complete Course of Lithography* was published in 1819. This was followed by Hullmandel’s *The Art of Drawing on Stone* in 1824. Although the first hand-coloured plate of a bird was published in 1820, no one had published a book dealing exclusively with one bird and this Lear decided to do using the new process in his *Illustrations of the Family of Psittacidae, or Parrots.*

Lear became one of the most accomplished lithographers and one who recognised the possibilities of the grain of the stone: how it could be used to vary tone and line, especially in the graduation of closely packed feathers. Although the wrapper promised 14 folios only 12 were completed. They appeared between November 1830 and April 1832. Although the book was an artistic triumph it was not a financial success and Lear abandoned the project.

Susan Hyman, in *Edward Lear’s Birds*, includes a series of plates that demonstrate Lear’s detailed preparation of Plate No. 2, the Salmon-crested Cockatoo (*Plyctolophus rosaceus*) and it is worth examining these in detail. The initial drawing, labelled ‘4/5 nat. size’, shows the bird’s pose clearly established with one of its talons grasping a branch and the other raised against its body and looking down at the observer. The cockatoo, shown in a three-quarter view, is already engaged with the viewer. There is minimal detail as far as feathers are concerned — only the main shaft or rachis is shown and these are restricted to the wings.

The second preparatory sketch is much more detailed and includes a first attempt at colouration. The feathers are remarkably detailed: not only are the
Plate No. 2 Salmon-Crested Cockatoo. (http://digital.library.wisc.edu/171.dl/DLDecArts.LearParrots)
Plate 9. Red and Yellow Macaw. (http://digital.library.wisc.edu/171.dl/DLDecArts.LearParrots)
rachises shown but the barbs are indicated as well. The watercolour sketch of the bird is surrounded by pencilled notes and colour tests. For example, there is a note alongside the bird’s neck that reads ‘xx straight lines’ as a reminder of the treatment of the barbs of the feathers. This sketch is followed by a finished watercolour, still with the bird glancing down towards the viewer’s left. The crest is coloured a pale red and there are touches of yellow on the tail. The setting is still minimal: merely the branch on which the bird is perched (signed on the right-hand end ‘E. Lear’) and some leaves in outline. This watercolour is labelled and noted as ‘No. 2. This is the illustration that Lear would have transferred to the lithographic stone to produce the final print that was then hand-coloured by assistants at Hullmandel’s. The published plate shows the bird coloured pale lemon over most of its body but with a more intense colour for the tail feathers. There is a gleam in the parrot’s eye and the beak appears polished — due no doubt to the use of egg white. Overall, though, the bird’s individuality shines through. Such a meticulous approach is evident in each of the forty-two plates: a blend of scientific precision and an understanding of and sympathy for the birds. It is possible to single out particular plates for their representation of particular parrots but several would be difficult to ignore. I have already drawn attention to Plate no. 2, the Salmon-crested Cockatoo and there are at least two others that demand attention: the Red and yellow Macaw (plate 9) and Baudin’s Cockatoo (plate 7). This particular plate has been described as a perfect manifestation of Lear’s singular talent, and is one of the most skilful drawings of birds ever done. I would also point out that the complete set of the original plates of the *Psittacidae* has been digitised and is available at http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/DLDRecArts.LearParrots.

II

While Lear was sketching his parrots in the Zoological Gardens he had been introduced to Lord Stanley, who was the President of the Linnean Society and a founding member of the Zoological Society. Stanley, the heir to the Earl of Derby, had built up an enormous menagerie at his ancestral home, Knowsley, near Liverpool. Following Lear’s success with his book of parrots, Lord Stanley invited him to Knowsley to make drawings of the birds and animals there. This, as Vivian Noakes states, ‘was the most far-reaching invitation of Lear’s life’ (Noakes 40). Lear first visited Knowsley in October 1831 and at first he was treated as an employee and housed and fed in the servants’ quarters but that soon changed and he was accepted fully into the family. When Lord Stanley succeeded to the title in 1834 he embarked on an extensive scheme of expansion and improvement to the menagerie. Much of Lear’s work at Knowsley was collected and privately published in 1846 under the title, *Gleanings from the Menagerie and Aviary at Knowsley*, edited by J.E. Gray who also wrote the Preface:

The following Plates are selected from the Series of drawings made by Mr. Edward Lear from the living animals in the Right Honourable the Earl of Derby’s Menagerie at Knowsley Hall, forming part of the large collections of Zoological Drawings in his
Lordship’s library. They have been lithographed with great care by Mr. J.W. Moore, and coloured by Mr. Bayfield. Their chief value consists in their being accurate representations of living specimens.

The true significance of Vivian Noakes’ statement of the ‘far-reaching invitation’ now becomes apparent. Lord Derby and his nephew Robert Hornby offered to fund Lear so that he could travel to Rome and begin a new career as a landscape painter. He had become increasingly interested in landscape while he was at Knowsley and he was also aware that with his failing eyesight he could not continue with the demanding work of bird illustrations. However, the artistic success of the *Psittacidae* meant that Lear was much in demand as a zoological illustrator. He contributed drawings for the *Transactions of the Zoological Society* and *The Zoology of Captain Beechey’s Voyage* and possibly for *The Zoology of the Voyage of HMS Beagle*. He also did drawings for Sir William Jardine’s series, *The Naturalist’s Library*, for Thomas Eyton’s *A Monograph of the Anatidae, or Duck Tribe* as well as Thomas Bell’s *A History of British Quadrupeds* and *A Monograph of the Testudinata*.

Another person he worked for was John Gould, who had also brought out a bird book in 1831: *A Century of Birds from the Himalayan Mountains*. Gould was aware of the impact of Lear’s book and he modelled his own on it, both in format and in the use of lithography. When Lear abandoned his book of parrots he sold the plates to John Gould and also agreed to train Gould’s wife Elizabeth in the use of lithography.

It was Lear’s example that provided the impetus for Gould’s first publication, and it was Lear who later transformed Gould’s static and rather unimaginative style into the confident and innovative work that characterised his second and all subsequent publications. (Tree 43)

Gould planned and wrote the book himself but the drawings were the work of others, especially his wife Elizabeth and Lear. No mention was made of Lear’s contribution as Gould felt that as he had paid Lear for his work he could claim them as his own.

Lear also worked for Gould on later books: *A Monograph of Ramphastidae, or Family of Toucans* and the five-volume *The Birds of Europe* (1832–1837). Although Gould acknowledged Lear’s help with drawings he nevertheless subscribed plates ‘By J. & E. Gould’ even though Lear had signed them. For example, when Gould’s *Birds of Europe* appeared it attracted great praise for Gould but hardly a mention of Elizabeth Gould or of Lear. Even when Lear’s plates are acknowledged they are awarded only a cursory ‘E. Lear del at lith’.

The relationship of the two men was never an easy one. Gould was the elder by eight years. He was the son of a gardener at Windsor Castle but in 1827 he was appointed taxidermist to the Zoological Society where he became a self-appointed zoologist. While he was no artist, he did provide sketches of the birds he employed others to illustrate as well as the general plan of the volumes. No
artist, but an effective businessman — which Lear was not. Over a long career Gould published 41 large volumes, including some 3,000 superb plates. When Lear was informed of Gould’s death in 1881 he recalled the man.

He was one I never liked really, for in spite of a certain jollity or bonhomie, he was a harsh and violent man. At the Zoological S. at 33 Bruton St. — at Hullmandels — at Broad St. ever the same persevering hardworking toiler in his own (ornithological) line, — but ever as unfeeling for those about him. In the earliest phase of his bird-drawing he owed everything to his excellent wife, & to myself, — without whose help in drawing he had done nothing. (qtd in Tree 43–44)

III

When Lear was first invited to Knowsley Hall his position in the stately home was uncertain since he came as both a guest and an employee. On his arrival he was shown to the servants’ quarters but that was soon to change. In any case the children of the house, of whom there was a great number, soon sought him out and each evening they gathered in the steward’s quarters, fascinated by Lear’s ability to entertain them with his drollery. Angus Davidson provides a more detailed account of Lear’s position in the household and his relationship with his employer’s grandchildren:

[Lord Derby’s grandchildren] were in the habit of dining every day with their grandfather, but soon Lord Derby remarked that they now seemed anxious, instead of sitting with him during the evening, to make their escape as soon as dinner was over. On his inquiring the reason for this they replied, with the candour of youth, that it was so much more amusing downstairs. “And why?” asked Lord Derby. “Oh, because that young fellow in the steward’s room who is drawing the birds for you is such good company, and we like to go and hear him talk.” (15)

He began to amuse them by drawing odd looking birds and animals and people with funny noses, and he made up ridiculous rhymes for them, and then someone asked him if he had seen a book which had been published about ten years before, called *Anecdotes and Adventures of Fifteen Gentlemen*. It contained illustrated verses like this one:

There was a sick man of Tobago  
Liv’d long on rice-gruel and sago;  
But at last, to his bliss,  
The physician said this —  
‘To a roast leg of mutton you may go.’

Obviously this kind of rhyme and drawing could be adapted to tell the remarkable stories of all kinds of men and women, and when Lear made up some for the children they were greeted with ‘uproarious delight and welcome’ (Noakes 33). A fitting start to his career as a nonsense writer.

The verses in *Anecdotes* were versions of the limerick and Lear adopted the form quite happily. In choosing his subjects he clearly drew on his work at Knowsley and it seems evident that he also made use of the various authors
he worked with. These ‘Nonsense’ were eventually published in *A Book of Nonsense* in 1846 and for this he used the pseudonym ‘Derry Down Derry’. This was to be followed by another four in Lear’s lifetime, the last, *Laughable Lyrics, A Fourth Book of Nonsense Poems* appearing in 1877. The first verse in *A Book of Nonsense* goes as follows:

There was an Old Man with a beard  
Who said, ‘It is just as I feared!—  
Two Owls and a Hen, four Larks and a Wren,  
Have all built their nests in my beard!

This verse is illustrated with a fellow with a remarkably long and bushy beard and the weight of the birds has clearly caused him to rise from his chair. It is obvious that the Old Man is far from pleased!

There is also a delightful verse about a Young Lady who has a similar problem with birds but she doesn’t seem at all agitated, in fact she appears quite delighted. And the sketch of the birds either circling or perched on her hat is almost a series of miniatures.

There was a Young Lady whose bonnet  
Came untied when the birds sat upon it;  
But she said, ‘I don’t care!  
All the birds in the air  
Are welcome to sit on my bonnet!’

When Lear came to collect and publish the original ‘Nonsense’ he made their origins clear:

Dedication  
To the  
GREAT-GRANDCHILDREN,
GRAND-NEPHEWS, AND GRAND-NIECES
OF EDWARD, 13th EARL OF DERBY,
THIS BOOK OF DRAWINGS & VERSES
(The greater part of which were originally made
and composed for their parents)
IS DEDICATED BY
THE AUTHOR
EDWARD LEAR

Lear provided a statement ‘By Way of Preface’ for an American reprint published by Roberts Brothers of Boston in 1894:

The first edition of the ‘Book of Nonsense’ was published in 1846, lithographed by tracing paper… In 1862 a second edition of the Book of Nonsense was published and is now in its sixteenth thousand. O bother!

This is a great indication of the continuing popularity of Lear’s Nonsenses. And it seems to be the case that Lear’s nonsense books have remained in print ever since.

Thomas Byron, in his important study of Lear claims that: ‘In both series [of limericks] there are more birds than any other creatures. Lear began his career drawing parrots and he was always fascinated by owls, ducks, geese and ravens’ (62). He argues that Lear’s fascination with birds can be related to the artist’s state of mind and he uses the changes in the relationship between birds and humans that appear in the verses as evidence for Lear’s biography. Whether or not this argument is sustainable is debateable; what is beyond doubt is the fact that the fascination that began in the cages of the London Zoological Society bore wondrous fruit.

NOTES
1 I should point out that I am indebted to a number of precursors, especially for biographical information. Is there anyone working on Lear who is not indebted to Vivian Noakes for her magisterial studies? Susan Hyman also deserves acknowledgement for her outstanding works on Lear’s birds and I am deeply in her debt.

WORKS CITED
Kite and Quilt: Olive Senior’s Exploration of Her Poetic Inheritance

In the poem ‘Ode to Pablo Neruda’, published in her most recent collection of poetry, *over the roofs of the world* (2005), Olive Senior finds herself ‘drifting and wordless’, so far from the sea she cannot strike the right chord. The poet narrator calls upon the spirit and word-craft of Pablo Neruda to help her re-discover the lost measure that will move others:

So I turn to find again something you said
about grasping poetry like a thread?
Here it is:

*You must spin it*
*fly a thread*
*and climb it...*

*This isn’t a matter*
*for deliberation*
*it’s an order.*

(‘Ode to Pablo Neruda’ 92)

It might be an order, but Senior does not ‘jump to’, responding rather with a series of questions that voice her anxieties about thread — thread that might be a lifeline, but as easily a noose: thread in the hands of sweaty fingers might become dirty, knotted, tangled, bloody and broken. ‘I worry,’ writes Senior,

…about clinging
too tightly to this thread. For what happens if it becomes
too knotted to decipher, too clotted with blood, with mud
from the traveller, too broken to tie again, too ravelled,
too threadbare?

What if you use it all up — for a clothesline that breaks,
for a leash the dog runs off with? (93)

and worst of all,

What if you confidently go to bed leaving a spindle of new
thoughts to be processed. Next morning you reach for the
thread and it’s gone like smoke — it’s the cobweb you’re left with. (93)

But Neruda is not the kind of poet to indulge weakness or accept excuses. In his ‘Ode to the Thread’ he rails:
We need blankets
to keep warm through the winter.
Here come people
from the farms,
they are bringing
a hen
for the poet, one
small hen.
And what will you give them,
you, what will you give? (63)

Taken out of context, Pablo Neruda’s question to and of the poet might sound
like a very poor apology for poetry: the people are in need of the most basic
rudiments of life — a blanket to keep them warm. They offer something precious
from the little they have to give — a hen. ‘And what will you give them,/ you,
what will you give?’ asks the poet of himself and of others of his ilk. The question
seems accusatory, asked of one who, it might be presumed from the tone of the
question, cannot give even the barest of covers to keep his people warm. Perhaps
the poet, although he might think himself big, is of less value even than the
smallest hen. (‘There are some poets so big/they don’t fit in doorways/ and some
merchants so sharp/they don’t remember being poor,’ writes Neruda in a poem
entitled, ‘Not Quite so Tall’.) But the hen has been given, and the poet must rise
to the occasion — he must give something worthy in return. ‘Now!/ now, the
thread’: the poet calls urgently for thread — not the thread of cotton, linen, silk or
wool — but the thread of magical property, the thread of poetry:

the thread
that will become cloth
for those who have
only rags,
 nets
for fishermen,
brilliant
scarlet
shirts
for stokers,
and a flag
for each and every one. (63)

Neruda’s ‘Ode to the Thread’ is an ode to what is so often relegated to the
category of ‘woman’s work’, but here it becomes the word-work of the poet — a
male poet it would seem (whose beard grows long with the time taken to bend
the vast mountain of material to his word-will) — and the recipients of that word/
thread work would also appear to be male — farmers, fishermen and stokers. So
when Olive Senior sets out to interrogate and ultimately answer Neruda’s call
to the poet to take up the thread in the cause of the people, she does so from
her womanly position, reminding him of the heritage of thread that has been a
burden as much as a blessing borne primarily by women. Senior claims to be
seeking ‘that old woman, the wizard of the cords/who used to tie up the wind
with three knots in a bundle/ and sell to sailors’ and she apologises for letting
loose a hurricane (on Neruda and on the world) because she ‘forgot which knot
was which!’ (101). But this is a woman who knows her craft well. She declares
that in fact her heart feels much better for the roaring — ‘it’s a strong wind that
cleanses, that/unburdens and purifies’, and that, although the thread is broken,
she will ‘mend it and restring with fresh beads’ (101). Yet after demonstrating the
skill with which she wields the needle like a sword, Senior moves on to claim,
somewhat unexpectedly for one so assured in her art, that:

I wanted more than woman’s knotted portion so I refused
to learn the way of thread: sewing, embroidery, darning,
weaving, tapestry, knitting or crochet do not appear on my CV.
(‘Ode to Pablo Neruda’ 101)

Refusing to learn the craft of woman’s knotted portion (whilst reminding
her readers of the cultural power invested in that portion) and choosing rather
to embroider, weave, knit and darn with the thread of poetry, Olive Senior both
extends and embraces woman’s position within the domestic and the literary
spheres. Like the poetry of Neruda, to whom she pays homage (despite her
disclaimer) in an ode that completes her third of four volumes of poetry, Senior
writes ‘impure poetry/that bears witness to the raw and the natural’ (‘Ode to Pablo
Neruda’, 92) — hers too, like Neruda’s is a ‘voice from the bottom of the well’
(92); but unlike the poetry of her male predecessor who speaks predominantly
with and through the voice of male experience, Senior’s poetry is earthed in
woman’s work and woman’s talk. As she remarks in ‘Hen’:

Some find you loud mouth and simple,
for every egg laid a big announcement
a cackle, some find you
the broody hen, not knowing all
is meant to throw spies off the scent
of your blood’s secret: you know
the sky isn’t falling, geese don’t lay
golden eggs, superior knowledge
resides in the feet. (23)

Superior knowledge might reside in the feet, but the poet must know earth and
sky. Poetry, declares Neruda,

comes from many sources,
...
it is strong because
it was made from ores;
it is fragile because it was
traced by trembling smoke;
the thread of poetry
is like that.
(‘Ode to the Thread’ 61)

So in this third volume, whose title, over the roofs of the world, is taken from Walt Whitman’s Leaves of Grass, Senior takes wing with birds of many a different feather to explore what might be understood to be her womanly craft in relation to a masculine art. The woman-weed gossip on which Senior has built her poetic voice over three decades is tested against or put into play with another inheritance represented by imposing male poets of the Americas like Walt Whitman, Wallace Stevens and Pablo Neruda. However, unlike the fledgling woman poet of Virginia Woolf’s Room of One’s Own, Senior does not find her vision of the sky blocked by an imposing male forebear, rather she is sufficiently confident to spar with him:

So Pablo Neruda, although I absolutely agree with many
things you have said this thing with the thread I find a bit
slippery as if you’d reeled it off without thinking and simply
disappeared leaving in the blue this monstrous kite
and me
the one
holding
the string.

(‘Ode to Pablo Neruda’)

This is ‘classic Senior’, claiming to give ground, where in fact she shifts the ground from under your (or in this case, his) feet. Over the roofs of the world might be understood to be, at least in part, Olive Senior’s alternative ‘Ode to the Thread’: the book of poetry begins with a reminder that the demonised Christopher Columbus was the son and grand-son of weavers who kept the craft alive in the writing of two books (see ‘The Pull of Birds’, 9); it includes the poems ‘Embroidery’ (78), ‘Penny Reel’ (80), ‘Lacemaker’ (86) and ‘Basketmaker’ — the last being a celebration of the South American basket makers of the Warao, for whom ‘warp becomes worth’: ‘In twill and twist of reeds’ the basket makers ‘entwine the divine, the labyrinth unwind’(90); and the volume ends in conversation with Neruda’s ‘Ode to the Thread’ — lines from his poem interwoven through her own, as weft to her warp, or warp to her weft — I’m not sure which — but of him she asks:

This thread of poetry: Where does it come from?
Are you born with it? Is it handed to you like a sweet
or a rattle to a child, who takes it without thinking?
As I took your kite string? (94)

Senior not only asks the question of her eminent predecessor, she has the temerity to provide her own answer:
Here’s how I see it: This thread is one that crosses your path like the spider’s web. You walk through unaware. The Great Spider still clings to it. So now Spider clings to you, my friend. This is not an accident. You have been chosen Spider’s apprentice. To master language. As Trickster, to spin and weave tales. To prophesy and heal. The go-between serving earth and sky. Sometimes the messenger left dangling. (94)

In his introduction to a bilingual selection of Neruda’s poems, Alastair Reid remarks of *The Heights of Macchu Pichu*, the volume that ‘remains Neruda’s most celebrated work, the testament to his spirit’, that here the Chilean poet realised his poetic calling: ‘to become a voice, a voice for the dead past, for the stones themselves, for the inanimate world of objects, for the natural world, for the continent in its myriad forms, and above all, for those in the present who lack a voice’ (5). Neruda himself observes of this work, ‘I thought about Ancient American man. I saw his ancient struggles linked with present struggles’ (qtd in Reid, 5). There is much here that could also be said of Olive Senior’s commission, for she too gives voice to the voiceless — those of the African diaspora for whom the past is a bitter legacy. So when she speaks with regret for calling up a hurricane (101), it is not just the hurricane of her attack on Neruda, but the hurricane that throws up the flesh and bones of the Middle Passage:

The ones bound in chains
Dragged across the Atlantic
In vessels, full-rigged.
Their vocal chords ripped
With their names
On the tips of their tongues.
Washed away in salt water
The cartography of home. (99)

In her ode to Neruda Senior explains:

I’ve had to weave a cloth to wrap it all up in, a bundle for carrying for I’m travelling too. But not flying — too much salt in my veins.

I’ve been seeking a thread to tie up the bundle which has been growing unwieldy with the cries and the whispers of the ones I can’t name: The lost ones, the limboed, the un-cared for, the un-loved. The mortified, the discarded, the ‘disappeared’. All resting uneasy on my conscience. (100)

Sometimes the burden is overwhelming: ‘Yes, we each have our measure, our burden to carry,’ Senior acknowledges, ‘but sometimes the cries are so piercing, we are silenced’ (100), and sometimes the poet feels the need ‘to feel/free/to fly/kites/if I wish/or just/dangle/from a thread/like/the spider’ (101) But Neruda will not let her sleep easy, or dangle carefree, and it is to him that she feels obliged to
defend herself and her art. This defence is at times an argument about poetry and
sometimes an argument about what it is to be a woman and a poet — an Afro-
Caribbean woman poet:

After you have taken the thread — the thread you cannot refuse
— you must choose how to handle it. You might cut off bits
to skip rope with or play cat’s cradle. That’s fine for joy
needs to unwind. But there comes a time when you might be
forced to confess: I don’t know what I did with the rest of it. (94)

When Senior looks up with some surprise to see it is she, holding the string of the kite,

But look at this:

In the sky
a kite
still aloft
and the one
holding
the thread
is me (102),

she is somewhat disingenuous, for she has not arrived at this position without
hard graft and in full knowledge, having eaten well of the fruit (the bitter and the sweet) of that tree.

Here’s the real trick (and no one ever tells you this):
the thread of poetry to safely travel, the knot of yourself
you must first unravel.

…
Stripped
and skeletal
you first
navigate
the crawl-space
that allows you
to enter
the labyrinth

of self, where monsters lurk at the heart of darkness; but it is also a woman’s own
thread that allows her to find a way out into the light of day:

If you find yourself
back here
you have mastered
the first trick.

You
can make your way
through the needle’s eye
pulled up
by the thread
of our poem
dragged down
by the weight
of words
waiting
to be strung.

The real apprenticeship
has begun. (97–98)

Although Senior speaks of poetry as a kind of calling for which you are chosen by The Great Spider, ‘To master language. As/ Trickster, to spin and weave tales. To prophesy and heal’ (94), poets are made not born, and Senior here acknowledges the debt she owes Neruda, whilst also asking for acknowledgement of the commitment made and the suffering endured by she who would be poet (a woman no less than a man). So when Senior proffers her gift of an ode to Neruda, it is a poem, made ‘like a quilt from thread/ and strips’ in exchange for a kite (103). It is not only the poor who require comfort; poets too require the support of one another, and Senior’s offering to Neruda is apt. For the quilt might be understood to be the blanket for which Neruda called, yet with typical Senior craft, the warmth and comfort it offers is thereby allied with a (black) woman’s craft (recalling Alice Walker’s story of ‘Everyday Use’), and with an art of not just ‘making do’ — the art of survival, but of making beautiful: quilt is that which combines earth and sky, providing solace for body and soul (Walker’s claim for the beauty, the art, of her mother’s gardens, might here be remembered):

With strips and remnants left over (and with bits and pieces of this kite I’m reeling in) I can make a costume for the dancing fools the masqueraders who dress in rags and tatters. (102)

Senior ‘shreds’ Neruda’s proffered kite in order to craft a thing of her own making — ‘a poem like a quilt’ (103) — that acknowledges but does not bow to that inheritance. Recalling her desire for ‘more than woman’s knotted portion’ (101), and remarking with some surprise her kite held aloft in the sky by the thread of her own spinning, Senior considers accepting her apprenticeship to the great Akan creator god and Caribbean trickster, Anancy spider-wo/man (Anancy here undergoes a sex-change/gender transformation, perhaps acknowledging not only a debt to the twinned Akan god, but also a literary debt to Ariadne):

Maybe I’ll accept my commission as apprentice Spider who spins from her gut the threads for flying, for tying up words that spilled, hanging out tales long unspoken, reeling in songs, casting off dances. And perhaps for binding up wounds? (102)

The inheritance and the commission that Senior takes on as her ‘joy and her obligation’ (Neruda, ‘Ode to the Thread’) is not only gendered, but historically and genealogically specific — it is, like Neruda’s, a commission derived from ‘the people’, her people:
Egungun
Jonkonnu
Pitchy-Patchy
Pierrot and Gombay

the ones who dance the ancestors. (102)

And it would seem here that poetry is a joint or shared craft — an art that is both individual and communal, for Senior goes on to surmise that,

Perhaps when they dance they’ll let the wind spin their strips and their tatters into thread flying ready to be climbed.

Or feather them into birds on the ascendant, their wings lightly stirring up the ocean below the Middle Passage. (102)

Ultimately, Senior acknowledges the debt she owes Neruda, needing ‘this kite-string to jerk me back to the/source of creation, to that mantra of obligation’ (98), but she also acknowledges a ‘creole spider-work of many hands’ (98) — the work of ancestors poetic and unpoetic.

And so, my trickster powers evolving, I’m learning like you, Pablo Neruda veteran tightrope walker, to swing more easily between joy and obligation.

Here it is: this poem I’ve made for you like a quilt from thread and strips as a way of thanking you — not for all your other gifts (for that would require a book) — but simply in exchange for your kite which — as you have seen — I’ve turned to good use. (‘Ode to Pablo Neruda’, over the roofs, 103)

NOTES
1 See Alice Walker’s essay, ‘In Search of Our Mother’s Gardens’.

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Erna Brodber

THE BABY FATHER

When I saw my face on a body no more than two feet long, pumping its legs and crawling towards me, I knew the depths of their hatred: nobody cared enough about me to tell me. It had reached for my leg. I watched it reach for my knee in an effort to stand. I froze. At that moment Miss Cecilly, the dried up one, rushed into the dark gallery and snatched it up. God is good. I let myself out. Nobody should have me for a father.

I walked down the paved path through the garden formerly called the ‘rose garden’, to the gate. Once upon a time those rose plants were so lush and vibrant, Della complained that they were sucking away her air, and more, messing with her hair as she walked by, pulling apart her bee-hive which she had so carefully constructed. She believed in beauty and particularly hers. You actually saw no more of Della’s skin than of any other girl her age, perhaps less for when the family went out, it was to the Assemblies of God down the road and they tended to cover more than any other church women. No visible flesh or skin, but no cloth could hide the tightly sculptured form and Della knew it. We couldn’t have that along with the mangoes going down to Pastor Henry. That is why we targeted her as the first. If I failed, there were others to do the job. And if she was impenetrable, there were two other sisters to try to humiliate.

I passed through the gate, heard the click behind me and moved on to the almond tree. It would be nice if somebody hearing the gate click, bothered to open one set of the jalousies and peep at my departing back. I would feel real. But the gallery was shut up tight like the angry lips of the black-skinned old woman, Della’s grandmother.

How did I come to be back in that gallery? In that moment of retreat, I couldn’t answer that. I wouldn’t know then what was real. Even leaning my head against the stout trunk of the almond tree could not bring me back to normalcy and reality for I was wandering off in a trance, still in that angry tight-mouthed gallery. Somebody had bitten a star apple, sucked it dry and flung it near to the almond tree. This was a long ago thing for the shell was as crystallised as a coconut shell. It was into this dried up star apple that I crawled on all fours like the being I had encountered in Miss Cecilly’s gallery.

Today a dour helper had let me in. In those days, laughter of any one of those gay sisters was what opened the door to me and there would be a loud call for Della for all knew that she was the purpose of my visit. They would close the door which led to the gallery from the rest of the house, and Della and I would be left alone with the jalousies closed as they were today.
It was really easy, too easy to win that bet. Della had stopped resisting. I had worn her down with my explorations and got her to want more than my hands. Everyone must have known what was happening, for we were unusually quiet. I knew how to quiet her little moans. And the smell of us, so pungent! How could they not have smelled that? Why didn’t that old shrivelled-lipped woman in whose mouth I am now trapped just push the door and stop us?

I was not ready to marry. I had no objections to marrying Della if marriage meant days and nights of what we had been doing in the gallery. I am not heartless: I was sad, sad, saddened by the turn of events. The fellows were supportive. I didn’t need to tell them. Junior just saw me sad and offered, ‘you don’t want to throw away your life for a bit of pleasure, you know’. And Nat did admit that to bet on such things was carrying things a bit far. Neville quizzed me: ‘did you ever tell Della that you had given up Precious?’ No I had not, which was true but I doubted that Della even knew or knew of Precious. They concluded it was Della’s fault for she knew I was attached to somebody else.

Those three girls were new in the area. They were from Kingston and thought to know about things. Their parents were separated or dead or something and they had come to stay with their grandmother whom we disliked for no other reason than that she had called the police on us while we were taking her mangoes. We, who were the hottest dudes in the area, were mortified and humiliated by this shrivel-mouthed old woman. Call police for mangoes! We would steal her precious granddaughters to spite her and whom would she call then?

The evening I not only scored but left with a nice Julie mango, I was not only hailed as a hero but raised to another level: They rolled me my first spliff. I should have been happy with this and given up the game, but my hormones were pushing me on, my body could not resist the memories and I went back and back until the shrivelled one even knew my name and seemed to give permission for our meetings; until Della and I were holding hands in public and intimate enough for her to take the cigarette out of my mouth ‘for it could give me cancer’. If I hadn’t been so greedy and kept going back, I doubt that Della would have felt comfortable enough to tell me why she felt something had gone wrong. We had reached the stage where we were walking out together and discussing issues, one of them being her condition and what could be done about it.

I had got the scholarship that was waiting for me in the wings. Marriage and fatherhood sounded to this twenty-year-old like a trip to Mars. How about doing away with it? Wasn’t that what people did? That’s what the fellows said and they knew a doctor and knowing of my lack of funds and the need for same to buy the necessaries of a new geographic space, pooled together to make the doctor’s fee but when I went to meet Della at the agreed place, there was no Della. It is true that she had told me that she was embarrassed by this picking up of collection by my friends; that her condition was her business and she would see to it. I did not know her well enough to know what resources she had available to her but coming from Kingston as she had, I assumed that she knew all about such things.
Della had disappeared, run away. I was not unhappy about this turn of events and continued to pursue my path to my diploma comfortably even when the gallery opened up and the relatives came out like bad dogs rushing from their cages to ask me what had happened to their sister, niece, granddaughter. I could truthfully say that I didn’t know. I did very well at school, giving not a thought to Della and her dilemma: I topped the class and came home with my diploma.

Nobody invited me to that house on my return. I don’t know what powers drove me there. I don’t know how I came to be knocking at the door of that gallery; how it happened that there was someone at the door who didn’t know me and let me in; how I came to be sitting on that day bed, its flowers faded now; how I came to see my face on that flesh which I don’t want to see or claim.

The almond tree is in the school yard. It is in the public space. No one can deny me this space. It is tough on them that it is near to their house. She hated my smoking. Cigarette was bad enough, but the spliff was more than bad. I am bad. I have stuffed what would normally last me two weeks into one big spliff and am sucking way. A spark hit the house and it is smouldering. My house and I will soon be gone. No one will be sad, not even me. I am thinking that I will rise like a phoenix out of the ashes, a new man, even a man. I would like to know what that feels like.

I knocked at their door but no one answered it. I know she of the withered mouth who does not speak, was standing behind it, so I addressed her. ‘I have risen from the ashes a new man, I have burnt my old housing,’ I said. My companions tell me that they called the police complaining that I had threatened to burn down their house. They took me to the station but without evidence no charge could be laid so they left me alone. I continue to sit in the old woman’s mouth where I have been sitting and quietly, for I know that one day if I sit quietly and behave myself she will spit me out, will reproach me verbally and I will be even more reformed. I hope this happens in time for me to walk my child to school. I sit quietly for I know when I am fortunate. I could be on her chest as I was at the beginning. That is a boney place and encourages little movement.

My parents cannot figure out what is wrong with their son. Why have I gone off? Why I am fixated on this old woman and her house with its closed jalousie windows. My mother has taken my handkerchiefs somewhere supernatural to detect what is wrong. The fellows know that they are boys and are vexed with themselves but they can’t help me now. I remain in the mouth of the withered lips. The teeth have not chomped me. There are few of them and what is there are placed so irregularly that the upper cannot close down on the lower, so there is a fairly comfortable space for me. I think she has the worst of it for she cannot get many chances to open her mouth and talk baby talk to my flesh. They love each other so this must really be a trial for her.

One day, as he was in her arms with her playing and kissing him, he poked her jaws with his fingers and out I am, plop upon the floor, no bigger than a frog.
He watched in fascination as I grew and grew until my face was beside his. She couldn’t help talking, the resemblance was so stark. ‘I actually approved of you! How could I have guessed so wrongly? What was so difficult with your coming forward?’ she asked. ‘To say what’, I asked. She looked nonplussed. I took pity on her. ‘I knew no more than you,’ I said, and we went silent but not my flesh who opened his arms and reached for me and I responded by opening mine and taking him. If there was a cat in a bag, it had been let out. We were all over the place together. The fellows stopped being angry with themselves when they saw my happiness.

When my mother saw us she said: ‘If that stingy one had only taken the child out to church or somewhere, all this mystery that she has stored up in her mouth and on her chest would have been solved. Calling the police on my son! Such foolish lies about your threatening to burn down her house! This is the spit and image of you, of your father and of your grandfather and perhaps more of the Moore men that I do not know. This is ours. I am not asking for the story’. I told her what I knew and my mother, Miss Marple, has gone with her microscope to find Della. All the grandmother knew was that an aunt told her that Della had gone into a place for pregnant teenagers from which she was telephoned and told about a birth. The family had gone and taken the child and decided that it should stay with the old woman in the country away from inquisitive eyes. Della had run away again. But Della, poor girl, is the mother of my mother’s grandchild so she is on the warpath, ‘for a child needs his mother’. I am quite prepared to be mother and father but she doesn’t want that. Poor Della’s name had been on every radio and television programme devoted to joining families.

She came, more I think to ask them to call their dogs off than to see the child. She did come to my home. My boy was sitting on my lap. There was no stretching out to her nor her to him. She looked as good as ever but my hormones are in check. She has found her way to teacher’s college and has promised to be seen more when her course is over. I hope she believes that I can manage. We live with my parents but we know we have a home with her grandmother who is old and needs attention. I have offered to be her adopted son. I walk my boy to school and we are very often in the house with the closed jalousies. When I am there the windows are open and good air flows through. I am in charge of mangoes. My boy needn’t steal them; they belong to him.
GRAHAM HUGGAN

Remembering Dian Fossey: Primatology, Celebrity, Mythography

It is generally accepted today that the turbulent life of the American primatologist Dian Fossey developed over time into the stuff of legend; so much so that its singularly nasty end — she was murdered in 1985 in circumstances that are still far from certain — is seen by some as ‘something she might well have made up for herself’ (Torgovnick 91). Fossey’s celebrity (or, perhaps better, her notoriety) is attributable to several different factors, not least the 1988 Hollywood film (Gorillas in the Mist) celebrating her exploits. The various scandals and rumours surrounding Fossey’s life, and the unsolved mysteries surrounding her death, also produced an inevitable knock-on effect on her discipline, itself no stranger to celebrity. As Linda Fedigan observes, the celebrity status of primate science today owes a great deal to the mid- to late twentieth-century media focus on Fossey and the other two so-called ‘trimates’ (Jane Goodall and Birutė Galdikas) whose pioneering work generated funding for primates and the scientists who studied them; who motivated others, particularly though by no means exclusively women, to follow in their footsteps; and who triggered a wave of public sympathy in North America, Europe and elsewhere (2001 63). It is also indebted to the popular appeal of conservation in its mythic form as an emotionally charged programme for saving animals. Conservation, and animal welfare more generally, have probably provided the most important route to public recognition through which primate science, popularised for a global TV audience, has simultaneously drawn attention to shared ethical issues and personalised these by encouraging audience members to identify emotionally with individual animals’ lives (Fedigan 2001; Mitman 2005). In this affect-heavy context, animals are as likely as human beings to be celebrity subjects; indeed, one of the features of this particular sub-field is the densely constructed web of mediated relations through which human beings are made to converge, in staged acts of sympathetic imagination, with animals and vice versa, performing media-friendly versions of what Michael Taussig (1993) calls, in a separate if not wholly unrelated context, ‘mimetic excess’.

This simulacrum of convergence, perhaps the most striking of primatology’s mythic narratives, is conspicuously gendered, with the figure of Woman, assigned a similarly mythic role as chosen mediator between animal ‘nature’ and human ‘culture’, being seconded into the service of mending the broken link between both of these and the master-figure of Original Man (Haraway 1989 150). Donna Haraway’s work, in particular, has been instrumental in opening out these and
other myths surrounding the development of primate science in the two decades immediately following the end of the Second World War. In *Primate Visions* (1989), Haraway provides compelling evidence for her view that primate stories often function today as ‘allegories of inventing nature in a world where the cost and the work of the construction can no longer be invisible’; in other words, they operate as mythic narratives in which the historical work of myth, and the social and political circumstances behind it, come to the surface even as the myth itself tries to empty history and politics out (1989 131; see also Barthes 1972 151).

Consequently, one of Haraway’s main aims is to put history and politics back into the post-war mythologies surrounding coded relations between (female) primatologists and (male) primates, dislodging the ‘spaces of origin’ embedded within these mythic structures and reconnecting them instead to historical contexts — decolonisation, the nuclear threat, the Cold War — that required, as a kind of ideological antidote, the ‘renaturalization’ of white/Western/scientific Man (145, 153). One common trope is unification. Here, (female) primatologist and (male) primate are fused in a multifaceted ‘drama of touch’ (149) that not only reaches across differences of all kinds — sex, race, species — but also does so in a ‘timeless’ setting in which each acts as a surrogate for the other and both are rehabilitated to a natural wildness to which Man, their ultimate stand-in, is reconciled and restored. Another is salvation. Here, relief is provided from the destructive fall-out of advanced industrialism by the staging of ideologically reassuring ‘rehabilitant narratives’, notably the lush audiovisual productions of *National Geographic*, in which endangered apes are painstakingly rescued in order that imperilled humanity might be rescued from itself (156).

There are counter-myths to these, of course, for example, the myth of the female primatologist as inspirational eco-warrior (Mowat 1987), shamanic sorceress (Montgomery 1991), or tragic if by no means innocent victim to Africa’s ‘inherent’ propensity to violence, madness and despair (Krasner 2000; Shoumatoff 1988). The important point here is that both popular and academic work on Fossey, as if mesmerised by the myths it seeks to analyse, tends to fall — precipitously at times — into extended mythmaking of its own, with sometimes excruciating results. Allowances should probably be made for some, for example, Marianne Torgovnick, who gamely confesses that she finds it difficult to achieve critical distance from her subject, but still seems entranced by her own metaphors: ‘Fossey had come to the gorillas with a gentle, idealized image of their lives as marked by primitive harmony: it was to be a kind of Eden, translated to the animal world. So [she] had trouble accommodating facts that reeked of death and ashes’ (98–99). It is difficult, though, to find much credit in popular biographical accounts of Fossey, which run the gamut from the portentously New Age (Nienaber) to the stock-feminist (Norwood) to the sentimentally protective (Mowat), with this last providing further evidence of the imitative fallacy, the seemingly insatiable desire to ‘out-Fossey’ Fossey, that accompanies even the most supposedly even-handed of commentaries on her life and work.
Her various biographical accounts, in fact, read more like mythographies than memoirs; and more still like competing exercises in sympathetic imagination, implicitly invoking celebrity parasocial relations in order to create mediated effects of intimacy with the biographical subjects they narrate. An extreme instance of this is ventriloquism. In *Gorilla Dreams*, for example, Georgianne Nienaber not only contrives to perform the role of spirit-medium for Fossey; she also reconstructs animated conversations between Fossey and her favourite gorilla, Digit, thereby literalising Sy Montgomery’s metaphor of the trimates as shamanic ‘wisewomen’ with privileged access to animals’ thoughts and memories and a magical capacity to effect the mystical reunion of human and animal consciousnesses across time and space (Nienaber 50–51; see also Montgomery 1991).

Posthumous accounts like these play between memory and myth to produce a series of alternative celebrity images of Fossey: embattled action heroine; sensitive animal advocate; freedom-loving feminist icon; reckless ‘madwoman confronting the primitive’ (Krasner 245); tragic victim of uncontrollable historical forces, redeemed by her ‘extraordinary love’ for the animals she protected and for whom she would eventually lay down her own life (Shoumatoff 42). Romantic myths of vulnerability come to the fore (‘In many ways I was more vulnerable than the gorillas I was determined to protect’ — [Nienaber 19]); so too myths of precedence and uniqueness (‘I was truly a lone representative of my species, about to be welcomed with open arms by *Gorilla birengei birengei*. I would become the first human to be completely accepted within their society, the first to bond with them, and the only one to die while protecting them’ — [Nienaber 20]). Over and against these, though, is the equally powerful sense of Fossey as a belated figure, seemingly condemned throughout her life to operate in others’ shadow: Montgomery, for example, sees her as demonstrative, seeking attention despite the relatively isolated existence she led at her secluded research station (Karisoke); but also doomed, fighting a losing battle with ‘Jane [Goodall] and her chimp’ and repeatedly predicting that both she herself and ‘her’ animals would suffer untimely deaths (Montgomery 228).²

The comparison with Goodall is instructive. While Fossey was certainly aware of her rivalry with Goodall (Montgomery offers the anecdote that Fossey, while working on the book that would later become *Gorillas in the Mist*, joked that she would call it *In the Shadow of In the Shadow of Man*),³ the differences between herself and Goodall have been romantically exaggerated, with Torgovnick — tongue admittedly in cheek — likening Goodall to the ‘conventional light-haired heroine to Fossey’s dark-haired counterpart: *Gone with the Wind’s* Melanie to Scarlett — both of whom have their “fans” among readers’ (103). Goodall, of course, is a celebrity in her own right, and she regularly gathers hagiographic accolades: ‘the mother of primatology’; ‘the foremost global celebrity animal person’; ‘the superstar who revealed nature to the rest of the world’ (McHugh 189, 192). In some ways, she fits the bill as a celebrity conservationist much more
readily than Fossey: adopted from a fairly early stage as a darling of the media, she continues well into her seventies to maintain a ‘marathon lecture circuit, which keeps her travelling as much as 300 days per year, drawing packed crowds from all over the world’ (McHugh 196).

Fossey lectured too, but her celebrity or, perhaps better, the production of her celebrity image has been quite different. For one thing, it is a fractured image, in which celebrity and myth — celebrity as myth — form part of a lively trade in mystery and rumour. Joshua Gamson’s ‘economy of tidbits’ comes to mind — that unseemly scramble, inadequately parsed as celebrity gossip, in which rival media agents (publicists, journalists, and the like) fight it out over access to the celebrity image and ‘unmined pieces’ of celebrity personalities’ lives (94). In this context, the elusiveness of Fossey’s life, and the inconclusiveness of her death, can be seen as conspiring to make her celebrity image precious precisely because it is so obviously unresolved.

For another, it is a hybrid image in which ‘real’ and ‘fictional’ selves combine and human and animal subjects intermingle. Digit and Dian, the celebrity cross-species pair, feature in much of this work, sometimes playing themselves but just as often made-up characters. Repetitions and resemblances abound. Some charm: Dian imitates Digit imitating Dian, while the celebrity of one nourishes the celebrity of the other. Others shock: Digit’s death prefigures Dian’s; both of these are unbidden, brutal, bloody. In a hall-of-mirrors effect, the victim narratives begin alarmingly to proliferate. Celebrity does not necessarily produce such effects, but it exacerbates them. Celebrity martyrology — the registering of iconic bodies in pain — ironically confirms the Fossey legend as ‘dark romance’ (Hayes 1991); as endlessly repeating versions of the same story; as the infinite regress of human-animal mimesis; as the death-driven chronicle of a life foretold.4

For a third, as the preceding fantasia suggests, it is a traumatic image. Celebrity may not be created by death, but it is certainly consolidated by it; and Fossey’s life is often represented, not least by Fossey herself, as having been marked out for violent destruction from the start. As Gillian Whitlock remarks of her 1983 memoir, Gorillas in the Mist, the eponymous gorillas are treated as subjects of mourning even at the moment of first contact; memoir doubles as obituary in a context of traumatic suffering framed by the recurrent image of the animal graveyard, with its plaintive arrangement of individualised burial sites (479). A doleful, agonised air similarly hovers over much of the secondary literature about Fossey. Harold Hayes begins his account with Fossey’s death, framing it immediately in terms of murder mystery; while Georgianne Nienaber goes one further by performing a kind of imaginative resurrection in which the ‘spirit of Dian, [still standing] watch over her beloved gorillas’, speaks to us from beyond the grave (Nienaber xvii).5

A fourth component of Fossey’s celebrity image is her activism. Unlike Goodall, whose iconicity has largely been structured through nuclear-family relations and
gentler forms of animal advocacy (McHugh 191), Fossey has acquired the mythic reputation of a rambunctious individualist, battling it out alone against hostile forces (poachers, corrupt government officials, and others) before eventually giving her life for the animals she loved. This ‘loner’ image has bolstered the myth in turn that Fossey was only ever able to connect with the gorillas, had little sympathy for the people with whom they shared the country, and failed to extend a sense of kinship that might work for the survival and wellbeing of both (Armbruster 222). Torgovnick’s portrait is particularly misleading in this regard. ‘It would be possible’, she says,

to characterize Fossey’s history as one of blindness towards Africans [which] in her case [was] ultimately quite dangerous … Fossey’s indifference to the Africans’ needs may [eventually] have doomed her. She stubbornly refused to think about gorillas from the Rwandans’ point of view, and this blindness, or wilfulness, may have cost her her life. (94)

It would be possible, perhaps, but it would also be inaccurate. Consider, for example, this telling passage from near the end of her memoir:

Foreigners cannot expect the average Rwandan living near the boundaries of the Parc des Volcans and raising pyrethrum for the equivalent of four cents a pound to look around at the towering volcanoes, consider their majestic beauty, and express concern about an endangered animal species living in those misted mountains. Much as a European might see a mirage when stranded in a desert, a Rwandan sees rows and rows of potatoes, beans, peas, corn, and tobacco in place of the massive Hagenia trees. He justifiably resents being refused access to parkland for the realization of his vision. (239).

In passages like this one, Fossey abandons the romantic narrative that she adopts elsewhere and that others have been so keen to construct around her. Her emphasis instead is on educating local people about the value of ecological sustainability by stressing the interrelatedness of human and animal welfare — an ecological perspective which, while recognised by several of her critics, is largely missing from popular accounts of her work. Fossey’s views here might be described as patronising, but they are not dismissive. Rather, they are pragmatic, just as her view on gorilla tourism was that it needed to be ‘properly directed’ in the interests of the majority, counteracting greed and tribalism by empowering ‘consistent, uncompromising individuals able to consider the needs of animals before their own’ (241).

Fossey’s pragmatism similarly underpinned her stated preference for ‘active’ over ‘theoretical’ conservation — a key distinction that helps to explain much of her local activist (as opposed to global advocacy) work. Active conservation, she believed, involved the day-to-day, sometimes necessarily punitive measures (enforcing anti-poacher laws, safeguarding limited habitat, and so forth) needed to secure the freedom of animals whose very existence was under severe threat (242). Theoretical conservation sought instead to build infrastructure, for example,
by encouraging the growth of tourism and the industries surrounding it, and by using the income derived from industry and commerce to meet long-term social and ecological goals (58).

It is certainly true that Fossey’s preference for active over theoretical modes of conservation brought her into conflict with the authorities, who were keen to develop the money-spinning potential of an emergent industry (ecotourism) in a new nation (Rwanda) keen to bolster its international credentials by indexing national ambition to economic growth. It is also true that theoretical conservation has since won the day in postcolonial Rwanda, where gorilla tourism is one of the largest income-generating activities in the country, and where a raft of new programmes and initiatives, some of them directly profiting from her legacy, might, as Farley Mowat melodramatically puts it, have Fossey ‘turning in her grave’ (Mowat 329). Still, it is important to get beyond the myth of Fossey as ‘anti-African’; if anything, she was ‘anti-foreigner’ in the restricted sense of what she calls ‘the self-eulogizing attempts of expatriates to impose the notion of wildlife as a treasured legacy’ — to inflict a Western conservationist ethic — on a local, impoverished people for whom ‘wildlife is [generally] considered an obstacle [unless] it proves economically viable [in the shape of] skins, meat, and tusks’ (241).

Part of the appeal of active conservation, then — for Fossey at least — was that it empowered local Africans to take responsibility for protecting their natural heritage; and part of the downside of its theoretical counterpart was that it ignored realities on the ground. In both cases, Fossey was acutely aware of the perils of celebrity, not least because she saw her work as practical rather than evangelical; heroic in its own way but unselfish and unheralded, its rightful place was ‘behind the scenes [and] far from the public eye’ (58). This brings me to one last aspect of her image, and in many ways the most troubling: her paradoxical status as an anti-celebrity celebrity. Ambivalence rather than opposition might be more accurate. Evidence suggests that she was keen to play the part of the reluctant celebrity, uncomfortable in the media spotlight and fiercely protective of her own privacy, which she often saw as being shared with ‘her’ gorillas and was increasingly fearful of losing as her work became internationally known. Still, pragmatic as she was, she was quick to recognise the value of celebrity in generating global publicity for what, in most other respects, was an intensely local cause.

A classic example here is the soul-searching that followed the slaughter of her ‘beloved Digit’ (183), himself already something of a celebrity figure, having featured prominently in national tourist-board promotional material and as her co-star on internationally networked TV shows. In discussing post mortem options with her Karisoke colleague Ian Redmond, Fossey recalls having been in two minds, equally determined to capitalise on Digit’s legacy and concerned that the world ‘would climb evangelistically onto a “save the gorilla” bandwagon upon hearing of [his] death’ (207). The results of the discussion are well known:
the Digit Fund, set up to support active gorilla conservation in Africa; and mass media coverage, captured in a further iconic moment: Walter Cronkite announcing Digit’s death to a shocked TV audience of millions in the US.

In one sense, it is easy to see why Fossey became famous, and why the different meanings surrounding her legacy are still debated with the same passion as she displayed in her work with Central African mountain gorillas during her short but colourful life. In another, though, it is hard to pin her down, for she is nothing if not a contradictory figure, and these contradictions feed into a composite legend that offers frequently contending, and always inconclusive, interpretations of her life and work. Controversial to a point, she was an obvious candidate for celebrity, and while she was never particularly comfortable with her celebrity status, she was astute enough to know how to manipulate it in what she thought was the best interests of ‘her’ gorillas, who — whatever else we may doubt about her — she undeniably put before herself.

Memoir has been a primary vehicle for the circulation of the various mythic narratives and celebrity images surrounding the Fossey legend: narratives and images that sometimes have a hallucinatory quality in their capacity to turn her life into the stuff of dreams and nightmares, generating a high-romantic vocabulary of sacrifice and transcendence that has been applied by academic critics and popular biographers alike. While this vocabulary may stretch patience at times, it at least shows how attempts to explain the Fossey phenomenon almost inevitably founder — and why she herself often seemed at a loss to explain it to herself. This is not to turn Fossey into a mystic, and I hope to have made it clear that I have little sympathy for the view that her life ‘fits certain “deep structures” in shamanism: for example, intimacy with mountains, and, most of all, friendship with animals and access to the language of the beasts’ (Torgovnick 109). Fossey was emphatically not, as Torgovnick suggests, ‘a modern woman with impulses that might, in other contexts, have become religious’; nor, in her mountain retreat, did she ever become fully cut off from the modern world (109). Rather, as Brian Noble (2000) rightly asserts, she was a ‘worldly primatologist’ whose local conservation work resonated with a global public that proved both emotionally disposed to support her and morally convinced of the rightness of her cause.

Contemporary celebrities, across a number of fields, can be seen to act as touchstones for an equally wide variety of competing legacies. This is very much the case with Fossey, in whose truncated life a number of different hopes — some of them in more-or-less direct competition with one another — continue to be invested. It is necessarily unclear how Fossey will be remembered in future, and what uses will be made of a life’s work that, in the decades since her own life abruptly ended, appears to have lost little of its original market appeal or romantic cachet. Whatever the case, though, it seems highly likely that the various mythic narratives and mediated meanings that have gathered around her will continue to proliferate; and that hers, like her romantic soul-mate Digit’s, will remain a decidedly unquiet grave.
NOTES
1 Mimetic excess, according to Taussig, is a form of ‘mimetic self-awareness’ in which ‘mimesis is turned in on itself’, usually for transformative purposes, for example, to effect new understandings of the relationship between self and other, subject and object, sameness and difference (252–53). One of the most arresting features of Fossey’s practice is the acute mimetic self-awareness it displays towards lived human/animal relations; the most radical interpretation of this is that it works towards new forms of ‘subject-forming entanglement’ (Donna Haraway’s phrase) in which the species boundary is crossed and both parties — animal and human, primate and primatologist — are mutually transformed (Haraway 2008; see also Whitlock 2010).

2 Fossey is also belated in other ways, for example, in her indebtedness to the field biologist George Schaller — a celebrity conservationist in his own right — whose pioneering work with gorillas, dating back to the late 1950s, is not always acknowledged in popular accounts of her work.

3 In the Shadow of Man (1971) was the title Goodall gave to her bestselling field study, based on her research on chimpanzees in Tanzania. Highly acclaimed, the book confirmed her fame rather than created it, consolidating her position as one of the most publicly recognised female scientists in the world.

4 Celebrity conferred a victim status on Fossey that she herself fiercely contested; the same might be said of ‘her’ animals. Admittedly Digit’s death, graphically related in her 1983 memoir Gorillas in the Mist, turns him momentarily into a sacrificial figure, heroically holding off poachers so as to allow other family members to escape (206). Generally, though, Fossey sharply rejected the instrumental view of animals as victims. Her aim instead was to ascribe agency to them: to see them as fully cognisant subjects in a world of their own fashioning. However, she recognised the usefulness of victim images in attracting attention to, and funding for, conservation work.

5 A staple of popular biography on Fossey is the use of her Christian name. While first names commonly feature in popular work of this kind, the claim to familiarity is arguably the greater when the subject is (1) a woman (2) a celebrity or (3) both. Once again, the desire for intimacy is the key, which is used in turn to create an affective bond between writer and reader. The conservation theme tightens this bond by adding a moral element of protection; but note that with (female) celebrity conservationists like Fossey, the celebrity figure is as likely to be a conduit to affection as an object of affection, with animals serving as the ultimate emotional goal.

6 Whether Fossey’s own idiosyncratic brand of active conservation was actually empowering to local Africans is, of course, another matter: for a starkly negative assessment, see Weber and Vedder 2001.

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Colonisation and Speciesism: Jules Verne’s *The Mysterious Island*

Ever since Thomas More’s *Utopia* islands have been primary sites for utopias, and the perfect location for the demonstration of the benefits of colonisation. From Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* in 1719 the moral architecture for colonial occupation had been set, and all features of colonial improvement could be concentrated on the clearly bounded space of an island. The utopian vision of the South Seas grew apace after Defoe, and the attraction of the Pacific Island in particular has been surprisingly persistent. The Pacific Island, under the influence of a string of eighteenth century utopias, the paintings of Gaugin, the anthropology of Margaret Mead and twentieth-century popular culture, became the archetypal utopian space, not only for its idyllic mythology and nicely circumscribed geography but also because, whether painter, anthropologist, traveller or coloniser it offered a social tabula rasa. The beauty of an island is its very clear boundaries, its presentation of a space in which the colonial project might proceed in a comprehensive way.

One novel that offers a virtual template for the power of modern ingenuity to turn a conveniently unpopulated Pacific island paradise into a colonial utopia, is Jules Verne’s *The Mysterious Island* (*L’Île mystérieuse*) published in 1874. The novel’s castaways proceed to dominate the space and time of the island in a copybook unfolding of the primary technologies of colonial transformation. But one particularly significant aspect of Verne’s fantasy is its demonstration of the function of the species boundary in colonial domination. The blurred boundary between human and animal undermines the ostensibly enlightened Darwinian purpose of the author with a startling confirmation of racial hierarchy.

The novel depicts the adventures of five men: an Engineer, Cyrus Smith the captain; a reporter, Spilett; a sailor, Pencroff; a young botanist, Herbert and Nab a black servant. These men, captured by rebel forces during the American Civil War and imprisoned at Richmond, Virginia, commandeer a balloon under the cover of a hurricane, which takes them seven thousand miles across America and half the Pacific Ocean to a deserted island where they crash after ejecting everything in the basket. This extremely unlikely journey prepares us for the equally unlikely island on which, due to the providential availability of everything — animal vegetable and mineral — exploitable by scientific ingenuity, the men establish a bountiful colony.

The plot of the novel is as improbable as the island itself. Having established a colony and having avoided crisis after crisis through the mysterious intervention
of an unknown protector on the island, castaways discover a note in a bottle indicating the existence of another castaway on nearby Tabor island. The note had been left twelve years earlier by a Lord Glenarven with the promise to return one day. Beating off a pirate ship manned by escaped convicts from Norfolk island the intrepid colonists eventually discover that their protector has all along been captain Nemo (from *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea*), whose *Nautilus* is trapped in a cavern under the island. The dying Nemo explains that the island is about to explode and asking them to scuttle the *Nautilus* he gives them a chest of treasure worth millions. As the island explodes Lord Glenarven returns just in time to take them off the island and with the treasure they purchase a large tract of land in Iowa on which they can relocate their colonial enterprise.

The astonishing abundance of the island suggests that rather than any attempt at verisimilitude, much less a repetition of Crusoe’s painstaking transformation, the novel is concerned to produce a morality tale of the limitless benefits of science and modern ingenuity. To this end Verne makes no attempt to invent the kind of island that might actually lie in the middle of the Pacific. This island snows in winter (because the Southern Hemisphere, according to Verne, is colder than the Northern!); its animals include kangaroos, koalas, echidnas, jaguars, tigers, foxes, rabbits, which are hunted, and sheep, goats, peccaries, onagers (a form of mule), which are domesticated. The fortuitous discovery of a grain of corn leads to an abundant harvest and the supply of edible plants on the island appears endless. But it is minerals that provide the key to the benefits of science. The discovery of coal and iron ore, conveniently near the surface, allows the production of everything from steel to glass to nitroglycerine. Cyrus Smith, true to his calling as engineer, supervises the construction of a blast furnace, roads, carts, bridges and hydraulic lifts. No invention is beyond him and no labour too difficult for the castaways.

Smith, the indomitable engineer who leads the group, is the embodiment of colonial determination and scientific modernity. As Verne demonstrates at great length, scientific knowledge, manufacturing expertise and engineering ingenuity are the key to dominance over the elements. Smith’s calm determination, resourcefulness, dependability and wisdom mark him out as a type of imperial superman. The civilisation of the island is an exercise in problem solving rather than sustained and difficult effort. Where Defoe, in *Robinson Crusoe*, insists upon the length of time and the degree of physical labour in Crusoe’s slow transformation of the island, such things as time and fatigue are ignored in *The Mysterious Island*. Labour is accomplished in the course of a sentence. Verne dismisses time and effort, dismisses the lengthy, arduous work required to bring these transformations to pass. The colonising process moves from problem to problem rather than from effort to effort. Consequently the castaways are not content with mere survival but engage in activities that present a virtual template for the colonial enterprise — surveillance, mapping, naming, hunting, cultivation and husbandry, manufacture, building and civilising. Their intention is to make
a ‘little America’ of the island, Pencroff asking only that: ‘we do not consider ourselves castaways, but colonists, who have come here to settle’ (54).

**Speciesism, Race and Imperial Dominance**

Scientific colonisation requires a race of noble and intrepid practitioners who can fulfil the moral requirements of imperialism. So the narrative of colonisation is not only the triumph of science but of a race of men. Curiously, Jules Verne, French novelist, salutes the Anglo-Saxon masculinity of these American settlers.

The settlers were men in the complete and higher sense of the word… It would have been difficult to unite five men, better fitted to struggle against fate, more certain to triumph over it. (63)

They are energetic (95) but the key to this narrative of colonial transformation is not energy but vision, the capacity to see beyond, to produce a monument to human ingenuity.

So is man’s heart. The desire to perform a work which will endure, which will survive him, is the origin of his superiority over all other living creatures here below. It is this which has established his dominion, and this it is which justifies it, over all the world. (311)

The issue of dominion signals a key feature of the novel, one that has not attracted much comment, but important because it announces that the challenge is not only one of science, modernity, and ingenuity, but the triumph of a species of human being who deserve to inherit the world. The moral problem of establishing a utopia on someone else’s land does not arise because the island is unpopulated, a necessary precursor to the narrative of science’s triumph over nature. But despite the absence of natives, the issue of race cannot be avoided because conquest must involve the exertion of power. Consequently the absence of natives is compensated in the novel by curiously contradictory speciesism.

The ‘civilizing’ mission can be linked to the assumption that ‘barbaric’ languages have placed other men at the level of animals, placing them in need of cultural redemption. It remains a given that animals are irredeemable, they remain the ultimate binary — non-human. Consequently speciesism and racism are not merely analogous, but one preceded and justified the other. We afflict other races because we first afflicted animals. As Carey Wolfe puts it,

Our humanist concept of subjectivity is inseparable from the discourse and institution of speciesism since the ‘human’ is by definition the not animal or ‘animalistic.’ This in turn makes possible a symbolic economy in which we can engage in ‘a non-criminal putting to death,’ as Derrida phrases it, not only of animals, but of other humans as well by marking them as animals. (40)

This conflation of racial ‘barbarism’ with inhuman animalism appears from the beginning of racialist thinking (and the word ‘barbarous’ still has the synonym ‘inhuman’ in Roget’s Thesaurus).
On the face of it Verne appears to be contesting the speciesist habit of abjecting animals. He was an enthusiastic supporter of Darwin but his apparent attempt in *The Mysterious Island* to give humanoid characteristics to an ape is radically subverted by the racialist hierarchy of the text. When the colonists regain their cave from a group of invading monkeys they capture an orangutan, and the description and subsequent improbable training of the animal demonstrate how the ape, in the absence of native inhabitants, works as a signifier of the link between ‘animal’, ‘native’, ‘barbarian’, ‘primitive’.

The settlers then approached the ape and gazed at it attentively. He belonged to the family of anthropoid apes, of which the facial angle is not much inferior to that of the Australians and Hottentots. It was an orangoutang, and as such, had neither the ferocity of the gorilla, nor the stupidity of the baboon. It is to this family of the anthropoid apes that so many characteristics belong which prove them to be possessed of an almost human intelligence. Employed in houses, they can wait at table, sweep rooms, brush clothes, clean boots, handle a knife, fork, and spoon properly, and even drink wine... doing everything as well as the best servant that ever walked upon two legs. Buffon possessed one of these apes, who served him for a long time as a faithful and zealous servant. (148)

What, we might ask, is the function of this species slippage in the novel? What purpose is served by the comparison of the orangutan with ‘the Australians and Hottentots’? Does it suggest the humanoid characteristics of the ape, as Verne’s Darwinist beliefs might suggest, or the level of primitive humanity with which the colonial project must contend? In Roland Barthes’ discussion of the structural codes of the novel, ‘Where to Begin’ he suggests that like *Robinson Crusoe* the myth of the desert island is based on a very real problem: how to cultivate without slaves? (85) Certainly the ape, named Jupiter or Jup is quickly taught how to be an unpaid servant, a position he adopts with alacrity and devotion. The Civil War back-story has banished any question of slavery from the island, but Jup seems to answer Barthes’ question. If Verne is offering a contemporary ‘scientific’ view of the affinity of apes and humans, the signifying function of the orangutan as racial subject countermands this. He signifies dependency and subservience and thus the superiority of the Anglo-Saxon settlers. The subjects who occupy the lowest orders of the party: the Negro servant Nab and the dog Top and the ape Jup share in their three letter names a sign of their marginal status and indeterminate species identity. While the novel’s treatment of Jup appears to be striving for a more scientifically enlightened view of apes, the racism of the representation is signified in the very blurriness of the species of the servants.

Barthes’ question: how to cultivate without slaves, suggests one motive for cultivating savages. Crusoe attempts to transform Friday, who is like a child into a white, civilized ‘adult’. Montgomery, in Wells’ *The Island of Doctor Moreau* attempts to transform the Beast People into docile Fridays. In *The Mysterious Island* the issue of servility blurs the species boundary considerably. The following
passage is worth quoting in full, so bizarrely does it traverse the animal/savage/primitive/slave categories.

By this time the intelligent Jup was raised to the duty of valet. He had been dressed in a jacket, white linen breeches, and an apron, the pockets of which were his delight. The clever orang had been marvelously trained by Nab, and any one would have said that the Negro and the ape understood each other when they talked together. Jup had besides a real affection for Nab, and Nab returned it. When his services were not required, either for carrying wood or for climbing to the top of some tree, Jup passed the greatest part of his time in the kitchen, where he endeavored to imitate Nab in all that he saw him do. The black showed the greatest patience and even extreme zeal in instructing his pupil, and the pupil exhibited remarkable intelligence in profiting by the lessons he received from his master.

Judge then of the pleasure Master Jup gave to the inhabitants of Granite House when, without their having had any idea of it, he appeared one day, napkin on his arm, ready to wait at table. Quick, attentive, he acquitted himself perfectly, changing the plates, bringing dishes, pouring out water, all with a gravity which gave intense amusement to the settlers, and which enraptured Pencroff.

‘Jup, some soup!’
‘Jup, a little agouti!’
‘Jup, a plate!’
‘Jup! Good Jup! Honest Jup!’

Nothing was heard but that, and Jup without ever being disconcerted, replied to every one, watched for everything, and he shook his head in a knowing way when Pencroff, referring to his joke of the first day, said to him,—

‘Decidedly, Jup, your wages must be doubled.’ (156)

Why would Verne risk the absurdity of an ape valet in white linen breeches, if not to confirm the fact that the ape is as much the subject of cultivation as the island? Pencroff refers to Jup as a ‘blackamoor’ the first time he sees him, and the description above inscribes Jup into a widespread nineteenth-century typology that interpreted racial features (or supposed features) as signs of ‘inferior’ races’ anatomical proximity to the great apes. The racial significance of the ape is cemented by the affinity between the ex-slave and the orangutan: they ‘understood each other when they talked together’. This is almost too neat a demonstration of the function of speciesism in racial marginalisation, and the quip about wages only emphasises his role as slave. Jup proves to be an indispensable servant, taking over, unmasked, the role of waiter usually reserved for Smith’s Negro servant. He learns to carry messages and drive a cart, and when wounded after a fight with a marauding troop of colpeo foxes, Pencroff cries ‘We will nurse him as if he was one of ourselves’ (178).

The acculturation of the ape appears complete when he is discovered with Pencroff’s pipe, ‘smoking calmly and seriously, sitting cross-legged like a Turk at the entrance to Granite House!’ (179). The servant has been inducted into the pantouflard pleasures of the bourgeoisie. Pantouflard is Roland Barthes’
favourite negative adjective for bourgeois complacency. Derived from *la pantoufle*, the French for a carpet slipper, it signifies an ideology of domestic cosiness indicating the extent to which class confinement is mediated by the home and partly explaining the resilience of bourgeois mythologies (Knight 33). It is remarkable that Barthes misses this connection in his reading of the novel. Jup’s induction into human society is a direct entry into the bourgeois comforts of the white middle class but, ironically, without diminishing his role as a slave. From this day Jup has a pipe of his own.

‘Perhaps he is really a man,’ said Pencroff sometimes to Nab. ‘Should you be surprised to hear him beginning to speak to us some day?’

‘My word, no,’ replied Nab. ‘What astonishes me is that he hasn’t spoken to us before, for now he wants nothing but speech!’ (179)

Jup’s rapid civilising demonstrates the extreme racial ambiguity exposed by the project of colonisation. What may seem on the surface an attempt at re-thinking the status of the animal is in fact a confirmation of the racial hierarchy established by imperial rule. The novel is unable to negotiate the contradictions of the ape’s position because the imperative of racial hierarchy in the colonising project is so strong.

But there is another way in which the novel compensates for the lack of primitive inhabitants on the island, and hence demonstrates the civilising benefits of colonisation. This also occupies the blurry no-man’s land of the species boundary, and it comes in the form of a castaway on a nearby island who has reverted to a wild and primitive state. Ayrton, marooned for twelve years on Tabor island, is discovered by Spilett and Pencroff in an animal like condition. At first they think he is an ape, but discover that he is a man, ‘fallen to the lowest degree of brutishness!’… it might justly be asked if there were yet a soul in this body, or if the brute instinct alone survived in it!… Hoarse sounds issued from his throat between his teeth, which were sharp as the teeth of a wild beast made to tear raw flesh (192). Ayrton signifies the ever-present danger of ‘going native’, the possibility that only a thin veneer of civilisation separates humanity from the animals. The moral implications of animality are attested by the fact that his descent to sub-human status has been triggered not only by extreme isolation but by an enormous sense of guilt at his criminal past, culminating in his intention to capture the ship that had eventually marooned him.

The ‘man-beast’ serves to demonstrate in concentrated form the civilising process designed to bring primitive beings into their full humanity. By feeding him, letting him develop at his own pace, allowing him to live in the corral to tend the animals and most importantly, by allotting him a role as labourer and servant, including him in the work of developing the island, Ayrton regains his humanity. The engineer ‘observed him every moment! How he was on the watch for his soul’ (199) and when he finally weeps, Smith exclaims, ‘Ah, you have become a man again’ (199).
Verne’s apparent desire to redefine the humanoid characteristics of the ape cannot escape the boundaries of colonial discourse. The discourse that carries the group of castaways on a triumphant journey of scientific ingenuity and social improvement, organises itself relentlessly on the basis of a racial / species hierarchy that subverts any Darwinist intention of the author. When the island explodes and the group is rescued, the ‘retrieved’ man, Ayrton, escapes while the ape Jup is killed, victim not just of the volcano but of the one unsolvable problem of the novel: the problem of the species boundary, the problem of an ape in white breeches.

NOTES
1 Although the Project Gutenberg version cited in this essay has different names (Harding for Smith; Pencroft for Pencroff and Neb rather than Nab) I will use the names in the original version. Page numbers refer to the Gutenberg Ebook.

WORKS CITED
HELEN GILBERT

A Line of Distinction: Orangutan Farces and Questions of Interpretation

‘I’m not looking for trouble as men are ... I like acting. It is so easy to amuse idle people.’ (Hornaday 62)

Fig. 1: The Disappearing Orange Trick. (Photo: Bronk Kaminski Every Which Way But Loose.)
In 2004, the American Academy of Television Arts and Sciences ruled that Bam Bam, an orangutan starring as a hospital nurse in the long-running sitcom Passions, could not be nominated for an Emmy Award on the grounds that ‘a line of distinction’ had to be drawn ‘between animal characters that aren’t capable of speaking parts and human actors whose personal interpretation in character portrayal creates nuance and audience engagement’ (Anon 2008 [my emphasis]). The judgment that Bam Bam could be a character but not create one suggests not only the extent to which the film and television industries guard the singularity of humans even while mining their similarity with other animals, notably apes, for comic purposes, but also what might be invested in acting itself as a marker of species difference. Since at least the late 1970s, the popular screen has harnessed the idea, long evident in traditional circuses and early zoos, that the most appealing animal acts turn on performance routines that, within constructed situations, subtly give ‘the impression that the animal has humanlike motivations, emotions and reasoning’ (Bouissac 118). Physical resemblances between performing animals and watching humans are not requisite to such acts — rats and parrots have performed starring roles as readily as have dogs, pigs, horses, elephants, dolphins and cats — but resemblance does add resonance to genres such as farce, where mistaken identity plots, slapstick physical humour and elaborate chase scenes are standard fare. Orangutans have lent themselves well to performing in these genres because of their expressive, individualised faces and their extensive use of gestural language, as well as their morphological similarity to humans. But are they capable of self-conscious representation? Like the silent mime, the orangutan actor ‘speaks’ volumes before an audience but always leaves room for interpretation.

Zoo and circus histories offer rich ‘behind the scenes’ accounts of orangutans’ intelligent work with (and occasionally against) humans in the world of popular entertainment, while science has demonstrated that orangutans have the greatest ideational capacity among non-human animals. Yet, this ability to understand situations abstractly and to devise appropriate actions does not necessarily confirm that orangutan performers are knowing actors as well as (apparently) natural ones. Faced with the impossibility of assessing what these animals think, and whether we humans could be the real butt of the jokes embedded in their performances, as my epigraph suggests, I want to consider briefly the representation of orangutans in comic films and what insights such works offer on the idea of acting as necessarily confined to self-reflexive impersonation by humans — a concept that works implicitly to limit personhood to humans. Acting here is approached in the sense of giving meaning to a role, although it is recognised that editing, through montage in particular, can and sometimes does give the appearance of acting (among humans as well as animals) even where emotion is not deliberately applied to the performance.2 The films discussed shy away from tackling direct questions about orangutans’ thespian capacities, but are invested in showing them
as possessing the qualities thought to make up deliberate acting: will, deception, self-consciousness, empathy and at least rudimentary (gestural) language. Intentional impersonation by these human-looking creatures is thus held out as a possibility that can deepen the comedy as well as adding to the intrigue.

Before 1978, when *Every Which Way But Loose* launched a spate of comic films featuring orangutans, the (real) red ape had registered on screen mostly as quarry in jungle adventure tales, while humans were recruited to play orangutans and other apes as generic monsters in horror cinema, though *Planet of the Apes* (1968) should be noted as an exception to these patterns with its landmark depiction of highly intelligent orangutans (via costumed actors) and its explicit focus on social interactions among primate species. Yet, there is one very early screen work that encapsulates the dilemmas entailed in representing orangutans as comedians: Buster Keaton’s silent film, *The Playhouse* (1921). This short farce, devised as a humorous tribute to theatrical forms whose mass appeal had waned with the coming of cinema, offers a brief glimpse of the virtuoso human performers whose athletic renditions of apes had been an energising force on the nineteenth-century popular stage. Using film’s facility for simultaneous doubling, Keaton presents himself as a variety-stage actor who plays all the roles in the show, including the part of a circus orangutan that he has accidentally set free from a cage. The comedy turns on Keaton’s extraordinary ability to imitate an ape imitating a man as he dines at the table, smokes a cigar and then jumps, unscripted, into the auditorium, making a woman faint. More subtly, the sequence also gains force from a cameo appearance of the real orangutan whose act has been sidelined by Keaton’s sly imposture, though the animal is only glimpsed briefly exiting from the stage.

Inadvertently, this film pointed to a question that would resurface periodically as cinema drew the orangutan character into new narrative genres: could the real ape actually play the part? While point-of-view filming could enhance character construction, and footage could be shot, edited, spliced, or otherwise manipulated to shape representation in ways never available to the stage, orangutan actors could not be expected to develop the same physical or emotional languages as humans. And they were not always biddable before the camera, as a 1915 report of one film shoot involving ‘an orang outang of enormous proportions’ reveals: ‘An elaborate stage setting was arranged, but when Chang “walked on” he promptly pulled up a drawing room carpet and rolled in it, turned a big settee into a pushcart and chased George K. Larkan, the hero, right round the studio with a cane’ (Anon 1915 655). On the other hand, casting humans in orangutan roles had its own limitations in film, an essentially realist medium that was expected to efface signs of artifice unless it was conducive to the chosen genre. As more became known about orangutans’ behaviour and cognitive sophistication, the less a man in an ape suit could plausibly finesse their representation — at least until the advent of sophisticated special effects.
Filmmakers eventually confronted the challenges that realism posed by presenting the idea of interspecies impersonation as a farce, albeit one open to ambiguity. The orangutan screen comedies turned on the ingenuity of an unusual actor who added verve and humour to well-worn scenarios by leaping across the shrinking evolutionary gap between apes and humans. That leap gained comic resonance from incongruity between the character and the action, so the ‘act’ worked best if the performer in question was recognisably an orangutan placed in human contexts. Whereas the adventure genre had required exotic jungle settings and the horror films preferred atmospheric country houses or villages, the comedies drew force from situating orangutans in urban societies. There, they could parody social and sexual mores, trick people into compromising situations, undermine species hierarchies and generally create mayhem, all to hilarious effect. The actual repertoire of the orangutan actor was not expansive but could be made to seem so through clever diegesis, aided by judicious filming and post-production work. In addition, cinema featuring real orangutans lent itself well to depictions of interspecies intimacy, a topic of great interest to audiences becoming better informed about human-ape affinities. This trope typically manifested through a ‘buddy friendship’ between an orangutan and a man or male child, marking a shift from the erotic pairing of woman and ape that characterised the horror films.

As *Every Which Way But Loose* showed, the combination of a rough and ready bare-knuckle fighter (Beddoe) and his orangutan sidekick (Clyde) in a freewheeling search for love and a little spare income proved to be a winning formula. This film and its 1980 sequel, *Any Which Way You Can*, not only drew handsome profits at the box office but also enhanced the popularity of screen star Clint Eastwood, despite being panned by critics. As Beddoe and Clyde manœuvre their way through pub brawls and drinking sessions, police blockades, sleazy hotel rooms and numerous showdowns with the Black Widow motorcycle gang, the films express both a vision of egalitarian mateship and a fantasy of kinship between species. Unlike the women in Beddoe’s life, Clyde is uncomplicated and trustworthy, even if inclined to minor mischief. His discretion makes him an ideal confidante and his strength proves convenient when man-muscle looks insufficient to get Beddoe out of a tight corner, but in fact Clyde ducks most of the fights, even covering his eyes and grimacing. His secret weapon against macho adversaries is a sudden, sloppy kiss on the lips, a tactic repeated in numerous orangutan farces. As well as working to temper the violence of Beddoe’s world and even skew its versions of masculinity, such slapstick gestures call attention to the staginess of the film, and in doing so suggest that Clyde — and possibly even the orangutan playing him at such instants — knows exactly what he is doing. Paul Smith notes that Clyde’s role in these films is as an ‘alternative human’ who embodies what is normally elided in constructions of the heroic male (176–77). Beddoe himself never treats the orangutan as anything but an intelligent ape who is equal to — or even better than — a person, but the representations of
species equivalence can only ever be provisional since their comedy inheres in an emphasis on the imperfect symmetry between ape and human. A roadside scene in the second film, for example, is played for laughs as Clyde stands with Beddoe and a friend to urinate while the camera lingers on their naked male backsides, all lined up in a slightly odd row. When Clyde goes to the zoo for a rendezvous with his ‘girl’, Bonnie, so he can share his human friends’ carnal pleasures, the running visual discourse of species likeness with a critical touch of difference also extends to (male) sexuality.
Some subsequent Hollywood instalments made scarcely any attempt to plumb the intelligence and intimacy themes, simply using the orangutan as a generic device to execute physical gags. In *Going Ape* (1981), the farcical action revolves around three ex-circus orangutans bequeathed to a young man who is charged with keeping them from the clutches of scheming zoo officials and sundry opportunists. Although the orangutans thwart their human pursuers at every turn, they are weakly individuated as characters and register mostly as clever buffoons. Nevertheless, there are fleeting moments when this buffoonery starts to look like self-conscious acting, at least as constructed on screen. At one point, an orangutan leaps onto a makeshift lounge-room stage and insists on performing a disco dance with three defiant encores, while the youngest ape looks on, apparently amused even if its master is not. At another instant, one of the trio stalks an incompetent mercenary, parodying his gait as she creeps along behind him after he fails to see her as a real orangutan because she is reading a book. As frivolous as such scenes are, something of the idea of crafted impersonation, of moving beyond the modalities of masquerade, can be discerned in the visible effort it takes these near-naked orangutans to dance and walk as humans.

Once the disobedient orangutan act at the core of *Going Ape* had been widely screened, only so much currency could be derived from slapstick routines that had migrated without much nuance from the circus repertoire. Orangutan characters with something more than ‘native’ intelligence and impeccable timing were needed to bring variety into well-worn plots and to allow topical and even political commentary. A short-running 1983 television sit-com titled *Mr Smith* broached this challenge by creating a primate genius with an IQ of 256. Having mastered the intricacies of law, medicine and nuclear physics, he is recruited to work as a special consultant to a government think tank in Washington. His periodic demand for (human) rights, which is a running gag in the series, points towards philosophical debates about ape rights and the status of animals in human society, even though the drama’s main action rests on family contretemps.

Television’s other notable orangutan character, the nurse played by Bam Bam in *Passions* (2003–5), projects a similar desire to be recognised as a non-human person, but in a much more risqué fashion, which possibly fuelled the debate about Bam Bam’s eligibility for the Emmy award. Nurse Precious has medical credentials, does her job competently and uses the internet as a resource when she needs specific information to deal with emergencies. While providing an obvious vehicle for comic relief, she is also an implicitly moral character in a corrupt human world where infidelity and vengeance rule the day. Her complex emotional life is played out in a series of fantasies in which she pictures intimate interactions between species. In one episode, she is assisting a human doctor at a birth when the action slides into reverie: out comes a baby orangutan! The infant is shown to its mother, who is also revealed as an ape, as the two ‘women’ share a smile. More provocatively, Precious imagines winning the love of the
show’s heartthrob, Luis, not by transforming into a human but as the orangutan she is. In her daydreams, Luis feeds her strawberries on their couch and rubs her feet sensually, declaring that she has ‘really grown on him’. He also brings her flowers after she has his children, and there is even a brief fantasy interlude in the
series where the interspecies foreplay leads to sex. At once ludicrous and moving, Precious’s visions of intimacy, and more broadly her desire to be recognised as a thinking, feeling, ‘fellow critter’ (to use Donna Haraway’s term for resituating humans in egalitarian relation to other lively beings) is in tune with the great ape rights movement as spearheaded by ethicists such as Peter Singer.4

In cinema, the 1990s produced comic works that engaged with rights issues, if sometimes obliquely, through plots with a sustained focus on orangutan captivity in urban societies. This theme could scarcely escape irony when orangutans themselves were cast as characters. *Dunston Checks In* (1996), for example, suggests the harshness involved in ape training regimes even while the film itself harnesses the quirky energies of the simian actor. As Dunston wrecks havoc in a luxury hotel when he escapes from his owner, who uses him to burgle the rooms of rich guests, the viewer glimpses of the animal’s cruel treatment at the hands of corrupt or narrow-minded humans. Most of the scenes are played for laughs but their resonances are unmistakable. At one point, Dunston knocks for attention from within a large crate that transports him to the crime site; at another, he makes rude gestures to his owner but carefully keeps out of reach to escape being beaten with a cane. There are also moments that hint at the orangutan’s displacement from his jungle habitat, again within the film’s farcical plot structures. ‘Pongo pygmaeus! You’ve got an orangutan problem,’ the wildlife control officer proclaims after flicking through mug shots to identify the exotic ape pest plaguing the hotel. Later, he stalks Dunston through a jungle greenhouse, only to find the orangutan hanging from the barrel of his stun gun. Such gags are interspersed with scenes pairing Dunston with the hotel manager’s young son, either in mirrored actions or moments of shared trust such as when the boy and his teenage brother remove a large splinter from the ape’s bleeding hand. The story ends with a repatriation spoof of sorts: Dunston relocates with his new human friends to Bali where a final shot shows him sitting in the trees with two other orangutans — possibly his wife and child — about to drop a coconut on a hapless guest.

*Babe: Pig in the City* (1998) presents a much darker view of the urban jungle in which apes sometimes find themselves as a result of their entanglements with humans. Even though the film’s plot has farcical elements, Thelonius, its featured orangutan, is only rarely a comic agent. Aloof and seemingly arrogant, he manifests as the most complex character among the various critters improbably rescued from their crowded menagerie by the heroic farm pig. Ape theatricals also figure in this film, but whereas the chimpanzees are cast as the natural actors, the orangutan takes the role of director and scene scorer for their dinner-party performances, which they all approach as work taken on voluntarily because it earns them a little extra food. Thelonius’s status as a moral being is demonstrated most poignantly by his attempts to protect his pet fish when the menagerie is RAIDED by humans intent on impounding its denizens. After he is captured, his humiliation at being labelled with a number and photographed naked is palpable.
Offered a chance to escape, he refuses to leave his cage until he can put on his clothes. ‘I’m not dressed’, he says to the waiting chimps, one of whom replies, ‘But Thelonius, you’re an orangutan’. He repeats, simply, ‘I’m not dressed’. At the film’s end, the animals are all safely ensconced at Farmer Hoggett’s rural haven, but whereas the other apes take easily to the trees, Thelonius insists on staying in the house with the humans. Because the narrative is constructed from a zoo-centric perspective, the viewer can read past the anthropomorphism by which Thelonius’s character is realised to register the finale as not only a critique of his (enforced) acculturation to human ways but also a suggestion that he has now chosen how to live amid limited options.

In their comic execution of implausible scenarios in which performance itself becomes visible as artifice in action, however fleetingly, these farcical films do more than manoeuvre deftly around species boundaries. They also allow us to glimpse something of the orangutan actor’s working processes. Coercion aside, such processes may not be so different from those of human actors, who also learn prescribed movements and responsive techniques, repeatedly presenting them to audiences, or the camera, for theatrical effect. Drawing from extensive observational fieldwork, Vicki Hearne argues that orangutans read performance situations creatively and with some appreciation of humour and that the apes’ routines show them using a ‘vocabulary’ that they share with their trainers not only for cross-species interaction but also for self-expression and even jokes. The relational aspect of performance is the salient issue here. More generally,
Eugene Linden proposes that we should understand orangutan intelligence as ‘the kind of mental feats they perform when dealing with captivity and the dominant species on the planet — humanity’ (online). Is there any compelling reason why such ingenuity could not be harnessed for genuine acting?

NOTES

1 Many thanks to Amanda Lynch for gathering data on orangutans in film and television, and helping to analyse shows such as Passions. Without her assistance, this essay would not have been written.

2 Lev Kuleshov outlines this process by describing an experiment in which audiences read the emotions of an expressionless actor differently according to the contexts and interrelationships provided by different montage sequences; nevertheless, he concedes that it is not always possible to alter the semantic work of an actor, even through skillful editing. See ‘The Principles of Montage’ in Kuleshov on Film, 183–95.

3 Going Ape was scripted to use the acts and actors of ‘Bobby Berosini’s Orangutans’, an immensely profitable show that featured live in Las Vegas in the 1980s until Berosini became embroiled in a lawsuit over cruelty.

4 See Peter Singer and Paola Cavalieri, The Great Ape Project: Equality Beyond Humanity.
This argument derives from Peta Tait’s view of animal acts as fitting the definition of theatre in *Wild and Dangerous Performances*, p. 2.


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*Mr Smith*, 1983, created by Stan Daniels & Edwin Weinberger, NBC Productions.


In September 1893 a small, elegantly-designed book of fewer than 40,000 words was issued by the London publisher T. Fisher Unwin as no. 3 in a new series called the Autonym Library. Titled *By Reef and Palm*, it contained fourteen stories by the novice Australian writer, Louis Becke. The volume also contained an introduction by the Earl of Pembroke who had made a sailing voyage through the South Seas and published in 1872 a book about his travels. Becke had requested the Earl, whom he had never met, to write an introduction for his collection of stories and supplied him with copious biographical information, some of which was substantially true. Pembroke obliged, lauding the book for the authenticity of the experience portrayed and attempting to forestall criticism of the rather narrow focus of the tales, although in doing so he may have simply called attention to it. Of the fourteen stories in the volume all but one have a white man and a native wife or lover either centrally or peripherally in the situation. In fact an earlier title of the book had been ‘Some White Men and Brown Women’ (Albinski 10).

Becke’s sketches and stories which had appeared in newspapers from the end of 1892 exploited a 20-year career of trading and adventuring in the Pacific which, at age 37, was abruptly curtailed by ill health. This article explores the rapid success Becke enjoyed in remaking himself as a writer, first in a colonial newspaper and then in the metropolitan book market, and the responses he made to the different expectations of these publishing environments.

*By Reef and Palm* was well received, reviews concentrating on the palpable authenticity of its sometimes painful events. The *Saturday Review* found the book a ‘delightful volume’ and ‘curiously impressive’, with its ‘conjunction of [a] romantic quality with [an] absolute “truth to nature”’ (*Saturday Review* 545). The *Bookman* found the stories ‘all vigorous and many admirably written’ (*Bookman* 196). Comparisons with R.L. Stevenson recurred; he had been living in and writing about the Pacific for five years, although he was to die in Samoa a few months after Becke’s book appeared. Reviewers generally agreed that while Stevenson’s portrayals of the South Seas were much richer in both atmosphere and characterisation and therefore more artistic, Becke knew a lot more about the actual life there. George Cotterel’s review in the *Academy* was unusual not only in being signed, but also in clearly laying out the paradox that Becke’s tales were appealing despite the often horrific subject matter.
There is hardly one of Mr Becke’s tales in which lewd passion, heartless betrayal, or brutal abandonment is not the central point... Yet in Mr Becke’s style there is charm and verisimilitude. You breathe the air and eat the fruits of the fair isles of the Pacific. The glorious sea is round you, and the gentle simple people; but in all there is a taint, a rotten horror, and according to Mr Becke, that is human nature. (Cotterel 530)

Becke may well have had this review in mind when he offered an enigmatic biblical defence of his choice and treatment of subject matter in the preface to an 1898 reprint of this volume with the 1895 novelette, *His Native Wife*:

As for my own opinion of these stories, I can only plead, when my friends say that there is too much of the weaknesses of the brown woman and the wickednesses of the uncultivated white man portrayed therein, that poor Eve in the Garden of Eden had but two friends — Adam and the Devil. (Becke 1898 iii)

Reviews also commented on the get-up of the book which was quite unusual. Unwin had in 1890 experimented with a novelette-length fiction series bound in tall narrow books approximately 17.5 cm by 9.5 cm which he was able to publish for 2 shillings in cloth and 1/6d in paper. With generous margins and the liberal use of decorative blocks, ornaments and elaborate initials he created a striking, luxurious *livre de poche*. This ‘Pseudonym Library’ series was limited to short books published under noms-de-plume. Frederick Nesta has pointed out that concocting a new series was one of Unwin’s favourite marketing ploys, to the extent that the firm had ‘twenty-eight series in its lists’ by 1917 (Nesta 171). He suggests that publishing a series of pseudonymous novels heightened mystery about the authors and made the series genuinely more attractive, but this is an overly generous assessment. When the ‘Pseudonym Library’ was joined in 1894 by the ‘Autonym Library’ — books written under the authors’ own names — it became clear that such groupings of authors were a meaningless gimmick.

In Becke’s volume the verso of the title-page is given over to a prominent if slightly stilted acknowledgment: ‘NOTE: The Publisher desires herewith to acknowledge the fact that most of the following stories appeared for the first time in the *Sydney Bulletin*. This was inserted at Becke’s insistence in a letter of 29th January, 1894 when accepting Unwin’s offer of publication, and for the rest of his life Becke gave credit to the *Bulletin* and its editor, J.F. Archibald, for ‘making’ him as a writer. After publishing almost forty books over a hectic twenty-year writing career he still looked back to his apprenticeship: ‘I wish to add that whatever literary success I may have achieved is due entirely to the training I received from the editor of The *Bulletin*, who taught me the secrets of condensation and simplicity of language’ (Becke 1913). This ‘training’ was probably more than the regular exhortation given by Archibald — ‘boil it down’. Sylvia Lawson writes eloquently of the openness of the paper in general and of Archibald in particular towards writers who had not exhausted the ‘one good book’ that Archibald believed every man was capable of writing (qtd in Lawson 154). Becke clearly received encouragement and a level of editorial guidance, but
Archibald also wrote on his behalf to an English friend, Harry Massingham, editor of the *Daily Chronicle*, to help launch Becke in London. During the subsequent negotiations, Becke used the *Bulletin* office as his address, so he probably had a much closer rapport with the firm than many other writers.

A. Grove Day has identified Becke’s earliest work as having appeared in the *Bulletin* in December 1892 (Day 1966). This was an untitled and unattributed account of the taking of the trading vessel *Inga* and the murder of her crew at Ocean Island in 1852. No doubt Becke was paid for the article, but it is significant that it is presented as though it were a piece of office gossip with the authorial credit going to the *Bulletin* office as a sort of lively yarns and news exchange. Far from being a crafted piece written by someone who had been back in Sydney for almost a year, the introduction suggests an oral account by an unlettered sailor who had virtually come straight from the docks.

A very old stager, just returned from the North-West Pacific, called in at the *Bulletin* office a few days ago and gave us the particulars of a tragedy which, although it happened way back in the ‘Fifties’ is full of interest in connection with the escape of convicts from America and Norfolk Island, and which, so far as we know, has not been alluded to by any writer* (*Bulletin* 24 December 1892, 24)

Louis Becke would have an extraordinary ascent from this rather ignominious (but no doubt still very welcome) start to his writing career. By the end of 1893 he would have published four non-fiction pieces in the *Bulletin* and seventeen stories. Not only would his contributions be signed progressively more fully, but in the Christmas issue of 16 December he would have a flight of three stories with their own decorative sub-heading and two good-sized illustrations. The *Bulletin* could hardly have done more to flag him as the writer of the moment.

Although the *Bulletin* was the most generous purchaser of periodical fiction in Australia, it was not Becke’s only publishing outlet and by mid-1893 he was entertaining ideas of book publication. He was also attracting attention from publishers. Cassell and Co. approached him in mid-September, by which time he claimed to have already rejected a publication offer from Remington, a firm that he thought insufficiently ‘well-known’ (Becke 1893). He was, however, also pursuing a different course assisted by his *Bulletin* contacts.

In those pre-photocopying, pre-word-processing days the production and transmission of an author’s copy (especially transmission between the colonies and London) were lengthy and laborious processes. Rather than arrange for the stories to be typed, Becke assembled cuttings from back issues of the *Bulletin* in which the stories had been published. He sent ‘a complete set’ of such cuttings to Harry Massingham in October 1893 to coincide with Archibald’s letter of recommendation. Massingham sent them on to Fisher Unwin who wrote to Becke on 14 December 1893 with an offer to publish which Becke received on 15 January. He took a fortnight to respond, no doubt consulting his *Bulletin* mentors, then wrote a conditional acceptance of £30 for the sale of the copyright
but rejecting the clause that allowed Unwin the right to buy two further books for the same price. He also sent copies of other stories that had been published subsequently in the *Bulletin* and other journals. Although Unwin said later that ‘beside the stories you originally sent’ he was taking ‘the other three or four to include in my volume’ (qtd in Day 40) Becke must have sent more than that because five of the stories in *By Reef and Palm* were not published till December 1893, and a sixth was not published in the *Bulletin*. When the volume was finally about to go to press, Unwin apparently had a choice of at least seventeen stories. He included six that were not in the original batch and dropped three from it, raising the number to be published from eleven to fourteen, and increasing the sum he paid Becke for the copyright accordingly. When Fisher Unwin made his first approach to Becke he envisaged a spring (April-May 1894) publication with Harry Massingham checking the proofs in London. However, a second set of proofs were to be sent to Becke for noting any errors to be corrected for later editions. When the publication was delayed till September, there was time for the corrections which Becke had made and returned on June 25th to be incorporated. Consequently, Becke had a reasonable degree of control over the stories up to publication.

Becke always played down his level of formal schooling, painting himself as nautical and outdoorsy, a man living a life of freedom and adventure. His occupations were not all pursued at the edge of empire, however, since at least for brief periods he had been a messenger in a bookstore, bank clerk, proof-reader for a newspaper, journalist, bookkeeper in a trade store, draughtsman in the NSW Lands Office, and secretary to a learned society. Similarly, he liked to claim that he had no literary style but simply strove for truth and simplicity. Some insight into how conscious his craft was might be gleaned from comparing the stories in *By Reef* and *Palm* with the versions that preceded them in the *Bulletin*. What changes were made, and what does that suggest about Becke’s self-consciousness as a writer?

While the changes are not extensive, they are revealing. At the lowest level, there are changes that can be attributed simply to the house style of each publication. The *Bulletin* did not italicise the names of ships, whereas Unwin did. The *Bulletin* printed numbers in figures whereas Unwin tended to spell them out in words. Unwin used more commas than the *Bulletin* and hyphenated compound words such as ‘breadfruit’ and ‘boatbuilder’. Reflecting a different publishing environment and audience, there is a much greater willingness in the book version to supply explanatory notes. None of the *Bulletin* versions has any footnotes, although many Polynesian words both for island objects mentioned in the narrative and expressions in dialogue had been glossed in the text in parentheses. The additional glossing must have been supplied by Becke, possibly at the request of the publisher, although Becke may well have thought about the needs of the British audience independently. He had certainly considered R.L. Stevenson’s depiction of Polynesian ways, and may have formed his strategy from that. *By Reef and Palm* directs the reader in other ways. Pronouns are replaced by names;
details of persons are added. In the Bulletin version of ‘A Basket of Breadfruit’ the bereaved grandmother whose grandsons have been killed in battle begs the heads ‘from those who had taken them’. In the Unwin version this is expanded to ‘from those Malietoa’s troops who had taken them’. In ‘The Revenge of Macy O’Shea’ the local word for a type of building block is introduced for the Unwin edition. Thus ‘great blocks made of coral and lime and sand mixed together;’ becomes ‘great blocks made of panisina — coral and lime and sand mixed together’. The addition adds nothing to the communication of meaning since the meaning for British readers comes from the gloss. However, the use of the local term assists the implied claim to verisimilitude and authorial knowledge. Such implied truth claims can affect titles, either by addition (The Bulletin’s ‘The Methodical Mr. Burr’ becomes ‘The Methodical Mr. Burr of Majuru’); or by substitution (‘Pallou’s Missus: A South Sea Sketch’ becomes ‘Pallou’s Taloi’: A Memory of the Paumotus’, Taloi being the wife’s name.

A few of the changes are genuine corrections. ‘Enderby’s Courtship’ opens rather gothicly with three people who are dying of thirst in an open boat. One calls (or rather croaks) out to another when he sees land. A few sentences later the text reads: ‘The man whom he called Enderby sank his head again’. Only he had not called him anything and so the name had to be inserted in the previous speech. This problem may have arisen as a result of pruning the original MS in the Bulletin office. This story starts in media res and it may be that an original narrative frame which introduced Enderby was removed. In the same story, when rain comes Enderby is ‘hurrying for’ard to the bows’ to lay out a mat to catch water. However, Enderby is supposed to be three parts dead of thirst, so his progress up the boat is throttled back and made less nautical: ‘staggering forward to the bows’ (87).

Becke also gave one of his characters excessively grand designs. In the Bulletin version of ‘A Truly Great Man’ a chief declares he will build ‘a house that shall be in length ten fathoms and five in width’. But at 18.3 metres by 9.15 metres this must have been implausible for the building materials available ‘on the low atolls of the Ellice Islands’ (118) for in By Reef and Palm the dimensions had moderated to ‘in length six fathoms, and four in width’ (or 11 metres by 7.3). Towards the end of ‘A Basket of Breadfruit’ in the Bulletin the dawn is announced by the ‘first boom of the crested pigeon’. Pacific pigeons are largish birds, but even for them ‘boom’ must have seemed to Becke on second thoughts a little ambitious. Moreover, the Pacific pigeon that is culturally important in Samoa and occurs in popular expressions is not crested, so Becke was right to change the phrase to ‘first note of the great grey pigeon’.

And then there are the mysteries and subtle adjustments of tone. It may have been quite adventitious that Becke decided to change a principal (unsympathetic) German planter’s name from Kuhne to Oppermann for the book version of “’Tis in the Blood’”, but changing Vaega’s ‘indelicate songs’ to ‘rowdy songs’ seems like self-censorship. In ‘The Rangers of the Tia Kau’, Becke seems to
be retreating from his normal suspicion of missionary activity. In the *Bulletin* version, king Atupa declines to adopt Christianity because he is ‘wise in his generation’ which seems to imply endorsement of his position. In *By Reef and Palm*, he declines ‘dreading a disturbing element in his kingdom’ (57) which is far more defensive and less cunning. Again on Christianity, the change from ‘In those days the fat-faced native missionary was an unknown quantity’ to ‘In those days the sleek native missionary was an unknown quantity’ (118) hints at a more complex reservation about missionary activity.

Becke was no modernist, but the evidence of his revisions does suggest that he engaged with language in a serious way, and if he was most concerned to tell a vivid narrative and get his Pacific facts right, he needed a good deal of linguistic skill to control his tone and maintain the texture of custom and ceremony that stands in such contrast to the barbarity of the stories’ events. I cannot see, as Peter Pierce claims, that ‘Becke’s romance has an underlying satirical undertone’ (159). His position as narrator seems too fluid and unstable to tie himself to principles coherent enough to enable a satirical position. Bruce Bennet’s vision of him as essentially a trader, dealing with the instant, the incident at hand, accurately recording but largely detached, and ever ready to move on to the next port or island seems to capture better the genesis of his powerful and haunting fiction.

NOTES

1 After the unsigned non-fiction pieces early in the year, Becke used the pseudonym ‘Malie’, a Samoan word with a number of meanings ranging from the name of a village, to ‘sharks’, to ‘agreement’, to ‘amusing’. Becke probably had the last in mind in adopting it. He then signed himself ‘Louis B.’ for several contributions, and then ‘Louis Becke’ (albeit with occasional lapses back to ‘Louis B.’) consistently from July 1893.

2 Becke was so prolific that there may never be a complete bibliography of his writings, but even for his early years when he was at his best, the coverage is very inadequate. The usually reliable *AustLit: The Australian Literature Resource* is very deficient on Becke.

3 This is the same process used by Henry Lawson when he was preparing the stories in *While the Billy Boils* in 1895–96. Lawson pasted the columns of fiction onto paper and used the surrounds to note corrections and emendations. See Eggert 2013, especially chapter 4.

4 The ‘complete set’ of stories to the end of October 1893 would have comprised: ‘“Tis in the Blood”’ (6 May 1893, p. 19); ‘Mrs Liardet: A South Sea Trading Episode’ (13 May 1893, p. 23); ‘Jack Keyes’ Wife: A Tale of Equatorial Polynesia’ (27 May 1893, p. 18); ‘Pallou’s Missus: A South Sea Sketch’ (17 June 1893 p. 19); ‘When the Tide Runs Out’ (24 June 1893, p. 22); ‘The Revenge of Macy O’Shea: A Story of the Marquesas’ (8 July 1893, p. 2); ‘Challis The Doubter. The White Lady and the Brown Woman’ (2 September 1893, p. 19); ‘Rangers of the Tia Kau’ (16 September 1893, p. 20); ‘Long Charley’s Good Little Wife’ (30 September 1893 p. 20); ‘A Basket of Breadfruit’ (21 October 1893, p. 5); ‘Enderby’s Courtship’ (28 October 1893, p. 24). Most of these were included in *By Reef and Palm*, but ‘Mrs Liardet’ and ‘When the Tide Runs Out’ (renamed to become the title story) were retained for Becke’s second book, *The Ebbing of the Tide* (1895), while ‘Jack Keyes’s Wife’ did not reappear until *Rodman the Boatsteerer and Other* Stories (1898) in which it was titled ‘The Trader’s Wife’.
Becke admired Stevenson’s work, but thought his Pacific knowledge very deficient. ‘I have noticed in all of Stevenson’s books some very absurd mistakes especially in native nomenclature etc. Of course this is natural enough in his case, and his great name covers all such errors, but in my case as I know what I am writing about I ought to have my writings letter perfect as there will be plenty of critics in the colonies eager to detect a mistake and jump upon anyone who dares to write a Polynesian story while Mr Stevenson is in the field’ (Letter to T. Fisher Unwin 16 June 1894, Unwin Papers).

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Personal journals have many attractions. The best of these texts detail everyday experience with an immediacy and purported veracity found wanting in narratives composed long after the event. Even more seductive, they are marked by a willingness to generalise about the components of a culture in ways that provide readymade models and assessments for an interpretative historiography. Compared to the barren records of financial history or the turgidity of legal documentation, journals are more likely to deliver the opposite aphorism and candid confession that can be immediately deployed in a telling turn of phrase. Although historians readily recognise the anecdotal hazards of such sources — coming as they do from a privileged literate class and often the creations of casual visitors — the temptations are too great for most to resist (Woodfine 185).

In the social history of the Anglophone Caribbean, one personal journal has long reigned supreme as a historical source. Best known as Lady Nugent’s Journal, it is the record kept by Maria Nugent, wife of a governor of Jamaica, for the years 1801 to 1805. Her account gained its visibility through an initial private printing in 1839, followed by the publication of a series of editions and reprints that began in 1907 and ensured the book’s availability throughout the twentieth century. The vitality of Nugent’s descriptive account quickly made it one of the most frequently cited sources for studies of colonial society during slavery, and it became a popular choice for anthologies of travel writing and diarising.1 The journal’s importance lies in its detailed impressions of creole life and manners, its contribution to a picturesque aesthetic, and the simple rarity of personal accounts of Jamaica written by members of the governing class and by women (Brereton 64). It was in this way that her lively style was married to the confidence with which she offered broad generalisations on the island’s society and culture.

Two examples suffice to illustrate Nugent’s style and its attractions as a source. These are among the most frequently quoted of Nugent’s remarks and both of them were recorded in the course of her first tour of the island, together with her husband and entourage, commenced in early March 1802 when she had been in Jamaica for seven months. Halfway through the seven-week tour and overwhelmed by the groaning tables of the planters, Nugent declared: ‘I am not astonished at the general ill health of the men in this country; for they really eat like cormorants and drink like porpoises’ (Nugent 1839a 195–96). At the end of
the tour, Nugent felt ready to generalise more broadly about the society. She told her journal that the ‘Creole language’ was shared by black and white women, and as proof recorded with disgust that ‘I stood next to a lady one night, near a window, and, by way of saying something, remarked that the air was much cooler than usual; to which she answered, “Yes, ma-am, him rail-ly too fra-ish”’ (Nugent 1839a 236). These two observations have become influential perennials in modern narratives of eighteenth-century Jamaica, quoted time after time in varied degrees of fullness in popular as well as academic texts. They have provided starting points for a series of debates about the consequences of conspicuous consumption and, more recently, the character of creolisation.2

Nugent’s journal has also attracted the attention of literary scholars, not so much as a text in its own right but rather as a vital contributor to English fiction of the early nineteenth century. Brontë scholars have argued that Jane Eyre and Wuthering Heights, both published in 1847, draw not only on contemporary narratives of (white) creole degeneracy in West Indian slave society but also refer to the intimate history of a particular Jamaican plantation. Nugent’s Journal is viewed not only as the potential source of elements of the critique of creole degeneracy but perhaps also even the names of characters in Jane Eyre, the congruencies leading Sue Thomas to speculate that ‘[Charlotte] Brontë may well have read, or had read to her, Nugent’s A Journal of a Voyage … issued for private circulation in 1839’ (Thomas 1999 4). Thomas quotes Nugent on the creoles’ indolence, their indulgence in eating and drinking, their lack of sexual propriety, and broad disregard of religion and morality.3

In spite of the role played by Lady Nugent’s Journal in the historiography and literature of empire and slavery, scholars have paid little attention to the provenance and status of the text. They have cited varied editions and reprintings, without wondering much about differences and possible editorial pruning and interference. There are in fact eight known versions of the journal, the most complete of which has been largely neglected by scholars. The eight iterations of the journal were, in summary: (1) the manuscript text written by Nugent between 1801 and 1811 and possibly later edited by her; (2) a two-volume edition privately printed in 1839; (3) Lady Nugent’s Journal edited by Frank Cundall in a single volume in 1907; (4) a second edition of 1934; (5) a third edition of 1939; (6) a new edition edited by Philip Wright in 1966; (7) a reprint of Wright’s edition with a foreword by Verene A. Shepherd in 2002; and (8) the 2006 British and Irish Women’s Letters and Diaries electronic transcription of the journal as printed in 1839. Some of these were truly iterations, reproducing more or less exactly the text of earlier versions, whereas others made substantial deletions and restorations. With the exception of its most recent — electronic — transformation, production and publication of the Journal was shared between Jamaica and Britain.

Nugent presented herself as British, and the wife of the British governor of a British colony. Her attitudes to things creole and colonial were however
complicated by the fact of her own colonial American origins. Born in the colony of New Jersey in 1770 or 1771, she was one of twelve children of Cortlandt Skinner (1727–1799) and Elizabeth Kearney (1731–1810). Maria's father was also American-born, the son of a Scottish father and Dutch-American mother, while Maria's mother was of Irish-American ancestry. Cortlandt Skinner played a significant role in the Revolution, as a prominent Loyalist. On the declaration of the peace in 1783, Skinner took his family to Britain, probably living between the west of England and Ireland. He was compensated for the loss of his American property, being one of the largest landowners of New Jersey. In 1797, two years before the death of her father, Maria married, in Belfast, General George Nugent (1757–1849), the illegitimate but wealthy and well-connected son of an Irish peer. George had joined the British Army as a young man and fought in the American War, including service in the Jerseys. His service and his family's political connections brought him appointment as Lieutenant-Governor and Commander-in-Chief of Jamaica and he and Maria arrived in the island in July 1801, soon after her thirtieth birthday.

The Governorship of Jamaica was one of the most important and best-paid in the British Empire. During the Nugents' time in the island, the Atlantic slave trade ran at a high rate; sugar production peaked in 1805, when Jamaica was briefly the world's leading exporter, creating great wealth for Britain; war with France ebbed and flowed; trade with the United States remained severely limited; and Haiti declared independence in 1804. It was the Governor's responsibility to ensure the security of this system and to oversee the smooth flow of trade and profits. The difficulty of his task was to satisfy both the British Government and the planter-dominated Jamaican Assembly. The Governor's official residence was the opulent King's House in the capital Spanish Town but the Nugents also enjoyed extended periods at the Government Pen, towards the coast, and at Port Henderson. They made a long journey through the Jamaican countryside in March and April 1802 and shorter visits to other sites. While in Jamaica, they had two children, George born October 1802 and Louisa September 1803. Maria and the two children left for England in June 1805 and George in February 1806. They stayed for some years in England, during which time George was elected to Parliament and in 1811 made a Baronet and appointed Commander-in-Chief in India. It was then that Maria became Lady Nugent though the title has been bestowed freely to her time in Jamaica. She was in India until 1815, then spent the remainder of her life in England, dying in 1834 the year of the formal British abolition of slavery. The manuscripts of her Jamaican and Indian journals soon came to light.

Without presenting too many statistics or trivial variations, it is worthwhile setting out the major differences between the eight iterations of Lady Nugent's Journal. The most important comparison is that between the 1966/2002 text as edited by Wright and the first published text of 1839/2006. Most of these differences were generated by Cundall rather than Wright but it is the Wright
Eight Iterations of Lady Nugent’s Jamaica Journal

Not counting the preliminary pages, the 1839 printing of *Lady Nugent’s Journal* contained approximately 192,000 words, Cundall’s edition 130,000 (142,000 if the Indian sections are included), and Wright’s edition 135,000 words. Cundall deleted almost one-third of the text. The impact of these excisions is, however, less dramatic if the Jamaican entries are regarded as the vital ones. Most of the 57,000 words missing from Wright’s edition came from the period of Nugent’s return to England but even for the time spent in Jamaica 18,000 words were omitted — roughly 14 percent of the total.

Wright’s edition added 4,000 words to Cundall’s 110,000 for the Jamaican period of the journal. Wright’s claim that he had followed the editing of Cundall was broadly correct but as well as restoring entries omitted by Cundall some of the material included by Cundall was deleted. Most of these changes come in the second half of the journal, commencing in the middle of 1803. Wright restored sixteen whole days but deleted even more (eighteen); he also expanded ten of Cundall’s entries but reduced twelve. The reasons for these counter-balancing changes, which overall added 4,000 words to the text, are not always apparent. Only one of Cundall’s excisions, restored by Wright, had to do with gossip and scandal regarding the philandering of the aristocracy that offended Nugent.

Nugent wrote in her journal almost every day while in Jamaica. She spent 47 months in the island but missed daily entries for only 26 days. Of these missed days all but four occurred in a single block at the time of the birth of her first child. On the voyage to Jamaica, Nugent missed sixteen days and her return to England ten; once back in England she resumed her regular daily pattern. Wright’s edition of 1966, however, omitted the equivalent of a whole year (368 days) from her time in Jamaica. Wright’s omissions were relatively few for the first eighteen months down to January 1803, never exceeding five days in any one month, but regularly exceeded ten from February 1804. His omissions peaked at 24 in January 1805 a month when Nugent had written in her journal every day.

To some extent, the omissions match the declining fullness of Nugent’s writing. Her entries peaked in March 1802, when she had commenced her grand tour of the island, filling 46 pages in the 1839 edition; and reached their minimum in January and February 1805 at five pages for each of those months. Thus some of the entries omitted by Wright were brief and lacking in detail. On the other hand, the stark difference between 1803 and 1804 in the rate of deletions by Wright did not match the length of the entries; the year 1803 covered 147 pages in the 1839 edition, and 1804 occupied 133 pages. The text for both of these years was substantially less than the 234 pages devoted to 1802. Probably, the very high rate
of deletions for 1804 represented not only a lack of originality in the material but also editorial fatigue and the desire to get the final volume down to an affordable size.

As well as omitting entire days Wright (following Cundall) pruned words, phrases and sentences from the 1839 version of *Lady Nugent’s Journal*. A large number of these excisions were indeed of the ‘trivial’ variety identified by Cundall and Wright, having to do with health, times of rising and retiring, things being ‘as usual’ and going for a drive, and these deletions were spread erratically but fairly broadly across the text. But Cundall and Wright also removed many references to religious activities — prayers, church attendance, reading the scriptures, and thanks to God for blessings received — and many references to the playing of games. Less consistent was the removal of the names of persons who visited or joined the family at table; these deletions became common only in 1804. For example, the 1839 version of the journal included the following entry for 2 February 1804: ‘Mr. Duckworth off, at daylight, to fish. — General N. at 8, in Spanish Town. My morning alone. Duckworth brought home a shoal of fish of all sorts. Only Dr. Adolphus at dinner. All prosperous in the evening’. Cundall and Wright reduced this to: ‘Mr. Duckworth off, at daylight, to fish. — Brought home a shoal of fish of all sorts’.

Overall, the excisions of Cundall and Wright left largely intact Nugent’s descriptive observations and her broad generalisations about Jamaican society. Most of what the editors removed seems unlikely to have been preferred by the twentieth-century historians who used her commentary in constructing historical narratives and interpretive models. On the other hand, the excisions of Cundall and Wright certainly do make it more difficult to construct the pattern of Nugent’s daily life, her preoccupation with the life of the healthy/unhealthy body, the life of the soul, the nurture of her children, the good nights and the bad. Insofar as these trivial events of daily life affected how other aspects of the life were lived, their editorial reduction impoverishes the possibilities of modern understanding. The nature of the trivial is itself subject to interpretation and reinterpretation. An appreciation of the richness of Nugent’s text in its 1839 iteration opens up a whole new range of investigation that connects with recent interest in, inter alia, diurnal rhythms, the history of food and consumption, social networks, familial affection, church attendance and the saying of prayers. The ability to search the electronic version — to analyse vocabulary, to identify collocations and contexts, and quantify behaviour — makes this not only possible but easy and opens up prospects for comparison and content analysis.

For instance, it is striking that Nugent, like the slave-owners around her, referred to ‘Negroes’ much more often than she used ‘slave’. The word ‘slavery’ appears just once in the whole journal, a week after her arrival in Jamaica, and serving as an explanation for ‘the want of exertion in the blackies’. Nugent used ‘Negro/es’ 86 times, ‘slave/s’ 21 times, ‘blacks’ 4 times and ‘blackies’ 24 times, but ‘poor blackies’ just twice. Male slaveholders such as Thomas Thistlewood and
Simon Taylor similarly avoided ‘slave’ — let alone ‘slavery’ — and commonly employed ‘Negro’ as synonym for enslaved persons. These findings provide a context for analysis of Brereton’s observation that Nugent had ‘little to say about slavery as an institution, though a degree of sympathy for the slaves might be deduced from her constant use of the term “poor blackies” and (perhaps) from her kindness to the King’s House domestics and her concern for their spiritual welfare’.8

Although born in colonial America, Nugent presented herself as thoroughly British and modern scholars have regarded her in this light.9 She offered no clear concept of a Creole America to which she might owe some allegiance. Nugent used the word ‘creole’ 22 times in her Journal, referring to people, things and attitudes, and adopted ‘creolise’, ‘creolised’ and ‘creolising’ (4 times in total), to identify afternoon leisure and idleness. Only one of these occurrences, cited above, refers to language or speech. The word ‘America’ appeared only three times in her journal (New Jersey never). The first two occurrences simply referred to people ‘from America’, but the third, from 1803, reported ‘A second breakfast, Madame la Marquise de Piquieres and her daughter. The latter was brought up in America, and speaks sad English!’ This is tantalising but the Marquise was among French prisoners of war and emigrés from St Domingue, so Nugent’s offence at the speech of Mademoiselle Piquieres was probably a reaction to its polyglot character and in any case the meaning of ‘America’ is at least ambiguous. In view of her colonial New Jersey youth, it would be interesting to know exactly how Nugent sounded to Jamaican creoles and what she remembered of American speech, but Nugent rarely attempted to report remembered words and even the complete text of her journal seems unlikely to prove a rich source for interpretation of the colonial origins of American speech. As well as disparaging (Jamaican) creole voices, Nugent complained occasionally of the accents of Irish, Scots and Welsh churchmen.10

Nugent thought of herself as an oasis of dignity and decorum, in the midst of an island of degeneracy and indecency. She catechised and lectured those few to whom she had immediate access, tutoring them in private. In the public sphere she averted her gaze, hoping not to pass in her carriage by the heads of executed black men stuck on poles or through surprise visits to uncover the exotic household arrangements of notables. She told herself privately that she detested all of these things that underpinned Jamaican creole society but neither argued for the abolition of slavery or the slave trade nor developed a proslavery defence.

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NOTES


3 See also Christopher Heywood, ‘Yorkshire Slavery in *Wuthering Heights*’, and Sue Thomas, “Christianity and the State in Jane Eyre”.


5 Raza, ‘Nugent’; Maria, Lady Nugent, *A Journal from the Year 1811 till the Year 1815, including a Voyage to and Residence in India, with a Tour to the North-Western Parts of the British Possessions in that Country, under the Bengal Government*.


9 Brereton, ‘Text, Testimony and Gender’, 64; Franklin W. Knight, *The Caribbean: The


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Olive Senior

FABULOUS EYELIDS

And our fabulous eyelids O
(St-Jean Perse, Éloges 2)

O ma mère, Madonna of the clothes-line
Embrace me, the child cries.

Stiffened against
the breeze, braced against the sun in her
eyes, Madonna the vise grips clothes pins
in her mouth, jabs the line, nappies
endlessly slapping white clothes Jesusing
to blue skies

and khaki pants for sons
1, 2, 3, 4, stiffening in the breeze with
father’s workingman’s blue that wouldn’t
do for Sunday sporting that she pretends
she doesn’t know about though she adds
more and more blueing to his whites nicely
ironed for the village rooster’s outing.

One day, the sport was left on our doorstep.
She took her in, grudgingly.

O sister, my sister of the
fabulous eyelids unlocked, you have our
father’s eyes. I took your hand. With you,
our house at once grew.

In the wash, increasingly, much too much blue.
HURRICANE WATCH

Every year we are forced to reinvent ourselves, growing shabbier. Perhaps uncertainty comes from the shifty breath of Hurricanes, their unlocked eyes revolving always counter-clockwise. Watchful. Unmaking us.
PERSEPHONE

The dark lady in her garden tends her skeletal trees, she’s gone underground for this season. It’s cold and she needs the sparkle of fire to warm up her body, prepare her green dress for her coming-out party; she’s starving herself for a reason. Who knows when we see her splendour in spring, the cost of this beauty? The gossips who sing: *She wears her clothes well. O she always had beautiful bones.* Do they still tell of her husband the abductor (or has he been redeemed?). Do they say how her mother’s extravagant keening endangered the world?

Of her complaints to her daughter of *i told you so and i warned you of dark men of bright flowers beware but even then when you were small did you listen? o no, by impulse you always were stricken.* The dark lady knows (but she just doesn’t say) as she crosses the threshold arrayed in her finery: It’s impulse that sparks fire, starts the engine of growth, drives the green fuse through the flower, sap through trees, brings new verdance to the bower. But at what cost to my lady? She grows weaker by the end of each season in the sun, returns to that dark room to rest. OH MY HEART (her husband taking over from her Mum). HERE, DEAR, TAKE THIS RED PILL. He opens the box, the door of unknowing. One seed less, yet a thousand still glowing. Again and again, she yields to temptation for she’s seized by both Eros and mourning. The bright red interior opens for him. Yet it’s he who’s been tricked. From one seed new life’s always growing. So her triumph: Each year he allows her — briefly — to escape the snare of the flower; walk through that door and return to her mother.
who — never to forgive that initial loss — is forever glowering. Forgetful now, she leaves her dress rumpled at times, her bed unmade and sour. Says the heat’s worse than it’s ever been. Says the day he grabbed you was an evil hour. The dark lady endures it all for her secret bliss: the fire she snatches from the jaws of death to ignite springtime in the world.

Yet, beneath her green dress at her coming-out party, who would guess how wildly her pomegranate heart beats to return underground for a taste of that treat: the fruit from the orchard of Death.
Trouble in Eden: Marion Halligan’s *Shooting the Fox*

Although the stories in Marion Halligan’s *Shooting the Fox* can be read independently, they also form an intricate whole where individual stories complement and reflect one another. A Garden of Eden, fruitful and safely enclosed until corruption and loss intervene, forms the book’s central motif. Language and communication are also important themes, as is the writer’s role in creating fictional worlds, where, serpent-like she introduces discord and betrayal to advance her narrative. Halligan’s opening story, gives the collection its name, establishing most of the book’s major ideas so that other stories appear to develop out of or relate back to it.

Gloria Jones, narrator of ‘Shooting the Fox’, is ‘a forty-three-year-old virgin’ who teaches French at an exclusive girls’ school whilst keenly aware of the contrast between her flower-like pupils and her ageing self, ‘like a rose hip on a branch, tight and firm and yellowish brown’ (2). In class, teacher and pupils rely on the discipline of reciting French verbs to keep ‘lascivious scents at bay’ (2). Nevertheless, Gloria is wooed and eventually won by a writer, John Malcolm Crape Pembroke, who invites her to his convict-built tower deep in the New South Wales high country, insisting she come and see a fox he has shot on his property that morning, and promising her a fur coat, made from the pelts of foxes he shoots, to match her own ‘russet, foxy-coloured’ hair (9). Despite her sexual inexperience, Gloria is shrewdly aware of the possibilities and paradoxes of her situation. Malcolm proposes to write for her the same cultivated life, full of sensuous and intellectual pleasures, he enjoys, ‘though it didn’t occur to me that it wasn’t my life’ (6). Despite reservations, however, she marries, only to be caught within her husband’s story. On their wedding night, Malcolm explains that his wealth comes from producing very expensive high class pornography, illustrated with elegant drawings, whilst insisting that, unlike photographs, these harm no one, although Gloria has her doubts:

I knew what he was talking about. The antique style of pornography. For rich men, whose wealth and honourable standing in the community was presumed to protect them from corruption. Not the vulgar cheap effects of television and movies. (13)

Halligan blends fairy-tale and gothic romance to create an edge of menace, with echoes of Edgar Allen Poe, *Jane Eyre*, *Rebecca*, and Angela Carter’s *The Bloody Chamber*, but Gloria’s apparently ideal situation is a form of stasis where threatened dangers never eventuate:
Malcolm is away, but he forbids me nothing. There are no locked rooms whose key I am not allowed to employ. No boxes I must not open. I am enjoined to look at everything. No fruits I must not eat. (18)

Although she is identified with the foxes Malcolm shoots, he has no need to harm her physically for she is firmly confined within the world he has constructed. Denied agency, she yearns for prohibitions so she may develop her own narrative: ‘I am waiting for him to tell me what I must not do’ (18).

The fruit must be picked. The room must be unlocked, and the lady turns the key, staining it with telltale blood. The pomegranate seeds must be nibbled, and Persephone complies. The box must be opened and Pandora obliges. (17)

Halligan’s exploration of male/female power relationships underlies many of the stories, bearing out Gloria’s view that it is women characters who generally promote the narrative through their response to male directives.

Despite a long-standing identification of women with cunning vixens, Halligan’s foxes are images of female vulnerability. Traditionally, however, in art and literature, the animal appears as a dangerous male predator. In D.H. Lawrence’s, ‘The Fox’, which Gloria’s narrative also evokes, two young women, known by their surnames, Banford and March, are hampered in their ineffectual attempts to run a poultry farm by a fox constantly raiding their henhouse. March, haunted by the creature’s presence, feels him ‘invisibly master her spirit’, (Lawrence 7) and when a young soldier, Henry Grenfel, offers to shoot it, he himself replaces the animal in her imagination since both man and beast are embodiments of wild nature. Henry, who determines to master and marry March, causes Banford’s death through a kind of symbolic murder, yet while March accepts his proposal, he remains uncertain she will yield the total submission he requires:

He wanted to make her submit, yield, blindly pass away out of all her strenuous consciousness, and make her just his woman. Just his woman. (68)

Another Halligan story ‘The White Peacock’, set on the Monaro plateau, gestures towards Lawrence’s novel of that name whilst questioning the extent and nature of female as opposed to male power. Jess, the local schoolteacher, with a failed marriage behind her, still hopes to meet a compatible man, but finds her one persistent suitor, Vaughan, physically unattractive. Nevertheless, she agrees to accompany him to visit a garden with peacocks, driving through countryside which seems to be ‘[w]aiting for a fairytale to happen. Grimm, or someone. A wicked stepmother’ (36). Nothing so sinister occurs, and they enter Eden, a small fishing village on the New South Wales south coast where they observe three male peacocks court a small brown peahen in the garden.

In Lawrence’s novel, a peacock, ‘its tail glistening like a stream of coloured stars’ (Lawrence 147), defecates on a stone angel in the local graveyard, disgusting the misogynist gamekeeper, Annable, and reminding him of the aristocratic wife who previously rejected him (148). Later he admits she may not have been entirely
at fault, prompting a suggestion that she was, perhaps, a white peacock. Ironically, it is the male bird Lawrence identifies with female vanity and pride. In Halligan’s story, two birds courting the peahen have the customary blue colouring, but the third, which Jess considers particularly beautiful, is white. Vaughan, however, explains the peahen will mate only with a blue-feathered bird. The white one is an albino, unable to breed because never chosen, so for Vaughan the female bird becomes an image of power: ‘All that display … for one little dull brown bird. And she chooses. They’re gorgeous but she chooses’ (41). This image of a small brown bird recurs in other stories, usually associated with a betrayed or submissive wife. Women may have power to choose whom they will marry, only to be rendered insignificant in their husband’s shadow.

Not all personal Edens are as exotic as Gloria’s tower. Other stories imply that happy family life within a secure domestic enclosure represents many people’s desired existence, although that too proves precarious. The narrative of a husband who enjoys the embrace of a mistress in addition to home comforts his wife provides recurs with variations throughout Shooting the Fox. In ‘Valiant’ an errant husband finds it increasingly arduous to juggle domestic responsibilities with the demands of his young mistress and former student, Vikki, as he drives between two households in his old Valiant. He himself, however, proves no Prince Valiant, refusing, despite many promises, to leave his wife even when Vikki throws herself theatrically before his car to prevent him driving home. While she lies there, her lover jots down a sentence for an academic text he is composing on suburban alienation: ‘If Vikki noticed what I was doing she would go mad’. Writing necessarily involves betrayal, since that is what creates the story.

The married man and the young woman. She believes he will leave his wife for her. So does he. But he doesn’t. He is that kind of bastard… There’s another narrative, in which the man does leave his wife, and in that he’s another kind of bastard. Neither is an attractive tale, but there would be no narrative if they were. (29)

‘We Were Sitting in the Garden’ features that other kind of bastard. In a suburban garden where newly-spread blood and bone gives off the ‘odour of corruption’, two long-married, middle-aged wives, Toni and Moira, discuss Moira’s predicament. Her husband has demanded a divorce, a consequence of chasing porn sites on the laptop purchased when he retired: ‘He went from porn to dating sites and found this tart and that’s it’ (175). Her emotional security is shattered, and her material circumstances greatly diminished since the house must be sold to pay her husband his share of the proceeds:

…where am I going to live? I’ll never get anything round here for half what we get for the house, not in this market. All my life is here, my neighbours, friends. And the garden, I’ve worked so hard on that garden, I’m just getting it right, I love it, I can’t bear to part with it. (176)

The story ends with Toni reflecting, ‘it is true, we are never safe’ (180), as she goes indoors to find her own husband just closing up his laptop.
Other stories explore a writer’s responsibility to her characters and her readers. ‘Bingle’ opens with a young woman, Tania, driving to work, while deploring her monotonous life and yearning for excitement, when another car rams her from behind. The male driver proves grossly abusive as Tania slides to the ground at his feet, but she berates the author, protesting against the earlier account of her dreary life and demanding the perpetrator of the accident give her a lift in his car despite the omniscient narrator’s warning, ‘He’s a nasty man, full of road rage’ (74). Tania disagrees: ‘He looks as though he should be wrapped in white woollen robes on a thoroughbred in the desert. An Arab steed’ (74). The author, however, has her standards: ‘I’m not writing a fantasy out of a Rudolph Valentino movie’ (74). She then disputes the conventions of romantic fiction with Tania who indicates her desired conclusion:

[He] fell in love with me when he saw me lying helpless on the ground — We get married and have four children and live happily ever after. (78)

The narrator dismisses this: ‘I don’t do closure’ (79). She wants the story to convey anxiety, unease and menace, but Tania protests: ‘Why can’t it be nice? Why can’t it be true love and marriage and children and happy ever after?’ (81). The author then bundles her off to hospital, where she might just meet a doctor who will fall in love with her — ‘But I don’t need to write that’ (84). Halligan mocks certain types of genre fiction, along with reader expectations, while also highlighting how fantasies of romantic love may entrap women within narratives they find impossible to control.

The writer also appears as a fictional character in ‘What About the Spider?’ credited with authorship of Spider Cup, a novel of Halligan’s own about a wife’s fantasies of revenge on her unfaithful husband. An audience member approaches the writer at a literary festival querying why she has never written about a disrupted marriage from the spider’s viewpoint, the rival who has ‘drawn the husband to her and is clutching him tight with these sticky hairy legs’ (97). Recognising this as a limitation in her own work the author acknowledges that the ‘other woman’ generally makes the story happen: ‘She’s the agent in the narrative of the couple but she has her own tale as well’ (97). Ancient-mariner-like, the woman insists on recounting her rather miserable experience as a married man’s mistress, while the sympathetic writer keeps developing the story in her mind, probing its narrative possibilities further. When a friend claims that secrets are never safe with writers, she responds, ‘They turn them into fiction and that’s safe’ (101).

The fantasies driving romantic fiction — that ideal happiness results from female submission and lasting union with a dominant man — often prove a poison cup. ‘Bingle’ and ‘What About the Spider’ frame the darkest story in the collection ‘Together Forever’, its title yet another romantic cliché. Ros, the narrator, records three stages in her life: as a young teenager, then twenty years later, and again twenty years after that. As a barely pubescent country girl, she is seduced by the Anglican priest who heads the secondary school hostel where she boards: ‘He
said that was what God wanted, it was innocent and pure, like Adam and Eve in
the Garden before there was any sin’ (85). With the priest in loco parentis and
addressed as Father, his abuse even carries faint hints of incest. Girls at the hostel
adore him, deploring his wife’s dowdy appearance: ‘his wife is a brown bird and
he is a peacock’ (92), and in an echo of Halligan’s opening story, the priest has,
himself, shot the foxes whose pelts form the rug where he and Ros make love:

I think of dripping sticky on the foxes’ fur but he doesn’t seem to mind. There is
beginning to grow a little bit of hair down there it is reddish too like the fox he says, my
foxy love, not like the hair on my head which is really just pale brown. (86)

She keeps and hides his love letters in the red satin lining of her sewing basket,
but, afraid of discovery, the priest expels Ros on a trumped up pretext, sending
her home in disgrace where everyone accepts his judgment of her as a slut. The
terrible damage inflicted continues to poison her adult life. After years of unhappy
marriage, she escapes a brutal husband to protect herself and their children from
further violence, but on learning that the priest who once abused her is now a
bishop, she renews contact, so their relationship resumes. His letters continue and
he even sends her the fox rug, though ‘it smells of mothballs now and the skins
are a bit dried and cracked’. He even leaves his wife for her, still talking of God’s
will and the baby he hopes Ros will bear: ‘And now I am happy for the first time
since being a child’ (93). But the church intervenes and he resumes his marriage.

Another twenty years pass but all Ros’s attempts to make a happy life have
come to nothing. She writes again to the bishop who responds he is now too old
— ‘I can’t be at this kind of thing any more’ (94). She reflects: ‘Forty years I am
thinking it is now, since I was a child lying on a fox rug … rubbing prickly in the
red brushes of foxes. If he is too old now I was too young then’ (94). With his
letters as evidence, she reports him to the church authorities and he is defrocked:
‘All the lovely robes, gone. All the godly clothes, taken off. Disgraced. Expelled’
(95). She fears, however, she could still be trapped within the romantic dream, so
if her lover asked to return, she might even agree. ‘I say no, to myself, but I don’t

Such female defeat and abjection are completely banished in ‘Polyhymnia’, set
in a secret, fertile valley among fruit trees and rose bushes. Here the trope of locus
amoenus, the delightful place and perfect setting for love, which has descended
through the centuries from Classical literature to the present day, is located in
Australia, with thick lawn ‘cropped green and fine and smooth by kangaroos’
(138). Polyhymnia, Muse of sacred song, is the beautiful presiding deity, who
seems to move in a blaze of light: ‘Her hair is a bright orange colour, standing up
in curling points all over her head, which seems to be covered with small dancing
flames’ (13). She devotes herself to hymn singing, particularly hymns infused
with erotic feeling:

\begin{quote}
Jesu lover of my soul
Let me to thy bosom fly… (140)
\end{quote}
A young man who enters the garden is entranced by Polyhymnia’s beauty, believing he truly understands her — ‘It is the song of the spinster, who thinks she is loving God but is needing a man’ (140) — happily accepting her frank offer of sex: ‘He knows he’s a good lover, but she astonishes him’ (140). Polyhymnia laughs, however, when he urges she stop singing ‘her passionate hymns of love to God’, replacing them with love songs to himself.

It’s my career, she says. I like it. You want your ordinary love poetry, you should see my sister Erato. But I have to tell you she’s a bit of a prude. Her stuff’s good, but she doesn’t live up to it. And that mountain she lives on is so damn cold.

Erato, Muse of lyric poetry, was believed to inspire love poetry, but in ‘Polyhymnia’ Halligan presents, as her image of creativity, a woman with direct access to divine inspiration and no need of male mediation.

Polyhymnia and her garden paradise appear timeless, but other stories show characters swept along by Time which promises Eden while simultaneously undermining it. In ‘Irregular Verbs’ a young girl studying for her final school examination worries about a future likely to constrain her within the narrow life of social conformity advocated for women of her generation — early marriage and a life given over to housekeeping. Studying French irregular verbs offers a possible lifeline to an alternative future: ‘irregular behaviour frowned on in girls but not in verbs’ (153). ‘Telling the beads’ is set in a nursing home where an old woman takes refuge in memories of a beautiful antique necklace she once owned, associating individual beads with happy experiences of her youth. The past is now the ideal place where she chooses to live, ignoring her present existence and no longer able to recognise that her regular visitor, the ‘shouting woman’, is actually her fondly remembered daughter.

For some, Eden represents past experience, while for others it symbolises a promising future, but Halligan’s final story ‘Letters From Eden’ invests it with an aura of fantasy, similar to the book’s opening story, so that, between them, these two pieces neatly book-end Shooting the Fox. Sirimenet, accompanying her newly appointed diplomat husband to Australia, writes her impressions of the place to her mother. The reader never learns her country of origin, but discovers it is cold and snow-bound, so Australia’s warm climate, relaxed lifestyle and attractive landscape, appear quite delightful. Halligan’s vision of an Australia governed from the New South Wales coastal town of Eden, transformed into an elegant, beautiful city, contrasts with the country presently governed from Canberra. In Sirimenet’s Australia education is highly valued, with special emphasis on foreign languages and literature, while the arts community appears larger than the bureaucracy. The prime minister, himself a poet, enjoys literary discussion and there is ‘a charming habit of writers’ always presenting him with each new book. But is this idealised Australia sufficiently dynamic to hold the interest of either residents or readers? Once again Halligan introduces the prospect of trouble, though whether this
originates in Eden or in Sirimenet’s home country remains unclear. A mysterious final letter warns her mother she will be unable to correspond further: ‘It is better that you not know anything’ (223), and it appears she and her husband are now exiled forever from their original home. A new story begins to develop, one impossible to contain within the confines of this particular book.

*Shooting the Fox* is not a discontinuous narrative set entirely in one location with the same characters reappearing in different stories. It resembles rather a cycle of poems united by recurrent themes and imagery. In Halligan’s opening story, Gloria observes a maze in the grounds surrounding her tower, learning that although its hedges are only waist high, ‘you could still get lost in it’ (7). She believes, however, that by looking down from the top of the tower she will eventually learn its pattern. Just as the pathway through a maze circles back on itself several times over, so individual stories in Halligan’s book lead back to earlier ones while pointing to those ahead. In her tower, Gloria discovers an old chest, opening it with trepidation: ‘Inside were old pieces of fabric smelling of peppermint. Ikat, and batik, brocades, embroidery. Most of them were old, some ancient, most had had another existence’ (10). Halligan’s stories resemble this collection of delicate fabrics. Malcolm is delighted to find Gloria looking at his ‘treasure’: ‘All beautiful things need looking at’ (10). *Shooting the Fox* emphasises that stories need to be told. Characters buttonhole listeners, demanding their tale be heard, and the stories fold in and out of one another, some drawing distantly on narratives and fables from much earlier periods.

The many observations about writing presented throughout *Shooting the Fox* underline the tensions involved in creating fiction. Readers frequently yearn for resolution and that some characters at least should live happily ever after. Accounts of ‘happily ever after’, however, are not in themselves especially interesting, so, although writers may imagine ideal states of existence, they must continually disrupt them so the narrative can develop. Consequently, there will always be trouble in Eden.

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Outside the region, the salt-water-imagining and imaging of the Caribbean is so powerful that the idea of water scarcity challenges belief; the recent years of drought were significantly under-reported. The Caribbean is a kind of blind spot in world water thinking; and even in regional perspective, it is not easily disaggregated from Latin America. The UN estimates the renewable water resources of the combined region as the second highest per capita in the world. In theory, then, the amount of water naturally available at any given moment is highly favourable to the local population. But very few people across the combined region actually receive the allocation that this kind of arithmetic might suggest is their entitlement. In practice, more than 130 million people in Latin America and the Caribbean lack access to safe drinking water. The combined region has the greatest theoretical potential of naturally renewable water, but takes from that pool the least amount per capita of any region in the world (World Bank 2007).

Last year the Amazon River was at its lowest level in half a century, ‘with several tributaries completely dry and more than 20 municipalities declaring a state of emergency’ (Black online). The Negro River dropped over forty-five feet; and 215 thousand people in the region were reportedly affected as crops were decimated, forest fires clouded the air with smoke and normally flowing waterways were reduced to stagnating puddles (Messenger online). Yet, at the same time, tankers were quietly removing millions of litres of Amazon water for transport to Europe or the Middle East; and it is believed that this illegal trafficking in Brazilian water has direct links to the major multinational corporations based abroad (‘Trafficking in the Amazon River’ online). A large oil-tanker, having divested itself of its export cargo, can take on approximately five million gallons of river water for refill for the return voyage. Approximately a quarter of the world’s bottled water — an industry with a market value already exceeding $US100 billion, and rapidly escalating (‘Bottled Water’ online) — is consumed outside the country of origin. That accounts for the movement of some 30 million m³ annually. The movement of crude (as opposed to bottled) water accounts for 130 million m³ every fortnight! (‘Shipping Bulk Water’ online). Recently developed transport technologies have vastly increased the transport capability, placing the Amazon River reservoir at even greater risk of hydro-piracy. The Amazon River reservoir, This is the reservoir that contains around 70% of the world’s fresh water, and supplies as much as one fifth of the surface water entering the Caribbean Sea (Moore et al 2578).
A fully-fledged poetics and politics of Caribbean water would be a vast undertaking, certainly beyond the scope of this paper. It would need to take account of salt as well as fresh water. Richard Watts, in his study of water as both commodity and sign in French Caribbean literature, concludes that the sea is constitutive of the modern Caribbean imagination, but that the literature of the Antilles has mostly tended to ignore the role of fresh water in its approach to questions of place, space and belonging (Watts 2007). This is perhaps not so surprising when the region is so well endowed with salt water and so under-supplied with fresh water. But the distinction is difficult to sustain, when so many Caribbean countries rely so heavily on seawater as the raw material for the production of their drinking water. Antigua depends upon desalination for 60–70% of its water supply; and on Barbuda every hotel has its own desalination plant. (‘Water Resources Assessment’). To a greater or lesser degree, Barbados, Trinidad, Anguilla, the British Virgin Islands and Cuba all rely on desalination processes which, sooner or later, will prove unsustainable: they are high in energy consumption as well as carbon emissions. For large corporations based in Europe and North America the economies of scale are such that it is less expensive to import and ‘purify’ Amazon freshwater than to desalinate locally sourced saltwater. For Caribbean nations, however, it seems that the more water-stressed the nations become the more likely they are to resort to desalination. The Caribbean Water Association, which is the umbrella organisation for water production and distribution companies across the region, notes a particular concern with this increasing reliance on desalination.

The US Defense Intelligence Agency report on global water security released this year predicts that, in the coming years of world water scarcity, some nations will be destabilised by their lack of water, while others will wield water as a make-or-break weapon (‘US Intelligence Report’ online). Writers of genre fiction have been quick to provide us with dystopian visions of a world where access to water is no longer a human right.3 Take The Water Thief (2012), by Nicholas Soutter, for instance, a near-future speculative fiction set in a post-apocalyptic American wasteland, where governments are extinct and corporations have evolved and taken over. The world is divided into sectors, with only corporate identities permitted water rights: people known as colleagues, whose value lies solely in what they are able to contribute to production. A person with no rights, stealing water from a tank, is easily branded as a seditionist, nostalgic for the long disqualified pagan heresy of human rights and the social contract. The Water Thief provides a rebuttal to Ayn Rand’s objectivist vision of unregulated capitalism as the ideal moral system for a human society dedicated to the virtues of selfishness. The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund have been instrumental in driving privatisation of water utilities as a corollary of free trade agreements with developing nations, where the public sector often finds itself overwhelmed by the scale of the problems involved.4 The world of The Water Thief is only the
logical extension of this controlling free-market theology, where everything is commodified, and everything is for sale, including water.

The ‘first big water war of the 21st century’ (Transnational Institute np) took place in the poorest country in South America, Bolivia, in the year 2000, following the US company Bechtel’s successful take-over of the city of Cochobamba’s water supply. Each side at the time accused the other of piracy: on one side, the corporate subject, the transnational privatiser, or if you like privateer — that is, a state-sponsored pirate — because that kind of piracy only proceeds with government approval, and most often through a formal public-private partnership; on the other side, the subaltern, whose act of piracy in the Bolivian circumstance may be nothing more than collecting rainwater in a tank.

The 2010 Spanish film, Even the Rain (También la lluvia), directed by Icíar Bollaín, clearly identifies the Bolivian water war as a repeat invasion of the Americas. Its title refers to the fact that, in Bolivia, ‘even the rain had been privatized’, the Bolivian people being banned from collecting rainwater so that they would have to buy from the company, a US company based in the Cayman Islands. On one level, the film is self-consciously a film about first-world filmmaking in the third and fourth worlds. Inspired by the first chapter of Howard Zinn’s historical work, A People’s History of the United States (2005), it depicts a Spanish film crew that has come to Bolivia to shoot a film about Columbus’s arrival on Hispaniola because labour in Bolivia is supposedly cheaper than it is in Haiti or the Dominican Republic. The director of this film-within-the-film expresses some embarrassment to be shooting the invasion in a completely land-locked country, twenty thousand feet above sea level, to which his producer responds: ‘From the Andes to the Pandes’ Who gives a fuck? They’re Indians — that’s what you bloody wanted’. For the outer film, however, the falsification of the Caribbean is significant. It is an aspect of what Joseph Vogel and his team at University of Puerto Rico calls geopiracy (Vogel 2008). The economic idea here is that the false attribution of location in a film potentially causes the people of the real location real harm. Its theoretical underpinning comes from Alfred North Whitehead, who identifies the ‘sin of economics’ (Georgescu-Roegen 320) as ‘the fallacy of misplaced concreteness’ that is, ‘neglecting the degree of abstraction involved when an actual entity is considered merely so far as it exemplifies certain categories of thought’ (Whitehead 11). Thus, hypothetically speaking, a film set in the Caribbean but filmed in Bolivia might deprive the Caribbean location of income, not only in the first instance with the filming itself but also subsequently with the influx of tourism that might result from box office sales influencing the choice of holiday destinations.

The Geopiracy Project at the University of Puerto Rico — an interdisciplinary and international endeavour under the auspices of the International Centre for Trade and Sustainable Development in Switzerland — aims to cull films from the Internet Movie Database (IMDb) and systematise them according to a typology of
false attributions of location in the visual arts (Vogel & Hocking np). Vogel gives the example of *The Curse of the Black Pearl*, the first of *Pirates of the Caribbean* movies, filmed on location in Dominica but adopting fictitious names like the Isla de Muerta. The IMDb breaks down the data on admissions by individual countries — the US box office, for example for *The Curse of the Black Pearl* was $305 million. Vogel tells us that by toggling between the IMDb webpage and the economic data available on the World Tourism Organization website, ‘one can begin to specify a model of tourist destinations chosen by country of origin with a time series analysis run on the International Tourist Arrivals and the International Tourist Receipts before and after the international release of the film’ (Vogel et al, 395). The difficult question then is: ‘how much tourism would have been generated had there been faithful attribution of location (Dominica) rather than use of fictitious names?’ (Vogel et al, 395). One could disaggregate the Arrivals and Receipts data by the countries listed in the IMDb link for Pirates (for example, Argentina, Brazil, France, Germany, Italy, The Netherlands, Norway, Spain, and the United States) and then test the before and after visits with the variable ‘geographic literacy’ for each of the nine countries listed. Then, from the variance in geographic literacy, one could infer how much more tourism would have been generated from faithful attribution.

Geopiracy, in these terms, is a form of epistemic violence committed against the people who belong to the place misrepresented, simultaneously producing a kind of geographical illiteracy in viewers, which can lead to further economic exploitation. The film, *Even the Rain (También la lluvia)*, makes this connection between geopiracy and violence directly, by having the fictional film producer of false representations underpay his indigenous actors for a repeat performance of their real history as brutally colonised subjects of European imperialism. What he does not bank on, however, is the outbreak of the Bolivian water war, which interrupts his shooting schedule and threatens to blow the budget out of the water. As the riot encroaches upon the local government reception for the film crew, the governor confesses his embarrassment with the backwardness of his people, their insistence on playing the victim in the face of modernity. The film director points out to the governor that people on the average income of two dollars a day cannot afford a 300% hike in their water bill. To which the governor responds: ‘Funny, that’s what I heard you were paying the extras’.

Who are the real pirates? Columbus and the Europeans, who send the locals to the river to collect gold rather than water, quite literally measuring their productivity in a drinking cup, and then making them slaves? Is it the IMF and The World Bank, commodifying and driving up water prices in developing countries by lending money for privatisation schemes that ultimately rob them of their rights. Or is it the film industry, and by implication, all those other Western media that trade even more obviously in the business of false representations of place and person?
In Bollain’s film, *Even the Rain*, the contrast between water regimes is stark: an Indian family takes water from a barrel; their visitor, the actor who plays the indigenous lead, drinks from a plastic bottle. Later, as blood spills in the streets, redemption is coded symbolically through water: the Spanish actor who plays Columbus, a drunk and a cynic to this point, defies and confuses the troops by offering his water bottle to a fallen Indian in the street. At that moment water becomes the redemptive sign of a redistributed wealth. The final scene of the film sees the producer in a taxi heading for the airport through the burnt-out cityscape of the water wars, unwrapping a parting gift from the lead Indian actor, the water activist: the producer — a man who has only ever seen value in what he produces — unfolds the string, cracks the box open, and lying inside, wrapped in straw, as if it were precious wine, he sees a bottle of clear bright liquid. What looked like wine is really something much more precious — water without berries.

If it were wine it would be the sign of blood, in accordance with the theology that underwrote the first colonisation of the Americas. But it is not wine; it is water. I read that reversal — of wine and water — as an act of ‘reverse transubstantiation’, which has a particular origin in the narrative arts of the Caribbean, as Wilson Harris has demonstrated over and over, in what he calls ‘reversible fiction’: where characters are not fixed in position, but exist in terms of mutuality, where they elude narrative control, or mastery. The last word the producer speaks, holding the bottle up to the light as we witness his face reflected in the Indian taxi driver’s mirror, as if it were our own, is a word in the local language — *yaku* — the indigenous word for water. Thus the film ends with a recognition of water rights, which at the same time signals a rejection of the colonising culture of narcissism, where water functions as a reflection and serves to designate the problematic of self and other. In this way, the film offers a powerful counter-discourse to the economic fundamentalism of the World Bank.

John Mihevc argues in *The Market Tells Them So* (1996) that the ‘structural adjustment agenda’ of the World Bank is not just an economic strategy but a religious vision, based on unquestioning faith in development and free trade. The discourse of water privatisation operates as a colonialist discourse always has, by seeking to naturalise the order of its own assumptions and so de-legitimise all opposing voices, the voices of the water-justice groundswell, like those of the National Youth council (NYC) in St Lucia; or of the labour alliance of public corporations in Puerto Rico; or the voices of liberationist theology in the time of Arastide’s presidency of Haiti; the voices of water democracy as opposed to water dictatorship, and of the community rather than the corporation.

Hydro-piracy is a form of geo-piracy, working on two levels, one empirical the other representational. Coca Cola decides to bottle and sell a new flavour of water in Mexico, Angola and Morocco and call it ‘Jamaica’. The water in that bottle, to which Jamaicans have no access and from which they can expect no profit, robs them of their name, place and person. This re-presentation works by re-branding
Jamaica, America’s original land of forest and waters, paradoxically confirming the essential nature of the commodity as a privilege for which one must pay to access. What flows from this is money, not water, from the Global South to North, while in rural Jamaica less than 50 per cent of the rural areas had access to quality potable water. In Clarendon, one of Jamaica’s most heavily populated parishes, even those who pay for connection to the public supply find water unavailable half the time (Jamaican Information Service). Yet the State’s idea of piracy is two women in Rocky Settlement, disconnected from the grid for payments in arrears that they almost certainly could not afford, who decide at length to reconnect without official sanction.

False representation, as we see in George Lamming’s *Water With Berries*, is ‘an unholy conspiracy’ (44) — the conspiracy of capitalism — that robs a person of his or her identity, forces him underground, and, when he fights back, calls him a terrorist, or a pirate. It forces resistance into secret gatherings in the shadow-world of Plato’s Cave, where geography and justice are disconnected from reality.

The State names off-the-grid citizens who seek to circumvent or counter-act the exploitation of their local water resources for profit as ‘thieves’ or ‘pirates’. Corporate hydro-colonialists, like earlier generations of pirates, focus their activities on a quest for ‘treasure’ — in this case, ‘blue gold’. The resistance, preferring to think of these same resources as their rightful heritage, reassigns the label: it is the corporate capitalist who is the pirate, in ‘unholy’ alliance with the State. The twenty-first-century ‘water scramble’ for Africa’s hydrological systems inevitably recalls the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century land ‘Scramble for Africa’. Independent African states, sponsoring this piracy, legitimate it in a way similar to the English crown in its issuing of letters of marque to license the piratical activities of seventeenth-century ‘privateers’ and buccaneers in the Caribbean. But today’s territorial acquisitions are really about water (‘buried treasure’) rather than land. Henk Hobbelink, Co-ordinator of the international NGO, GRAIN, which assists local communities to maintain or regain control of their food systems, warns: ‘If these land grabs are allowed to continue, Africa is heading for a hydrological suicide’ (qtd in Tran online). Something similar might be predicted for the Caribbean and Latin America if the drive towards water privatization in the region continues. Water is at the core of the Caribbean imaginary, a key source of ideas and images in constant flow through the literature and visual arts, which not only connects and shapes the region but also underpins its most successful industry: tourism. The literary imaginings of Caribbean water and desertification suggest both utopian and dystopian potentialities, with a clear indication of what is at risk.

NOTES

1. ‘In the Serra da Mantiqueira region of Brazil, home to the “circuit of waters” park whose groundwater has a high mineral content and medicinal properties, over-pumping has
resulted in depletion and long-term damage. In 2001, residents investigating changes in the taste of the water and the complete dry-out of one of the springs discovered that Nestlé/Perrier was pumping huge amounts of water in the park from a well 150 meters deep. The water was then demineralized and transformed into table water for the “Pure Life” brand (‘Corporate Crimes: Illegal Extraction of Groundwater’ online).

2 The Orinoco and the Amazon river-systems are linked. One arm of the Orinoco — the Casiquiare — flows into the Rio Negro, an affluent of the Amazon. The discharge of the Orinoco River contains organic sediments that have been found to stimulate the growth of plankton far out into the Caribbean (Müller-Karger et al, 1989). Satellite imagery of the Caribbean Sea reveals spatial patterns of coloured water mass associated with the discharges of the Amazon and Orinoco Rivers, with patches of low salinity occurring as far as 2000 km away from the mouths of these rivers (Chuanmin Hu et al, 2004).

3 On 27 November 2002 the United Nations recognised water as a human right rather than an economic good, a commodity simply to be bought and sold. A number of countries subsequently sought to define the nature of this right in law. But the implementation of the right to water has been fraught with difficulty, (Bluemel) so that in 2010 the UN moved to enshrine the principle explicitly within international human rights law. Yet billions of people still lack access to clean drinking water and commodification proceeds apace.

4 In 2005, the government of St Lucia arranged a loan of $8 million from the World Bank to improve its public water and sewerage utilities in preparation for auctioning them off to private investors. When the bidding opened in December 2008, there were three offers, from three of the biggest global water corporations, two based in France, and the third in the UK. The process stalled and was eventually terminated in March 2009. (Had it proceeded, the government would have lost 80% of its financial interest in local water utilities (Long online). After the 2010 drought, however, the public utility was declared insolvent; and earlier this year a local cable TV news poll found that 61% of voters were in favour of the government re-opening the debate on privatisation.

5 For further discussion of ‘reversible fiction’, see McDougall, ‘Walter Roth, Wilson Harris and a Caribbean/Postcolonial Theory of Modernism’, and Vera M. Kutzinski, Vera ‘Realism and Reversibility in Wilson Harris’s Carnival’.

6 In Western cultures, water functions symbolically as a locus for reflection on identity, with the Narcissus myth serving as the primal scene of tragic distinction between self and other (see Spivak 1993).

7 Caribbean water utilities have some of the highest levels of unaccounted-for water in the world. Economists estimate the optimum level of unaccounted-for water in a well-managed urban utility should be no more than 20 per cent. Estimates of unaccounted water in Cuba and St. Lucia are as high as 40%. In St. Lucia, the public utility company is unable to account for 40%. In Trinidad and Tobago, the figure is closer to 50%, and in some areas of Jamaica as high as 70% (Progress in the Privatization of Water-Related Public Services).

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Even the Rain (Tambiéen la lluvia) 2010, dir. Icíar Bollaín.


Multi-media careers in the wider global entertainment market of the United States, Europe and Britain were commonly sustained by Australian-born performers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Such performers indicate something of the international reach of mobile actorly careers in the modern period (Kelly; Dixon & Kelly). Validation through overseas success is also a persistent model of the Australian performer. What then is an ‘Australian’ performer, in an enterprise in which ethnicities and regional identifications are mobile and frequently claimed for interested professional or social purposes? Opportunities and talent, birth, beauty, gender, regional or class identifications, whether assumed, avowed or disavowed — these are the categories which actors must manage as part of their careers and manipulate as elements of their stage personae.

In the year 1892 two interesting actors both made their show business debuts. The first was the daughter of the New South Wales rural squattocracy, an Australian-born beauty who in her youth became a national heroine. She is remembered now, if at all, as a minor character in a classic colonial novel. Late in her life, this woman performed her own early heroic deeds on the popular stage in a melodramatic play written especially for her, which played in second-rank companies in Australia. Despite this, she was in her own way an Australian international celebrity. She died in the Prince Alfred Hospital in Sydney on 7th December 1898, aged 57, still ‘a beautiful old lady, with fine white hair’ (Otago Witness, 11 March 1897 39). The other actor is the tall and handsome younger son of New South Wales rural gentry, born in 1875 into a family of four boys. Although destined for the law, at the age of seventeen he instead joined a ramshackle touring theatre company in Victoria. After assiduous work in Australia and a steady rise in J.C. Williamson companies, he left Australia to make his West End debut in 1902, and within a few years he had convincingly ‘made it’ in London. After a considerable career as a Broadway leading man, he died in 1929 in the USA aged 54. These two actors who went from bushrangers to Broadway are Caroline Keightley, born Caroline Rotton, daughter of Henry Rotton, pastoralist and MLA for Bathurst, and her youngest son Cyril Keightley.

Both mother and son were blessed with natural good looks which complemented their high social caste. At the time of the tall and fair Caroline Rotton’s marriage to the equally tall and good-looking Henry McCrummin Keightley, a pastoralist and police magistrate, they were considered the handsomest couple in the country.
(The Era, 20 February 1899). They took up pastoral holdings at Dunn’s Plains, where on Saturday 24th October 1863, the bushranger Ben Hall and his associates
Mickey Burke, John Vane, Johnny Gilbert and John O’Meally attacked their station. Keightley shot Burke in the stomach, and Burke then killed himself rather than be captured. But upon Caroline’s appeal Hall, who though a professional bushranger was not essentially violent, prevented Vane from shooting Keightley in revenge. The ensuing events became entangled in later social histories by conflicting popular memories (for example, ‘Mrs Keightley and the Hall Gang’), but the essential aspects are clear. Caroline persuaded the intruders that she was able to get cash at short notice. With her husband left as hostage she rode the fifty miles to Bathurst accompanied by her neighbour, Dr Pechey, ousting her father from bed early on the Sunday morning. The canny Henry Rotton marked the banknotes of the £500 ransom, Caroline returned with it to her homestead, and Hall and associates departed leaving the couple unharmed. Eighteen months later Ben Hall was himself gunned down, thus founding his own forms of mythic circulation, while Caroline’s courage and riding ability would spread her fame (if not her name) world-wide via fiction, film and other forms of adaptive exchange. The Gulgong police magistrate, one Thomas Alexander Browne, fictionalised the deeds of ‘Mrs Knightley’ in Robbery Under Arms, his 1882 tale of bushranging and gold written under the pen-name Rolf Boldrewood (Lea-Searlett, McPhereson, Moore, Penzig). A decade after its first serialised appearance in the Sydney Mail, Caroline it seems decided to take charge of her own story, seeking to capitalise upon it in a dramatic version.

Reports suggest that in the early 1890s she commenced her theatrical training in Tasmania with the larger-than-life provincial melodramatist, Dan Barry (Launceston Examiner, 14 May, 1892 7). On the 10th February 1892 the play Bail Up by Lester Bellingham and Arthur Wranghan premiered at Bathurst’s Victoria Theatre. Her co-stars for the two performances were experienced Australian actors, with George Ireland as Henry Keightley and Alfred Boothman as the Ben Hall character ‘Captain Burke’, a vengeful black-hearted scoundrel. Caroline herself, as performer, repeated onstage her epic horseback ride (‘Bail Up’). This city may seem suitable for such a local and topical sensation, but rural memories are long. The Bathurst audience ‘didn’t quite like to see the lady making capital out of an event which cost one man his life and very nearly cost the late husband his’ (Otago Witness, 10 March 1892 36). The operative word in this judgement is ‘lady’; Caroline is positioned as a wayward daughter of the squattocracy rather than as a performer. The troupe then took their play to Albury where Browne himself, who had clearly benefited most from his own fictionalising of the Keightley story, was the town’s Police Commissioner, but the play did little better.

By August of 1892 Caroline was in Brisbane performing Bail Up at the Gaiety with the Wilson Forbes Company. According to the Brisbane Courier’s theatre advertisements (20 & 22 August 1892), she rode ‘a thoroughbred lent by Mr Fenwick’ to cheers from an audience packed to the doors, ‘notwithstanding bad times and strong opposition’. The theatrical ‘opposition’ was in fact considerable:
Robert Courtneidge and London’s Gaiety Burlesque Company playing *Faust Up to Date* in the Opera House. The ‘bad times’ were the onset of the 1890s depression, and theatrical business was precarious everywhere. In August Keightley also took up the offensive against her own writers, Bellingham and Wranghan. These two were now in London giving word of a proposed production of *Bail Up* to star Keightley herself in ‘her’ role. She posted correspondence dated from Sydney on 13th July in the London theatrical trade paper the *Era* (27 August 1892) declaring ‘I am at present touring the colonies with this play’ and anyone else claiming to be the real Caroline is ‘a fraud’, and would be sued by her London solicitor. The Forbes company took their show to the Theatre Royal in Rockhampton commencing 13th September, and again it was Caroline herself rather than the production that was seen as the attraction (*Morning Bulletin*, 14 September 1892 6). Next month saw them in Charters Towers, and in mid-1893 she continued to perform her role, now with the J.S. Lyle company, in such centres as Bendigo, Horsham and Mt Gambier.

Why did the aristocratic Caroline take to the stage in the popular and unruly genre of bushranger drama? Her father Henry Rotton had died in 1881, followed in 1887 by her husband ‘Harry’ Keightley so it is possible that the widowed Caroline’s finances did not remain healthy during the 1890s economic plunge. A further clue might lie in her writers’ creation of a bad Ben Hall character: an example of a bushranger as villain in a populist genre that by then was equally apt to cast outlaw figures as chivalrous, or at most ambiguous, heroes. Yet even framed in production favouring a gentry perspective, in the writing of which she probably had a big say, Caroline was nonetheless exhibiting herself in a genre that her law-enforcing and property-owning caste despised and deplored. Such
unrespectable drama was at best deemed injurious to the maintenance of good order; at worst, it verged on the seditious.

The ‘colonial heroine’ whom most Australian audiences encountered is exemplified by Aileen Marston in the play *Robbery Under Arms*, which was dramatised by Alfred Dampier and Garnet Walch. It premiered in Melbourne in 1890 and enjoyed lengthy popularity on stage and film. But as Richard Fotheringham has shown in his edition of this play, this version was far more resonant of the recent exploits of the Kelly gang, and the horse-riding and warm-hearted Australian heroine was by then a stock character with few points of contact with the aristocratic colonial equestrian ‘Kate’ Keightley of three decades ago. This urban, democratic and Irish-inflected form of the bush melodrama constructed heroines who could be identified as proletarian. Given her social sympathies and traumatic experience, Caroline would be little likely to entertain R.B. Walker’s assertion that ‘to some extent bushranging was an act of protest against social wrongs and governmental oppression’ (13). Yet, a strong-minded and unconventional woman of some spirit, Caroline Keightley took an atypical path for one of her background: she became an ‘actress’ who performed to raucous popular audiences. Through *Bail Up* Caroline both performed herself as colonial heroine, and sought to take ownership of her own legend.

Few such hindrances of gender expectations confined Cyril, her equally tall, handsome and fair son. His own rural barnstorming, possibly in the rambunctious Dan Barry companies, commenced in 1892, the same year that his mother played in *Bail Up* (*Otago Witness*, 22 July 1908 69). While Keightley himself claimed that his mother Caroline had herself played ‘for some years’ with George Rignold (*Evening Post*, 14 June 1913 12), this has not been confirmed, though it is possible that, mindful of family sentiment, Caroline used a stage name. By 1895 Cyril was himself in Rignold’s company in Sydney playing in Drury Lane-type melodramas, where good looks and well-bred ease of person and manner were professional assets. With the Brough-Boucicault company’s repertoire of modern society comedies, these actorly strengths were further developed. While he acted as support for distinguished visitors such as the 1896 tour of Kyrle Bellew and Cora Brown-Potter, and Reuben Fax and Edith Crane in *Trilby*, the logic of casting to physical type implies that an actor of Keightley’s physique and natural talent was clearly suitable to play leading men. His work was praised and his acting responsibilities became more important. By 1897 he was touring Australia and New Zealand in support and character roles for the Julius Knight company, and it was during this tour that his mother Caroline died. But could he make the transition from good support to leading roles, and if so, would it be in Australia or elsewhere? A New Zealand comment on his work with Bellew-Brown pinpoints his industrial predicament: leading actors were made abroad. ‘It seems somewhat strange that so capable a young actor as Mr Cyril Keightley is kept so much in the background… Perhaps, Mr Bellew has a shrewd notion that his own glory might
be eclipsed if Mr Keightley were pushed a little more prominently to the front’ (Observer [Wellington], 23 January 1897 9).

In 1901 Keightley and his wife the South Australian actor Ethel Dane left Australia and toured South Africa in the company of the American star, Nance O’Neil. This imposing tragedienne, Australia’s first Hedda Gabler, was strikingly tall, so she probably looked out for even taller men to be her co-stars — the logic of casting to gendered type again. O’Neil’s next date after Egypt was the ultimate goal of England, where Cyril made his West End premiere supporting her in Sudermann’s Magda. The Keightleys then put their class contacts to work, staying in wealthy rural Surrey with his uncle, the Reverend George Keightley, and chatting up such leading managers as Charles Wyndham and Henry Irving (Otago Witness, 10 September 1892 56; 1 October 1902 56). By 1903 the ‘tall, broad-shouldered handsome young Australian’ had joined Frank Benson’s touring Shakespeare company, thus getting the kind of experience in major classic roles which came too seldom in Australia. He made an immediate sensation as the lead in the touring Benson version of Stephen Phillips’ poetic drama Paolo and Francesca, and in April 1903 Benson showcased his star in London (Star [Canterbury], 9 February 1903 1; Evening Post [Wellington], 21 March 1903 11; Otago Witness, 15 April 1903 56). Keightley then tried provincial management for himself and Ethel, performing Shakespeare and period comedy such as She Stoops to Conquer, yet he turned down an offer from H.B. Irving (the son of the late Sir Henry) to tour America as a replacement for the
murdered matinee idol William Terriss (*Evening Post*, 11 November 1905 13; 13 October 1906 13). Keightley was not about to go backwards now. When he finally arrived in America, it would be as a West End star.

An imperial Briton by caste and family heritage, Keightley exhibited little sentiment for regional partisanship. In 1906 he declared in a London interview:

> Australia is all very well in its way, but is not to be compared with the old world in light, learning, and culture. In fact, he admits, that he is himself an incomparably better actor than he was when he left his native land, owing to the superior training of the higher standard in London.

This contrasts with the comments in the same article of his fellow Australian-born actor Arthur Greenaway, then also working in Britain:

> The diversity of performances, the frequent changes of plays, and the exacting nature of Australian audiences … gives the actor experience he has no opportunity of gaining in bigger centres; while, as for walks of life outside acting, the Australian more than holds his own everywhere. ‘The Australian is the world’s handy man,’ concludes Mr. Greenaway; ‘wherever you go, in any part of the earth, you will find some Australian or other occupying a big position, and directing some great enterprise.’

(*Evening Post*, 1 December 1906 11)

In 1908 Keightley was at last ready for a significant American season. He was selected by the major impresario Charles Frohman to co-star on Broadway with Billie Burke, the celebrated and fascinating Edwardian musical comedy star. Their vehicle was a French comedy called *Love Watches*. Burke recalls sighting Keightley during this run standing in his dressing room in his underpants, with a top hat crammed over his head in order to straighten his curling hair: ‘all actors are a little mad’, is her conclusion (74–75). Many Australians were doing well in America at the time in theatre and cinema, and by now Keightley was dividing his time between the West End and Broadway. He performed major roles in Benson’s Shakespeare prominent season at His Majesty’s in 1910, and at Drury Lane in 1909 and 1910 he played the sexy villain Sartorys in the autumn melodrama, *The Whip*, set in the world of high society and horses. This kind of work flags an actor’s arrival.

Until 1915 he crossed the Atlantic patrolled by U-boats to appear in both theatrical centres, but after 1917 his main work was on Broadway in modern comedies and drama. Though Broadway hosted a large expatriate British acting colony, New York does seem a strange wartime location for a patriotic son of Empire. Despite his extensive work with Benson, he performed in Shakespeare only once in the USA, playing Cassius to the Brutus of Tyrone Power in a 1918 *Julius Caesar*. The gravel-voiced South Australian, O.P. Heggie, later prominent in cinema character roles, was his occasional colleague, (for example, in *The New Sin* at Wallack’s Theatre in 1912.) Always known publicly as an Australian actor, Keightley once actually performed an Australian character. *Just Beyond*, Reginald Goode’s ‘drama of the Australian bush’ played in New York in December 1925
Caroline and Cyril Keightley


Unlike his colleagues O.P. Heggie or the comedienne Bille Burke (later Glinda the Good Witch in The Wizard of Oz), Keightley did not live into the era of sound films. He made only one movie in Manhattan in 1915, The Spendthrift was set in the worlds of high society and fashion models, but has not survived. Hollywood was located across a continent, and Keightley was now pre-eminently a denizen of the east coast theatrical hub. Although his early training in tough Australian touring conditions laid the foundation of his career (as Arthur Greenaway correctly asserts), Keightley’s physique, fine appearance and his social capital both enabled and shaped his professional life. Cyril Keightley was a distinguished upper-middle class gentleman and an upper middle-rank player. In America however he graduated from sensational society melodrama to sustained work in the mostly realist modern repertoire: the upmarket popular fare catered for today in quality film and television drama. This makes an interesting contrast to Caroline’s brief career in provincial shoot’em-up bushranger melodrama.

It is clear that Australian actors have always been mobile, versatile, and prepared to follow the work in any region, country or genre. The class and gendered aspect of public careers is evident in the contrasted theatrical opportunities of the Keightleys, mother and son, who both in their differing modes became identified or re-constructed as mythic types of ‘Australian’ figures within the international systems of cultural and symbolic exchange.

NOTES

1 Ethel Dane came from Adelaide and was reportedly Ethel Spiller. Her great London hit was The Glad Eye which ran in London for two years and which she played in Australia 1914–15. In 1925 they were divorced. He married actress Isabel Wright in January of the year of his death; Ethel married American film actor Louis Wolheim in New York in, reportedly, 1923 (Milestones online).

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*Morning Bulletin* (Rockhampton), 1892, 14 September, p. 6.

Lai Hin woke to a chilly damp in the room. The wintry air had seeped through the door and the papers pasted over the windows, and he lay there, listening to the soft breathing of his mother, reluctant to stir and to leave the warmth of his bed cover. This December morning his left leg was aching, as it did in cold weather. It was always the shorter leg that hurt, as if it ached to be matched with his normal right leg. He said aloud to himself: ‘It has to be today; or I will lose her forever’, as though she was ever his, and at the sound of his voice, his mother stirred and asked if tea had been made already.

He forced himself to get out of bed, pad across the stove, and started the fire going, put on the blackened kettle with water in it from the night before. The heat radiated through the room and dispelled some of the cold and soon the kettle was whistling. He made tea and then started to re-heat the rice porridge from the day before, with its slices of salted egg and preserved mustard. This would do till the late afternoon.

He had first met her six months earlier when she came to his stall in the village with a letter for him to read. Before that, though, he’d always seen her outside of the school, waiting to escort her younger brothers home but had never had the nerve to approach her because he felt that no girl would be interested in talking to a cripple. But he had watched her from afar, attracted by her slender body, her neatly coiled jet black hair, held back with a pin, her slim oval face, delicate complexion and curving lips. His heart had ached with jealousy and loss when he heard that she was to be married at 16 to one of his own class mates, a handsome athlete, Yu Mui. And now here she was in front of him, six months pregnant with their first child and her husband far away in a foreign land, somewhere named Jamaica, a word that he could hardly pronounce.

Yu Mui had gone off with fifteen others from the village to try and make a better life abroad because the Kwangtung region was in the seventh year of drought, the harvests had been terrible and hunger and deprivation widespread. He, himself, had thought he would try his luck but one look at his deformed leg made the recruiters reject him and so he was now still in the village with his widowed mother.

He had always been good at school, and had been favoured by the old man who was the instructor in calligraphy and who recognised that the young student had a rare talent: he was passionate about the art of calligraphy, had a good eye, a rapid grasp of concepts and drew with speed and dexterity. He would spend hours practising drawing an ideogram in the framed sand box till he thought it
was perfectly captured in the sand, clearly delineated, with every subtle curve, every flourish, the sweep of the lower parts and the arch of the upper parts of the ideogram held in suspension in the normally shifting sand.

As he demonstrated his mastery, he was soon allowed to practise on paper and given a brush and a jug of black ink. This was a signal honour and his old instructor was happy to provide what he could. For Lai Hin calligraphy was a sensuous pleasure which took the place of being on the playing field or being involved with sports. Because he limped, he was never chosen for any team and was scoffed at by the other boys. So he spent more and more time practising his calligraphy because he was good at it and it gave him a sense of self worth.

Touching a new sheet of paper was a thrilling sensation and he loved the different textures, from the fragile, almost transparent to the heavy, denser pieces. But what he loved best were the thick vellum sheets that had a distinct aroma, with a creamy white colour and tiny flecks showing their origin of cloth and wood pulp.

His teacher would store these in the cupboard which he kept locked because that quality paper was very expensive and difficult to come by. Lai Hin had to settle most times for the cheap newsprint with its challenges. It was absorbent and blotted easily, sucking up the ink as soon as he touched the brush to paper. He made a lot of this challenge, dipping the brush with the right amount of ink, holding it at the right angle to begin the first downward stroke and exerting the right degree of pressure that the line ran true, and then lifting the brush at just the right time so that the outline was sharp and clear and yet flowing with life and energy. In this way he completed page after page of calligraphic figures that were positioned exactly, that left the right amount of margins and pleased the eye with the distribution of space and line thereby achieving the perfect balance of movement and stasis.

In his final year, he was at the top of the class and was awarded a banner-sized piece of the precious vellum paper to transcribe a poem from the Tang dynasty. His work reflected the movement of the poem in the sweep and curve of the calligraphic figures, and ensured that the emotion of the poem was visible in every arch and curve so that the visual became part of the meaning of the poem. His teacher was so delighted that the finished product was hung at the entrance to the school.

But that would earn him no money so it was his teacher who suggested that he offer his services to the village as a letter writer because so many people in his village as well as in the neighbouring villages had a need for someone to read and write for them. Lai Hin welcomed the idea since he could not find work where his bad leg was not a hindrance, and this gave him a chance to practise his art and also be paid for it.

He was given a permit from the village elders to set up as a letter writer in a small stall on the main road. Business was slow at first but started to pick up because the ten men from the village who had gone overseas to find work and
make something of their lives had begun to send remittances home to China, with letters that needed to be read. There were others from neighbouring villages who brought letters for him to read and write responses.

To Lai Hin it brought a steady income but it was hack work. He had to write his replies on the cheapest of airmail letter forms. He had to concentrate on fitting as much on the page as his customers dictated so that his writing looked cramped, reduced to the purely functional, with no artistry or passion. Moreover, he had to do several rough drafts because his customers would say one thing and then immediately change their minds and he dared not put what they had to say directly on to the airletters because they were pre-stamped for mail overseas and were quite expensive.

So he had learned to condense what he was being told and then read back to the customers what he had written for them to amend, all this before darkness fell. Much of what he had to write was so dull and humdrum, without the emotion and feeling that he had experienced in the poetry. He wrote with speed and dispatch, just getting the job done.

But the day Mei Ling came to his stall stood out in his memory because he had yeardned for her for so long and now there she was right in front of him, needing his services, her black silky hair coiled in a bun on top of her head, with the faint perfume of apple blossom and her belly gently curving with her expected child. He was overcome with a passion for this girl who had come to him to read the letter from her husband.

When Lai Hin first read the letter, he was struck by something odd because Yu Mui addressed his young wife as ‘Dear Little Sister Mei Ling’ and signed off as ‘Your brother Yu Mui’. This made him wonder if all was well but the letter went on: ‘It hurts when we separated. Because our family is poor, we have to go to the ends of the earth to make money. Hope you will respect and be loyal to my parents on my behalf. I am always thinking about you. Hope you still like me? If you have time, please write me letters. I am hoping that you can get along with my brother’s wife and please avoid arguments. I am sure you will listen to me. I am sending you some money so share half with my parents. Talk to you later’.

Mei Ling stood there quietly, absorbing what had been read aloud to her, and saying nothing. Then she asked ‘Is that all?’ He hadn’t asked how she was doing and how she was coping with her pregnancy; and why was he taking his sister-in-law’s side? But she kept all this to herself though a flush spread to her cheeks so that Lai Hin noticed she seemed angry as she pursed her lips.

The reply she dictated was brief and almost abrupt because she was very conscious of the fact that she was having to filter her thoughts through a third party. She thanked Yu Mui for the money and said all was fine at home, making no reference to her sister-in-law. Times were still hard, and food short. She made no mention of her pregnancy but said she missed his company and wished she could be with him soon. There she ended, but Lai Hin then added another sentence
of his own to her dictated letter which he did not read to her. He had added: ‘Have you already forgotten that I am expecting our child in a few months or have you already found someone else to care for in Jamaica?’

Lai Hin could not get her image out of his mind and all he could think about was seeing her again. How had he dared to add something to the letter to her husband, without her knowledge or consent? Suppose she ever found out, what would happen. But he told himself she could never find out since she could not read. He dreamt about her and muttered in his sleep so much so that his mother asked what was bothering him. He must have said something in his sleep one night because the next morning she said to him, ‘Son, this can go nowhere. She is already married’.

Lai Hin saw Mei Ling a month later when she came with the second letter in which her absent husband still addressed her as ‘Dear Little Sister’ but was much more loving: ‘Even though we are now in two different places, my heart is still next to you! I have not written to you for quite a few days. You must be wondering about me and think that I am lacking in concern or love. In fact, I have been busy physically but not mentally. It is not that I have forgotten about you. Hope you will forgive me.

‘I have something that worries me. It is about your health. Listen little sister! You have to understand that your body is not that of a normal person. You are already 6 or 7 months pregnant. Whether you are working inside or outside the house, you have to be very careful. If you forget what I am telling you, you don’t love me.

‘You have to get along with my younger brother’s wife. Don’t quarrel over small matters. It is the fortune of the family if the in-laws can get along. Talk to you next time. Wish you peace.’

When Lai Hin read this letter aloud to Mei Ling, he carefully omitted to read out the paragraph in which Yu Mui expressed concern about her health so that she thought again that he was ignoring her pregnancy and irked by his repeated instruction that she was to get along with his brother’s wife.

There were no more letters for three months by the end of which Mei Ling had a baby girl. She had Lai Hin write this to Yu Mui and his response was one of disappointment: having a girl child was like having no child at all because she could never carry on the family name. He did not ask if the birth had been difficult or how she was managing. so Mei Ling was now convinced that he had not wanted this child, though his expression of caring and loving did not cease: ‘During this past year, there is never a day when my heart was not at home, especially at night during the dreaming hours when I met up with you’. But Mei Ling knew nothing of this because Lai Hin did not read out this sentence to her, and so she continued to feel aggrieved.

In her response to this latest letter, Mei Ling asked for more money to meet the expenses of the new child but Lai Hin added: ‘Are you using your money to care
for someone else?’ This provoked a heated response from Yu Mui which delighted Lai Hin because he had come to the conclusion that if somehow he could raise a barrier between husband and wife, Mei Ling would not go to Jamaica to join Yu Mui and he would then have his chance with her.

Yu Mui had now been away for a year and Mei Ling, desperately unhappy with his family, kept writing asking when he was going to send for her to join him. In response Yu Mui had written: ‘I feel sorry that I have left you behind and cause you such loneliness and hardship. It hurts me too. However, I have never for one moment forgotten about you. I am not trying to delay the immigration papers for you on purpose but there are reasons why I have delayed asking you to come over. I am waiting for father’s letter to tell me that you are a good lady and one who does not quarrel. At that point I will ask you to come over. However, if you don’t act properly and don’t respect my parents, or if you cause more trouble in the family, I will immediately change my mind and not send you the immigration papers’.

Hearing this, Mei Ling moderated her reply but Lai Hin continued to try and enrage Yu Mui by adding: ‘I still believe that you are having an affair with another woman and no longer care for me though you say you have not forgotten me’. Yu Mui’s rapid response was brief and to the point: ‘If you stick with your opinions and are not willing to change, you are forcing me to re-marry abroad. Having married you, I am not thinking of abandoning you half way. I am sure that you are not thinking of leaving me half way either’.

So this is why Lai Hin decided that this day he would write something so drastic that Yu Mui would definitely not send for Mei Ling, and the marriage would be over. He wrote: ‘Despite all you say, I don’t believe a word you say and even if you sent the immigration papers now, I am no longer interested in joining you in Jamaica because I know you no longer care for me or our child’. That should do it, he thought, while Mei Ling stood there not knowing.

When Mei Ling trudged home, nursing dark and bitter thoughts about how her life was going, she saw her mother-in-law at the entrance of the house, holding the packet of Yu Mui’s letters in her hand. ‘What have you been writing to Yu Mui?’ she asked angrily. Mei Ling’s equally furious reply was: ‘Who gave you the right to search my things? The letters are to me, not you or anyone else!’ Her mother-in-law answered: ‘He is MY son, and that gives me every right. Why are you accusing him of having an affair with another woman? I had to get Uncle Lam up the road to read that to me or I would never have known what you are up to. My son would never disrespect his wife by doing that, never!’ And she flung the packet to the ground and turned back into the house.

Mei Ling was totally stunned. She knew for sure that she had never written that and that Lai Hin must be the one responsible. The thought that he had been intervening in her letters stunned her into silence, but she determined that she had to confront him and find out for sure.

She headed straight back to the stall and at the top of her voice — she who was always so quiet and soft-spoken — vented her anger and demanded to know what
he had written without her authority, and why. She was enraged at the betrayal of trust, enraged that she had never been sent to school to learn how to read and write and so was forced to rely on another to know her business and intimate thoughts, and still angry that her mother-in-law had presumed to invade her privacy.

Lai Hin stood there, withered by her anger, and stunned at being exposed, feeling his whole world crumbling and his plans in the dust. Mei Ling pushed him away and overturned his table so that the bottle of ink spilled its contents, running over the sheet of good paper he had brought with him to compose a letter of love for her when he found free time. The ink spread with speed across the sheet of paper, finding its way in a bold curve, black and precise and looking very much to his horrified gaze, like the ideogram for ‘doom’.

One month later, the immigration papers arrived and Mei Ling was gone from his life.
I like to think of Helen as ‘the argumentative Indian’ that English propriety and Canadian restraint conspire against my realising in my own person. I use this phrase in its colloquial sense, with the raucous humour and deep affection that has characterised our friendship, to evoke the ready interlocutor, passionate opponent, and kindred spirit that she has been over the years. I happened, however, to be reading Amartya Sen’s *The Argumentative Indian: Writings on Indian Culture, History and Identity* (2005) and Pankaj Mishra’s *From the Ruins of Empire: The Revolt Against the West and the Remaking of Asia* (2012) while composing this essay and, documenting as they do pre-colonial, decolonised, and revolutionary sensibilities as constituents of a non-secular, deterritorialising, and non-Eurocentric discourse (anti-Eurocentric in Mishra’s argument), their writings enable me to articulate what I have hitherto only felt: the singularity and geopolitical tilt of Helen Tiffin’s ‘moral imagination’ (I hope to elaborate upon the pertinence of Sen’s discussion of Jonathan Glover’s phrase). In the essay that follows then, serendipity and idiosyncrasy shall be my guides.

If I may switch worlds and frames for a moment, this essay gives equal consideration to a different lens through which to produce a retrospective account of Helen Tiffin’s fashioning of the postcolonial: I choose as exemplary of current Anglo-American debate the reflections by Neil Lazarus and Timothy Brennan in *Race & Class* 53.1 (2011) and the essays featured in *New Literary History* 43 (2012). I deploy these ruminations and assertions to suggest why and how she has remained in the vanguard of the shifting terrain of privileged postcolonial angst despite being identified (an identification she would not resist but for different and, in my view, more compelling reasons) with an often dismissed, maligned, underrepresented or forgotten disciplinary formation, that of comparative Commonwealth literary studies. I should say that I have reminded myself of a substantial cross-section of Helen’s prolific critical contributions, but with a desire to engage with their spirit rather than with the letter of her persistent grappling with the geo-historical, cultural, institutional, methodological, economic, and environmental determinants of meaning and value, effect and action, and bodies and affects in her wide-ranging literary interpretations. The question that animates this lively and provocative corpus has always been ‘who or what counts and why/not?’ and ‘who is it whodunit?’ My aim, in a similar vein, is to indicate what still matters in her writings not only to draw ‘the roadmap for a future postcolonial studies’ (to borrow Brennan’s phrasing 107), but to insist that her lauded position
within what one might dub a postcolonial orthodoxy is a consequence of her heterodox and heretical persuasions. In tracing her significance within the field of postcolonial studies and commenting on the prescience of her interventions in it, I want to show all the doors she opened for later scholars.

In ‘Postcolonial Remains (2012)’, Robert Young writes,

settler colonialism has managed … to affiliate itself to the emancipatory narratives of anticolonial struggles — witness the widely circulated The Empire Writes Back of 1989, which assimilates all forms of colonial liberation into a single narrative of freedom from the imperial metropolis. What this passes over … is the extent to which the achievement of settler self-governance enforced the subjection of indigenous peoples and indeed increased the operation of oppressive colonial practices against them. In almost any settler colony one can think of, settler liberation from colonial rule was premised on indigenous dispossession. (25)

First, Young mistakes the premise of The Empire Writes Back for its conclusion: the shared experience of colonisation is its opening proposition that becomes progressively nuanced, multiplied, and even contradicted by the literary encounter with Africa, India, the Caribbean, Australia, and New Zealand. The combination of abrogation and appropriation the authors discern is not synonymous with ‘freedom’ and the possibility of a single narrative denied by the ambiguity and complexity of the strategies of representation and expression they analyse and the sheer geographical and cultural diversity of the regions from which these tactics emerge. Even the common linguistic inheritance of English becomes dispersed, diffused, dissipated and, paradoxically, enriched, by ‘englishes’. By the same token, the authors do not apologise for describing patterns of convergence and divergence in struggles for liberation, as Young describes them, and towards the decolonisation of the mind, as the authors of The Empire Writes Back would describe the literary texts they examine.

I do not wish to indulge in a conflict of interpretations of what is after all a ‘widely circulated’ (Young 25) work, although I cannot resist challenging Young’s surprisingly casual treatment of its argument. It is certainly true that the publication of The Empire Writes Back was a moment of affirmation, and the work itself a modest compendium of a postcolonial literary efflorescence; thus, its purpose was not identical to what Young rather melancholically asserts has always been postcolonialism’s concern: ‘to locate … what remains invisible, unseen, silent, or unspoken’ [because] postcolonialism has always been about the ongoing life of residues, living remains, lingering legacies’ (21). While the subjects of The Empire Writes Back certainly contend with imperial legacies, theirs is not a morbid pursuit, and their works signify voice and agency rather than silence and powerlessness. This distinction, however, is crucial, because the ‘shifting conceptualizations’ (Young 20) of postcolonial theory acquire manifestly different contour and depth when they adumbrate ‘the revolt against the West’ and the ‘remaking’ of subjugated peoples rather than the exclusions of Western dominance.
Pankaj Mishra’s splendid tale of the ‘extraordinary sequence of events and movements … that together decided the present shape of Asia’ (9) challenges the ‘dangerously misleading’ ‘assumptions of Western power’ from the vantage point ‘of the collective experiences and subjectivities of Asian peoples’ (8). Mishra appears to adopt Young’s method of locating ‘the hidden rhizomes of colonialism’s historical reach’ (21) when he elicits the fantasies ‘of national freedom, racial dignity, or simple vengefulness’ in Asian hearts and minds. Mishra’s subtle shift in emphasis from Western dominance to encroachment, and from Asia’s subjugation to sullen endurance, however, marks the journey to potency and self-respect rather than a sifting of the remains of Empire. Mishra evokes ‘colored pride’ (2) in the outcome of the Battle of Tsushima that transcends distinctions of class and race in his recording of ‘the recessional of the West’ (6), tracing the convergence ‘of lines of history in individual lives’ (10). He thus unashamedly produces ‘a single narrative’ of the emergence of Asia from the ruins of Empire. In light of Mishra’s achievement, the search for common ground among experiences of colonisation and aspirations to freedom and dignity in colonised peoples in The Empire Writes Back seems neither naïve nor tendentious.

Second, no intellectual with a modicum of historical knowledge and the semblance of a moral conscience, least of all the authors of The Empire Writes Back, would refute the intimate connection Young makes between settler liberation and indigenous dispossession; indeed, Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin characterise settlers as invaders throughout, develop the connotations of place and displacement, and focus on the construction of indigeneity within narrations of nation and settler identity rather than annex indigeneity to settler identity and culture. I want to mention, in particular, Helen Tiffin’s ‘Re recuperative Strategies in the Post-Colonial Novel’ (1987), in which she demonstrates Patrick White’s radical interrogation of the ‘order of Europe’ by ‘the ordered absence of the Aboriginal presence’ (39 [my emphasis]). She abandons a preoccupation with representations of the self or other to ‘[disrupt] the notion of pioneering and settlement … and [foreground] the conflict and annihilation of cultures and systems on which imperial expansion depends’ (41–42) without ignoring in the process the ‘radical fractur[ing]’ (42) of Ellen’s composure and inviolateness. I mention this still convincing reading of A Fringe of Leaves in order to describe the accoutrements of a post-colonial settler consciousness that refuses both the pleasures of capture and containment and the consolations of a ‘spiritual accommodation’ (43) between cultures entertaining, instead, the possibility of a deracination of imperial orders of intelligibility and value. This move on White’s part, and in Tiffin’s explanation of it, envisions a far more disturbing and ambiguous terrain for the interaction between cultures, while leaving both open to negotiation and reinvention. It must be said that the violence of invasion and annihilation cannot be glossed over in such post-colonial reordering of societies, but the significance of the necessity of relation born of the simultaneous recognition of equivalence and incommensurability cannot be gainsaid.
To my mind, the conclusions Tiffin draws from her extraordinary interpretation of ‘the psychic paradox that is the colonial legacy’ (123) in ‘Melanesian Cargo Cults in Tourmaline and Visitants’ (1981) resonate powerfully with Young’s call for the interrogation of ‘the ongoing life of residues, living remains, lingering legacies’ precisely because Stow represents the entangled, rather than assimilated, past and imagined future of ‘native’ and ‘visitant’. As Tiffin puts it, ‘the cults depend for an impossible restitution on the very forces which degraded them in the first place. The destruction and the hope of millennial rescue from it are irretrievably linked’ (123). Neither Stow nor Tiffin wants to deny the hope of regeneration and restitution to ‘native’ cultures, but they do seek to complicate the desire to resuscitate ‘integrity and wholeness’ (123), particularly when cultural boundaries become undecidable in the face of an inescapable and hostile present. Tiffin’s elaboration of ‘the curious nexus of power, shame, dislocation, promise and dissatisfaction that have been the legacy of colonial visitants everywhere’ (124) finds its intriguing corollary in the epilogue to Mishra’s From the Ruins of Empire.

In charting the journey of Asian intellectuals who, by virtue of their education and experience, were both marginal to their fellow countrymen and charged with the task of ‘articulat[ing] their deepest predicaments, needs, and aspirations’ (300), Mishra concludes that the revolt of Asia has resulted in ‘an ambiguous revenge’ because its agents were themselves ‘[p]ersonally powerless’ and ‘lurched between hope and despair, vigorous commitment and a sense of futility’ (300). The ‘psychic paradox’ for Asian elites has been the impossibility of reconciling themselves to ‘the dwindling of their civilisation through internal decay and Westernisation while regaining parity and dignity in the eyes of the white rulers of the world’ (300). The gap between ‘formal decolonisation and true sovereignty and dignity’ (303) recalls Partha Chatterjee’s foreboding about the derivative discourse of nationalism which has left ‘native’ communities with nothing left to imagine and with the baleful contemplation of an emergent Asia on the threshold of ‘repeat[ing], on an ominously larger scale, the West’s own tortured and tragic experience’ of modern ‘development’ (Mishra 307). Mishra’s deceptively triumphalist narrative of the remaking of Asia ends on a sobering note decrying the ‘bitter outcome of the universal triumph of Western modernity’ (310): what drives the new Asia is not a dream of the restitution of cultural integrity but the ‘pursuit of endless economic growth’ that ‘looks set to create reservoirs of nihilistic rage and disappointment among hundreds of millions of have-nots’ (310). In this regard, it is worth noting the depth and seriousness with which Helen’s numerous essays on V.S. Naipaul address his controversial obsession with mimicry as the fate of the B. Wordsworths of the world and his cynical treatment of wannabe revolutionaries and anti-colonial insurgents. Whatever one may make of the ire Naipaul provokes with relish among ‘believers’, the ironies of the colonial legacy are only too visible. Helen’s willingness to risk asserting the equal importance of disappointment and futility as constituents of the postcolonial predicament may
well be attributed to the sensitivity with which she illuminates the paradoxes of unaccommodated settler sensibility, but it is also a testament to her talent for complexity, to her desire to expose the full range of affects and dispositions, not all of them rousing or inspirational, in the writings back to Empire she has made peculiarly her own. If, as Mishra claims, the victories of the East are ‘truly Pyrrhic’ (310), Helen’s early endorsement of complementary strategies — Wilson Harris’s concept of ‘infinite rehearsal’ (1987 31) whereby the ‘rereading’ of a particular cultural archive … interrogates and revolutionises the terms of its production and continuing existence’ (1987 31) and work analogous to that of antigens that replicate and then expel intruders by altering their function and direction (1987 31) — keeps the hope of cultural regeneration, economic equality, and socio-political transformation alive in the wake of complicity and contamination.

In ‘What postcolonial theory doesn’t say’, Neil Lazarus, with his customary elegance and perspicacity, excoriates scholars in the field of postcolonial studies for their failure ‘to situate the historical projects of colonialism and imperialism in the determinant contexts of the inception, consolidation, and development of the modern world system’ or within ‘the enfolding historical dynamic … of capitalism in its global trajectory’ (7). This failure results in a tendency to ‘construe “colonialism” as an exercise solely in political domination, of the global projection of power’ (11 [emphasis in original]). The ‘specific regimes of accumulation, expropriation, and exploitation’ (10) that served to ‘[undermine and disrupt]’ the material, and ‘moral’ or symbolic’ (12) economies of local cultures and communities thus disappear from analysis despite literary efforts to ‘[identify] the social conditions of existence in the (post-)colonial world’ (12). Lazarus is concerned to close the gap between the ‘purviews of “literature” and “criticism”’ (14) because he ‘see[s] it as … testifying both to [the] abstraction [of postcolonial criticism] and to the tenuousness of its grasp of the central realities of life in the “postcolonial” world’ (15). To this end, Lazarus, following Fredric Jameson, demands ‘a new type of literary comparativism; namely the comparison … of the concrete situations from which such texts spring and to which they constitute distinct responses’ (14).

Despite reading Lazarus with both sympathy and attention, I was struck by how his essay also testifies to the absence of communication between postcolonial criticism in his scheme of things and the literary comparativism in Commonwealth literary studies that Helen has ‘pioneered’, altered, and challenged during her career. In ‘Opening Panel’, she expresses what has remained fundamental in her critical essays: the meaning and value of individual works must be considered within their context (26). It is this principle that animates her adherence to ‘cross-cultural humility’ and to ‘homework’ (30) in the practice of literary interpretation. The meaning of ‘concrete situations’ in her criticism extends both to the ‘most intimate roots of speech and signification’ (29) and, as her essay ‘History and Community Involvement in Indo-Fijian and Indo-Trinidadian Writing’ (1983)
demonstrates, to patterns of linguistic and psychic adaptation to economic misadventures/regimes of expropriation and exploitation such as slavery and indenture. The mutual imbrication of symbolic and material economies is perhaps most astonishingly revealed in her systematic and unsentimental account of how horticulture and agriculture in the Caribbean became inescapably associated with servitude, torture, and exile. Thomas Thistlewood’s entries in 1781 reveal how crops bear the weight of these associations and the history of plantations: ‘Wednesday, 14th February, 1781: Had Dick flogged for letting them plant potato slips the wrong end in the ground’ (Tiffin 2000 149–50). The ‘radical alteration’ rather than disruption here is to the Caribbean landscape itself which witnesses the establishment of a ‘monoculture’ dependent ‘on the kidnapping, transportation and enslavement of Africans, and, after 1830, on Chinese and Indian labourers whose “return” indenture agreements were rarely honoured’ (149). For Helen, too, literature has always been in the vanguard of identifying the social conditions of (post-) colonial existence; however, Jameson’s ‘always historicize!’ might be her ‘enabling political horizon’ (Brennan 104) for the examination of modes of production and systems of accumulation and extraction that were not, or not yet, identifiably capitalist.

Lazarus’s next charge is that imperialism is typically defined in civilisational terms as a dematerialised and unhistorical ‘West’ which is routinely conflated with a Europe reduced to the colonial history of some of its states. This attribution of a false intrinsic civilisational unity or community of values to ‘Europe’ produces a blunt instrument of diagnosis — ““western” thought [is] Eurocentric, colonizing, logocentric, rationalist’ (15) — and fails to account for the fact that Europe was both the product and initiator of a process of conquest and cultural transformation (Bartlett qtd in Lazarus 18). Lazarus’s point that this approach identifies ‘Europe’ as both the source and the very form of domination (the latter, surely, is the unilateral imposition of the logic of capitalism) is well taken, but it is not clear, at least in this essay, what such critical scrupulousness and courtesy (attractive on their own terms) would accomplish in altering the stakes of postcolonial criticism. Sen, too, in his quest to establish an affinity rather than a clash between civilisations, challenges the classification of the cultures of the world (xiv) but from the receiving end of the identification of the West with rationality, materialism, liberty, tolerance, rights, and justice (285) and in the interests of the cultivation of moral sentiment and imagination premised on ‘reasoned humanism’ (287). Sen’s refusal to confuse the embrace of ‘civilisation’ with colonial compliance and deprecation makes sense in a postcolonial world born of the asymmetrical dialectic between modes of knowing and being. But, as his own essays on Tagore and Gandhi reveal, the distinction between British civilisation and British administration was crucial to colonial subject formation, notwithstanding the irony of ‘the colonial metropolis supplying ideas and ammunition to post-colonial intellectuals to attack the influence of the colonial
metropolis!’ (133). Tagore wrote that the rule of law and order was a mockery of civilisation and had no claim on his respect (107), surely the beginning of the moral distance between Englishman and Indian: ‘We are not going to follow the West in competition, in selfishness, in brutality’ (Mishra 299 [emphasis in original]), a distance marked in civilisational (characterological) terms.

Mishra’s new configuration of Asia is a clever amalgam of the Orient that figures in Edward Said’s magisterial work — ‘the continent being defined here in its original Greek sense, with the Aegean Sea dividing Asia from Europe, and the Nile as the border between Asia and Africa’ (8) — and the ‘cumulative heft’ of ‘populous nations’ such as China, India, and Indonesia that ‘now seems to pose a formidable challenge to the West itself’ (305). He deliberately conflates the ideological with the geopolitical in order to dislocate the trajectory of ‘modernity at large’. Perhaps because of her antipodean perspective, Helen’s literary criticism was prescient in its scrutiny of ‘Asia’ and/in the contemporary Australian novel (1984) and, by extension, in its unsettling of the meanings of both ‘the West’ and ‘Australian’ in the discussion of novels that feature political, metaphysical, anthropological, and somatic encounters with Asia as the means to re-conceive Australians’ ‘psychic relationship with the universe’ (1984a 479). If, as Partha Chatterjee argues, ‘[a]nti-colonial nationalism creates its own domain of sovereignty … by dividing the world of social institutions and practices into two domains — the material and the spiritual…’ (qtd in Sen 156), the Australian (settler) novelist’s dilemma was that (s)he could lay claim to neither a distinct material nor a distinct spiritual culture and thus sought in ‘Asia’ the potential, as Tiffin pointedly suggests, for the transfiguration of social function into metaphysical purpose. In short, while it might be salutary for criticism to refrain from dividing the world into ‘civilisational blocs’, authors and texts have continued to find meaning and value in these albeit phantasmatic projections that demand an ethical deracination from ethnocentric assumptions, economic brutalities, and political complacencies. It remains to be seen whether the ‘cumulative heft’ of countries such as China and Indonesia will return the novel to the patterns of representation before 1950 that Helen identifies: ‘the exotic Asia delighting the tourist’, ‘the infernal Asia torturing the jungle soldier, or the non-union Asia threatening to destroy the democratic rights of the working man’ (468).

In ‘Plato’s Cave: Educational and Critical Practices’, Helen compellingly argues that the aim of education in the colonies was ‘to diffuse a grammatical knowledge of the English language as the most important agent of civilization for the coloured population’ (145). The ‘belief in the excellence of all things English’ was instilled through the mechanism of learning by heart. As she goes on to explain, ‘[t]o learn by heart is to absorb into the very processes of one’s being the material so taught’ (145), to imbibe the ‘abnegation of the Caribbean body’ (2000 153) in the transformation of stance, accent, and gesture. In this unequal exchange between imperial production and colonial consumption, ‘the coloured population’
learned to view itself as an imperfect rendition or a dangerous aberration (147). In these circumstances, the dematerialised or unhistorical idea of the West is irrelevant; what matters is its ‘efficacious [repetition]’ and circulation (153). Besides, as she asserts, post-colonial societies, according to writers such as Achebe, Raja Rao, Wole Soyinka, Wilson Harris, and George Lamming, even, I suspect, Ngugi wa Thiong’o, experience these economic incursions as ontological fractures that must be overcome by an alternative metaphysics or a transformation of the accidentals of European cultural time into the endurance and serenity of spiritual time or by acts of cultural reclamation (see Tiffin 1988). Even if the idea of Europe will not hold, its capture and containment of colonial cultural imaginaries cannot be explained away by modes of production and their uneven development across time and space. The interrogation of the European episteme is thus ‘metonymic of contemporary cultural formations in the continuing struggle over the word’ (1988 171). Helen has always been uncompromising about the inherently political character of this struggle, castigating certain tendencies within Euro-American post-structuralism and post-modernism [for seeking] to appropriate and control ‘the other’, while ostensibly performing some sort of major cultural redemption, … and assimilating post-colonial works whose political orientations and experimental formations have been deliberately designed to counteract such European appropriation, and, it might be argued, have themselves provided the cultural base and formative colonial experience on which European philosophers have drawn in their apparent radicalization of linguistic philosophy.

(1988 170–71 [my emphasis])

The danger of once again making ‘the rest of the world a peripheral term in Europe’s self-questioning’ (1988 171) must, she has contended, be assiduously avoided, and, in this sense, she has had no desire to close the gap between the purview of criticism in post-colonial studies and of post-colonial writers. For Helen, the ontological fracture of Europe will never be more than ‘a titillating possibility’ (172 [my emphasis]) whereas the task of establishing the terms of an opposing system is all too pressing for the post-colonial world (173). These are claims that I believe Lazarus, Brennan, and Benita Parry, among others would find congenial; I would suggest that in the combined critique of euro-centrism and anthropocentrism that animates her more recent work, her analyses of the colonial extraction of resources, transplantation of species, and destructive importation of farming practices, and her integration of the critique of development, of the might of multinational corporations, and of the colonial origins of the unequal trade patterns in globalisation, Helen is in tune not only with Parry’s warning against separating environmental crises from the logic of capitalism (2012 347) but with Lazarus’s insistence ‘that whatever else it might have and, indeed, did involve — all the way from the systematic annihilation of whole communities to the cultivation of aesthetic tastes and preferences — colonialism as an historical process involved the forced integration of hitherto un-capitalised societies …
into a capitalist world system’ (11 [emphasis in original]). My aim is of course not to make each over in the other’s image or even to detect unacknowledged affinities between these critics but to asseverate that the arc of Helen’s career incorporates all of these significant shifts in emphasis while remaining true to her situation within the institution and ‘political anachronism’ of Commonwealth literary studies and to her modest sense that criticism cannot serve as panacea or cure for the ills of the world. As even her early writing on botanical gardens in the Caribbean indicates, the survival of the species has always been in question in the nexus of environment and empire.

Sen writes of the need to cultivate moral sentiment under the influence of reason as a restraint against atrocity but Helen’s intellectual curiosities and commitments have never been drily ethical or dully political. I had never thought it would be possible to feel joy rather than say grim self-congratulation or, at best, pleasure, in the conduct of what Sen describes as ‘consequential analysis’ — the desire, with Arjuna in the Bhagavad Gita to fare well rather than only forward in matters of life and death — (3–6) until I met her. Her atheism means that her gods are many, neither innocent nor pure, and always game to defy the rules, but not averse to a spot of (usually warranted) self-righteousness either. I am still mindful of the doubleness of Derrida’s phrase ‘the ends of man’; like to balance concern over human overpopulation with Sen’s discussions of the invisible and pre-emptive mortality of women; believe anthropocentrism can be displaced but that anthropomorphism cannot be transcended (although Jane Goodall’s recent demonstration of the speech of chimpanzees gave me pause); and carry a mobile phone (Helen first drew my attention to the scandal of mining for Coltan). Helen never fails to turn me upside down and inside out and to remind me of Bentham’s unanswerable question: ‘can they suffer?’ For these and many other gifts, I want to say
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Paul Barrett, Holly McIndoe, and Tim Wyman-McCarthy, each of whom in his/her thoughtful and generous fashion, has been instrumental to the completion of this essay. Arvind Subramaniam brought the writings of Pankaj Mishra to my attention.

NOTES
Footnote from Chapter XVII ‘Of the Limits of the Penal Branch of Jurisprudence’, p. 283:

The day has been, I grieve to say in many places it is not yet past, in which the greater part of the species, under the denomination of slaves, have been treated by the law exactly upon the same footing as, in England for example, the inferior races of animals are still. The day may come, when the rest of the animal creation may acquire those rights which never could have been withheld from them but by the hand of tyranny. The French have already discovered that the blackness of the skin is no reason why a human being should be abandoned without redress to the caprice of a tormentor.* It may come one day to be recognized, that the number of the legs, the villoosity of the skin, or the termination of the os sacrum, are reasons equally insufficient for abandoning a sensitive being to the same fate. What else is it that should trace the insuperable line? Is it the faculty of reason, or, perhaps, the faculty of discourse? But a full-grown horse or dog is beyond comparison a more rational, as well as a more conversable animal, than an infant of a day, or a week, or even a month, old. But suppose the case were otherwise, what would it avail? the question is not, Can they reason? nor, Can they talk? but, Can they suffer?

* ref to Louis XIV’s Code Noir

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NOTES FROM CONTRIBUTORS

BILL ASHCROFT (University of New South Wales, Australia)
I first met Helen at a SPACLALS conference at University of Queensland in 1978, the conference, incidentally, at which ASAL was conceived. In the early 1980s at an AULLA conference at Macquarie University I met with Gareth and Helen and the glimmering idea of a book on postcolonial/New Literatures/post-European writing took shape. The subsequent years in which The Empire Writes Back was written proved to be some of the most stimulating and exciting of my career. This present chapter acknowledges Helen’s consistent passion for animal rights and their implication in colonial and postcolonial discourse.

ERNA BRODBER
Helen lived on the other side of creation but she seemed so near! This sense of ‘nearness’ struck me first as she gave a paper at a seminar in the Department of Literatures in English at the University of the West Indies, Mona. In her paper Helen quoted a verse of a song, apparently popular in my mother’s youth and which as children we heard her singing at her work. Helen so easily identified the common thread: ‘It is the Irish’, she said, so coolly and quietly, a connection which Paul Robeson, the great African American singer later verified for me. Helen’s response opened my eye to the place of the so-called ‘secondary whites’ in the culture of the social geographic area which has my intellectual interest: the descendants of Africans enslaved in the New World. Helen, the so-accessible Helen, thus set me off on research that has taken up quite a bit of my life and which has found outlet in my fiction as well as my social history.

VICTOR CHANG (University of the West Indies, Jamaica)
I first met Helen in 1971 when we were graduate students at Queen’s University in Canada, both working on Commonwealth Literature, with Helen doing her thesis on the work of V.S. Naipaul. We became fast friends and have maintained contact over the years and over several countries as we continued to meet at the triennial ACLALS conferences in India, Malaysia, Australia, Cyprus and Jamaica.

ANNE COLLETT (University of Wollongong, Australia)
I will let my editorial speak for me.

LEIGH DALE (University of Wollongong, Australia)
I met Helen when I went to the University of Queensland as a postgraduate student in 1986, to do a masters degree in South African and Australian poetry. At our first meeting, she stunned me by chiding me gently for not telling her I was coming, so that I could have been picked up at the airport. It was clear Queensland was going to be different. I considered deserting for a PhD in Education (with Helen kindly vetting my potential supervisors at the University of London), but common sense prevailed and I went back and did a PhD, again with Helen, that became
the book *The English Men*. Throughout the years of study, and the work which has followed, Helen has been an amazing support in every way — intellectual, emotional, and practical. If I’m an academic, it’s mainly her fault.

MARGARET DAIMOND (UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL, SOUTH AFRICA)
I first encountered Helen Tiffin in the pages of that invaluable, landmark work *The Empire Writes Back*. For several years it was prescribed for Honours students (4th year) in the Postcolonial Writing course at The University of KwaZulu-Natal. Then I met Helen in person at conferences — the first was, I think, the ACLALS conference in 1992 in Kingston, Jamaica. After which we met regularly at ACLALS and EACLALS conferences, most recently in Istanbul in 2011. In 2010 Helen visited South Africa and I had the pleasure, with Margaret Lenta, of taking her to the Hluhluwe Game Reserve. Helen was thrilled to see the elephants, but, to our delight, she was equally pleased by the flowering trees, the chattering monkeys (thieving too if one leaves a chalet window open) and the resolute dung beetles.

HELEN GILBERT (ROYAL HOLLOWAY, UNIVERSITY OF LONDON, UK)
I have variously been a student, colleague, collaborator, yacht skipper, friend, admirer and fellow traveller of Helen Tiffin’s over some 25 years since we first met in 1989. Despite having a professed dislike of theatre, she did a stint as supervisor for my PhD and almost convinced me that those on stage are the only ones ever having fun. Most recently, we have been long-distance comrades in arms, a pair of recalcitrant Helens working against formidable odds to complete *The Wild Man From Borneo: A Cultural History of the Orangutan*, which has sometimes played out in its own way as a farce.

STEPHEN GRAY
Deep in my Oz file of thirty years ago I still have a snap of Helen in a striped T-shirt and shorts, hopping over a fallen gumtree on a Brisbane beach. Behind her in dark glasses is the timid writer-in-residence she welcomed to the University of Queensland in mid-1982. Ever since I’ve been following her lead whenever students back home have needed a theoretical quote re postcoloniality. I’ve even kept a postcard of hers of ten years later — from Jamaica, or was it Tulsa, Oklahoma, or Sri Lanka? Or Fiji? She saw to it that my isolated life was broadened out.

GARETH GRIFFITHS (UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA)
Helen and I met so long ago she seems to have always been there. In reality it was probably at a conference in Australia in the mid-eighties. Since then we have written and edited three books together, books that have gone on to several editions. Writing with Helen (and our colleague on these books, Bill Ashcroft) was probably one of the most satisfying and fun experiences of my career. From colleague to dear friend without a cross word after three books, must be some sort of record. We still meet up at odd spots, in the last few years in Italy and in
France when people were kind enough to structure conferences around our work. Helen has a raft of photos from all these occasions — one of which involves me wearing a pith helmet! What are dear friends for if not to embarrass you! It is such a pleasure to be able to celebrate her work and life in this way.

SYD HARREX (FLINDERS UNIVERSITY, AUSTRALIA)

It is an immense pleasure and honour to contribute to the festchrift for my colleague in post colonial studies, a loyal friend over the years, as well as dedicated supporter of her university colleagues. I acknowledge and admire Helen’s inspirational teaching which opened the eyes of many students to the truth of Australia’s place in a post colonial world. Helen is a pioneer, respecting the integrity of text, context, theory of literature, and the art of story-telling in colonised and colonial cultures. Helen knows the value of intellectual respect and endeavour and is always original and stimulating in her reflections. I remember fondly the good hearted and sometimes not so tolerant sparring over obsessions and ideas over breakfast croissants at many conferences. Helen could keep admirable balance between the serious and light hearted, and loved a joke with a healthy disrespect for charlatans and bureaucrats. Helen is a shrewd observer of life and an idealistic advocate for causes she is committed to, such as feminism and social justice in emerging societies.

BARRY HIGMAN (AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL UNIVERSITY)

Although Helen made several visits to the Mona campus of the University of the West Indies, we never overlapped there. Probably I first met her at the 1997 conference of the Australian Association for Caribbean Studies, held in Sydney. This was the beginning of a long scholarly dialogue on Caribbean literature, gardens, food and many other things. My most vivid memories however relate to dinners. The first was the night in Canberra when I served as an entrée kangaroo cooked in Jamaican jerk seasoning, thinking I would score a creole cooking hit — only to discover that Helen was a committed vegetarian. The second was the night Helen entertained Merle, my late wife, and me, when Helen’s pet Miss Ratty perched on her shoulder while we ate our greens.

GRAHAM HUGGAN (UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS, UK)

I first met Helen in the late 1980s while doing research at the University of Queensland towards my PhD degree. This was eventually awarded in 1989 by the University of British Columbia, and Helen was my External Examiner. I then met Helen quite regularly during the 1990s and 2000s at conferences worldwide, where we exchanged ideas and generally made mischief. During the later part of the 2000s, we decided to write a book together on postcolonial ecocriticism. The division of labour was simple: Helen would work on animal rights and representation issues, and I would work on everything else! As always with Helen, there were lots of good laughs, and some prodigious disagreements, along the
way. The book was eventually published by Routledge in 2010. For the entirety of my career, Helen has been both a supportive and an inspirational figure. She is a warm-hearted and generous person with a razor-sharp intellect. I can think of no one I have learned from more, no one I have enjoyed meeting more, and no one I would rather work with, than Helen.

PETER HULME (UNIVERSITY OF ESSEX, UK)
I first met Helen in 1999 when she invited me over to Queensland to give the Brooks lecture and to take part in the ‘Trading Places’ conference. One of the memorable aspects of the conference is that it’s where I first met so many people I now regard as close friends, most of them colleagues or students of Helen’s, members of that extraordinary group of postcolonial scholars that Helen helped foster through the generosity of her intellect and the warmth of her personality. My essay here is based on a lecture given at the conference ‘Disunited Empires’, held at Queens University, Kingston, Ontario, in May 2006. Helen had invited me in what her friends will recognise as the ‘usual fashion’ — a late-night phone call when defences are low; but, as always when Helen calls, the occasion proved both delightful and stimulating.

DOROTHY JONES (UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG, AUSTRALIA)
I first encountered Helen as an audience member listening to the paper she gave at a SPACLALS conference in 1984. It was only at a number of later conferences that we actually met face to face and talked to one another, developing a firm friendship over the years. I admire Helen not only for her impressive scholarship but even more for her warm-heartedness and terrific sense of humour. It is great to have her as a friend.

VERONICA KELLY (UNIVERSITY OF QUEENSLAND, AUSTRALIA)
Helen and I were exact contemporaries in the English Department of the University of Queensland, where I began my degree in 1963; she taking Honours in English and me in French. Helen was always the great traveller and adventurer, deeply interested in ‘third world’ countries and cultures, as is evident in her later international eminence in postcolonial studies. During our later careers we met up again; briefly in the UK while she and Chris were touring, well, most of Europe; and again in Canada when we were all undertaking various forms of postgraduate work. When in January 1973 I returned from the UK to Brisbane, broke but happy, I was met by the Tiffins who drove across the just-flooded city to pick me up. My contribution to this publication is intended as a compliment to Helen’s intellectual accomplishments and trail-blazing adventurousness.

RUSSELL MCDougALL (UNIVERSITY OF NEW ENGLAND, AUSTRALIA)
I was a Masters student, presenting my first conference paper (at an ASAL conference in Brisbane, 1980), when I first met Helen. Soon after that we
caught up in Fiji, at the ACLALS conference, and then at Queen’s University at Kingston, Canada, where I followed in Helen’s footsteps to do my PhD and where she introduced me to the culinary arts of the curry. When I published my first book, *Australian-Canadian Literatures: Comparative Perspectives* (with Gillian Whitlock), Helen was the first person I asked to contribute, which she very kindly did. ‘Helen’s generosity is legendary; but her friendship is a gift.’ So it has been, for more than thirty years, catching up here and there around the world — more recently in Hobart or on Lord Howe Island — sharing ideas, meals, lots of laughter. I live in Armidale, which is a bit off Helen’s map, even with the special attractions of my much loved pup, Piper, and gentle Julie. Once Helen came with Miss Ratty, snoozing in a tissue box (the rat, that is, not Helen), but that was before Piper …

SUSIE O’BRIEN (McMASTER UNIVERSITY, CANADA)

I met Helen in 1989, when I arrived from Canada to start my MA in the English Department at the University of Queensland. The joy of the two years I spent in Brisbane (not to mention the degree I eventually received) was due in no small part to Helen’s warmth and generosity, and to her curiosity and brilliant critical intelligence, knit together by her great sense of humour. Helen is a model for the way I teach and do research today, and I appreciate her continued friendship, in spite of distance, and my irresponsible contributions to the problem of human overpopulation.

EVELYN O’CALLAGHAN (UNIVERSITY OF THE WEST INDIES, BARBADOS)

I met Helen through our mutual friend, Victor Chang, when I took up a junior post in English at the University of the West Indies Mona campus in the early 1980s. I remember sitting between Helen and Stephen Slemon at an ACLALS conference there and giggling uncontrollably at their inappropriate comments during a fairly turgid presentation on Walcott. And this is one thing about Helen that I so admire: she combines a dauntingly rigorous intellect with a refusal to be serious. We have visited each other’s homes (Australia and Tasmania for Helen and Barbados for me) although only Helen’s featured a pet rat, Miss Ratty! She is unfailingly generous in advising and sharing material with colleagues in the postcolonial field. Her constantly evolving scholarship is inspiring, as is her insistence that research serves ethical ends. I have swum with Helen in seas across the world, and hope we can do a few more times!

KIRSTEN HOLST PETERSEN (ROSKILDE UNIVERSITY, DENMARK)

I think I first met Helen on a balmy summer Sunday in London, or more specifically Kew where Anna had invited these two Australian friends of hers, Helen and Chris for lunch. We were staying in a friend’s house; I cooked and we sat for a long, lazy afternoon in the garden, surrounded by the murmur of voices from the adjacent gardens where people were doing the same thing. This is many years
ago, probably sometime in the seventies. This is very atypical of Helen! There is nothing balmy about her — her conversation is always memorable and you had better be on your toes when you talk with her. In fact, perhaps I have got it wrong, perhaps it was on an entirely different occasion. It could have been in Kampala, where we were at a conference during Amin’s dictatorship. She had come from or via the West Indies, or perhaps it was Sweden, she had caught some disease and had an adventurous battle to get medicine, but had succeeded. That sounds more like it. Since then we have got lost in snowy mountains in Norway, driven up the York peninsula, wandered through jungle, travelled on a dog sledge and seen each other through bad patches. Helen is one of my very closest friends.

OLIVE SENIOR

Olive does not know Helen personally, but I asked her to contribute some poetry to this special issue because I know how much Helen admires her work. Although Helen is known to abscond when others are being herded toward the conference poetry reading, this doesn’t mean that she dislikes poetry. It may not be her favourite genre, but it has certainly figured, particularly in its Caribbean voice, in essays published over the course of her career; and Helen must take full responsibility for introducing me to the delights of Caribbean poetry in my undergraduate degree, and thus for what became the foundation of my academic career. Thank you Helen and thank you Olive. (Anne Collett)

ROB SELLIICK

I can’t quite remember when I first met Helen — it was either at an AULLA conference in Brisbane in the mid-70s or at ACLALS conference in India, also in the mid-70s. In either case we have remained friends ever since. I have followed her movements, and visited her in each of her various locations: in Brisbane, of course, and then in Kingston, Ontario and when she decided to return to Oz, in Hobart, where I followed her as an earnest disciple along the beaches there as she practised her passion for photography. I have yet to visit her on Lord Howe Island. Perhaps this year! I also remember spending time with the triumvirate when they met in Sydney, working on the ground-breaking publication, The Empire Writes Back. Throughout these years we have remained great friends, although we have not always agreed and Helen, as her friends know only too well, can be a combative opponent.

PAUL SHARRAD (University of Wollongong, Australia)

I first read Randolph Stow in an undergraduate class and found The Merry-go Round in the Sea a bit remote because of its landed-gentry world and 1940s West Australian setting. Later I read Visitants, and, having lived in Papua, was excited by its wonderful evocation of the voices of a place loaded with disturbing ideas and poetic style. Delving into commentary, I found Helen Tiffin’s work, which took me also to Tourmaline. I had met Helen by then at conferences, and her passion
for Commonwealth literature helped drive my own interest and indirectly led me back to the Pacific, back to Stow, and back to my own upbringing. I was raised in the Congregational church in South Australia, and our ‘cathedral’ in Adelaide was always known as ‘Stow’. Only later did I realise that it was a memorial to the first Congregational preacher in the state, Thomas Quinton Stow, and that he was Randolph’s great-great grandfather. I also spent some time working on Wilson Harris and Caribbean writing, one of Helen’s great enthusiasms, and Harris also wrote about Stow. So an assortment of unrelated places, under the impact of collegial contact and then personal friendship, becomes a meaningful network. Thanks, Helen.

STEPHEN SLEMON (University of Alberta, Canada)
I found my way to Helen Tiffin through Bill New, my M.A. supervisor at the University of British Columbia: my first great academic mentor. He had an unambiguous answer to give when I asked him, after a decade outside academia, where, for my PhD, I could find the future of ‘Commonwealth’ literature studies? My doctoral work at the University of Queensland, from 1985–88, happened during the time that my supervisor, Helen, was meeting regularly with Gareth Griffiths and Bill Ashcroft, talking about everything, singing joyfully late into the night, and in the intervals writing their Methuen book, The Empire Writes Back. It is not easy, now, to convey the excitement I felt in standing witness to the birth, from Commonwealth parentage, of a new scholarly subdiscipline: postcolonial studies. Nor to the quality of training I came into — from Helen, and from her globally ubiquitous circle of friends. Everything I learned in postcolonial school happened on Helen’s watch. She remains my academic counsellor. She remains my friend.

CHRIS TIFFIN
I was privileged to follow closely Helen’s academic and intellectual progress for a lengthy period from her early writing on Caribbean literature, through her investigation of comparative Commonwealth literatures, and then her increasingly sophisticated theorisations of postcolonial literature, often through daring applications of metaphor. Helen has always represented for me a model of the engaged, imaginative and endlessly surprising critic the direction of whose next book or article could never be reliably predicted from her previous one. Her work covers an extraordinary geographical, methodological, and philosophical range and is as inspiring as it is compelling.

ASHA VARADHARAJAN (Queen’s University, Canada)
Helen was a cherished and much-missed colleague at Queen’s University where she graced the Department of English with her presence as Canada Research Chair. Neither her replacement nor I have had the desire to remove the simultaneously outrageous and stringently ethical cartoons in her erstwhile office or on its door:
we need them in her absence from the staid world of Watson Hall. If I didn’t know she’d guffaw at my pomposity and my resort to colonial cliches, I’d dub her friend, guide, and philosopher. Contra Shirley MacLaine, Helen taught me that our most profound relationships are with others and that collegiality is founded in the fearless exercise of citizenship and in the commitment to the mission of the university. But when I look forward to our increasingly rare encounters, I anticipate instead couch potatoedom and endless British serials, the delights of political incorrectness, shopping trips, landscapes and wildlife that are feasts for the senses, and laments for the chronic lack of frisson in the hallowed halls of academe. Oh and a chuckle over how we helped the Dalai Lama!
Helen and Friends
Postscript

These photos of Helen and friends were drawn from many sources; but it was surprisingly hard to find photos in which Helen featured, perhaps because so often she is the eye behind the camera. We all have an idealised picture of ourselves that we would like to see, but so often do not see, reproduced in photographs. The photograph is that instant moment that is in fact rarely seen — blink of eye, quirk of mouth — an expression gone as quickly as it has appeared; and of course, we see the aging process all too clearly revealed to us in ways we would rather not admit. But what I hope these photos have achieved is to remind Helen of all the good times and good friends, and to give others a sense of her warmth, spark and joie de vivre. I would have liked everyone who contributed to this issue to appear in a photo but that was impossible to achieve. It is at this point however that I would like to express my gratitude for all those who contributed an essay or story or poem at short notice; and those who suffered the editorial knife because I wanted to include so many; and those who were not asked to contribute because I had to make hard choices. In particular I would like to thank those who acted as readers — it is increasingly hard to find academics prepared to referee papers for journals, perhaps because it is unsung and unpaid work that is thoroughly unappreciated by the institutions in which we find ourselves today. So I would like here in particular to sing the praises (sorry no pay forthcoming) of scholars who over the fifteen years of my editorship of Kunapipi have always said yes — thank you in particular to Paul Sharrad, to Dorothy Jones and in more recent years, to Leigh Dale. Thank you also to the best sub-editor and formatter an editor could hope for — Greg Ratcliffe (he has been with me through all the pain and pleasure), and thank you to my (fairly recently acquired, but much needed) proof reader, Carmel Pass. Thank you also for the work of postgraduate students who attempted to keep the God of Chaos at bay and who answered the many letters, phone calls and emails from subscribers wondering when the overdue issue was likely to appear. The publication of this final issue will bring with it a lightness of being as the weight of conscience is lifted, but I will miss very much the creative and intellectual enjoyment of putting a journal together, and the opportunity it brings to make new friends. I would also thank EACLALS and the University of Wollongong for their support. Finally, thank you to Anna Rutherford, the founding editor, who passed the mantle on to me. I hope she feels Kunapipi was left in good hands; and I hope she is not too disappointed that I felt the time had come to bring her creative vision to conclusion.

Anne Collett
February 2013
(yes, late again)
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