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Anne Collett
University of Wollongong, acollett@uow.edu.au

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Abstract
Full text of issue.
Kunapipi is a bi-annual 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. Wherever possible the submission should be prepared in Microsoft Word and sent by email attachment. Please include a short biography and contact details.

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Dr. Anne Collett
Editor — KUNAPIPI
English Literatures Program
University of Wollongong
Wollongong NSW 2522
Australia

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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

So i turn back turn back to ship & journey here & water
flowing my beginning, quiet ending
the great mass of the memory mountain
rising up slowly out of the sea before sun
before sun
-rise

for even when it is dark. it is dark. it is home. it is here
the presences appearing thru the power thru the light. which is still dark.

...we survive the midnight terrors when they knock or blow. Fire
earthshake. know we the gunman of tornado when they blow. how
we survive

Many of the essays, poetry and stories in this issue confront and enquire into
what might be called the catastrophe of difference — the violence that erupts
when people/s and cultures collide. They consider in various ways and to various
degrees, the fallout from that contact — its negative and positive impact. In a
keynote address, delivered at the ‘Caribbean Migrations: Negotiating Borders’
conference at Ryerson University (Toronto, Canada) in July 2005, Caribbean
poet, critic and historian, (Eddie) Kamau Brathwaite, made the somewhat startling
claim that Caribbean literature on the whole had ‘failed to see itself, to act itself
out, in omen/ts of catastrophe’, and declared that ‘every step we make’ as writers
and critics, ‘we have to carry with us all the tokens and omen/ts of the past’:
‘Every step we make has to carry that purpose, that responsibility. Every bit of
literary criticism we write has to be conscious of what went before, all of it … the
responsibility to know all the implications of it’. 2

Given the degree to which the history of violent conquest, decimation of
peoples and land, slavery, diaspora and exile has been the theme, guiding force,
even vortex of most literature that has grown out of the Caribbean experience, it
is hard to see how Brathwaite could support such a claim. Perhaps the clue lies in
his use of the phrase ‘all of it’. When he speaks of catastrophe and the need for the
novel to be re-visioned as ‘the re-enactments of catastrophe’ he is advocating the
representation of catastrophe as larger than that which is specific and particular
to the Caribbean — the catastrophe of civilisation (for which he takes the fall of
Rome as his beginning) and the catastrophe of universal proportions (the explosion
in our galaxy that created life on earth). Catastrophe then might be productive not
only of pain, darkness and fragmentation, but of love, light and new life.

This theme of new beginnings and belief in the possibility offered by
catastrophe has been an important aspect, indeed, the imperative of Brathwaite’s
work over the last forty years. His dissertation (in poetry, criticism and history)
on the importance of survival of peoples and cultures, and the remarkable richness of creolisation in the Americas, is integral to that work — a sense of Africa not lost in the middle passage but reconstituted and transformed in a new environment: the Caribbean, he believed, was not the black hole of loss and nothingness as infamously designated by V.S. Naipaul, but a new fecund world in which the pain of passage was a birthing process. Diaspora offers the possibility of new combination — what Brathwaite describes in his recent address as ‘this tremendous complexity dancing at the border’. It is an image that reverberates throughout his work:

We walk
we walk
we walk, Nana Tano,
and it will soon be night.
And it will soon be night,
Nana Tano,
when the dry seed cracks
and a new star splits
into darkness. When the
drum sticks
bend and the drum-
er climbs out of the dark-
ness. Buttocks balance
the earth; spine
fuses the drum-
beats to move-
ment; lights twinkle to life
in their root tips; the
tree rises
again and you rise
with its trunk and its move-
ment of branches; leaves
hear again what the distance is
saying; and my mem-
ory bends, curves, nods
heads and crouches;
feeding the dust at the soles
of its feet as it dances.3

Brathwaite urges us to face the past but to face it as Janus — also looking to the future. He would have us recognise the possibility that catastrophe offers, not just to assess ‘where we have gone wrong’ and change our ways, but to recognise something ‘rich and strange’ in lives transformed by catastrophe. He believes in and asks for a new criticism and a new literature ‘of intercultural reconstitution of fragments’. This issue is evidence of just such a literature.

NOTES
2 Quotation from the address is taken from the sound recording, Kamau Brathwaite’s Middle Passages: A Lecture, produced by Sandberry Press, 2006. My transcription may not be as Brathwaite conceives it in all instances (as for example the word that sounds like ‘omens’, being a combination of ‘omens’ and ‘moments’) but it stands as my translation of the oral into the written word — ‘omen/ts’.
MAC FENWICK

Realising Irony’s Post/Colonial Promise: Global Sense and Local Meaning in *Things Fall Apart* and ‘Ruins of a Great House’

Locusts ... were very good to eat.
(Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*)

Ancestral murderers and poets.
(Derek Walcott, ‘Ruins of a Great House’)

The only thing that can be said for certain about irony is that it is the trope *par excellence* of uncertainty. This is why I have chosen to begin this study not with a statement about irony, but with a couple of ironic moments. Still, the term is so protean that even to claim that the above examples are instances of irony will undoubtedly be contentious. The purpose of this study, then, is not to generate a new theory of irony (the world has no need of that) but to realise what I will be calling the ‘promise’ of irony within post/colonial texts. I use the word ‘promise’ in both of its senses: to indicate the potential of irony (a potential that is best realised, perhaps, in never being fulfilled), and as an oath or compact made between irony’s co-conspirators: the reader and the text.

There has been, for a very long time now, a vast and ever-growing list of journal articles and books on the form, nature and use of irony. Given the breadth and intelligence of the work already extant on the nature of irony, I shall forgo even the attempt to address those issues here in any but the most cursory manner. Most standard definitions of irony identify three different kinds, each one of them motivated by a different form of opposition between the literal meaning of the said, and the figural sense of the unsaid. Verbal irony is the result of a statement in which the meaning of the words used is the opposite of their sense. Irony of situation occurs when a character acts in opposition to expectation. Dramatic irony (the only form of irony that is exclusively literary) arises when the audience perceives something that a character in the literature does not know; dramatic irony is, then, the opposition of the limited meaning of the situation as it is understood by the character, and the full sense of that situation as it is apprehended by the audience. The extra-linguistic capacity upon which all three of these ‘types’ depend is apparent in even the simplest form of irony, the sarcastic remark. If I were to say ‘that sounds like fun’, in such a manner as to make it clear that it does not, the literal meaning of my sentence is replaced by its ‘real’, extra-linguistic
sense. Furthermore, with my sarcasm I am not just indicating my reluctance to undertake the proposed adventure (hang gliding would be a good example), but I am also indicating a certain amount of disdain for the proposition, and perhaps even for the person making it. The promise of irony is, therefore, that it enacts a moment of extra-linguistic communication in which the limitations of the literal — and even the aporia occasioned by the opposition of sense and meaning — is (apparently) overcome.

Irony thus enacts a relation between truth and falsehood. While the literal meaning of my statement is false, I am excused from the accusation of lying insofar as the true sense of my utterance is understood. If it is not, the failure to communicate truth is not the result of my false utterance, but of the auditor’s inability to understand what I am saying, or of my inability to mark the irony clearly enough. By saying one thing while meaning another, it would appear that irony is a form of the lie; but with the appeal that irony makes to a figural meaning that is in excess of its literal falsehood, it avoids (or even transcends) the accusation of lying. In a sense, irony — in its suspension of falsehood during a clearly untrue statement — suspends or resolves the ethical tensions of the moment. The true sense of my utterance not only transcends its false meaning, but adds to that meaning extra-linguistically. Irony, then, even in the everyday form of the sarcastic quip, appeals to a realm in which the true sense of the utterance transcends its false and limited meaning.

This aspect of irony gains special significance in post/colonial texts. For irony to ‘work’, that is, for the reader to apprehend its true sense, the reader must apprehend its false or limited meaning. I may say that I like hang-gliding, but if I do so in a context that makes it clear that I do not, the true sense of this statement is revealed: not by the utterance itself, which conveys a false or limited meaning, but by an act of reference to the local and particular circumstances that surround and inform the utterance in such a way as to mark its falsity and point the way toward its true sense. In this respect, then, irony enacts a relation not only between truth and falsehood but also between local and global, insofar as it brings into contact an extra-linguistic sense that surpasses or exceeds the utterance, and a meaning (or set of discontinuous meanings) that can be understood only within the particular context of the utterance. Above, I spoke of irony’s promise as both potential and compact, and it is in this interdependent relation of local meaning and global sense that I think this promise is fulfilled. There is within every ironic utterance the potential for the successful communication of a true sense despite false or limited meaning. Irony is thus the composite of a moment of global representation, as the true sense is apprehended despite the falsity of the meaning, and local reference, insofar as that global representation depends upon reference to the local circumstances of the utterance. The contact enacted by irony between global sense and local meaning is what has made it such a rich, and problematic, form of address for post/colonial critics and theorists.
William New's *Among Worlds* (1975) is among the first works to address the relation between irony and post/coloniality and it remains one of the most comprehensive. New approaches irony as symptomatic of 'the dualities that abound in Commonwealth literatures', and argues that irony is a dominant method whereby post/colonial authors are able to 'express concretely this sense of incomplete options', which he argues characterises the condition of post/coloniality (1–2). New maintains this stance throughout, consistently arguing that the ironies in the texts that he examines are the literary manifestations of a pre-existing condition of 'duality' endemic to and characteristic of post/coloniality. He does not attempt to reduce the rich multiplicity of these texts to any single version or theory of irony; on the contrary, New explicitly states that 'thematic and technical likenesses must not be allowed to obscure each writer's private viewpoint. Though dualities abound in the ironist's world, the stances he may take range from parody and innuendo through sarcasm and self-disparagement to absurdity and nihilism' (3). Despite this important acknowledgement that there is no specific kind or manner of post/colonial irony, New does go on to explain that 'at its best the ironic stance provokes serious deliberation into the problems that led to the dualities in the first place' (3). For New, then, the many different uses and forms that irony takes on in post/colonial writing spring from the same source and lead to the same end. That is, ironies in post/colonial texts symptomatically reflect and provoke inquiry into the specific 'duality' of the 'split loyalties and unresolvable tensions' (2) of the post/colonial condition.

In "'Circling the Downspout of Empire'" (1989) Linda Hutcheon both echoes and refines New's argument when she argues that as a double-talking, forked-tongued mode of address, irony becomes a popular rhetorical strategy for working within existing discourses and contesting them at the same time. Its inherent semantic and structural doubleness also makes it a most convenient trope for the paradoxical dualities of ... post-colonial doubled identity and history. And indeed irony ... has become a powerful subversive tool in the re-thinking and re-addressing of history by ... post-colonial artists. (171)

Despite this move toward irony as a strategic response by post/colonial authors against the conditions within which they must write, Hutcheon retains New's formulation of irony as symptomatic of the post/colonial condition: 'irony is a trope of doubleness. And doubleness is what characterises ... the twofold vision of the post-colonial .... Doubleness and difference are established by colonialism by its paradoxical move to enforce cultural sameness ... while at the same time, producing differentiations and discriminations' (176). Like New, Hutcheon characterises irony as the literary manifestation of a literal state that has been imposed upon the writer by imperial history.

For both New and Hutcheon, irony is an effective means through which to express the conditions of post/coloniality insofar as it embodies the nature of those conditions. Hutcheon is quick to acknowledge the limitations that this
view places on irony within post/colonial texts: ‘Irony is ... a way of resisting and yet acknowledging the power of the dominant. It may not go the next step — to suggest something new — but it certainly makes that step possible. Often combined with some sort of self-reflexivity, irony allows a text to work within the constraints of the dominant while placing those constraints as constraints in the foreground and thus undermining their power’ (177). The only effective means of contesting ‘the dominant’ that irony would seem to lend the ironist is the ability to highlight the nature of that domination. There is, according to Hutcheon, neither liberation from nor replacement of that domination with ‘something new’ but merely a suggestion of how that ‘something new’ might be possible.

Hutcheon’s stance echoes the argument of Homi Bhabha in ‘Representation and the Colonial Text’ (1984) insofar as he argues that irony is a mode of the imperialising power, and thus insufficient to the task of countering the oppressive and possessive gaze of the European critic. Stating that ‘behind the realist irony [stands] a European philosophical tradition of ethical realism’ (115), Bhabha concludes that the irony of post/colonial texts exists only within the eye of the imperial-beholder. In his analysis of V.S. Naipaul’s *A House for Mr. Biswas*, Bhabha claims that ‘[t]o demonstrate thematically how *House* resists its appropriation into the Great Tradition of literary Realism would not be difficult. It would be possible to see ... its mode of address as the “uncanny” rather than irony’ (115). According to Bhabha, irony is not a strategic tool of the post/colonial writer, but an alien form of mimesis that is imposed upon post/colonial texts by the imperial reader. This imposition, however, is neither stable nor lasting. Bhabha argues that the irony which the Western critic ‘finds’ in post/colonial texts is symptomatic of the central and indeed defining irony of the European critic’s own critical practice:

Writing as the filling of a gap ... linear time consciousness as the effect of the sequential practice of writing; teleology and unity, progression and coherence as convention-bound, formal productions — all these notions give writing a materiality, a productive position.... There are intimations here of the construction of the unity of the sign (as opposed to its primordial ‘givenness’), and the resulting stability of the signified which, paradoxically, suggests the possibility of its arbitrariness, that is, the irony of its repression of discontinuity and difference in the construction of sense, those modes of meaning that we call realism and historicism. (96–97; emphasis added)

In this view of the relation between irony and the post/colonial, the irony that the European reader/critic imposes upon post/colonial texts is symptomatic of the difference and discontinuity that always/already exists within the imperial culture. In effect, the attempt to ironise post/colonial texts rebounds upon the European critic. According to Bhabha, the attribution of irony to post/colonial texts reveals how the critic’s own practice is irretreivably ironic insofar as it depends upon a false sense of unity that has been constructed to ‘repress’ the discontinuous and different meanings which undercut that practice.

Despite their differences, for New, Hutcheon and Bhabha the promise of irony for post/colonial texts is realised insofar as it ‘disturbs’ — or highlights the inherent
disturbances between — different cultural meanings without offering any way past or beyond this moment of recognition. For each of them, irony is a cognitive dead end. It is my contention that the protean nature of the ironic utterance promises a mode of understanding for the post/colonial (con)text in which global sense and local meaning are related to one another within a provisional transcultural truth that exceeds the *aporia* or disruptive discontinuities of the post/colonial 'condition'. However, just as there is no monolithic or singular way of 'being' post/colonial, so too is there no monolithic post/colonial form of irony. In order to preserve this recognition of multiplicity I have chosen to examine here two moments of irony from markedly different (con)texts. Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* dramatises the conflict between Igbo and British as the clash of binary opposites. Derek Walcott's 'Ruins of a Great House' dramatises the speaker's difficult and dramatic confrontation with a history which he feels yokes together through violence and oppression these same two cultural 'sides'. More importantly, these two moments allow me to explore the promise of irony within the post/colonial (con)text from the perspective of each of irony's co-conspirators: the reader and the text. In *Things Fall Apart*, the extra-linguistic sense with which the different and oppositional meanings of the situation are overcome is the reader's own. In 'Ruins of a Great House', this extra-linguistic sense is expressed by the speaker. Despite their different perspectives, then, these moments fully realise the promise of irony within and for the post/colonial (con)text insofar as they realise a mode of transcultural understanding in which global sense and local meaning are brought into a productive and equivalent relation.

Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* concludes with a moment in which the colonial divide would appear to be unbridgeable, as the District Commissioner turns his back on the hanged form of Okonkwo’s suicide and contemplates the title of the book that he will write: ‘*The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger*’ (148). This moment marks the violent and brutal eradication of the hope expressed elsewhere in the novel that reciprocity between coloniser and colonised might indeed be possible. Despite this lack of effective communication on the part of the characters, the novel does not lead only to *aporia* and the failure of understanding. While the narrative may very well end with a moment of painful stasis, its conclusion is, I would argue, quite different. The novel is itself poised upon a particularly painful irony as the meaning of its final moments is counterbalanced by the sense of the whole. In effect, the final stasis of the novel is overcome by the dramatic irony that allows the reader to resolve the conflict that entraps the characters, and even the Igbo Storyteller.

Nowhere is this dramatic irony more apparent than during the locusts’ descent upon Umuofia:

And then quite suddenly a shadow fell on the world, and the sun seemed hidden behind a thick cloud. Okonkwo looked up from his work and wondered if it was going to rain at such an unlikely time of the year. But almost immediately a shout of joy
broke out in all directions, and Umuofia, which had dozed in the noon-day haze, broke into life and activity.

‘Locusts are descending,’ was joyfully chanted everywhere, and men, women and children left their work or their play and ran into the open to see the unfamiliar sight. The locusts had not come for many, many years, and only the old people had seen them before.

At first, a fairly small swarm came. They were the harbingers sent to survey the land. And then appeared on the horizon a slowly-moving mass like a boundless sheet of black cloud drifting towards Umuofia. Soon it covered half the sky, and the solid mass was now broken by tiny eyes of light like shining star-dust. It was a tremendous sight, full of power and beauty.

Everyone was now about, talking excitedly and praying that the locusts should camp in Umuofia for the night. For although locusts had not visited Umuofia for many years, everybody knew by instinct that they were very good to eat. (39-40)

This passage disturbs the Westernised reader, as our expectations are at first supported by the prose, and then overturned by it. The foreboding and even apocalyptic language of the passage’s beginning (‘a shadow fell on the world, and the sun seemed hidden behind a thick cloud’), gives way within three paragraphs to a radically altered vision of the event (‘it was a tremendous sight, full of power and beauty’). This passage is ironic in the most direct sense insofar as its conclusion is directly opposite to what the reader is led to expect by its beginning. Beyond this relatively simple instance of situational irony, however, the passage enables a moment of dramatic irony in which the reader is able to apprehend the relation of the two ‘sides’ of the conflict between Igbo and British in a manner that exceeds the literal expression given that conflict in the text — in particular, as that conflict is presented as an oppositional binary in the novel’s final paragraph.

This dramatic irony is evident in the statement that ‘everybody knew by instinct that [locusts] were very good to eat’. Throughout the novel there are moments in which the Igbo Storyteller’s view of events is directly at odds with the Westernised reader’s perceptions — but nowhere is the division between narrator/text and reader made so palpably clear, or so (apparently) unbridgeable. For the Storyteller, human ‘instinct’ dictates that ‘locusts are good to eat’; but the instincts of the (vast majority) of Westernised readers are entirely different, and not just because of the different cuisines. Western forms of mass agriculture are susceptible to locusts in a way that traditional Igbo cultivation is not; more significantly, there are also the Biblical associations of locusts with the wrath of God. The meaning of the passage, then, is to signal to the Westernised reader in as shocking a manner as possible that we do not fully understand the Igbo culture that we are encountering in the text. This act of recognition is a salutary and necessary component of the novel, for it removes those readers who have this apprehension from the perspective posited at the novel’s conclusion by the District Commissioner, who is absolutely certain that he knows — and is authorised to write down — all that is necessary about the ‘primitives’ under his control.
There is, however, a sense in the passage that is at odds with this meaning; a sense that is apparent (ironically) only to someone encountering the text from within that same Western perspective that the meaning of the passage disturbs. The swarm of locusts foreshadows the destruction of the Igbo by the British — a point that is later made quite clearly when the Oracle warns the people of Abame that the Europeans ‘were locusts ... and that first man [on the bicycle] was their harbinger sent to explore the terrain. And so they killed him’ (98). In the wake of this murder, the entire village of Abame is wiped out by British troops. When regarded in this manner, the passage reverses itself once more and the locusts change back from being ‘a tremendous sight, full of power and beauty’ and recover the far more foreboding implications of the passage’s beginning, ‘a shadow fell on the world, and the sun seemed hidden behind a thick cloud’. This passage is ironic, then, insofar as its meaning signals the insuperable divide between the narrator/text and the Westernised reader (‘locusts are good’), while its full sense is revealed only to that same reader (locusts are not good). The result of this passage is a moment of excruciating dramatic irony as the Westernised reader is put into the position of knowing or perceiving more than the characters, and even the storyteller. The Westernised reader is thus immediately constituted as a part of the same imperial ‘us’ that encompasses the District Commissioner (who ‘knows better’ than the ‘natives’), but whose (illiberal) cultural chauvinism the reader rejects. I would like to suggest, however, that this moment need not be an uneasy aporia in which different cultural meanings are irreconcilably opposed (‘locusts are good’ versus ‘locusts are bad’). Rather, this moment holds the promise of a global sense within which the different local meanings lead not to the sterility of binary opposition but to a new understanding of the relation between Igbo and British cultures. The reader’s ironic apprehension of the claim that ‘locusts are good to eat’ resolves the apparently irresolvable aporia of the cognitive conflict between Okonkwo and the District Commissioner.

I said at the beginning that irony appeals to a realm in which the true sense of the utterance transcends its false and limited meaning. I went on to argue that irony is the composite of a moment of global representation, as the true sense is apprehended despite the falsity of the meaning, and local reference, insofar as that global representation depends upon reference to the local circumstances of the utterance. With this in mind, we can say that the ironic promise of Achebe’s novel is realised only in and through the dramatic irony of the reader’s recovery or (re)construction of a true sense of the text (that European and Igbo are both necessary to understand the text) that surpasses its false and limited meaning (that European and Igbo are insuperably divided from one another). This true sense is not, however, to be understood as truth-as-object — as a singular or totalising form of truth that concludes or resolves the ambiguities of the text. The promise realised within the ironic statement that ‘locusts are good to eat’ is a provisional form of truth, insofar as the reader’s ironic apprehension of that moment does not
resolve the conflict between different intercultural truths, but enacts a relation between those truths. The statement ‘locusts are good to eat’ is neither a falsehood to be overcome with truth (as the District Commissioner would claim of that ‘primitive’ belief), nor a truth that rebuts the falsity of its contrary (as Okonkwo would argue). It is a stage upon which these truths are brought into contact and relation with one another.

As Hutcheon argues in *Irony’s Edge*, ‘irony is a relational strategy in the sense that it operates not only between meanings (said, unsaid) but between people (ironists, interpreters, targets). Ironic meaning comes into being as the consequence of a relationship, a dynamic, performative bringing together of different meaning-makers, but also of different meanings’ (58). As we have seen with *Things Fall Apart*, the ‘dynamic, performative bringing together’ enacted by irony within post/colonial texts entails a relation not just between different individual ‘meaning-makers’ but between different cultural perspectives. I have argued that the promise of irony is that it enacts a moment of extra-linguistic communication in which the limitations of the literal — and even the *aporia* occasioned by the opposition of sense and meaning — is (apparently) overcome. If this is so, then the promise of irony in post/colonial texts would be that it enacts a moment of extra-linguistic communication in which the differences between cultures is (apparently) overcome. It is precisely at this point where my analysis is sundered (perhaps irretrievably) from those of New, Hutcheon and Bhabha, each of whom characterises irony as disruptive with little or no reference to its potential for creating something new. For it is precisely this that I believe is happening in *Things Fall Apart* insofar as the dramatic ironies of the narrative allow the reader to move past (or through) the disturbing and disruptive clash of Igbo and British to a transcultural truth within which the two sides of this bipolar historical conflict meet and interact. In Achebe’s novel, the promise of irony is realised insofar as it allows for a sense of transcultural truth that exists in the relation irony enacts between or amongst the discontinuous meanings of different cultural truths. This transcultural truth is neither homogenous nor stable, for it exists upon the protean stage and word of the ironic utterance. The provisionality of this truth does not necessarily condemn it to directionless or relativistic play, nor to inconclusive *aporia*. In fact, the speaker in Derek Walcott’s ‘Ruins of a Great House’ seizes upon this very provisionality as the basis of a new transcultural truth that surpasses or overcomes the discontinuities and *aporia* of cultural difference which threaten to overwhelm him.

In ‘Ruins of a Great House’, the speaker addresses the ironic nature of his own poetic voice and persona(e), as the poem dramatically represents the speaker’s struggle to understand the complicated relation of master and slave. As a West Indian, the speaker of this poem does not have the option to retreat into any illusory form of cultural singularity — as do the characters of Achebe’s novel who can identify themselves as or with Igbo or England. As the descendant of
both ‘sides’ of the historical conflict between Africa (slave) and Europe (master),
he must instead confront the ironic nature of the relation that exists between these
two cultures which have together created his identity. In this sense, the speaker
of ‘Ruins’ must realise the same promise of irony as was achieved by the reader
of Things Fall Apart. For the first part of the poem, the speaker attempts to work
through the relation of master and slave on a consciously intellectual level, but
eventually the ironies overcome him:

A green lawn, broken by low walls of stone.
Dipped to the rivulet, and pacing, I thought next
Of men like Hawkins, Walter Raleigh, Drake.
Ancestral murderers and poets, more perplexed
In memory now by every ulcerous crime. (20)

The ironies of this moment produce a complicated series of relations
and realisations that spread outward to the rest of the poem; energies that
simultaneously disturb and reconfigure the speaker’s understanding of himself in
such a way that the intent to resolve the opposition of meaning and sense merges
with an acceptance of this opposition. In this manner, the speaker realises the
promise of his ironic identity.

The ironic opposition of meaning and sense that motivates this poem is most
apparent — and is at its most disturbing — in the verbal irony enacted by the
speaker’s recognition of his ‘ancestral murderers and poets’. As the speaker
himself realises, this is a moment of profound ‘perplexity’ as the line’s fluid,
almost protean meaning simultaneously confronts and confounds the sense that the
speaker finds in it. The Renaissance figures he imagines are ‘ancestral murderers’
in at least two senses: first, as part of the enslaving culture that brought Africans to
the Caribbean, they are the murderers of the speaker’s ancestors; second, they are
murderers who are ancestral to the speaker, who in this poem is confronting the
disturbing fact that he is, as Walcott puts it in ‘A Far Cry From Africa’., ‘poisoned
with the blood of both. / ...divided to the vein’ (18). The line is rendered even
more ironic by the fact that it is to these ‘murderers’ that the speaker owes his
very voice, inasmuch as they were also the ‘poets’ whose lyrics have produced
the poetic form that he depends upon now in his attempt to reject their legacy.
They are thus, ironically, both his ‘ancestral poets’ and his ‘ancestral murderers’
at one and the same time. The ironies of this moment come to dominate the poem
as the speaker is able to conclude (or terminate) the complexities of this line only
by, ironically, silencing his own voice and giving the conclusion of his poem
over to one of his ‘ancestral murderers and poets’. in the form of John Donne’s
‘Meditation XVII’ from his Devotions:

Ablaze with rage I thought.
Some slave is rotting in this manorial lake.
But still the coal passion fought
That Albion too was once
A colony like ours, ‘part of the continent, piece of the main’,
Nook-shotten, rook o’erblown, deranged
By foaming channels and the vain expense
Of bitter faction.

All in compassion ends
So differently from what the heart arranged:
‘as well as if a manor of thy friend’s…’ (20–21)

It is thus by sublimating his own colonial voice to the oppressive European ‘Master’ culture that the speaker, ironically, learns the lesson of ‘compassion’ that resolves his poem. At the same time, his deferral to Donne is perhaps an allusion to another figure that ironises this deferral. The principal character of Wilson Harris’s Palace of the Peacock (1960) is also named Donne, and his journey into the heartland of Guyana dramatises the brutality of European conquest of the Caribbean. The speaker’s ‘turn’ to Donne is thus doubly ironic insofar as even as he seems to be sublimating his own voice to that of the master, he is doing so, perhaps, through an appeal to a figure who has himself been ironically rewritten already by the Caribbean’s most prolific, imaginative and formidable novelist.6

This ironic conclusion is, apparently, the only way that the speaker can effectively lay to rest the difficult and divided imagery that marks this poem. On the one hand, he attempts to fan the ‘blaze of rage’ that he feels in response to the idea of a slave ‘rotting in this manorial lake’. On the other, is the ‘coal of compassion’ that seems, ironically, to extinguish the fire of rage rather than fuel it. The ‘blaze of rage’ with which the speaker first attempts to conclude the poem is highly reminiscent of the conclusion to Things Fall Apart insofar as it leads toward a moment in which the reader is suspended within the same manner of static opposition between coloniser and colonised embodied by the District Commissioner’s book. The ‘blaze of rage’ that the speaker wishes to feel is sustained only by the opposition of the brutalised ‘slave’ and the ‘manorial lake’ that seeks to hide him or her. As in Things Fall Apart, this opposition is overcome by the dramatic irony initiated by the idea of the slave as ‘rotting’. To this point in the poem, what has been ‘rotting’ is not the slave, but the Manor (‘the manorial lake’). In the first verse paragraph, we are presented with a number of images of rot and decay, all of them grouped around the manor:

Stones only, the disjecta membra of this Great House,
Whose moth-like girls are mixed with candledust,
Remain to file the lizard’s dragonish claws.
The mouths of the gate cherubs shriek with stain;
Axle and coach wheel silted under the muck
Of cattle droppings. (19)

The irony of the speaker’s ‘blaze of rage’ is that it is the opposite of how he began his poem. At the beginning, his ‘compassion’ seems almost wholly reserved for the manor and for those who dwelt within it. The ‘girls’, who are presented as having been ‘moth-like’, present to his imagination no threat or evil,
and are the ones who — like the rotting slave at the end — are now ‘mixed with candel dust’. The ruins of the Great House are themselves under continual threat from the ‘lizard’s dragonish claws’. As with the locusts in Things Fall Apart, the Biblical allusions do not distance the speaker from the manor, but close the distance with a sympathetic response. The loss of the manor is, in some sense (and quite ironically), regarded as an Edenic fall, in which the forces of evil have taken over, ‘staining’ the angelic guardians of this realm (the ‘gate cherubs’). By the end of this opening verse paragraph, the rot that has overtaken the manor becomes, possibly, a source of hope and redemptive fertility as the landscape is buried beneath ‘cattle droppings’. The meaning that the speaker strives to give his experience at the conclusion of the poem by firing within himself a ‘blaze of rage’ is at odds with the very sympathetic meaning of his opening stance.

The provisional sense of the relation between past and present that the speaker here achieves redresses what New thought was a gap within West Indian literature. In a discussion of George Lamming and V.S. Naipaul, New argues that

order is ... an irony in any community embarrassed by its past, for the people in it are constantly alienating themselves from the experiences they share. Their grasp on the present is preserved by the satiric displacement of the past, but their identity is subsequently diminished. A different kind of satire, attracted to the human beings whose foibles were being exposed, would embrace the past rather than distance it, but it would at the same time announce a different apprehension of the human predicament.

(9)

In his apprehension of the complicated relation of past and present, master and slave, the speaker of this poem is able to construct just such an ironic vision in which the past is ‘embraced’ rather than distanced. In this manner, Walcott’s poem establishes the same mode of understanding the relation between coloniser and colonised achieved by the reader of Achebe’s novel, insofar as the speaker moves beyond the relatively simple binary opposition of master and slave that confounds the beginning of the poem. This new understanding is realised when at the poem’s conclusion the speaker’s ‘blaze of rage’ is confronted and quelled by ‘the coal of his compassion’. The fuel with which he keeps alight this ‘coal’ is the idea that ‘Albion too was once / A colony like ours’. The ironies of this stance are many and profound. First and foremost, is the ironic nature of the utterance. The speaker is here attempting to construct for himself a space of resolution and retreat in his own landscape while predicating that retreat upon a valuation of the imperial power that has scarred and wounded that landscape. What is more, this ironic stance is initiated by the affirmation that England was ‘a colony like ours’. There are within this statement two closely allied ironies that the speaker seems to be accepting. The first irony is historical, insofar as the speaker’s claim that England was ‘a colony like ours’ is patently untrue. The ‘colonisation’ of England by Rome was of an altogether different nature than was the colonisation of the West Indies by England. The speaker himself seems to recognise this in his lament for the ‘vain expense / Of bitter faction’. The scars and wounds that
he perceives upon the history of England are, apparently, self-inflicted in civil war and the internally enacted violence of ‘bitter faction’ rather than the legacies of imperial control. The speaker also seems to accept and pass over without comment the irony of the fact that a nation that was itself a colony should become a brutalising coloniser. The final irony of the speaker’s stance, then, is that he is able to find ‘compassion’ for the imperial brutalisers of his own history by transferring onto them the violence that they have enacted on others. The fact that he may see that violence as having been self-inflicted only adds irony to irony. Thanks to this ironic understanding of his circumstance — and of himself — he is able to move past the ironic opposition of meaning (‘England and the West Indies are the same’) and sense (‘no, they’re not’) to his final moment of compassion. Of course, as I have already argued above, this final stance is also ironic insofar as he depends upon the voice and words of his ‘ancestral murderer and poet’ to resolve his conflict for him. By this point, however, the irony of this reaction is overlooked — or transcended — by the speaker’s ironic mode of understanding the relation between coloniser and colonised.

Irony, as the trope par excellence of misdirection, ambivalence and doubleness generates a fluid kind of truth that puts into motion opposing or contradictory terms or positions that cannot be reconciled, but which in their (ironic) mobility can be conjoined and mutually experienced. The reader of Things Fall Apart is able, through the apprehension of dramatic irony, to realise a truth of the imperial encounter that escapes or exceeds the actors caught up within it: that the situation it explores is not one that can be apprehended from within the static polarities of binary opposition. Just as locusts are neither ‘good’ nor ‘bad’ to eat, neither side of the cultural conflict is in the right, and both have something to offer to our understanding of their mutual clash. This global sense of the text, however, subsists only insofar as the reader is willing and able to perceive and understand the local and particular circumstances and point of view of the Igbo Storyteller. The transcultural truth achieved by the reader is therefore mobilised by and within the process that relates the reader’s own perceptions and understanding to the text’s differing and different truths. While it is the reader who must realise the promise of irony in Things Fall Apart, in ‘Ruins’ it is irony’s other co-conspirator, the speaker, who realises this promise when he is able to conclude his poem in compassion by neither rejecting outright, nor accepting unquestioningly, his ‘ancestral murderers and poets’. This conciliatory gesture is maintained by the ironic conclusion of the poem in which the speaker finds his own voice only in and through the voice of the tradition that his poem began in rebellion against. Both works bring to fruition the promise of irony for post/colonial texts by becoming the stage or ground upon which a global sense of the historical relation between coloniser and colonised (‘As well as if a manor of thy friends...’) is brought into a reciprocal and equivalent relation with the local meanings of that history (‘some slave is rotting in this manorial lake’).
These texts realise the promise of irony insofar as they each construct a sense of the relation between cultures that not only surpasses the discontinuity of different cultural meanings, but which actively adds to that meaning extra-linguistically. This sense is, however, always/already provisional, insofar as it is maintained by the extra-linguistic (inexpressible) sense that irony both aspires to and depends upon. It is this always/already provisional sense of truth that I have in mind when I speak of the promise of irony in and for post/colonial texts, for there is no uniquely post/colonial form of irony any more than there is an identifiable and singular ‘condition’ of post/coloniality. The ironic utterance holds within it the promise of a mode of truth in which global sense exists in an equal and reciprocal relationship with local meaning. At the same time, this relation is maintained upon the strength of the promise that binds the reader to the text, and the text to the reader; it is the promise made in and by every reading act — that this act is not meaningless.

NOTES

1 I use this form (post/colonial) of this most contentious term in order to sidestep the difficult (and never-ending) question of the hyphen. Whether the writers I will be examining are post-colonial or postcolonial is, for the purposes of this study at least, secondary to their status as ironists.

2 Interestingly, there have been very few works of sustained criticism on irony and the post/colonial. In fact, the three works that I examine in this study are the most substantive yet produced. There are literally hundreds of papers and books in which the role of irony is considered in specific post/colonial texts, but by and large these works do not address the specific function or nature of irony as it is realised in a post/colonial text.

3 A few pages before this moment we hear of the conversations between Mr. Brown — the more ‘moderate’ missionary — and Akunna, in which each was able to learn of the others’ beliefs, but significantly in which neither ‘succeeded in converting the other’ (126).

4 The novel’s one and only legitimately ‘in between’ character, Okonkwo’s son, Nwoye, is radically incapable of enacting any form of fruitful or lasting understanding between the cultural forces represented by the District Commissioner and Okonkwo. Nwoye’s own rebellion against his father is neither articulate, nor productive of a new or comprehensive understanding:

   It was not the mad logic of the Trinity that captivated him. He did not understand it. It was the poetry of the new religion, something felt in the marrow. The hymn about brothers who sat in darkness and in fear seemed to answer a vague and persistent question that haunted his young soul... He felt a relief within as the hymn poured into his parched soul. The words of the hymn were like the drops of frozen rain melting on the dry plate of the panting earth. Nwoye’s callow mind was greatly puzzled. (104)

5 For example, when Okonkwo beats his second wife for not preparing his meal the Storyteller explains that Okonkwo ‘was provoked to justifiable anger’ and condemns him only for beating his wife during the Week of Peace (21); the Storyteller also does not condemn the murder of Ikemefuna, the practice of leaving twins to die in the Evil Forest or the brutally callous treatment of Okonkwo’s dying father.
Donne is not the only ‘ancestral poet’ whose voice we hear in these concluding lines. The description of England as ‘nook-shotten’ is found in Shakespeare’s Henry V as the French Constable openly wonders at the value of the English given that the climate of ‘Albion’ is ‘foggy, raw, and dull’ (3.5.14). The ironies of this potential echo are compelling when we consider that in Shakespeare’s play the Constable utters these lines for ironic effect insofar as the English are destined to conquer France — as they did the Caribbean. The speaker of Walcott’s poem, then, is able to adopt the voice of an outsider, of one who contests the conquest of the English, only through a reference to that most canonical of all English authors, and only through the mask of a character who mistakenly believes he can defeat the English.

This passage thus opens yet another ironic allusion insofar as the reference to England as Albion — the Roman name for their English province — hearkens back to the beginning of Conrad’s Heart of Darkness, in which Marlow compares the Roman conquest of England to British imperialism. The irony of this reference stems from the fact that Marlow condemns Roman imperialism as ‘robbery with violence’ (65) in order to celebrate British imperialism by comparison. The speaker’s alluded sympathy with this point of view thus (ironically) aligns him with Marlow’s pro-imperial sentiments even as the speaker is attempting to align his own experience with the coloniser’s in terms of their mutual status as colonised victims of imperial aggression.

The very practice and purpose of empire is ironised in this poem, insofar as the plantation that it presents was used to grow limes, which were required by British sailors to avoid scurvy. The imperial plantation was thus dedicated to growing a crop that was required to fight a disease that was itself caused by imperialism.

WORKS CITED


Conrad, Joseph 1899, Heart of Darkness, Broadview, Peterborough.


In Kingsbury, English is not the only spoken language
Chinese, for example, is one of the many spoken, and written as well as read
Languages in the early 21st century
And in this language people discuss issues
Such as the ability to speak English
Badly and how this will un-Mayor a Mayor
In John So. a man who hasn’t got much else to un-recommend himself
Except his ability to speak an English that brings out the worst
In his political enemies
C, my friend, used a simple analogy:

This is like a disability
If you want to throw him from the throne of Mayoralty
You blame him for being a cripple or a fat chin or a lopsided face
Or, simply, for pronouncing rice as lice
But that proves your own weakness
For jidan li tiao gutou (finding bones in an egg)

I have nothing to say except that
I admire John for being so english
That he has Chinesed it
To the degree of providing his opponents
With his strongest weakness
THE KINGSBURY TALES: the non-academic’s tale

Critics are not above criticism
They, of all the people, are the ones who deserve criticism, if not carping
What if they keep calling me Mr Bai, not Mr Li
Because my Chinese name is Li Bai and keep putting me under B, not L
In the bland and mostly blind bibliographies
If they know Bai in Chinese means White they are committing an even worse crime
Which I would call, not racism, but namism
And, believe it or not, critics can even pretend they know a language
That they don’t know at all but let me tell you how
If someone has written something on, say, a Greek poet
Let’s assume he is Cavafy
And has quoted him and included him in his footnote
Next time I quote the quote or the quoted I simply include the info. in my foot
Note as if I read it in the original
Isn’t that simple enough? Critics
Please stop this lazy practice
For you’ll be caught out one day
Even though no one will openly write about it
There are other critics who will write about one
As if they know everything
By relying on a fashionable theory that will one day become a
Theoretical stereotype
And by adhering to the merely publisheds
(ah, so much unpublished is so exciting but did they know that? Not a thing!)
But they can’t even ensure that they have got their facts right
Avoid, at any cost, the prevalent academic laziness
That I see on a daily basis
Regardless of what large amounts of quotations are quoted
And what a long list of reference books is compiled
For the fact remains that it’s a shoddy piece of academic business
That forever keeps me out of business
And forever helps people get to the top
Beware of academic businessmen and businesswomen
Who sell their ware successfully in refereed journals
That no one reads
That are only refereed
As another dead piece goes down
The drain history
THE KINGSBURY TALES: the shirt

Lying in a corner of my room, the shirt
Is a gray color
I shed it as soon as I put it on this morning for the Court
As my back, the back of my neck, and, in fact, my whole upper trunk
Started getting itchy
It's a strange shirt in that sense for it never fails to make me itch
Far as I remember it this is a gift shirt from Ming my brother in October 1999
Back then, he was alive (what a redundant thing to say)
Now, he is dead
Today, finally unable to take the itchy load, I stripped myself bare
Of the gift, the memory, along with the guilt
That by so doing I might have committed an act of betrayal
I said to my wife:
I'm going to dump this itchy shirt
I'm not even going to give it away to the Australian poor
For philanthropy
China-made, it should be Chinese-trashed
Good idea, she said
After putting on a different shirt, I remembered
Once again for the hundredth time
That Ming was tortured to death in a Chinese prison
On 20 August 2003
Because of his Falungong belief
Due Preparations for the Plague: Globalisation, Terror and the Ethics of Alterity

The plot of Janette Turner Hospital’s latest novel, Due Preparations for the Plague, deals with some of those events and issues that humanity is presently striving to understand: terrorism, unlawful or unethical political dealings, and religious fanaticism, to mention but a few. The novel unravels these polemical issues through the story of the fictional hijacking of an Air France plane by Muslim fundamentalists in 1987, and in particular through the story of Lowell and Samantha, a young man and woman who desperately try to ‘[map their] way out of fog’ (Hospital 2003 47) by searching for the truth about the fate of loved ones who died on that doomed flight from Paris to New York. Although Due Preparations for the Plague is, over and above everything, an examination of a terrorist incident and the traumatic marks it makes upon the survivors, it also tackles the subsequent political obfuscation and unacknowledged interference by a government engaged in a different kind of war, one that involves consorting with the enemy, and thus diluting and obliterating any previously existing ethical codes and values. In the end, everything is relative and there are no fixed truths to cling to. To quote the explanation given to some would-be agents by Salamander, the CIA operative in charge of the hijack incident code-named Operation Black Death:

In our profession (making the world safe for stability, as we like to say; and sometimes, relishing our own esoteric wit, making the world safe for moral systems) it is a given that chaos is all; that order is not only arbitrary but evanescent, and that it is the task of a small circle of like-minded people to establish and guard it. Exactly which system of order we sustain — morally and politically speaking — is immaterial. We support the system most likely to stay in place. Hence our dilemma.

(227–28; emphases in original)

As Barbara Tuchman argued in A Distant Mirror, the Black Death of 1348–50 may have marked the transition from medieval to modern thought, since the random and undeserved deaths it inflicted could not be accounted for in a world created and designed to reflect God’s justice. If the plague did not make any distinctions between the wicked and the innocent, perhaps the Almighty was not capable of keeping earthly affairs under control. Perhaps luck, chance, accident and, what is even worse, absence, were running the show. How is one supposed to react in the shadow of such knowledge? (in Bliss 2004 78). This is one of the main
questions that *Due Preparations for the Plague* seems to ask. The novel is thick with literary allusions: Defoe’s *Journal of the Plague Year*, Camus’s *The Plague*, Thomas Nashe’s ‘In Time of Pestilence’, Bocaccio’s *Decameron*, together with allusions to the works of many other writers, such as Homer, Dante, Shakespeare, Browning, Bunyan, Lewis Carroll, Meredith Wilson and S.T. Coleridge. However whimsical some of them may at first seem to be, they all aim to highlight one single but crucial idea: we cannot control our lives, nor the obscure mechanisms that rule the complex world we live in, and there is no escape from the caprice and injustice of death. As Homer Longchamp, one of the ten hostages that the terrorists eventually keep in the bunker so that they can exchange them for ten imprisoned fundamentalist fighters, asserts a few minutes before dying:

> I don’t know [...] which of the three great mysteries can be considered the most impenetrable. Life. Or death. Or randomness. But I think randomness, the maddening neatness of randomness. Yes, I think the geography of chance is the ultimate teaser, intellectually and morally, because of the sheer enormity of divergence that results from a micro-change here and a micro-change there. It’s almost a commonplace now, with mathematicians: the Lorenz discovery — an accidental finding in itself — that minute changes in weather systems can have catastrophic results. (333)

The maddening neatness of randomness. Or should we instead speak about the maddening neatness of unstoppable globalisation processes? If, as Manfred B. Steger argues:

> Globalization refers to a multidimensional set of social processes that create, multiply, stretch, and intensify worldwide social interdependencies and exchanges while at the same time fostering in people a growing awareness of deepening connections between the local and the distant (2003 13).

then it seems clear that nobody can escape the effects of this international phenomenon. since the transformative powers of globalisation reach deep, not only into the economic sphere, but also into the political, cultural, technological, and ecological dimensions of contemporary social life all over the world. Although the fact that the world is becoming increasingly interdependent could very well contribute to enhancing world-wide co-operation and mutual understanding, it is nonetheless true that most manifestations and tendencies of globalisation seem to be working against the configuration of a more egalitarian and less violent universal order.

In Hospital’s novel, the main stimulus for arousing moral and intellectual response to global insecurity and uncertainty from both readers and characters is terrorism. The novel thus becomes yet another desperate effort to cope with the impact of 11 September 2001 on the world’s collective unconscious. As Alex Houen explains (2002 1–17), most commentators found it difficult to respond to this massacre without making analogies with other previous events and images, real and fictional alike: Pearl Harbour, the nuclear bombs of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, American *fin-de-siècle* fiction and Hollywood catastrophe movies
Due Preparations for the Plague

such as *Independence Day*, to name but a few examples. To quote one television critic’s words:

What strikes me first is that the most vividly appalling images are all, in a strange way, palimpsests reflecting other images from the nation’s visual memory, whether factual or fantastic. (Lawson 2001 10)

Unless you were one of the victims, the brutal reality of the events, to quote contemporary Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Zizek’s words, ‘could not but be reminiscent of the most breathtaking scenes in big catastrophe productions’ (2002 15). For many of us corrupted by Hollywood, the destruction of the World Trade Centre towers could only be experienced and expressed as hyperbole, that is, as surpassing the normal limits of experience and expression. All of a sudden, not only the fictional, but also the figurative was at the very heart of the massacre. The hyperbolic is an index of the way that performative aspects of discourse generally, and figurative language in particular, can affect the nature of material events, just as material events can modulate discursive practices. Within the ideology of radical Islam, 9/11 may have served, in Lee Harris’s words, as ‘a symbolic drama, a great ritual demonstrating the Power of Allah’ (2004 15) but, within the American collective unconscious, 9/11 certainly evoked a disturbing sense of *déjà vu* or *déjà lu*. To put it differently, the al-Qaeda mastermind behind 9/11 knew what he was doing only too well: the apocalyptic nightmares of the postmodern American imaginary would all of a sudden come true, ‘so that, in a way, America [would get] what it fantasised about, and that was the biggest surprise’ (Zizek 2002 16).

Whereas many authors wrote about the feeling that the big surprise given by the events of 11 September 2001 had rendered literary productions futile, others, such as Hospital, felt compelled to respond precisely because of the events’ tragic dimension and symbolic nature. The inclusion of so many literary allusions palimpsests in the novel could therefore be interpreted as one way to point to the hyperbolic, nightmarish, recurrent and postmodern nature of the attack. German composer Karlheinz Stockhausen, to give but one polemical example, was one of the many artists and critics who also saw this connection. As he argued, if according to the *New Oxford Dictionary of English* (1998), postmodern art would ‘include a deliberate mixing of different artistic styles and media, the self-conscious use of earlier styles and conventions, and often the incorporation of images relating to the consumerism and mass communication of late twentieth-century post-industrial society’, then it was obvious that 9/11 was the greatest work of art of all time (in Harris 2004 3–4). However, the tangible physicality of the bodies and buildings involved made it clear that the event was anything but artistic and metaphorical. For Osama bin Laden, though, the attacks were nothing but a copy, an imitation of the effects US foreign policy has had on Muslims in Palestine and Iraq (in Gillan 2001 1). According to Bin Laden’s interpretation, the attacks were simultaneously hyperbolised and diminished through being explained...
as figurative events. As Zulaika and Douglass have put it, ""terrorism" as a term is primarily a "rhetorical product"" (1996 23). Chris Hables Gray makes similar claims about war in general. With the predominance of information technology and global networks of power, war has become both postmodern and discursive, "its unity is rhetorical" (1997 243), he argues.

There is still no internationally accepted definition of terrorism, especially when terrorism takes on world-wide dimensions. The distinction between terrorism and war has become ambiguous, just as ambiguous as the definitions of terrorism put forward in the legislation of individual nation-states. The reasons for this are easy to guess: ambiguity allows for maximum flexibility in applying the law. By the 1990s, Adrian Guelke has argued, "the concept of terrorism had become so elastic that there seemed to be virtually no limit to what could be described as terrorism" (1995 1). If anything, Zulaika and Douglass go on to argue, "terrorism is a succession of actions; its real efficacy lies in its power to provoke, through sudden actions, disruptions of the existing order" (76). The physical, non-linguistic aspects of terrorism are therefore recognised as having a distinct role. And the way this role becomes significant is through ritualisation and pattern recognition. As long as terrorist events appear to be choreographed by the perpetrators as media spectacles, and often involve subsequent, at times even serial, attacks on symbolic buildings and sites, such ritualisation is clearly brought to the fore — the 3/11/04 and 7/7/05 terrorist attacks perpetrated in Madrid and London, to give but two notorious examples, clearly prove this. The belief that terrorism and the media form a symbiotic relationship has become commonplace. As Anthony Kubiak has put it:

Terrorism first appears in culture as a media event. The terrorist, consequently, does not exist before the media image, and only exists subsequently as a media image in culture [...] the media do not merely need and support terrorism, they construct it mimaetically as a phenomenon. (1991 1)

Information technology and widespread mechanisation have led to a blurring of boundaries between the private and the public, the physical and the psychological, perception and representation. The result is, according to Mark Seltzer, a traumatic space of socialisation. Serial killing, and by extension ritualistic terrorist attacks, are a response to this pathological public sphere, which is "everywhere crossed by the vague and shifting lines between the singularity of the subject, on the one side, and collective forms of representation, exhibition, and witnessing, on the other" (1998 17–18). Furthermore, the terrorists' dramaturgical tendencies should not be underestimated. As John Orr has argued:

Acts of violence against property or people are staged for different audiences simultaneously, sometimes to frighten, often to intimidate, usually to provoke the state enemy into excessive and unpopular counter-terror, but always to ensure that the act itself cannot be ignored. Such outrages would be nothing without their dramatic impact. They are the unlikely fusion of two contradictory things: spectacle and secrecy.

(1990 2)
It seems clear that the act of violence is also an act of communication. But what kind of messages does terror help to convey? As Anil K. Jain has claimed, contradiction lies at the core of the sign of terrorism, since the ultimate message that terrorist acts carry is, paradoxically, the impossibility of any kind of effective understanding. The only message terrorism can possibly convey is:

the (tragical) message about a failed act of communication. Terrorism symbolizes a severe crisis of understanding. The exclusions, which the order of modernity produces in its fear, fall back on it: as an attack. The misunderstanding of the ‘others’ that it creates is dreadfully disclosed to it. Terrorism is thus much less an act of mere physical violence but a communication act that seeks to overcome the speechlessness that results from the processes of silencing invoked by the order of modernity. (2004 np)

Terror, Anil K. Jain goes on to explain, is both an intrinsic part of civilisation and a taboo, and is thus placed in a strange relation of proximity to the divine and the diabolic alike. Fear and anxiety should not be seen as peripheral, but must be considered as central to the understanding of the order of modernity and its movement of Enlightenment. Modernity can never rest — it has wholly subscribed to never-ending progress. Paradoxically, it is its forward drive that paralyses modernity. In its permanent ambition of becoming something (else), neither can it be nor can it let be. The engine of the movement of modernity is fear, and this fear does not allow a break, nor can it allow divergence. Everything must submit to its urge for order and progress. The forward-drive of fear fixates modernity, turns it into the prey of radical rationalism. As Horkheimer and Adorno put it, ‘the curse of irresistible progress is irresistible regression’ (1972 36). Enlightenment has become a violent and totalitarian system in which full control is a must. Everything that is different or resistant to the order must be eliminated. Modernity is an endless war against ambivalence and chaos. Furthermore, the purifying movement of modernity is not only expressed in scientific classifications, but it also manifests itself in social practice. A system of discipline emerged to which we necessarily have to submit. Yet, the violence of modernity is a highly refined violence: it enacts itself in the form of a civilising process in which external constraints are transformed into self-constraints. This internalised violence is hard to identify, since it works below the surface and remains mostly invisible. It is the very fundamentalism of modernity, Anil K. Jain concludes, that triggers the emergence of fundamentalist counter-movements. Fundamentalists are the true children of modernity, and terrorism is nothing but one of the most explosive manifestations of the latent terror of modernity. Violence becomes the instrument of institutional politics par excellence. We are the hostages of terrorism as well as of the war against terrorism. As Jean Baudrillard asserts, ‘It is from this no-man’s land of terror that the world is now managed; it is from this in some sense extra-territorial […] space that the world is literally taken hostage’ (1991 38).

The position of exclusion is a condemnation to powerlessness and speechlessness. In order to be heard and become visible, the (subaltern) terrorists
make use of the suppressive logic of the language of the system they try to annihilate. Their only way out is destruction, a radical attack on the system. On the other hand, the challenged system cannot forgive this strike and responds in the same language, and the result is an escalating dynamics of misunderstandings, confrontation and violence. Yet, it must be noted that the terrorists do not become ‘others’ by the execution of terrorist acts, since they are already ‘others’ by definition: the order of modernity constantly produces the ‘other’ by its exclusions. As is well known, within this process of othering everything that is bad is projected onto the created image of the threatening ‘other’. Thus, we get rid of all our own ambivalences. However, it is the realisation of the deep similarity of the other to us that ultimately generates these strong defensive reactions against it. To put it in simple terms, we cannot stand the other within. Victims and victimisers are equally trapped in this destructive vicious circle that keeps them completely apart. Communication between them does not seem to be possible. As Amin Maalouf has argued, widespread refusal to see things with the eyes of the others encourages people to adopt an attitude that is partial, sectarian, intolerant, domineering, sometimes suicidal, and frequently even changes them into killers or supporters of killers. Their view of the world is biased and distorted. Those who belong to the same community as we do are ‘ours’ [...] As for the others, those on the opposite side, we never try to put ourselves in their place, we take good care not to ask ourselves whether on some point or other they might not be entirely in the wrong, and we won’t let our hearts be softened by their complaints, their sufferings or the injustices that have been inflicted on them. The only thing that counts is the point of view of ‘our’ side; a point of view that is often that of the most militant, the most demagogic and the most fanatical members of the community. (2000 30–31)

As Due Preparations for the Plague seems to claim, lack of communication, obstinacy and narrow-mindedness can only generate violence and death. Nobody wins in the end, because nobody is in control. ‘Consider that it is entirely possible that you too are being watched as you watch’ (284), CIA agent Salamander warns those who dare to watch his Decameron tape. On the other hand, the terrorists’ secrecy does not at all mean that they confidently pull the strings behind the scenes, but rather that, however hard these fundamentalists may try, they cannot possibly control the representations of themselves and the outcome of their actions. It is clear that most of them have powerful reasons to carry out such dreadful attacks: they support the Palestinian cause and denounce that the world’s superpowers have turned a deaf ear and a blind eye to their suffering and humiliation. However, all we know about these terrorists is what journalists say, namely that ‘the hijackers cannot be counted on to behave rationally or logically or with any recognisable human compassion [...] They are extremists. They are psychopaths. They are ideologically mad’ (151). Not only are they unequivocally demonised and deprived of their humanity, but they are also unable to be the masters of the situation they apparently originated. As one of the ten hostages who are about to die exclaims while addressing the terrorist leader and the camera
that is indifferently filming their agony, 'You think you have forged this bond, Sirocco, but it no longer has anything to do with you. You are nothing. Do you understand?' (326).

The novel under analysis clearly points to the obsession that both terrorists and CIA agents have with filming everything and preserving/destroying the records. Salamander wants the 'entire operation' to 'be transmitted and monitored' (177). Sirocco, for his part, indulges in believing that the media and 'the world [have] eyes in [his] plane' and that 'the world is listening to [him] as [he speaks]' (159). He wants to believe other people’s lives are in his hands. For Salamander,

[Sirocco] is a gifted designer of the custom-made hell and enjoys a visual record of his power [...] he watches and re-watches his own tapes. He likes to imagine us watching [...] Sirocco [...] wanted me [...] to watch, and [...] the world to watch. See how calmly torture can be inflicted, he wanted to say. I am setting up shop in your nightmares. I live under your pillow and under your skin. You will never sleep peacefully again. (273, 283)

To be forced to watch while being completely helpless and unable to do anything seems to be the worst possible nightmare, affirms Samantha’s aunt, the only relative of Samantha’s who watched the hijacking and took care of her after her parents’ deaths (49). Yet, according to Salamander, there is something that is even worse, namely, ‘seeing and not intervening to stop. The worst is that this happened under hi-tech surveillance. The worst is those who watched and monitored and voted: acceptable collateral damage’ (268; emphases in original). What Salamander for years regarded as ‘the necessary rituals of risk’ has all of a sudden turned into ‘blasphemy’ (28, 284).

It might therefore be argued that one of the issues that Due Preparations for the Plague puts fons'ard is that uncertainty doesn’t seem to free individuals of their obligation to be ethical, that is, to engage in an open-ended dialogue with the world and the others, to open themselves to the experience of alterity that will let them cling to love and make the most of the redemptive resilience of their spiritual dimension, however inevitable and tragic the ending may eventually be. In other words, this novel could be said to bring to the fore the lethal consequences of arresting dialogue and absolutising certain forms of life and thought. It invites the reader to meditate on the experience of otherness and the need to endorse a dialogical ethical model, thus subtly echoing some of the most well-known current discourses on narrative ethics.

Emmanuel Levinas is, without doubt, one of the main philosophical figures of the turn to ethics that has characterised literary criticism for the last two decades. His theories, mainly as put forward in Totality and Infinity (1961) and Otherwise Than Being or Beyond Essence (1974), have time and again been used by critics concerned with defining and advocating a postmodern post-foundational ethics. This ethics clearly asserts that it is possible to make ethical claims without relying on normative codes, categorical imperatives or universal moral principles
because ‘there are no categories or concepts knowable prior to what becomes the decisive ethical moment in Levinas’ philosophy: the encounter with the singular, irreducible Other’ (Kotte 2001 71). According to Levinas, ethical responsibility is prompted by the encounter with the Other, or ‘the face’, as he also names it. For him, the Other is always radically different and resists being transformed or appropriated. To quote Christopher Falzon’s words:

the other is an absolute difference, a truly other, in the sense of that which is genuinely new, unexpected, unpredictable, something which comes from ‘outside’. It is that which has independence from us, which resists or eludes our efforts to impose ourselves upon it, and which can in turn influence us, affect and transform us. (1998 33)

Yet, our encounters with the Other are often ruled by our attempts to assimilate it and transform it in terms of our categories of understanding. To put it differently, we strive to reduce the Other to the Same, which turns this ethical moment par excellence into a rather unethical imposition. This has been, according to Andrew Gibson, the characteristic mode and ultimate sin of Western philosophy, which has systematically tried to ‘speak of and therefore master the other as whole, to reduce the other to the terms of the same’ (1999 65). Change and modernity have systematically been associated with the West. This has led most Westerners to regard their civilisation as ultimately superior, and thus as a model to imitate by all the other cultures, which cannot in turn help experiencing ambivalent feelings towards this non-stop westernisation/ modernisation process. As Amin Maalouf has put it:

For the rest of the world’s inhabitants, all those born in the failed cultures [...] For the Chinese, Africans, Japanese, Indians and American Indians, as for Greeks, Russians, Iranians, Arabs, Jews and Turks, modernisation has constantly meant the abandoning of part of themselves. Even though it has sometimes been embraced with enthusiasm, it has never been adopted without a certain bitterness, without a feeling of humiliation and defection. Without a piercing doubt about the dangers of assimilation. Without a profound identity crisis. (72)

Is there a way to escape this humiliating assimilation, this phagocytic impulse towards the Other? The only answer for Levinas is to confidently open ourselves to the experience of reciprocity and alterity. Meeting the Other on ethical grounds implies assuming that there are no monolithic truths, that we cannot possibly be in absolute control, and that the subject is in constant dialogue and transformation, since our encounter with the world involves a reciprocity, a two-way movement or interplay between ourselves and the world that inexorably turns our self into un sujet-à-venir. In Levinas’s words:

A calling into question of the Same — which cannot occur within the egoistic spontaneity of the Same— is brought about by the Other. We name this calling into question of my spontaneity by the presence of the Other ethics. The strangeness of the Other, his irreducibility to the I, to my thoughts and my possessions, is precisely accomplishment as a calling into question of my spontaneity as ethics. Metaphysics, transcendence, the welcoming of the Other by the Same, of the Other by Me, is concretely produced as the
Due Preparations for the Plague is full of solitary characters who, like Lowell, desperately try to cope with sadness, absences, loneliness, bad memories and silences (93). They all share the same morbid incapacity to open themselves up and communicate with the others. Rowena refuses to believe that Lowell, her ex-husband, can begin to improve, and he finds ‘the injustice of this [...] monumental’ (13). Lowell can never get to know his father. To make matters worse, he feels totally unable to live up to what he considers to be his father’s expectations, which have tormented him permanently. ‘It was like living in parallel universes, [Lowell] said. All the time. Simultaneously. [...] I was never sure which one he was when he was with me. [...] Even when he was with us, he wasn’t with us’ (20). Lowell’s father has remained a complete mystery to everybody, even to Elizabeth, his new young wife, who after his funeral confesses: ‘he was a stranger to me. I knew the mailman better’ (23). Being a CIA agent, he felt compelled to cope with quite a contradictory and alienating situation: he was to know all the others’ secrets while scrupulously keeping himself to himself. He knew that people like him are inexorably doomed: the better you train a secret agent, the less he will trust his peers and be able to collaborate with them, and the more likely he will be to spoil everything by the obsessive need to know all. In the end, he will get killed: too much distrust — and too much knowledge — will annihilate him. The locker containing the secret documents and videotapes that Lowell’s father wants to hand to him can be said to symbolise not only his father’s own cryptic and labyrinthine inner self — his own ‘blacker than dark, and more dense [...] impenetrable’ particular Inferno (273) — but also Lowell’s anguish at the impossibility of understanding and reaching him.

Locker B-64 has taken up ghostly residence in Lowell’s bedroom. Sometimes, in dreams, he is inside it, banging on the door for the key holder to let him out. Sometimes, mathematically and malevolently, the walls of his room shift subtly [...] while he, Lowell, falls downward, faster and faster, down and down, clutching at handles that come away in his fingers and never getting below or beyond the endless doors [...] but he can never get to the bottom of the riddle of Locker B. (31)

His father remains an absolute difference, a truly Other. No encounter between them seems to be possible. Génie, the only hostage who, together with Tristan, finally seems to be given a slight chance to escape and survive, experiences a similar feeling of isolation and failure — ‘a virus of bereavement’ (121), as she likes to put it. She has created her own ‘security system’, which consists in ‘leaving before she is left’ (121). She is too afraid of love. The same could be said of Cassie, who can only feel good and safe in the abandoned boathouse where the members of the Phoenix Club (the internet support club that the surviving children of the ill-fated plane set up, both to request information concerning the infamous incident and to help their troubled members to cope with life) occasionally gather,
or of Samantha, who for so long insists on rejecting the affection given to her by aunt Lou, the only relative she can actually trust and cling to. Refusal to establish any kind of encounter with the other is not the only source of agony and distress, though. The opposite attitude can also lead to the same regrettable end. To give but one example, it is Tristan’s attempt to wholly transform, possess and control Génie that makes her leave him. She is in love with Tristan, but cannot cope with so much jealousy and possessiveness: ‘Either you stop being a travel writer, he shouted, or you leave. And she had left. She had vanished without a trace’ (114). Tristan realises his mistake, but only when it is too late, when he is completely on his own. The novel abounds with scenes and symbols that bring to the fore the overwhelming solitude, isolation and otherness that are such an intrinsic part of the human condition: the unattended child on a swing (182–83), the old man whose family is not visiting him for Christmas (183–84), the man conversing with his dog for want of better company (194), and the Greyhound buses, almost exclusively used by society’s outcasts, that is, ‘the poor and the desperate’ (212).

There is only one possible way to overcome frustration and accept otherness, the novel seems to suggest: to go ‘beneath the radar of rationality’ that imposes categorical divisions and exclusions and have ‘a healthy respect for intuition’ (250), the intuition that enables us to understand that it is only by relinquishing our supposedly fixed selves that we will be able to preserve and enrich them. Tristan’s puzzling experience with the wave when he was only a child can very well illustrate this conviction:

he hunches up again, bracing his small body […] with the wave hanging over him like a vast implacable wall. Terror. He sees the fluted green frown beetling above, utterly indifferent. You are nothing, boy. nothing, it says, bored. He prostrates himself before Wave, the annihilator, the God of Smash. […] His brother Pierre keeps shouting: Like this, like this, keep your eyes open. […] And curl yourself up in its armpit, give yourself to it, like this, so that you are the wave. (152–53)

Open yourself to the experience of alterity so that you can overcome terror and get to know and understand the Other, which will in turn allow you to better know and understand yourself, the novel seems to claim. It is only when Samantha realises how much she cares about Lowell and his children Amy and Jason: when she learns to love her aunt Lou — who eventually turns out to be her true biological mother; when she manages to hold them all ‘in the sacristy of her mind’ (390) that she finally recovers peace. The same is true of Lowell. Now that he has succeeded in overcoming all his fears, forgiving his father and letting the world know — or rather letting those who really want to know know — the other side of that disgraceful story, he feels confident. For the first time in his life he is able to show firmness in his convictions. ‘I’m not asking you, I’m informing you’ (378), Lowell says to Rowena when she tries to prevent him from taking the kids to visit their grandfather’s grave. Lowell’s insistence should not be regarded as an act of defiance, though, but rather as his attempt to convince Rowena of the
importance of this visit so that a final reconciliation between the three generations can be possible. Last but not least, it is highly significant that it is Tristan and Génie, the two most altruistic characters, who seem to be allowed to survive and take refuge in some ‘unfindable [village] which is no longer on maps’ (352), or so we, readers, want to believe. The reasons for this are all too obvious. As Tristan explains to Génie: ‘They were gifted for love, Tristan and Genevieve. Great love was their destiny’ (138): love, generosity, openness, survival, transcendence. They are idealists, they do not easily crack under pressure. That is why Salamander finds them so attractive and dangerous. It is ‘the exceptional nature of their stubbornness’, their ‘insane thickheadedness which paradoxically makes [them] impossible to kill’ (232), he exclaims.

However, nothing or very little has yet been said about the other idealists, the Others par excellence in the novel: the terrorists. The only fundamentalist who is given any protagonism is, without doubt, Sirocco. Sirocco is often described as ‘a total stranger’ (146), as a cruel and ruthless mercenary who only cares about himself: ‘The Jews, the Palestinians, what do I care? I am for myself. Enlightened self-interest, I would say. Those are my politics’ (247). As was argued before, he is not an inexplicable oddity, but rather the logical outcome, the true child of modernity. Not in vain does he use the word ‘enlightened’. Yet, it must be pointed out that it is mainly through the eyes of other people, especially those of Salamander, that we have access to Sirocco’s thoughts. Consequently, he is systematically demonised and depicted as the enemy, the devil society must necessarily fight against. However, this might be nothing but an oversimplification, an attempt to manipulate reality and make it fit into clear-cut and binary categories such as good vs. evil. Samantha, for example, likes to think of Salamander — who eventually turns out to be Lowell’s father — as an unobtrusive and callous being who delights in destroying people’s lives (45–46), which does not finally seem to be the case. Similarly, Salamander and most of the characters in the novel have, and transmit, a rather negative and monochrome impression of Sirocco. Yet, Sirocco is given some identity, and is at times allowed to speak. By contrast, nothing is said about the other fundamentalists, about their lives, their problems, their families, their history, their beliefs, their reasons for doing what they do. They are the true Others of the story, the stubborn and thickheaded — and therefore dangerous — idealists at the other end, the subaltern that are not allowed to speak, nor even to have a name, an identity. It is evident, then, that the novel occasionally fails to treat all characters on the same ethical grounds. However understandable this exclusion may be — nobody who in his/ her right mind, and who is not undergoing a desperate situation, can approve of indiscriminate violence — it can by no means be justified. The novel’s refusal to give them a voice is one of its biggest and most blatant faults and contradictions. After all, as Samantha says to Lowell on the phone before they meet, ‘what can be worse than not knowing?’ (5). The experience of reciprocity and alterity accepts no exceptions.
Nevertheless, the void that this silence creates is so flagrant, so unexpected to some extent, that one cannot help thinking that this is the price that writing about such a polemical issue inevitably entails. Important drawbacks apart, *Due Preparations for the Plague* is a brave attempt to bring to the fore, explore and analyse the lethal consequences that turning one’s back on the Others inevitably brings about. ‘In a time of embedded journalists’, Jonathan Bennett argues, ‘it is ironic that a form as old as the novel is the one medium that can actually make us imagine what it might be like to live as another does’ (2003 3). The novel, Hospital seems to argue, is still a valid vehicle, if not one of the best vehicles, to discuss all these thorny questions or, to quote from the novel itself, to gather the ‘pieces which make up the puzzle of the self’,

[which] are held together by the glue of memory. Certain solvents can dissolve this glue: a stroke, catastrophic events. Then we are forced to become scavengers of our own past, searching, finding, relearning, reassembling the self. (47)

Literature can still help us to cope with uncertainty and remain alive. As the Yiddish writer proclaims before dying,

we must still tell stories […] because the Horsemen of Death still gallop […] Our villages are plundered […] our houses are burned, but even so, the spark of the divine cannot be quenched, and where the spark of the divine touches, there is dancing and play. (309–10)

Like the Baal Shem Tov, first of the zaddiks (Jewish spiritual leaders), we tell ourselves stories ‘because there [is] no escape’, but over and above everything because we want to live ‘in the land of even so’ (309–10; emphases in original). Literature, and culture by extension, is a powerful constituent and vehicle at the core of possible transformations, given that it mediates and transfers ideas, values and intellectual refinement between generations and between civilisations. Culture is, therefore, both a preserving and a transforming force, a factor without which sustainable global development will never be possible. As Ada Aharoni stated:

Culture is a key factor in promoting genuine peace. If a peace culture system instils recognition of the ‘other’, respect for its identity and culture, as well as a commitment to solving conflicts and differences by peaceful means, then the chances for peace will be greatly enhanced. By contrast, if the cultural and educational system instils self-centeredness, rejection and hatred of the ‘other’, of its identity and of its culture, and calls for and justifies the resort to violence to solve conflict — then sustainability may be endangered. […] There is therefore a crucial need for reform at an international scale, concerning culture, literature and the arts, that can undermine and replace the culture of violence terror and crime. (2002 unnumbered pages)

It is clear, then, that Hospital’s novel explores a number of ‘terror and war- on-terror’ themes, such as the frightening sensation of permanent risk, the use of human beings as damage collateral for men who will do whatever they need to in order to achieve their own personal and political goals and enforce their own
immutable ideological creeds and, worst of all, the fact that neither the official (American) press nor the government (Congress) are concerned with knowing the dark side of their truth. As Lou dishearteningly says to Samantha in a desperate attempt to find some kind of explanation for this indifference: ‘Horror doesn’t reach people anymore. Horror’s TV. Horror’s special effects’ (383). The novel examines the psychological destruction inherent in personal loss, especially when this loss is cloaked in ambiguity, to conclude that any kind of definite understanding or belief in information received is simply impossible. Just as Defoe’s *Journal of the Plague Year* (1722) suggested centuries before, *Due Preparations for the Plague* makes it clear that we have no idea what the future will be like, so we have no way to genuinely prepare. All our efforts to stop oncoming disaster are, to some extent, futile. To quote Defoe’s words:

I have often asked myself what I mean by preparations for the plague … and I think that preparations for the plague are preparations for death. But what is it to make preparations for death? Or what preparations are proper to be made for death?

*(in DPP iv)*

However, it is not only fear that this political thriller seems to wish to exploit. This novel is frightening in so far as it gives insight into how easily intolerance and terrorism can affect and destroy our lives, and how thin and questionable the barrier between what we regard as ‘good’ and ‘evil’ can be. Not in vain does Lowell’s father, code-named Salamander, finally become aware of the split personality that has tormented him for years:

S for substructure, subterranean, subterfuge. S for split selves, Siamesed. It is by the other man, Salamander, that events have been nudged in dreadful directions […] I want […] to stop Salamander from taking up more and more space while I am becoming […] smaller and smaller, like Alice in Wonderland with the shrinking potion. (219)

He goes as far as to think that there is no such difference between himself and the rogue agent Sirocco: he also fantasises about punishing his wife, wishes to make idealists like Tristan and Génie pay for their defiance and pride, seeks to control his daughter’s life, and places all the people he wants under surveillance. ‘I plead guilty’ (274), Salamander finally says. It may not at all be accidental, then, that S is the initial of the names of both — Salamander and Sirocco.† Salamander has an obscure and repressed dark side that, from time to time, firmly takes hold of him, thus disclosing his utter helplessness and inability to control anything, not even his own life and feelings. His extra-marital relationship with Anna is nothing but a clear eruption of ‘the other within’.

On those nights when the torment comes, when nothing else helps, I want continuing access to the basement apartment which is not in my part of the city. […] The building through which one gains access to that dark and desirable basement is quite dissimilar, even violently so, from the graceful town house where I live with my young wife. […] I refer to the cramped below-street-level space of the young courtesan, the lovely Anna in leather and chains. Anna […] lives on the dark side of the moon. […] The lovely
Anna, my Nefertiti, is black and croons the blue news of underground, which it is my professional duty to keep beneath sewer caps. We have a contact which both of us understand. (222)

Salamander’s sado-masochistic relationship with Anna seems to be the only way in which he can possibly handle the irrepressible fear, anguish and frenzy that so often gnaw at him: ‘When she cracks her whip, he tastes, very briefly, absolution’ (246). However dark and similar the condition of those two agents may at times be, it is only Salamander who eventually manages to redeem himself by saving the children who were travelling on that plane, that is, by opening himself up to the others’ needs and feelings. He wants to make up for the past, to restore self-confidence to his confused son. He longs for his truth to be known, even at the cost of his own immolation. It is by no means accidental, therefore, that Salamander should become obsessed with the words uttered by Scipio, the conquering and victorious Roman general, after the terrible Roman siege of Carthage in 146 BC: ‘How do we tell a glorious victory from horror?’ (244)

However poignant this question may be, the novel often strives to make tolerance, hope, faith and forgiveness its very real issues, mainly though a strong belief in the human capacity for transcending old absolute forms through dialogue and for showing resilience in the face of extreme horror and adversity. It is true that Due Preparations for the Plague sometimes falls into its own trap by silencing most of the terrorists, the apparently most unpalatable protagonists of the story. Yet, the fact that this silence should be so conspicuous only reveals how successfully the novel has disclosed its daring message despite its own shortcomings. Contradictions and omissions apart, Hospital’s novel could be said to endorse Falzon’s belief in the necessity of throwing caution to the winds, to ‘expose oneself and one’s culture to the possibility of being challenged and even transformed by the other in a concrete dialogue […] [because] if this dialogue exposes us to uncertainties, risks and dangers, the effects are ultimately positive’ (1998 98). It is lack of dialogue and understanding that can — and will eventually — bring about ever-increasing violence and ultimate destruction. To quote Maalouf’s warning words again:

When new facts emerge we need to reconsider our attitudes and habits. […] in the age of globalisation and of the ever-accelerating intermingling of elements in which we are all caught up, a new concept of identity is needed, and needed urgently. We cannot be satisfied with forcing billions of bewildered human beings to choose between excessive assertion of their identity and the loss of their identity altogether, between fundamentalism and disintegration. But that is the logical consequence of the prevailing attitude on the subject. If our contemporaries […] cannot reconcile their need for identity with an open and unprejudiced tolerance of other cultures […] then we shall be bringing into being legions of the lost and hordes of bloodthirsty madmen.

(34–35)

The heart-breaking — and utterly symbolic — description of the ten hostages in the bunker simply corroborates this. They belong to very different ethnic,
social and cultural groups, and yet, they all seem to stand for the same: our fragile, 
but dignified and resilient, human condition. All of them, without exception, are 
isolated, trapped, stranded, helpless, terrified, completely different but utterly 
similar, with enormous difficulties in communicating with one another, deprived 
of light, and watched by an invisible presence which manifests itself in the form 
of absolute absence.

Strangely shaped shadow-beings, with grotesque heads, move about in a slow ballet, 
and if it were not for the dread fact that we know all too well what we are watching, we 
might think we were in the first circle of Dante’s hell. The light is murky [...]. Hooded 
shapes, stumbling about like the damned — they are the damned — reach out and grope 
at each other. They feel the walls, they stretch their padded arms against, reaching up, 
reaching down, describing large arcs in many directions, measuring the dimensions of 
their cage like blind men who have been told that somewhere on the walls is an Open 
Sesame switch. They have twenty-four hours to find it. [...] The stage set seems to be 
a room, or a bunker, about twelve feet square. There is no furniture. There are only the 
ten padded shapes which sometimes curl up on the ground, immobile, and sometimes 
bump into one another. When collision occurs, sometimes the bodies embrace and 
cling. At other times, they start apart like similarly charged magnetic poles repelling 
each other. High in one corner, where two walls and the ceiling meet, there is an eye 
of infrared light. (282–83)

Nevertheless, as soon as Yasmina Shankara, the Bollywood movie star, gives up 
her life so that she can pass Kalidasa’s beloved Sanskrit poem on to her son Agit, 
the remaining nine hostages miraculously become ‘one organism, multicelled’, as 
if they were ‘an ant colony or a swarm of bees’ (308). They are all possessed by 
’an oceanic sense of love and connectedness’ (334) to the other people with them 
in the room. Like Yasmina, most of them choose fast death so that they can try 
and help the other hostages out of the bunker and, most important of all, they can 
send a final message of hope and beauty —not in vain are many of them creators 
and artists— and ask for the forgiveness of the ones they love. Moreover, many of 
them are overwhelmed by the unexpected discovery that they are not as secular 
as they thought. After all, as violinist Avi Levinstein states, ‘the religious impulse 
begins in awe, and awe begins at death’ (326).

However hard we try to avoid the encounter with the other, the other will 
always come to us, because, as the Indian actress finally discovers, ‘[e]verything 
returns. Nothing can ever be lost’ (306). Poverty had frightened Yasmina since 
she was a child in Bombay. She couldn’t even bear to touch beggars or put coins 
in their hands. Paradoxically, she is now to die the death of the beggar girl who sat 
outside her gates and who, day after day, tapped at her window to ask for a coin. 
If the beggar girl died of hunger, Yasmina will die of oxygen deprivation, but not 
before passing the beautiful story of the Cloud Messenger on to her son. Isabella 
Hawthorne, for her part, will also succeed in offering her tormented son Lowell 
the story of the two white doves that flew off into the sky as her powerful healing 
legacy. Love and acceptance of the Other will bring us, if not happiness, Samantha 
finally realises, at least ‘something rich and mellow that [we] could call a state
of being at peace’ (390). But one fundamental question still remains unanswered: ‘How do we ready ourselves for what might happen tomorrow? What possible preparations can be made?’ (390). It seems there is only one answer, a very simple — but also complicated — answer. Hospital’s meditation might be said to hold the key to find it:

[In the West] death is something that happens to other people. We live in a state of constant denial about it, and this is why I was so amazed and fascinated by the reactions of the people in the top floors of the World Trade Towers. That suddenly they were sort of rushing at incredible speed into the white effulgence of death and had to react with the minutes of life left to them, and reacted in ways that to me are hugely reassuring about the human spirit [...] what possible preparations can be made? The preparations that can be made are to live well and decently and magnanimously now, while we’ve got life. (in Hall 2003 1)

These words inevitably bring to mind, and desperately make us cling to, Albert Camus’s hopeful, although at times undoubtedly difficult to believe, defence of humanity’s worth as expressed in *The Plague*:

To state quite simply what we learn in a time of pestilence: that there are more things to admire in men than to despise. (in *DPP* iv)

NOTES

1 The research carried out for the writing of this paper has been financed by the M.C.Y.T. (Ministerio de Ciencia y Tecnología). D.G.I. FEDER. Proyecto HUM2004-00344 FILO. A previous draft of this paper was presented at the 10th IBACS (Iberian Association of Cultural Studies) Conference *Culture and Society in the Age of Globalisation*, which was held in October 2004 in Burgos, Spain.

2 The story begins with the tenth anniversary of this catastrophe. The children on the plane were released before the tragic end — the plane was set on fire and literally disintegrated in air. Those surviving children are now adults who, from time to time, meet in an abandoned boathouse, and who have set up an internet support group, significantly called the Phoenix Club. Of these surviving children, Samantha, Jacob and Cassie have forged the closest bonds. Samantha is particularly obsessed with trying to find answers and she searches constantly for links and connections. An additional layer of complexity is provided by Lowell, whose mother was on the ill-fated plane, and whose father, an important CIA operative, was a top agent in the hijack incident code-named Operation Black Death. Blaming himself for his father’s emotional distance, Lowell has been an ineffectual husband and father. When Lowell receives a mysterious package from his father, who has just died in a suspicious car crash only four days before the tenth anniversary of the massacre, the contents change his perspective and raise serious questions of personal responsibility. Samantha has relentlessly pursued Lowell via telephone, desperate for any clues he might have about the terrorist attack. When Lowell finally decides to contact Samantha, he is in a panic. He is quite rightly convinced that he is being pursued for the inflammatory material now in his possession. Lowell and Samantha wonder if they are becoming paranoid. As a result of their separate investigations, they come to believe that it is not only possible but likely, that members of US security agencies helped engineer and implement the catastrophe which claimed their parents. They believe a Muslim
man called Sirocco to be the terrorist who commanded the hijacking, but they are also trying to identify Salamander, the American CIA agent who is supposed to have 'controlled' him. When some of the other now-adult children of the tragedy begin to die mysterious deaths or find themselves followed and observed, the tension between the remaining survivors increases, and when Lowell reads that 'Operation Black Death was a politically necessary exercise that got out of hand', his own fear and anger at this betrayal by his own countrymen — especially his father, who eventually turns out to be Salamander himself — threaten to drive him mad. In a secret meeting, or so they hope, Lowell and Samantha must make a difficult decision on how to balance the use of the explosive information they have and their desire for survival. They are faced with a serious dilemma: to determine who is friend and who is foe as they strive to unravel a picture of American political influence, unethical schemes, double-crossing and a cover up conspiracy.

3 The etymology of the term hyperbole points in different directions. In Greek the verb huperballein has more than one meaning: 'to overshoot', 'to exceed all bounds', 'to go on further and further', and 'to pass over, cross, or traverse (mountains, rivers, etc.)'. In other words, it denotes both material and discursive excesses, and those excesses are in turn bound to produce transferences between discourse and material events.

4 It must be said, however, that in a subsequent message Stockhausen stated that the press had hideously misinterpreted his meaning, and clarified as follows: 'I am as dismayed as everyone else about the attacks in America. At the press conference in Hamburg, I was asked if Michael, Eve and Lucifer were historical figures of the past and I answered that they exist now, for example Lucifer in New York. In my work, I have defined Lucifer as the cosmic spirit of rebellion, of anarchy. He uses his high degree of intelligence to destroy creation. He does not know love. After further questions about the events in America, I said that such a plan appeared to be Lucifer's greatest work of art. Of course, I used the designation 'work of art' to mean the work of destruction personified in Lucifer. In the context of my other comments this was unequivocal' (Stockhausen 2001 1).


6 Cassie's talented parents — her father was a prestigious cellist and her mother a well-known soprano — died in the terrorist attack. From that moment onwards, Cassie has been unable to lead a normal life and has lived in a psychiatric hospital on an almost permanent basis. Significantly, the abandoned boathouse is totally isolated and surrounded by water, which could plausibly be interpreted as symbolising Cassie's desperate regression (to her mother's uterus) and inability to cope with life and reality.

7 Tristan runs Editions du Double and helps poor and proscribed writers to make their works known and read in the West. Génie, for her part, works for Caritas. She carries family and personal letters from one place to another, thus connecting 'too many small and ordinary lives behind too many dangerous barriers' (127).

8 Yet, such is the subversive and revelatory power of literature, the novel also seems to warn, that it can conversely put us into a difficult situation. The sudden death of Agit, Indian movie star Yasmina's son, clearly shows how wrong Samantha is when she exclaims: 'No one in government circles or Intelligence pays any attention to fiction' (74). Jacob has reasons to believe that Agit did not commit suicide. He is convinced that Agit got killed simply because he drew attention to himself and his mother's
disquieting death by publishing the book of short stories *Flight into the Dark*. Contrary to what Samantha wants to think, literature is anything but neutral, and even politicians may pay attention to it, if only to prevent people from thinking.

Yet, the meanings of those two names are rather different, if not complementary. If *sirocco* means 'the hot wind that burns where it blows' (148), a *salamander* is, among other things, 'a mythical creature having the power to endure fire without harm' (45). Both of them can be just as tough but, whereas the former stands for destruction, the latter represents endurance and resilience.

It is certainly no coincidence that the secret documents and tapes that Lowell's father hands to him in the blue sports tote should be firstly made to fit into Lowell's old-time pillowcase, the same pillowcase he had until he was six years old and started school.

WORKS CITED


RON MORRIS

THESE DEPTHS; THIS WEIGHT

We’re in the deep quiet place where blood slows
Air bubbles rise to hatch in their element.
The sky surges and swells as the sea
Surges and is swollen. But who can fathom sky?
Clouds are vaporous legends; the sun’s
An unconfirmed report. Whereas,
The water’s surface is a diaphanous veil
Dappling light. The upper sea’s
Translucent, a lid cradling certain dark.
In which we drift, where we anchor ourselves
To the words: You may see your father now.
And there he is, caged upon his narrow bed.
The pulse of his throat beats ragged.
Hello love, he mouths as we haul
On hope like rope and pull up a sack
Of sodden cinders. Hello love, he says
As if love’s a ship’s hold brimming
With lucent pearl. It’s not.
And yet this very sea is love.
And we’re immured in a rift where
Love is blood is thicker than water
When I open my mouth to speak
This sea of love pours in.
BITTERSWEET

It's winter behaving like spring.
First, the peach blossom,
And now the jonquils herald
August in the yard. Their petticoats bob
And sway in moist warm air. The scent
On your tongue like a glut of candy, or incense.
The wife beams at you from her brass cell
Photo-frame; wherein, she spreads her arms wide.
Her eyes are steel blue hooks.
She thinks you are the catch she holds.
But no.
You're tethered to Tuesday 10.00 a.m's
Cupidon lips as he lisps line by line
Rhymes that immortalise beloved callow youth.
He speaks and the room is doused in light.
It gilds the blackboard the golden-green of still,
Deep water and turns assembled flesh to bronze.
And you?
You'd be wick to his flame. You ought to be
Ashamed of yourself! If you could place your need
Upon the table you both could eat need
And drink need and be sated. Here's brawn of truth,
You'd say and offer him the pulp, the very pith
Of your need made palpable. You'd sear yourself
On his sibilant kiss and once consumed devour
Him like manna; his fragrance as heady
As the stink of jonquils that rise
From their bed of blood and bone.
UNDO ME, HE SAYS
AS LEDA WAS UNDONE BY HER LOVER

Sweet William wants to die falling.
He wants to coast smack-bang into the Iris
Of the Universal Principle knowing
That the Centre cannot hold.
Sweet William would tread air
As a black swan treads water.
As angels tread the blue
Of stratosphere. With feet of clay
He would dive into the whorl of all flesh,
Fancying he is The Black Swan of Trespass,
Fancying he is white Leda flying and flailing,
He becomes Wee Willie Witless plummeting
Towards the place where things fall apart.
The work of Patrick Chamoiseau has often met with a polarised reception; Annie Le Brun identifies the writer’s work as part of a ‘new exoticism’ (qtd in Bongie 343), while Derek Walcott effuses that the ‘elation’ of Texaco ‘cracked my heart’ (45). Richard D.E. Burton declares him the ‘leading Martinican writer of the new post-Césaire, post-Glissant generation’ (467), while others lament Chamoiseau’s rejection of filiation with Aimé Césaire, Fort-de-France’s long serving politician and poet and one of the founding fathers of Négritude (1997 133). Whatever the text’s reception beyond the Franco-Caribbean world, my own encounter with Chamoiseau’s work has always been compromised; my encounter is always with a text in translation. This would seem to begin with a redundant proposition, a statement applicable to much post-colonial fiction. However, Chamoiseau’s distinctive blend of Martinique’s linguistically privileged — or acrolectal — French and the less prestigious — or basilectal — Martinican Creole, would seem sometimes to exist at the margins of the translatable, especially if we treat what Maria Tymoczko calls the ‘dilemma of faithfulness’ with appropriate seriousness (21). Inevitably, the process of translation always risks a degree of appropriation:

An author can choose a fairly aggressive presentation of unfamiliar cultural elements in which differences, even ones likely to cause problems for a receiving audience, are highlighted, or an author can choose an assimilative presentation in which likeness or ‘universality’ is stressed and cultural differences are muted and made peripheral to the central interests of the literary work. (Tymoczko 21)

Thus for the assimilative or transparent text the cultural values as originally transmitted or rendered opaque by an author in a source language are always reckoned to exist beyond the ‘central interests’ of the text. Patrick Chamoiseau’s Texaco becomes interesting here not simply because it is a text in translation — in fact a translation of an interlectal text — but because, through a mobilisation of
Edouard Glissant’s ‘relay’, the novel can be seen not only to enact the processes of a creative translation, but also to critique them.

According to Celia Britton, Edouard Glissant ‘discovers the “relay”: the principle that narrative is always multiple, decentered, and nonhierarchical’ (7), not in his theoretical writings, but in the novel Mahogany. Indeed the term, while explicitly linked to Glissant’s concept of Relation, rarely appears in either Caribbean Discourse or Poetics of Relation. Nevertheless, Glissant’s consideration that ‘Relation relinks (relays), relates’ is suggestive of the dual narrative functions that emerge from the wider theoretical work of Relation under the title of relay (1997 173). Britton positions this same short citation (‘La Relation relie (relaie), relate’) at the opening of a chapter that deals explicitly with Glissant’s use of relay (164), and in the absence of any explicit commentary from Glissant himself, it will be to Britton that I defer here.

The ‘double significance’ of relay is that it first presents us with ‘a nonhierarchical diversity of narrative structure’; secondly, it acknowledges ‘a break or spacing in the relation between subject and language’ (164). In dealing with the former, this non-hierarchical system of narration is created at its simplest by the use of multiple narrators: the text is not dominated by the univocal authority of a single voice, but becomes the product of competing voices and versions of events. Thus, in attributing its chapters to different narrators Britton considers that Glissant’s Mahogany generates a network of voices that exist in Relation (165). The diversity of voices presented by this technique is identifiable as a surface feature of the text; the arrival of each new voice can be tracked across the horizontal plane of the narrative. The presence of this quality within a text however is not a prerequisite for the appearance of relay in its other guise, which can exist in the imagined depths of a character or narrator’s history; in the known and unknown influences of one voice upon another. Relay does not create a network of informants whose voices are always distinct, but works against ‘the notion that individual subjects are the origin of their language’ (Britton 164). Relay is the process by which words, phrases and stories are passed, or relayed, from one individual to another; it thus interrogates the assumption that ‘language both expresses and is authenticated by a unique, stable identity’ (Britton 164).

Within Chamoiseau’s fiction this kind of strategy is most apparent in Texaco, where it seems that every narrative voice is necessarily reported through some kind of interpreter. By using the term ‘interpreter’ though, I am suggesting more than Glissant — or Britton — hopes to express through the mobilisation of relay. In fact, I argue that the process of interpretation is entirely antitheetical to that of relay, though both are present in Texaco. The process of interpretation suggests, not the spacing between subject and voice generated through the passive relay of that voice from some other ‘origin’, but the active process of creation more easily associated with the act of translation. This is a distinction that will be made more forcefully once the functions of relay in Texaco have been identified.
Texaco, Patrick Chamoiseau’s weighty third novel and winner of the 1992 Prix Goncourt, tells the tale of the eponymous squatters’ settlement erected on the outskirts of Fort-de-France. Inheriting its name from the oil company that owns the land, the settlement becomes a site of contested power where the construction and control of both histories and homes are matters of survival. The oral family history of Texaco’s founder, Marie-Sophie Laborieux, as reported to Chamoiseau’s narratorial alter-ego, Oiseau de Cham, comes to critique the colonial and neocolonial history of Martinique. Combining elements of traditional folktale, magic realism and metafictional devices, the novel stages negotiations between orality and the written word, essentialism and Créolité, official and fictional history.

The bulk of Texaco’s narrative is generated by Oiseau de Cham’s re-presentation of Marie-Sophie’s voice; however, it is only one of many that ‘complete’ the narrative. In addition to Marie-Sophie’s recollections, the text becomes more and more frequently interrupted by excerpts from her own notebooks, as well as the fractured musings of ‘The Urban Planner’s Notes to the Word Scratcher’ (alias Oiseau de Cham). The novel opens with a letter to the Word Scratcher from Ti-Cirique, Texaco’s resident intellectual (9), and elsewhere, excerpts of letters from the Word Scratcher to Marie-Sophie are reprinted (201–202; 322). The latter in particular reinforce the suggestion that the text is in some ways a provisional construction site—the result of a selective process whose assemblage is negotiable. Catalogued as letter numbers ‘647’ (202) and ‘708’ (322) they suggest a history that extends itself beyond the selective confines of the novel, and assert the text’s status as a composite document.

Though the various fictional sources upon which Oiseau de Cham draws in the construction of Texaco are many, distinguishing between the various narrative documents is a straightforward process. Invariably those passages which might be considered interjections are assigned to a particular author and indented within the space of the text. Thus they would seem to conform to our first conception of the relay, whereby the use of multiple narrative voices might be mobilised to decentre the authority of a central narrator. Relay is also at work in its second guise though, serving both to generate a gap between the subject and that subject’s speech, and to complicate our notions of authorship. During the first half of the book, in which Marie-Sophie narrates her ‘papa’s arrival on earth’ (34), the founder of Texaco often seems little more than a cipher for the words of her father, Esternome. Indeed, according to Oiseau de Cham, she ‘had all her life run after her father’s word’ (387). Thus, in evoking Esternome’s words as they were spoken to her, Marie-Sophie often refers to herself in the third person. The disorientating effect of this on the ill-prepared reader is one of feeling lost in words suddenly detached from their subject. I refer initially to the first instance of this device, that being the sentence which reads, ‘Allow me not to go into details about the dungeon, Marie-Sophie, because you see those things are not to be described’ (36). Though it is unusual to do so, in describing the effect upon the reader it will also be
productive to reproduce my panicked note, hastily scrawled at the bottom of the relevant paragraph on my first reading of *Texaco*: ‘Who is talking?’ I asked: ‘Is it Marie-Sophie? Is it her papa? Is it both?’ The reader believes initially that she is listening to the voice of Marie-Sophie, as transcribed by the Word Scratcher: thus, as the first pronoun of the sentence is reached it is attached by reflex and without hesitation to the presumed speaker. However, the reference to the speaker in the third person which follows disturbs this certainty. The question ‘who is talking?’ is a pertinent one, and has resonance beyond the confirmation that it is indeed the voice of Marie-Sophie, for if her speech is but an echo of Esternome’s, in what way can she be considered ‘The Source’ of Texaco’s history, or of Oiseau de Cham’s story (201)?

It is here that the distinction between relay and interpretation, suggested above, must be made: beyond this function of the relay the reader also discovers that each document is a result sometimes of active negotiation between its author and others, and in other instances the result of unauthorised editing subsequent to the text’s creation. The most powerful example of this is without doubt the writing, editing, construction, reconstruction and eventual fragmentation of Marie-Sophie’s notebooks throughout the pages of *Texaco*. Ostensibly an effort to ‘write down the skeleton’ of Esternome’s influence upon Marie-Sophie’s survival in Texaco (321), the evocation of a lifeless body becomes a fitting metaphor for both the creation of the notebooks and Texaco’s trajectory towards ‘The Age of Concrete’ (316). As Maeve McCusker suggests, the settlement’s development from straw to concrete, is paralleled in the text’s movement ‘from the tumultuous orality of the spoken word to the static solidity of the printed book’ (58). Writing, for Marie-Sophie, is analogous with ‘death’ (321). As she begins to transcribe what she can remember of her father, Marie-Sophie falters: ‘Each written sentence coated a little of him, his Creole tongue, his words, his intonation, his laughs, his eyes, his airs, with formaldehyde’ (321).

The analogy between the development of Texaco and the creation of Marie-Sophie’s notebooks can be taken further. Texaco’s trajectory from straw to concrete represents the fruition of neither the will of those who live there, nor the intentions of the city council. Texaco, the settlement, does not have one author, but many; it is the result of negotiation between parties. After his visit with Marie-Sophie the Urban Planner, whose initial instructions are to ‘rationalise space, and conquer the pockets of insalubrity’ (26), is believed by the inhabitants of Texaco to be ‘working for us’ (381). Indeed, the Urban Planner confesses that ‘Out of the urban planner, the lady made a poet’ (341). Through her narration of the tales that are eventually repeated to the Word Scratcher, Marie-Sophie convinces the Urban Planner of the value of Texaco, though at the same time the site becomes irrevocably altered by his intervention. Similarly, Marie-Sophie’s notebooks come about through a process of negotiation. Ti-Cirique is the first to influence the shape of the notebooks. Within the novel he represents an intellectual rival...
to Oiseau de Cham, the latter seeing the Haitian with ‘the head of a haggard teacher’ as misguided in his employment of ‘a perfect, finicky French’ (323). Ti-Cirique’s reaction to the Creole of Marie-Sophie’s notebooks is thus one of disgust: ‘My God, Madame Marie-Sophie, this tongue is dirty, it’s destroying Haiti and comforting its illiteracy’ (323). Thus, he begins to guide Marie-Sophie in her efforts to relay Texaco’s history, ‘correcting my horrors, giving sense to my sentences’ (325). It seems fitting then, if these notebooks are to be the product of multiple, competing voices, that it is to Oiseau de Cham, Ti-Cirique’s antagonist, that Marie-Sophie entrusts her ‘innumerable notebooks’ (387):

I numbered them, notebook by notebook, page by page, I taped the torn pages together, sewed back the loose sheets, and wrapped each one in a plastic cover. Then I deposited them at the Schoelcher Library. From time to time, I consulted them in order to compose what she had told me, to compare what I thought I had heard, and, if need be, correct a voluntary omission, a reflexive lie. (387–88)

Oiseau de Cham’s initial response then is to order and repair the fragments which constitute Marie-Sophie’s notebooks. Petrified in writing, her memories become as vulnerable to physical damage as the hutches of Texaco are to the ‘destructive romp’ (354) of the Compagnie Républicaine de Sécurité or ‘seyaress’ (337). As the inhabitants of Texaco begin to reject asbestos, tin and crate wood in favour of the more permanent, ‘more cumbersome’, concrete, so Oiseau de Cham endeavours to preserve Marie-Sophie’s volumes (365). However, neither the concrete hutches of Texaco, nor the reconstructed notes of its founder can be regarded as secure until they have been recognised and legitimised by official institutions; the former by Fort-de-France’s city council, the latter by the Schoelcher Library.

By far the most significant moment in this passage however, certainly for our present reading, concerns the Word Scratcher’s admission of composition. The authentic version of Texaco’s history, even for Oiseau de Cham, is the one that is written down; the one that has been edited by Ti-Cirique and that he himself has reconstructed. It is always then through a series of interpreters, rather than relays, that the voices of Texaco are ultimately heard. As Lorna Milne has noted, ‘The Marqueur [Scratcher] maintains overall control of the text and is able to have the last word on the enterprise’ (163). What is of particular interest for the anglophone reader is that this is a process perpetuated through the translation of the text itself.

As an Anglophone I am arguably unqualified to discuss in too much detail issues concerning the transformation of a source text into a receptor language. However, my position does afford me a particular means of access to the text, worthy of examination by virtue of the very restrictions my position places on any possible reading. I would suggest in fact that any writing which concerns itself with the post-colonial condition must make itself conscious of the geographical, cultural and linguistic differences between a text’s point of creation and its point
of consumption. Bassnett and Trivedi suggest that in both the translation of a text from source language to target language, and the writing of a post-colonial text ‘a distinction is always made between whether to take an audience to a text, or to take a text to an audience’ (14). In the case of Chamoiseau’s texts, fulfilling as they do the criteria of translated text and post-colonial artefact, these considerations are of double significance. In the first instance, the author of a ‘post-colonial’ narrative inscribes a text which exhibits a mixture of accessibility and opacity, whether located in the use of culturally specific lexis and syntax, or in the case of Chamoiseau, the elliptical phrasing of the Creole folktale. In turn, a translator who approaches the text works at the interface between integrity and accessibility, perhaps paralleling Oiseau de Cham’s own undertakings as interpreter.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, translation was generally regarded as something of ‘a secondary activity, as a ‘mechanical’ rather than a ‘creative’ process’ (Bassnett-McGuire 2). The view to the contrary has run concurrently however, and with the advent of deconstruction has become central to literary theory. Derrida suggests in ‘Letter to a Japanese Friend’ that ‘the question of deconstruction is ... through and through the question of translation’ (270). The process of translating a single word from a source language to a target language becomes disrupted by the play of differences within the source language which cannot be carried across — explained in Derridean terms by the concept of trace in particular. Thus, translation is perceived as ‘involving the same risk and chance as the poem’ (276); it can only be a creative act, as a verbatim transposition which retains the exact meaning of the original is not possible. However, as an anglophone reader this consideration, applied to Chamoiseau’s texts, exists beyond the realms of the examinable; I have access only to English, an insignificant degree of French and almost no Martinican Creole. To resort to this rhetorical figure alone, no matter how persuasive, would seem insufficient; it would legitimise my judgements only by negating the material process that I wish to examine. This does not refute Derrida’s argument, though it does demand that the questions asked be answerable.

What can be examined then are the processes through which publishers and translators tend to decrease the opacity of the original, and the implications of this for the anglophone reader’s interaction with Chamoiseau’s work. Glissant famously concluded Caribbean Discourse by declaring that for ‘all peoples’ opacity was nothing ‘but an expression of their freedom’ (255–56). Opacity is for Glissant the defence against universalising systems of knowledge intent on rendering every culture transparent; it is a resistance to constructing and understanding an/Other’s culture only as an object of knowledge. Yet, it is quite clear that in a number of ways the opacity present in Chamoiseau’s own texts has been reduced; recomposed much like Marie-Sophie’s notebooks. In the case of Texaco, the translators’ emphatic denial of betrayal is belied by the space given over to their plea: ‘Have we ... as translators betrayed the original book by actually
making it readable when it can strike so many as opaque?' asks Rose-Myriam Réjouis in her afterword (393). She thinks not, and calls Chamoiseau himself as a witness for the defence, stating that 'despite the Babelian ambitions of *Texaco*, Chamoiseau meant for his book to be readable' (393). However, this does not necessarily agree with the views of the Créolistes, or Chamoiseau himself.

In the first instance, the translation of any work written by the Créolistes must necessarily compromise the specifics of the interlectal space carved out by their compression of basilectal Creole and acrolectal French. Burton, writing shortly before the publication of *Texaco*, described the complexities of Chamoiseau's interlectal language, which I reproduce here in some detail in the absence of meaningful access to Chamoiseau's French-Creole original:

Any paragraph in a Chamoiseau novel is likely to contain one or more passages in basilectal creole, sometimes a word or cluster of words, not infrequently a clause or entire sentence; ... on many occasions the exoteric reader must rely on context, etymology, or simple guesswork to deduce the writer's meaning. Just as frequently, though, the rhythm and structures of creole will be cunningly simulated in French, or a creole expression will be infiltrated into the text 'disguised' as French, making of each sentence and paragraph a chain of convergences and divergences between French and creole, of momentary tangences [sic] followed by abrupt deviations, a coupling and friction of codes. (467)

Thus for Burton, Chamoiseau's mobilisation of both French and Creole extends itself far beyond the simple juxtaposition of two distinct lexicons upon the page. It is rather that the syntax, idiom and rhythm of one might at any point mobilise the lexis of the other. How then might this interlectal space be reproduced for an audience reading Chamoiseau’s prose in translation? This question is negated by Réjouis, whose formulation of Chamoiseau’s style places it not in the sprawling complexities of interlectal space, but firmly in a 'basic matrix of... largely standard written French' (393), clearly moderating Burton’s analysis. These two examples would seem to polarise the debate: on the one hand the literary critic sees the syntactical and lexical métissage of languages as pervasive; on the other the translator, much to her advantage if correct, perceives the original as employing a relatively distinct and independent linguistic code.

It is possible that this analysis does Réjouis something of an injustice. After all, though reservations are expressed regarding the translation’s ‘stiffened colloquiality’, in reviewing the novel Derek Walcott was quick to acknowledge the ‘obvious delight of the two collaborators [Réjouis and Vinokurov] and their determination to make Texaco a gift’ (48). In truth, this debate would necessarily be produced by any act of translation which attempted to render the play between two source languages into a single target language. It is thus an unavoidable compromise perhaps brought about, as James Ferguson considers in his interview with Chamoiseau, by the original text’s status as an ‘untranslatable novel’ (n.p.).

While the interlectal qualities of the novels are unavoidably compromised in the process of translation, in other instances the translator (or publisher)
intentionally compromises the opacity of the text in the name of accessibility. The appending of glossaries, footnotes and appendices (‘paratextual commentary’) represents the unambiguous means by which the latter occurs, and in the case of Chamoiseau’s fiction would appear to run counter to the wishes of the author (Tymoczko 22). As is often the case, the origins of the decision to include such material are unclear. The process of tracing responsibility is complicated here by the material’s circuitous linguistic and geographical voyage from Martinique to the English-speaking West. Originally published by Editions Gallimard, the adaptation of the texts by various translators has been subsidised by both Nebraska University Press and by the French Ministry of Culture, before finally being published by Granta Publications (Ruth Morse 23). Thus, just as Marie-Sophie’s notebooks are the products of many interventions, so too Chamoiseau’s words reach the reader via multiple interpreters.

In interviews, both Chamoiseau and fellow Créoliste, Raphaël Confiant, have made clear their attitude towards the use of glossaries. In conversation with Lucien Taylor in 1997, the latter spoke of his concern of being ‘recuperated by the Parisian literary scene as a form of exotic literature’ (147). By way of resistance Confiant cites both Chamoiseau’s and his own refusal to ‘explicate the Creole in our writing’ by rejecting the inclusion of ‘glossaries or footnotes’ (1997 148). Yet translator’s forewords, afterwords, glossaries, footnotes and even appendices trouble and permeate all of Chamoiseau’s works in translation. While Chamoiseau insists, writing in the introduction to Strange Words, that ‘the Storyteller must take care to use language that is opaque’, this desire seems easily dismissed once the process of translation begins (xiii). Writing in the preface to Chamoiseau’s second autobiographical work, School Days, Linda Coverdale professes that while ‘Chamoiseau does not believe in glossaries’ one has nevertheless been included ‘to explain a few basic (or irresistibly choice) terms’ (ix). In the first instance, one might hope that the meanings of ‘basic’ terms might be suggested (though never rendered transparent) by the context in which those terms are placed. Beyond this, Coverdale’s subordination of responsibility for the opacity of the text to her own personal excitement at revealing that which is ‘irresistibly choice’ becomes an attempt to circumvent the preservation of respectful distance between self and Other. The text has become an object of knowledge, whose equivalence is locatable in the English lexicon. Fundamentally, Coverdale is exerting her will over a foreign territory; denying the specificity of Martinican Creole. As we are reminded by Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin:

Ultimately, the choice of leaving words untranslated in post-colonial texts is a political act, because while translation is not inadmissible in itself, glossing gives the translated word, and thus the ‘receptor’ culture, the higher status. (65)

Inevitably, the question which presents itself is a Derridean one, for it concerns the presence of the ‘original’ author in the translated and therefore ‘secondary’ text. I have, of course, omitted a stage of the argument. If, as Derrida suggests,
'We are dispossessed of the longed-for presence in the gesture of language by which we attempt to seize it' (1992 78) — this attempt being the act of writing — then Chamoiseau’s presence in the ‘original’ is equally unsure. But while the metaphysics of Derrida’s philosophy will no doubt continue to interrogate all that is textual, our investigation must remain a more overtly political one, concerning as it does the nature of consumption rather than that of ‘origin’.

If in the glossing of individual words the opacity of Chamoiseau’s texts are disturbed, then at the level of the tale this opacity can be rediscovered. The micro-structures, or detours, which constitute the narrative of Texaco, often present themselves to the reader as unreadable, the magic realism of the text ultimately instituting opacity as a narrative strategy.

Glissant considers that the Martinican Creole, faced with the prospect of assimilation, suffers from the absence of a pre-established cultural tradition into which to retreat (1989 102–104). The establishing of a ‘cultural hinterland’ is for Glissant a significant strategy in the development of opacity (103); thus the maroons retreat into the forest, and Papa Totone, the last Mentoh, ‘seemed to live outside, under the dome of the great trees’ (Chamoiseau 1998 287–88). But for those who have left behind their cultural authenticity, and are seen daily through the exterior vision of ‘transcendental Sameness’ a different strategy is required (Glissant 1989 102). Britton summarises Glissant’s strategy beautifully when she writes ‘Opacity therefore has to be produced as an unintelligible presence from within the visible presence of the colonised’ (25); this clearly conflicting with the ethnographer’s scopic drive. It is this play between seen and unseen that Estemome’s father exploits in evading the sight of the overseer, and it is in part the former’s own opacity that may provide shelter from transparency for Chamoiseau himself.

Marie-Sophie’s grandparents meet one day when her grandfather ‘jumped out of an allamanda bush’ to exchange a few words (39). He begins to visit her daily as she works by the river ‘careless of the overseer’s eye’:

*Kouman ou pa an travay, So how is it that you don’t work? asked Grandmama all astonished. Man ka bat an djoumbak la, I haven’t left work, he would answer opening his eyelids wide around his eyes. And when Grandmama asked around, no one had ever seen him leave his post or sabotage his cutting. The overseer who accounted for the number of slaves at work never fell upon his missing backside. (39)*

As the narrator suggests, this presents the reader with ‘a real nice mystery’ (39). The same mystery, I would suggest, that all of Chamoiseau’s works in translation present us with. Much as the overseer locates Estemome’s father’s presence in the cane fields, the author’s name, marked on the cover of each publication, seems to guarantee his presence in the target language. Perhaps though, as Estemome’s father neglects the site of colonial economic production, Chamoiseau, careless perhaps of the academic’s eye, is located elsewhere. For Estemome’s father the real mystery is to be found in ‘the only thing that ever came of his silences: his
inaudible Low Mass’ (37). And while Esternome’s father’s murmurings remain obscure to the Béké, ‘who thought he heard a witch’s song’ (37), the reader soon learns that ‘the impossible mute Low Mass had been only one long question. Until the end of his life the man had wondered how birds could be and how they could fly’ (38). It seems to be here that the process of translation critiques that very process, for as Réjouis and Vinokurov assert. Oiseau de Cham translates literally as ‘Bird of Shem’, but phonetically (emphasising Chamoiseau’s concern with orality) as ‘Bird of the Field’ (400). Esternome’s father’s inscrutability would seem to parallel that of the birds themselves. though ultimately the birds’ opacity suggests something unreadable about Oiseau de Cham, and perhaps Chamoiseau himself.

Derek Walcott’s demand, reprinted from ‘A Letter to Chamoiseau’ on the front cover of Texaco, dictates ‘You have to read this book’. It is easy to imagine that the subject of this sentence, printed as it is on the cover of the English-language version, is the anglophone reader. It is not. It is ‘every West Indian’ who must regard the text ‘as if it were a lost heirloom’ (45). Walcott too seems to find Chamoiseau’s alter ego located firmly in Martinique; the text belongs not to the anglophone reader in search of a new exoticism, but to

the vendors selling T-shirts and their children screaming in the shallows, one that has entered our vegetation, as familiar as the thorny acacias along the beach, one with the cemetery stones bordered with conches, one with the cooing of ground doves in the brown season, and one with the melody of the bird in the dogwood’s branches, common to Martinique and Saint Lucia, the champs-oiseaii with its melodic voice and amplitude of heart. (48)

To appropriate a phrase from another Antillean writer, Antonio Benitez-Rojo, the process of translation surely reveals nothing more than ‘repetition’ as ‘a practice that necessarily entails a difference and a step toward nothingness’ (3) [emphasis added].

NOTES

1 Marie-Sophie is referred to as ‘The Source’ at various points throughout Texaco. Instances occur on pages 201. 202. 322 and 388. Marie-Sophie’s function as passive cipher is complicated however by Oiseau de Cham’s references to her as ‘my Source [emphasis added]’ (387. 388. 390) suggesting both a subjective account and relativistic relationship between Texaco’s saviour and the Word Scratcher; this is also supported by Marie-Sophie’s warning that ‘if it didn’t happen like that, that doesn’t matter’ (27).

WORKS CITED


THE LONG-TERM CARPARK

sends metal feelers to the sun;
spread emptily over acres,
cars squat nose to nose
pugnaciously, a regiment
of baked cicada husks,
their contents flown.

We pupae stretch and crawl
and hum from shell to shell
to shell, each swarm a drift
desperate to swim, to run,
to fly so far, so fast
and free at last of aid,
of all protections, in that
one shrill transfiguration,
that brief burst of glory
as the season ends.

Feb 04.
I’m driving again — it’s
Christmas; my pilgrimage to parents
tracks the skyline across plains
that shimmer promise of arrival.

Tractors built like semis
plow up dust clouds storeys high,
gray sheep and black cattle graze the stubble
from sorghum paddocks the size of dry suburbs.

Further out, the saltbush stretches clear
on every side. I remember you said.
‘Flat is not my favourite’. Well,
you’d really hate it here.

But you’d love the flight of eagles
and the rolling line of cloud.
the wind that whips the world clean,
a line of emus stalking the fence-line.

It’s a landscape where the mind goes
when it’s sloughed off daily care
from city life; the routine of farm labour
seems a ritual meditation.

They say open skies mean freedom,
plains make you your own man;
but the space around me speaks
your absence; come here with me when you can.

December 2004
IN ANTICIPATION

After all our traded readings,
all the Rumi and the Yeats,
the songs and sighs and silences
of tape, phone, email, cards,
the novels of our different lives,
what reading will I bring to you
when we meet? An ode
to the sunlight you have pinned
to my kitchen window? hymn
to the companions of your new solitude?
the epic ballad of our journeying
towards each other? a plain
couplet of my empty hands?

When we touch again
it will be gently, each
fearing the enchantment
of our tales will at that instant fade;
when we meet again
I shall need to hold you
to feel you flesh and bone
more real than any story,
as miraculous as any song.

2005
RUMI TO SHAHMS

When the hill behind my house turns
to sea of grass, the waves afoam
with paspalum seed. I shed
my daily clothes and don a robe.
some rubber boots, a hat. commence
a meditation. Step by step I tread, a
petrol-powered monk. whipping
the world into shape. I am
Death with mechanical scythe
enacting the demise of self. of all
proverbial grass cut down. I am
Michael with the sword of judgement.
the simple terrorist reducing all
to calm uniformity of green. and
then I am the figure in the garden
tending the wilderness.

I do not know
what prayer is. but I have learned to
pay attention to the moves from shade
and broadleaf. dandelion. dock to
an attempt at lawn by the stump
of a clothesline (a man did this: it’s
a hundred yards uphill from laundry)
the dense clumps of kikuyu in the runnels.
old bricks left for drainage, the rock
that holds the hillside down, dry
flame tree leaves that crackle and
the constant attack of lantana.

As Saint Francis may have said
(and if he didn’t. then the Buddha probably did).
the buena and the mala are all yerba.
all grass is weed. all weeds are grass.
it just depends on how you cultivate.
how you mow. and so I walk. attending
to the whine of the shortened cord, the
pulse of cutting in and out at thickets
so the spindle does not bind. the exact
kiss of right length and swing and texture. all
becoming one mindless flow to the
engine's 'ohhmm' until the walk
is at its end and everything is
washed clean by wind and silence.

My Tess, it is you brings me to these fancies;
How is it that this hillside once
was just an inconvenience, and now
is haunted by two horses, a ghost
of scuppernong, and your beloved soul?

2005
STONE POEM

To everything there is a season

Right now, it is crisp spring; the sky
bright amethyst cut and polished by wind.
A tinfoil confetti of pigeons wheels and glitters
in sunlight, gardens
are incandescent with azaleas.
We saunter on gray sand, feet etched
by wavelets crystal-tipped
rock sculptures embrace
our stunned gaiety.

A time to cast away stones

The man beside me
is older, has worries
about his weight,
the stones that mark his past.
But his laugh today
reflects the sun, is light itself.
I wonder if it’s us, or if
that mossless shine is
just from careless rolling.

A time to gather stones together

I can see why she picks up stones:
they weight her bag so
she doesn’t fly straight up,
like some kid on an aircastle
delightedly angelic, and
fuelled on pure enthusiasm.
‘Don’t collect what you can’t carry’,
she says, wise as ever;
and I wonder what small cairns
of memory line her windowsill.

And a time for every purpose under heaven

So perhaps it’s stones that balance us,
sediment our feelings, solidify fires
of molten sex to warm joy that shines
or just sits comfortable in the hand.
Stones sign the rocks to be avoided, boundaries to be observed, with stones we can build paths or hearth, fell giants, track home through forest, drown or keep an even keel. Beach stones are clean of guilts and expectations; jostled together, or singly beached and still, they are just content to be washed by waves and light and time.

You can learn a lot from stones: they tell the ways we tread this earth.

June 2005
AFTER RUMI

I took my misery for a walk beneath the stars, 
and sitting on the silvered grass, 
heard a myriad insects ringing out 
creation’s symphony.

What word 
shall I sing now, Shams? 
What theme is stringing me 
a new movement?

April 2006
Religion, Health and the Hindu Woman in Mauritius: Ananda Devi’s *Le Voile de Draupadi*

This study will explore the theme of transculturation in Francophone Mauritian writing through a critical reading of the metaphor of ‘le voile’ in Ananda Devi’s *Le Voile de Draupadi*. At one level, the study will examine the myth of Draupadi’s veil within the cultural context of Hindu mythology and its interpretation and contribution to the constitution of a Hindu identity in Mauritius. At another level the reading of the veil will be juxtaposed against the wider linguistic and literary context of Francophone literatures where the term ‘voile’ takes on a different religious, cultural and political significance. Ananda Devi’s narrative is a site of creative contestation and exposes the complex and dynamic nature of exclusion and marginality in the multi-lingual, multi-racial and multi-religious Mauritian society. The essay will argue that ‘le voile’, a metaphor for women’s oppression in literary convention in Francophone writing, is translated by Ananda Devi into a metaphor for regenerative tension in the construction of a Hindu identity in Mauritius.

Published in 1993, *Le voile de Draupadi* relates the story of a young Hindu Mauritian woman, Anjali, whose only child Wynn is dying of meningitis. Anjali, educated and urbanised, is married to a successful Hindu lawyer, Dev. Faced with the tragedy, Dev and his family believe that the child could be saved if Anjali performed the firewalking ritual. The young woman is torn between her maternal grief and her disbelief in the rigid ritualistic traditions of Mauritian Hindu society. Her refusal to accept these practices stem from a variety of reasons, both conscious and unconscious: her socialisation in a progressive urban environment; her unhappy marriage; and her traumatic memories of a tragic incident in her family. Anjali and her brother, Shyam, had helplessly witnessed the fatal accident in which their cousin, Vasnathi, had killed herself while performing a fire sacrifice. But, Anjali’s stubborn refusal to perform the ritual is viewed by a dominating Dev and his accusing family as tantamount to her refusal to save her own son. Pitted against the forceful patriarchy of the Hindu society that believes in the meek submission and unquestioning loyalty of a wife, Anjali finds herself isolated from Dev’s family as well as her own. The decision to perform or not to perform the fire sacrifice which is central to the construction of the novel’s narrative tension takes Anjali on a voyage of self discovery and forces her to face her inner self and to question her fixed identity as mother of a sick child, wife of a successful
lawyer and daughter of a traditional Hindu woman. In recent years firewalking and Kavadi as surviving folk Hindu practices in migrant societies, like those in Singapore, Malaysia and the Reunion island, have been exoticised and submitted to the tourist gaze. The narrative, through a critical review of the practice itself and the use of the metaphor of Draupadi’s veil, detaches it from an Orientalist framework and places it within the larger issues of religion, health, gender and identity in postcolonial societies.

My reading of the veil metaphor in the narrative is anchored in the central theme of Wynn’s sickness that draws our attention to the relation between religion and health in all cultures. In this narrative where religion, sickness and motherhood are closely intertwined, two aspects need to be explicated before we proceed any further. Firstly it would be useful to define the notion of womanhood within Hindu society (sub-continental or diasporic) in order to fully comprehend the gravity of Anjali’s dilemma: ‘Should she or should she not perform the fire sacrifice as a way of asking the divinities for the life of her dying son?’ Secondly it is important to elucidate the complexities of Mauritian society where different forms of Hinduism as well as different religious practices integrate and complement each other especially in the matter of sickness and cure.

According to social and religious convention, a Hindu woman’s auspiciousness is her unique virtue. This quality is defined exclusively by the living presence of her husband and her ability to bear and rear healthy children. Textual (scriptures) and anthropological studies, as well as the customary religious practices of women, have shown that the image that emerges as a norm is one of the woman as ‘householder’ (grihasthini). According to the textual tradition a woman fulfils her religious duty (dharma) only in as much as she devotes herself completely to her husband, home and family. The ideal woman modelled along the mythological characters of Sita and Draupadi, performs the prescribed rites, conforms to the self-sacrificing and self-denying image expected of her so that the health, prosperity and longevity of her husband, son and the entire lineage is ensured. Fieldwork studies have also shown that rituals, family rites, vows and fasts that constitute the core of a woman’s religious practice are concerned mainly with the welfare of others. The religiosity of the woman as householder rarely finds expressions of a more spiritual sort. The dharma of Hindu woman or her goal is to be a loyal and adaptable wife, in Anjali’s words: ‘une femme hindoue imbue à la fois de sa féminité, de sa fidélité et de sa flexibilité’ (‘a Hindu woman full of her own femininity, loyalty and adaptability’) (26).

Marital felicity (good husband, healthy children) and spiritual salvation or moksa are interlinked. The fulfilment of the ideal of a devoted wife is the key to her liberation. To pray that she will die a married woman is to pray for her moksa. Responsible for the well being of her family in this birth and in this world, she leaves her husband to deal with salvation, oneness with the divine and the more spiritual pursuits of Hinduism. It goes without saying therefore that motherhood
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as duty is also linked to a Hindu woman’s path to salvation. Ethnographic studies have shown that it is difficult to distinguish between medicine, superstition and religion in rituals concerning pregnancy, childbirth and post natal care. Traditional child care practices like the ritual bathing and adorning of the infant, stress close body contact between mother and baby. On the other hand, exorcising rites are often performed by women to protect both child and home from evil influences. Belief in medical science and in superstition continues to co-exist in the most emancipated of households. Two forms of Hinduism co-exist in all Hindu societies: popular Hinduism with its pantheon of divinities, rites of corporeal mortification and mystical cults, and a ‘high tradition’ of Hinduism based on sacred texts having a focus on non-violence, karma and ascetism. The former is often considered pejoratively by Western educated urban Hindu elites. Immigrants to the labour islands who came from the South of India mainly practiced folk Hinduism. While in the Reunion islands Hinduism is almost exclusively Dravidian, in Mauritius such homogeneity does not exist. In his description of the island Jean Benoist says that ‘L’Inde Mauricienne est une sorte de modèle réduit de toute l’Inde’ (‘Mauritius is a small-scale model of the subcontinent’) (222). Both Hinduism and Islam were also introduced on the island by traders and coolies from the North. While high caste Brahmins and Sanskrit textual tradition were absent in Tamil Hinduism, castism was present in the group from North India and Brahmins and sacred scriptures played an important role in the maintenance of religious culture. Even today, the high caste ‘maraz’ officiates in North Indian temples and functions, and the ‘poussari’, non Brahmin Hindu is the Tamil priest. However when it comes to religious cure, the ‘poussari’, like the local Creole healer, plays an important role. Even the Non-Tamils call the ‘poussari’ to exorcise sickness thought to be caused by the ‘evil eye’.

Le rapport à la maladie et au soin est donc à Maurice comme dans les autres îles, le lieu privilégié d’une perméabilité interculturelle qui retentit sur les religions elles-mêmes, soit en menaçant leur orthodoxie soit en conduisant à un œcuménisme mauricien que pratiquent certains prêtres catholiques et des mouvement hindous’. (Benoist 223)

The link to sickness and cure is, in Mauritius, as on other islands, the privileged space of intercultural interaction which has its effect on the religions themselves, either by threatening their orthodoxy or by producing a Mauritian syncretism that is practiced by some catholic priests and Hindu groups. (Benoist 223)

Benoist argues that in religion’s rapport with sickness these complicated strands are interwoven and this relation becomes the privileged space for intercultural interaction. So, even if there is a huge gap in the practices of the two dominant forms of Hinduism, and even if popular practices are shunned by urban elites, these practices are sanctioned in matters of sickness (Benoist 226).

Le Voile de Draupadi is truly representative of the complexities of the Hindu Mauritian society. In the novel, Devi uses ‘pretre tamoul’ or ‘poussari’ when referring to the men of God in the narrative, thus referring to the practice of Tamil
Hinduism. The central issue in the narrative, 'la marche sur le feu' (firewalking), is a Tamil Hindu practice on the island. On the other hand, there are indications in the text that prove that Anjali's ancestors may have come from the North of India. For example, the references to the Gita as the sacred text that Sanjiva, her grandfather, believed in, as well as the notion of Kala Pani which is a Hindi word (Hindi being the language spoken in the North of India). Dev and his family impose the fire sacrifice on Anjali as a last resort attempt to appease the Gods, and as Benoist argues, when it comes to sickness and cure, differences between religious practices disappear. Fatmah prays for her friend's child and even Matante Sec, the creole healer, pays Anjali a visit and performs an animal sacrifice on the request of Anjali's Creole servant, Marlène.

Anjali's non-conformism, her disregard for the practice of folk Hinduism and her dismissal of the rite as a cheap bargaining with the Gods, can be read as the natural reaction of the urbanised, high cast and anglicised Hindu elite. On the other hand, the fact that it is imposed on her by her urban educated and progressive husband leads her to revolt against the image of a self-denying Hindu married woman. Anjali cries with indignation:

> Et il préserve quant à lui cette image radieuse, auréolée d'une femme hindoue imbue à la fois de sa féminité, de sa fidélité et de sa flexibilité. Mon enfant est malade et il me demande l'impossible. (26)

As for him, he preserves this radiant and hallowed image of a Hindu woman full of her femininity, loyalty and adaptability. My child is sick and he asks me to accomplish the impossible. (26)

She refuses to fulfil the prescribed role of wife which denies her the strength that motherhood attributes to her persona. The contrast between ('mon enfant') my child and he ('il') underlines the frustration of Anjali, the mother who is asked to do what she deems impossible (expectations of her husband and society) to save her child. To Anjali, therefore, it is the ultimate irony that her streedharma (obedience to husband) has to be accomplished for her to save her motherhood. Her words of frustration, 'mère omnipotente, omniprésente, mais d'autres dieux règnent sur la mère, une autre servitude' ('omnipotent, omnipresent mother, but other Gods reign over the mother, another servitude') (40), recall the paradox that defines the social construction of womanhood in Hindu society. Anjali believes fervently in her 'foi de femme' ('woman's faith') (27) and her power as life giver, but will Dev and society consider that sufficient to save her child? Despite his urbane background, Dev seems to have blind faith in certain practices. This is in accordance with Benoist's thesis which argues that when it comes to sickness various strands of the same religious faith come together in a desperate recourse to save life. However, in Anjali's eyes, Dev is guilty of emotional blackmail. According to him, 'Une mère qui refuse de faire une offrande pour son fils, n'est pas une mère' ('a mother who refuses to make an offering to God for her son is not a mother') (24).
Initially, Anjali seems to suggest that she has lost faith in such practices because of her cousin’s untimely death in a tragic accident. Vasanthi, in order to prove her love for Shyam, had naively attempted the fire sacrifice but she had been burnt to death. Anjali holds herself responsible for not having saved her. However, as the narrative progresses we realise that her death is not the real cause of Anjali’s lost faith or guilt. The wild, uncultured and beautiful Vasanthi (Anjali’s alter ego) had represented a woman’s freedom from social conventions. Anjali knows that even if Vasanti had died, she had consciously chosen a path, while her own life, ‘sans révolte, sans rebellion’ (‘without revolt, without rebellion’) (100), monotonous but drearily comfortable in a marriage of convenience, had been built on a series of ‘non-choices’. Anjali realises that ‘Vasanthi had refused to become a labourer’s wife. She had made a choice: ‘Vasanti avait refusé d’être femme du laboureur. Elle avait fait un choix. Moi, j’avais fait un non choix. Je m’étais laissé faire’ (‘As for me, I had made a non-choice. I had let myself be talked into it’) (114).

It is in her maternal bonding with Wynn that Anjali finds herself a new identity. ‘Ce n’est qu’avec Wynn que je suis née’ (‘It is with Wynn that I was born’) (9), she proclaims. Ironically his sickness reveals to her the meaningless name of her status as Dev’s wife. The faith in her motherhood gives her the strength to question her subordinate position in her relationship with her husband. Anjali, therefore, desperately wants to believe that the physiological connection between herself and her son would suffice to deliver him of his sickness/destiny. She tries anxiously to communicate to him that,

C’est maintenant que nos deux chairs sont soudées, et tu tiendras bon… et je te laisserai tes mythes d’indépendance. (40)

It is only now that our flesh is joined together and you will survive … I will hand over your tales of freedom to you. (40)

At the outset she seems to pit a form of Occidentalised individualism and the collective religiosity of Hinduism against one another. In fact she is falling into the same trap that she accuses Dev and his friends of falling into — colonial mimesis, but she soon realises with the help of Fatimah that it could be a losing battle if she does not anchor her struggle within specific paradigms of belief. Prayer is universal virtue, but practice can be diverse. Despite trying her utmost to escape the confines of her condition as a woman in a Hindu society, Anjali realises that History (colonial) and Tradition (Hinduism) cannot be ignored, but this revelation occurs through her interaction with Fatmah. I argue that Ananda Devi subverts the literary convention of the veil as a metaphor of oppression in Islamic societies by positing Fatmah, the Muslim woman, as the metaphor of religious permeability. At another level, by transposing the veil metaphor on to another religious and cultural context, Anada Devi transforms the veil into a symbol that permits dialogue, a passage between traditions that does not deny the historicity of each
religious tradition but forces Anjali to think of her identity, not in terms of cultural
syncretism, but in terms of a dialogic interaction or transculturation.

Generally speaking, the meanings attributed to the term veil/voile can be
seen to have four aspects: the material, the spatial, the communicative, and the
religious. In the process of translating dress codes and religious significations
across cultures, especially between Islam and Christianity, the veil is analysed
as an object with a universal meaning: seclusion on one hand, invisibility and
oppression on the other. Scholars have argued that the European term veil/voile
gives the illusion of having a common referent in Islamic culture while in actual
fact it refers to face cover, head cover or elaborate headress each of which could
denote cultural differentiations of social context, class, rank and socio-political
expression. In Non Islamic, feminist, Orientalist discourse, the veil symbolises
the subordination of Islamic women.

In the case of the novel under scrutiny, the veil/voile is used in yet another
cultural tradition. Hinduism. Moslem women in India, like their sisters in the
Arab world, are also familiar with the tradition of head, face and body cover.
However, Devi specifically uses the term ‘veil’ in the context of Draupadi’s
heroine of the Hindu epic Mahabharata. Draupadi is humiliated in public by the
Kaurava prince Duryodhana as he attempts to disrobe her in front of everyone.
Draupadi has no other recourse but to surrender herself completely to her divine
faith. Lord Krishna comes to her rescue and saves her by providing her with a
never ending piece of cloth to cover her body so that her modesty is not violated.
This incident has served for centuries as a glorious example to Indian devotees of
the supreme benefits of unflinching devotion and surrender to God. Draupadi’s
sari is perceived as symbolic of ‘human faith’ in the divine. What is truly original
in the context of this study is the fact that no English translation uses the term veil
to describe Draupadi’s dress. Oft used terms are sari, cloth or garment. It cannot
be denied that when worn by traditional Indian women the sari is a flexible dress
and the end of the sari can also used to cover the face or the head for the sake of
modesty or reverence. So why does Devi so provocatively entitle her story Le
Voile de Draupadi?

In the story, the ‘veil’ is used in the context of the Hindu firewalking sacrifice. According to some traditions, it is believed that the devotees are protected by the
supreme Mother Goddess, Maha Devi, and hence can walk the fire pit without
getting burnt. In some traditions followers believe that divine protection appears
in the form of a fabric over the burning cinders that prevents the soles of the feet
from burning. This protective cloth is believed to be none other than that which
had preserved Draupadi’s chastity and purity.

The first reference to the veil is made when Anjali meets Fatmah to share her
dilemma with a compassionate friend. When she reflects on the possibility of her
participation in the rite, she sees herself as a phantom in saffron coloured robes
following the others to the fire pit to seek Draupadi’s ‘veil of femininity’. It is in
the dialogue between these two women that the veil is symbolically reappropriated into a framework that anchors its symbolism outside non-Islamic conceptions of veiling, concealing, and gender disempowerment. Fatmah is literally speaking unveiled. She is not in chador, and she has access to public space as Faisal’s secretary, but is physically segregated from the rest of the household because of the cruel whim of the family matriarch and is therefore metaphorically veiled/excluded. However she enjoys the seclusion and has re-appropriated her prison as a sanctuary to enjoy her privacy because she is no longer the object of public gaze. Her identity is solely dependant on her voice and agency. She says: ‘En attendant de trouver la solution de mon énigme personnelle, j’attends, je patiente, je prie’ (‘While I await a solution to the riddle of my own identity, I stay, I hang on, I pray’) (107). It is Fatmah who makes Anjali see the truth beyond the narrow issue of the fire sacrifice: that she cannot use her motherhood as a pretext to live or to die. Anjali becomes aware that tradition cannot be ignored but, more importantly, that its acceptance or its rejection has to be a conscious choice: ‘Il y avait aussi des siècles de traditions qui en émergeaient et établissaient sur nous leur pouvoir. On les acceptait ou on les refusait, mais on ne pouvait pas les ignorer. C’était cet appel que j’entendais comme un son de cloches au fond de son regard’ (‘There were also centuries of traditions that emerged and established control over us. We accepted them or refused them, but we couldn’t ignore them. It was this call that I heard like the sound of bells in the depth of her gaze’) (108).

In order to discover her real ‘foi de femme’ (‘woman’s faith’) Anjali would have to perform the sacrifice by considering it as an act of duty (dharma). She would have to embrace it as a mother’s conscious duty (126), and not endure it passively as an imposition. Consequently, she comes to grasp the fact that her duty (‘devoir’) can be transformed into a moment of self realisation:

...tant qu’il aura un doute en moi, j’imaginerai encore que dans certains cas le sacrifice et la mortification sont les moyens les plus directs d’atteindre Dieu. Puisqu’il s’agit de mon fils, il y va de mon devoir, j’en suis responsable et j’en suis la gardienne, alors en dépit de mes croyances profondes, je me dis que je dois le faire.... (107)

...as long as I have my doubts, I will still believe that in some cases, sacrifice and mortification are the most direct means to reach God. Since this concerns my son, it becomes my duty, I am responsible for him and I am his guardian, so despite my fervent beliefs, I tell myself that I must do it.... (107)

But the road to self discovery is painful. The ritual fasting depletes Anjali physically and she verges on hysteria. She purposefully takes the fast to such an extreme point in the hope that her weakened, anorexic body will not survive after the fire sacrifice. Fatmah once again helps her to see that such an act of abnegation is selfish and cowardly and that by giving up even before accomplishing the act, she is making the act meaningless. Fatmah’s words are also echoed by the Hindu priest who advises Anjali that fasting is not an act of denial but an act of self-control: Le refus de la souffrance est une lâcheté et une faiblesses. Prenez-la et
faites — en une force, pour aider les autres, pour vous aider vous-mêmes’ (‘To decline suffering is an act of cowardice and weakness. Accept it and make it your strength to help others and yourselves’) (159).

The memory of Vasanti and her faith brings Anjali to her senses. Much to her family’s pride, she walks across the fire ‘successfully’ and discovers that ‘the translucent veil’ (‘le voile translucide’) (168) is in fact only a narrow and unsteady passage (‘un passage étroit et mouvant’) (168). She discovers that there is no mysticism in the act of abnegation and if anything it is a selfish act. She no longer feels guilty of having abandoned Vasanthi and neither does she feel guilty about not having accomplished her duty as a mother. The following quotation reflects Anjali’s new awareness of her Self as mother and wife:

Nous sommes autant à blâmer pour nos actes que pour notre inaction. Pour les paroles prononcées que pour celles qui demeurent informulées. Pour ce noyau de haine qui, en nous, fait naître des cruautés et des trahisons, d’inconscients égoïsmes, alors que d’autre part, nous sommes capables de plus puissantes abnégations, d’offrir notre être et notre essence sur nos paumes tendues, pour une divinité, pour un enfant, pour un homme. Et parfois, les deux choses se mélangent, et l’acte d’abnégation est en vérité le plus pur des égoïsmes. (114)

We are as much to blame for our acts as for our inaction. As much for the pronounced words as those that remain unarticulated. As much for this core of hate which begets cruelties and betrayals and thoughtless selfishness in us, whereas on the other hand, we are capable of the most fervent acts of self sacrifice, of offering our being and our essence on our outstretched palms, for a divinity, for a child, for a man. And sometimes, the two get muddled and the act of self-sacrifice becomes, in reality, an act of sheer selfishness. (114)

Through her interaction with Fatmah and her participation in the ritual of the fire sacrifice, Anjali converts the veil, metaphor for passive femininity, into a metaphor for woman’s regeneration. Here one is reminded of the episode in Ramayana, rarely reinforced in popular tradition, when Sita proclaims after proving her innocence that she prefers to leave her husband to his stately duties and retreat into the forest to live a life of ascetism. Anjali’s sense of liberation is firmly anchored in the Sanskritist tradition of maya and dharma. Comparing the labyrinth in Greek mythology to the life as maya or illusion in Hindu mythology, a liberated Anjali declares that if destiny is perceived as tragic by human beings it is because they attribute a sense of seriousness to their acts without realising that life is a game. Ariane’s thread and Draupadi’s sari, she says, are constant reminders that the dilemmas and indecisions of humanity are eventually insignificant:

Il suffit de savoir que chaque labyrinthe à son fil d’Ariane, ce sari sans fin de Draupadi, pour nous rendre compte que nos dilemmes et nos indécisions sont risibles. D’une façon ou d’une autre chacun est occupé à perpétuer son karma, à suivre son fil invisible à travers le temps. Si notre destin nous semble tragique, c’est que nous attribuons à nos actes une gravité qui n’y est pas. C’est qu’il nous arrive, parfois, de refuser de jouer le jeu. (160)
It is sufficient to know that every labyrinth has its Ariane’s thread, this never-ending sari of Draupadi, to make us see that our dilemmas and indecisions are ridiculous. In one way or the other, everyone is busy perpetuating his *karma*, following his invisible thread across time. If our destiny appears tragic to us, it is because we attribute seriousness to our acts where there is none. Sometimes, we refuse to play the game.

On a larger plane, as suggested earlier, given that the text is inserted within the literary space of francophone texts where the veil as garment is employed uniquely in the context of Islamic womanhood, Devi’s text demystifies the usage and unveils the falseness of the debate. Anjali observes: J’ai vu le voile de Draupadi, J’ai marché sur le feu sans me brûler. Il ne me demeure aucun enchantement mystique. Je l’ai fait comme si je passais un examen J’ai pénétré un monde, qui n’est pas le mien, à présent je retourne à l’intérieur de moi-même, rien n’est résolu, rien n’est expliqué (‘I saw Draupadi’s veil, I walked on fire without burning myself. There is no mystical enchantment left. I did it as though I was taking a test, I entered a world that is not mine, now, I am returning to my inner self, nothing is resolved, nothing is explained’) (169). In the end, she loses Wynn but Anjali emerges from the ordeal, which was both social (religious) and personal (maternal), with a strong sense of identity. Performing the sacrifice has taught her that she can construct her identity within her Hindu tradition and at the same time outside the confining limits of the three aspects fundamental to the definition of femininity in Hindu society: wifehood, motherhood and religious dogmatism. The narrative thus defines Anjali’s identity within a universal conception of humanity but outside Orientalist definitions of non-Western womanhood. Devi ‘tears’ the metaphor of the veil associated with oppression in Islamic societies from the framework of non-Islamic conceptions of womanhood and religiosity by rewriting its significance for the urban educated, progressive and self-reflective women in previously colonised societies. In *Le Voile de Draupadi* a new Hindu identity is lived ‘in dialogue’ with other cultures in contact, conflict and convergence. Ananda Devi stresses the importance of religion (philosophy and practice) in the construction of post-colonial subjectivity. She suggests the possibility of finding emancipation within different cultural and religious paradigms. By highlighting the differences between oppressive tradition and individual practice in different cultures, Devi, on the one hand, denounces religious dogmatism as a patriarchal construction and on the other, calls for a plurality of womanhoods.

Anjali’s history is rooted in the history of colonialism in Mauritius. As a descendant of the coolies brought in by the British from India as workers on the sugar plantations on the island, her Hindu identity in postcolonial Mauritius is a tradition she cannot ignore. In the same way, being locked into a self Orientalising view of her Self as she struggles to find the meaning to her existence within societal conventions and religious practices of which she disapproves, is also an integral part of the colonial heritage. Devi succinctly describes the ‘postcolonial predicament’ of the island nation. In Mauritius, she says, Mauritian identity is
orientated towards religions, especially in their collective aspect. This contributes to cohesion within each group but at the same time becomes the basis of separation between groups. The multicultural model in postcolonial Mauritius is commended by critics like Franoise Lionnet, who work on concepts of transculturation and méttissage in order to present a harmonious co-existence of multiple religions and languages. Devi interrogates the island identity differently without ignoring the historicity of the social and religious construction of identities, and at the same time she imbricates the notions of class and gender in the evolving construction of knowledge that shapes the present. Arguably, the discourse and practice of Orientalism exemplifies the ‘postcolonial predicament’ both in ex-colonised and ex-colonising societies. Van der Veer and Breckenridge note that ‘one aspect of the postcolonial predicament is that critiques of colonialism have not really led to a reflection on the evolution of knowledge that brings us into the postcolonial (neo-colonial) present’ (2). Devi’s work brings into focus this lacuna. It reveals that in postcolonial societies identity formation is not a syncretic progression but a regenerative conundrum.

NOTES
1 See Sahadeo (1974); Vertovec (1993, 1996)
3 All translations into English are mine. The page number corresponds to the original edition in French: Le voile de Draupadi. Paris: L’Harmattan, 1993.
4 See Julia Leslie, Roles and Rituals for Hindu Women.
5 See Julia Leslie and Mary MacGee (eds), Invented Identities; Susan Seymour, Women, Family and Childcare: A World in Transition.
6 In Creole societies like those found in Reunion and in the Caribbean islands the two forms are woven together in a continuum and Jean Benoist in Hindouismes Créoles: Mascereignes, Antilles argues that this is what gives it its unique identity in these regions. The majority of the immigrants in Reunion are from the South of India. They identify themselves quite differently from the Hindus of North India. In what Benoist calls ‘hindouism tamoul’ in the Creole islands, Brahmins do not play an important part and high castes are absent amongst the devotees. Tamil is used instead of Sanskrit in temple functions and the gap between this form of lived religion and the Sanskrit textual tradition has had the effect of relegating the classic Hindu concepts of karma, dharma and moksa to a secondary/negligible level. In fact Tamil Saivism is being constructed as an alternative to Sanskrit Hinduism in the Creole diaspora.
7 The material aspect of the veil refers commonly to the woman’s head, face or body cover, that could include a netting attached to a hat, or part of the nun’s head dress that frames the face; the spatial aspect: the veil could refer to a screen dividing physical/social space; the communicative aspect of the term suggests concealing and invisibility; and the religious aspect refers to seclusion from worldly life and sexual pleasures.
8 See El Guindi Fadwa, Veil: Modesty, Privacy and Resistance, and Walther Weibke, Women in Islam. Fanon had argued that colonialism produced a new symbolism. In
French Algeria, the occupier was bent on unveiling Algeria; it became part of the colonising strategy to uproot and control, but the opposite effect was produced — the movement strengthened the Arabs' attachment to the veil. The veil in contemporary societies is seen by Islamic women as a fierce symbol of nationalism and resistance. In Islamic societies the veil in the twentieth century has thus become a symbol of resistance and tradition in the struggle against occupation, and more recently as a symbol of resistance against Western imperialism, while the ‘West’ continues to see it in terms of exclusion and subordination of women. Most contemporary Islamic feminists believe that gender emancipation can be achieved only when the feminists are rooted in their own culture.

The righteous prince, Yudhistira, the eldest of the five Pandava brothers had staked his kingdom and all his possessions in a game of dice against his rivals and cousins the Kauravas. Duryodhana, the eldest Kaurava prince with the connivance of Sakuni, his uncle, beat Yudhistira. The Pandava prince was therefore asked to surrender Draupadi, wife of the five princes, to the Kauravas as their slave.

A form of folk Hinduism, the practice was banned by the British India. While one rarely witnesses this ritual in urban India, it persists in parts of rural Tamil Nadu and in those ex-colonies where Indian indentured labour was brought in by the British as in Malaysia, Fiji, Mauritius, Reunion and so on. The devotees have to go through a period of preparation before performing the rite. For ten days before the penance, devotees fast, pray and deny themselves any form of bodily comfort in order to concentrate their mind on spiritual things.

‘Aborder ces sujets était naturel, puisque la pensée mauricienne est orientée vers les religions, en particulier dans leur aspect collectif, qui constitue à la fois une force de cohésion à l’intérieur des groupes et une base de séparation entre les groupes. J’avais envie, encore une fois, de dénoncer ce rôle intégriste des religions et de montrer qu’il y avait d’autres possibilités d’interrogations. (Quand je dis ‘dénoncer’, ‘montrer’, je ne veux pas dire que ces romans ont été écrits pour cela; mais le thème central du Voile... était justement ce dilemme entre le collectif et la croyance individuelle…)’

See Françoise Lionnet, ‘Logiques Métisses’.

WORKS CITED


Te Reo Shakespeare: *Te Tangata Whai Rawa o Weniti / The Maori Merchant of Venice*

In 1945, Maori scholar Pei Te Hurinui Jones translated Shakespeare’s *The Merchant of Venice* into a classical, formal variant of te reo Maori (the Maori language). The resulting play, *Te Tangata Whai Rawa o Weniti / The Maori Merchant of Venice*, was made into a film in 2001 by the Maori production company, He Taonga Films. On the basis of these unusual credentials alone, *The Maori Merchant of Venice* stands as an extraordinary cinematic and linguistic achievement. Employing a large all-Maori cast, it was the first Maori-language feature film ever produced, as well as the first Shakespearean film to be made in Aotearoa-New Zealand. It was directed by Don Selwyn, who developed the work out of a stage production he had directed in Auckland a decade earlier. Selwyn merged two modes of cultural representation, bringing lavish sets and costumes inspired by seventeenth-century Venice together with an array of Maori arts and cultural performances.

While the majority of recent ‘indigenised’ productions of Shakespeare in Australasia have been oriented towards cross-cultural communication, The *Maori Merchant of Venice* was aimed primarily (though not exclusively) at Maori audiences. Selwyn holds that the imperative of Maori language recuperation was the film’s central purpose, and one that was directed first and foremost at Maori people (‘The Maori Merchant’ 8). This philosophy was not Selwyn’s alone: *The Maori Merchant of Venice* was both produced and funded by Maori companies whose explicit function is to further the revitalisation of te reo. This essay examines the importance of *The Maori Merchant of Venice* as a Maori language cultural project, as well as the various complexities associated with translating Shakespeare into such a project. It also examines the significance of the film’s Maori creative and corporate autonomy. Finally, the ongoing implications of the film will be considered.

Independently of these key contextual issues, *The Maori Merchant of Venice*’s striking stylistic and performative characteristics constitute a unique study in cross-cultural representation. The film presents a blended aesthetic of historical European and traditional indigenous imagery. The early scenes introduce the busy trading centre of Weniti (Venice), its marketplace a throng of people, animals, and numerous produce and merchandise stalls. This appealingly rustic European-style space is populated by Maori, and is located within a landscape whose foliage (of
ferns, flaxes, and cabbage trees) and frequent birdsong (the bellbird/korimako and tui) are conspicuously native to New Zealand. The effect is to create a dislocating vision of an alternative cultural history, or as Macdonald Jackson expresses it, ‘an imaginary Old New Zealand … a rich concoction of European and Polynesian’ (158). The medium of film enabled the filmmakers to construct a multifaceted visual representation that employed several performative (often ‘real-world’) spaces. Selwyn was eager to exploit the possibilities of his medium; as he explains, while the work was ‘born out of the theatre’, film allowed him to ‘go beyond the proscenium’ and ‘expand the imagination of the story’ (qtd in ‘The Bard of Aotearoa’ 15).

This imaginative expansion of Shakespeare’s narrative involved the incorporation of iconic elements of the New Zealand landscape. The film’s opening image of Antonio’s (Antonio’s) ships battling a storm-tossed open sea was shot in the upper reaches of Auckland Harbour. The following sequence, which tracks the progress of Piriniha O Morako (the Prince of Morocco) and his retinue towards Peremona — the home of Pohia (Portia), and the equivalent of Shakespeare’s Belmont — was filmed in a lush New Zealand forest. This sequence incorporates Maori mythology: the forest is represented as the forest of Tane, which is under the guardianship of the Turehu (fairy people) (Selwyn np). A Maori world is evoked; special effects enable the Turehu (portrayed by children) to scamper up tree trunks, leap from branches, and somersault through the air as they watch Morako’s approach from hidden vantage points. These images effectively bring to life a world ‘behind the scenes’ of Shakespeare’s story, which was a creative aspect Selwyn relished: ‘we’re celebrating all the cultural elements … which you wouldn’t do normally in the stage production’ (qtd in ‘The Bard’ 15).

The film’s climactic trial scene was shot in the ornate Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Auckland’s Khyber Pass where the original 1990 stage version of the play was performed (Calder np). As well as reflecting Selwyn’s acknowledgement of the work’s theatrical origins, this overtly Christian setting amplified the cultural prejudice underpinning the psychology of the trial; as Selwyn observes: ‘a place like this [the church] just reinforces the influence of Christianity as opposed to the Jewish element. I find it much more dynamic that we set it in something that looks really Christian. We see the vulnerability of Shylock here’ (qtd in ‘The Bard’ 15).

Standing in contrast to this Christian setting is Peremona, which is situated beside a waterfall-fed lake within the forest of Tane, and is the locus of Maori culture within the film. Selwyn explains that because Shakespeare’s Belmont is a fictitious location, he was able to make Peremona an explicitly New Zealand space, governed by Maori culture (Selwyn np). Pohia plays a central role in this respect; she can be seen as the custodian of Peremona’s Maoritanga, and the embodiment of a wahine toa, or strong woman. Selwyn characterises Pohia as a Christian with strong Maori cultural roots who sets ‘the protocol and cultural ethos within her estate’ (Selwyn np). The Maori Merchant of Venice conveys a
definite sense that formalised Maori protocol is integral to Peremonia. A conch shell announces the arrival of Piriniha O Morako (and is juxtaposed with the sound of Moroccan trumpets), after which he is given a ceremonial Maori welcome, involving a karanga (female cry of welcome) and wero (warrior challenge).

The interior of Pohia’s home is constructed as a romanticised, dreamlike idyll. Maori cultural elements pervade the space, and include wooden window frames carved with traditional Maori designs, numerous potted ferns, flax baskets, feather cloaks, tukutuku panels (patterned flax weavings), paua-lined steps, and a taiaha (a spear-club). This Maori imagery predominates, but is juxtaposed with European objects such as a harp, books, and a nineteenth-century sofa. Pohia and Nerita (Nerissa) appear in various costumes during the film, all of which are essentially European in style, but incorporate intricate Maori design features and Maori materials. In the first scene that she appears in, Pohia’s dress is decorated with a finely woven flax shawl that curls in a koru (coiled fern) shape above her shoulder. A koru pattern is also tattooed around her wrist (see fig. 1). In the same scene, Nerita wears a flax bodice and a feather necklace. Both women wear traditional Maori hairpins. This representational fusion extends to the music of the Peremonia scenes; the approach of Pohia’s suitors is accompanied by Italian-style arias sung in Maori, and interspersed with traditional Maori wind instruments, all of which are performed by Maori artists.

When considered from a critical perspective that is cognisant of Eurocentric objectification of minority (and particularly indigenous) cultures, the unashamedly exoticised and fantastical representation of Peremonia might be criticised for

Figure 1. Pohia (Portia) and (Patanio) Bassanio, *Te Tangata What Rawa o Weniti / The Maori Merchant of Venice*, He Taonga Films, 2001.
promulgating particular mythologies and stereotypes of Maori culture. Jackson raises this issue when he discerns 'a hint ... of the Victorians’ exotic “Maoriland”, of “Hinemoa the Maori Maiden”, and the long-forgotten cinematic fantasies of Frenchman Georges Méliès’ in the film’s representation of Peremona (158–59). He goes on to assert that the film’s ‘Maoritanga ... is authentic’ (159) in reference to its various traditional Maori art and cultural objects. With this distinction, Jackson seems to be suggesting that the representations influenced by a European imaginary are less authentic than those derived from pre-contact Maori culture.

Jackson’s point is underlined by a tenable historical concern: the Victorian fantasies of Maoridom to which he refers became the substance of stereotype at the same time as lived Maori culture was being colonised and threatened. The concept of ‘Maoriland’ was ‘a sentimental fantasy of the imperial era’ (Blythe 91), which served to exoticise and thereby demarcate the unalterable ‘Otherness’ of Maori people. Additionally, by employing imagery evocative of ‘Maoriland’, The Maori Merchant of Venice runs the risk of operating in a similar manner to the early New Zealand films (by Europeans) that, as Merata Mita observes, tended ‘to exaggerate or minimise aspects of Maori character and culture, to make the action more accessible and attractive to a foreign audience’ (42). Yet, aesthetic judgements such as Jackson’s are problematic. To question certain modes of Maori representation because they bear the marks of European (mis)appropriation (or even simply of European influence) may amount to what Christine Prentice describes as an ‘oppressive ethics of originality’, which fails to ‘acknowledge the impurity of all beginnings in the postcolonial moment’ (553). While observations like Jackson’s may point out the historical processes by which Maori representation has been taken out of Maori hands, they may ultimately end up circumscribing Maori creative expression.

Shakespeare’s The Merchant of Venice is arguably an inherently political play that, like The Tempest, lends itself easily to explorations of racial and cultural prejudice. In their introduction to Post-Colonial Shakespeares, Ania Loomba and Martin Orkin identify Shylock, along with Caliban and Othello, as characters that ‘enact the tensions of intercultural, interracial, or interreligious encounters’ (9). Similarly, John Theime asserts that in The Merchant of Venice, ‘Shakespeare clearly constructs a locus for investigating his own society’s anxieties about alterity’ (156). These politics have obvious resonances in relation to the marginalised cultural position of Maori people, and in one pivotal scene, The Maori Merchant of Venice provocatively engages with them by connecting the theme of Jewish persecution to contemporary New Zealand debates over Maori experiences of colonisation. This is the scene in which Hairoka (Shylock) and Anatonio negotiate the loan, and in which Hairoka protests the discrimination and dehumanisation of his people by the Christians. The scene takes place in an artist’s studio, hung with Selwyn Muru’s famous Parihaka paintings. These works commemorate the now notorious 1881 sacking of the small North Island
settlement of Parihaka by colonial forces, amidst attempts by Maori to halt an invasion using passive resistance. During this scene, the camera tracks back to reveal Muru working on a canvas clearly bearing the word ‘holocaust’.

In the film’s context, this word contains a double allusion, and, as Michael Neill observes, it causes ‘a double displacement’ for New Zealand audiences (vi). As well as referencing the genocide of Jewish people during the World War II, recent history’s most horrific manifestation of anti-Semitism, the word holocaust refers to an incident that occurred shortly before the film was made, in which Maori politician Tariana Turia referred to ‘the holocaust suffered by indigenous people including Maori as a result of colonial contact and behaviour’ (Turia np).

This comment generated a public furore; Prime Minister Helen Clark condemned it, and asked Turia to apologise in Parliament — which she did (Main 2). The Maori Merchant of Venice can be seen to symbolically re-validate Turia’s retracted statement by pointing to a moment in New Zealand’s history in which Maori did sustain an indiscriminate loss of life. Effectively, it called upon audiences to consider the manifestation within two seemingly disparate cultural histories — the Maori and the Jewish — of the same basic ideology, whereby the rights and humanity of a particular group of people are devalued by a more powerful society. Within a Maori language film aimed primarily at Maori audiences, the use of this (written) English word effectively constituted a momentary focus on cross-cultural communication.

The latter was not, however, the film’s central imperative. Critic Veronica Schmidt observes that Selwyn is ‘beyond using his work to preach to the unconverted’ (52), and that his primary political agenda was that of ‘getting a feature film made in te reo Maori’ (52). Selwyn is pragmatically aware that The Maori Merchant of Venice is unlikely to be seen by a large number of non-Maori people, freely asserting, ‘Shakespeare in Maori is enough to turn most people off’ (qtd in Schmidt 52). He guesses that beyond Maori, interest in the film will probably be limited to ‘theatrical people’ (qtd in Schmidt 52) in addition to a small number he refers to as ‘The Curious’ (qtd in Schmidt 52). This does not appear to concern him; as he explains: ‘First of all, it’s an art film geared for the Maori people to feel good about their own cultural dimension. Anything else is going to be a bonus’ (qtd in ‘Don Selwyn’ np). Selwyn is making the claim that he is not enormously concerned with how The Maori Merchant of Venice might operate in relation to non-Maori audiences. The fact that he chose to circulate the film in small Maori communities before releasing it elsewhere stands (alongside the fact that it is spoken in te reo Maori) as a commercial substantiation of this assertion.

The film’s Maori language has important implications in terms of Maori socio-cultural interests. The use of indigenous language in performance serves as a powerful statement of indigenous cultural ownership or authority over the work. Privileged access to indigenous language performances belongs to those with knowledge of the language, and access for non-speakers — through subtitles or
extra-linguistic performative means — will necessarily be secondary. *The Maori Merchant of Venice* contains brief and simple subtitles, written in contemporary English rather than Shakespearean English. Thus, the film departs from typical patterns of reception, so that audience members familiar with Shakespeare’s work but not with te reo Maori, find themselves in a position of alienation as cultural readers of a Shakespearean performance.

By appropriating Shakespeare in this way, Selwyn and Jones can be seen as adapters in the sense proposed within Patrice Pavis’s intercultural hourglass model: ‘The adapter can be the linguistic translator of the text as well as the director, designer, actor ... [those who] adapt the source culture to the target culture, i.e. mediate or act as a bridge between two poles’ (191). However, characterising Selwyn’s and Jones’s roles in this way is problematic: the enormous temporal and geographical circulation of Shakespeare’s works means that their cultural ownership, and thus their source culture, is open to debate. Certainly, the Shakespearean text does not constitute a ‘more or less codified and solidified’ source in the sense propounded by Pavis (4). Even in English, Shakespeare is not necessarily any more foreign to an indigenous artist than to a non-indigenous artist. A translation of Shakespeare can highlight this: as Dennis Kennedy asserts, ‘In general, foreign productions of Shakespeare, freed from the burden imposed by centuries of admiring his language, have been more ready to admit that the door to the past is locked’ (146). In other words, translated Shakespeare productions can disrupt what Kennedy refers to as ‘the myth of cultural ownership’, and support the concept that ‘Shakespeare doesn’t belong to any nation or anybody: Shakespeare is foreign to all of us’ (146). This idea of Shakespeare’s cultural indeterminacy (and its counterpart, indigenous cultural hybridity) does not fit straightforwardly within Pavis’s hourglass model.

Nor does Pavis’s concept of a clear-cut target culture accommodate the heterogeneity of *The Maori Merchant of Venice*’s Maori audiences (not to mention its Pakeha audiences). The assumption that a target Maori audience member automatically occupies a position of receptive privilege or authority due to the film’s language is problematic, given that most Maori are not fluent speakers of te reo (Nicolson 206). In fact, a performance entirely in Maori could be seen to constitute a form of cultural exclusion amongst Maori. *The Maori Merchant of Venice* risks reinforcing an artistic hierarchy whereby knowledge of the Maori language is held up as a signifier of authentic Maori identity. Of course, to question the value of Maori language productions on this basis is absurd: rather, what is important is that the fostering of Maori language production does not equate to the concomitant devaluation of English-language performance by Maori — within either Maori or Pakeha discourses.

In any case, *The Maori Merchant of Venice* was underpinned by an educative ethos that largely dispels questions of cultural exclusivity: the filmmakers wanted the film to encourage the learning of te reo, rather than to communicate first and
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foremost to those already fluent in the language. This aim was directed particularly at the young; Selwyn used several young actors in the film who were all highly proficient in Maori in order to 'inspire other young Maori to take up the language' ('The Maori Merchant' 10). The functionality of The Maori Merchant of Venice's subtitles was not intended as an exclusionary or alienating device; rather, it was meant to promote awareness of the film's Maoritanga. Audiences were encouraged to approach the film on its own terms, engaging with it as a Maori cultural text, rather than mediating their understanding via its Shakespearean counterpart. As Selwyn explains: 'We want people to be able to ... get a feel for the reo, and a feel for the emotional element ... [to] hear the beauty of the Maori language' (qtd in 'The Bard' 15). As a basic performative effect, the film's Maori language — being something that permeates every scene, driving the narrative — is crucial to its evocation of Maori culture.

Maori critic Lana Simmons-Donaldson is enthusiastic about The Maori Merchant of Venice's role in relation to Maori language acquisition, asserting that its 'usefulness and relevance as an educational, even motivational tool for particularly young Maori will be hard to match' (np). Speaking as an audience member with knowledge of the Maori language, Simmons-Donaldson asserts that the film 'satisfies the full range of Maori language ability from those with a smattering, to the native tongue' (np). This review differs from the norm by implicitly privileging a Maori perspective; like Selwyn, Simmons-Donaldson does not deem the development of Maori-Pakeha cross-cultural communication as one of the key purposes of The Maori Merchant of Venice.

The educative function of The Merchant of Venice connects it with other Maori language initiatives that have occurred in New Zealand. Maori became an official language of New Zealand under the Maori Language Act of 1987. The revitalisation of the language has been fostered by such developments as Te Kohanga Reo (language nest), the enormously successful Maori language immersion preschool system that was founded in 1982 (Barlow 52), and the long-anticipated Maori Television station, which was launched in March 2004 and remains successful. Maori language initiatives are frequently based around the performing arts. As Christopher Balme has observed: 'Against the background of the renaissance of Maori culture and language, to which the theatre movement has in no small way contributed, the language issue is a central one' (121).

A discussion of language in relation to The Maori Merchant of Venice inevitably raises issues concerning the cultural politics of translation. The notion that language and cultural identity are connected is widely accepted (the imperative of Maori language renaissance is, of course, implicitly based upon it). As Gayatri Spivak observes, 'language may be one of the many elements that allow us to make sense of things, of ourselves.... Making sense of ourselves is what produces identity' (179). In this light, the act of translation cannot be deemed culturally or ideologically neutral. Susan Bassnett and André Lefevere describe translation
as ‘a rewriting of an original text’, arguing that ‘[a]ll rewritings, whatever their intention, reflect a certain ideology and a poetics and as such manipulate language to function in a given society in a given way’ (xi). According to this view, translations produce a text that is in some way underpinned by a particular cultural or ideological position, and in a sense, can be seen to have a cultural or ideological effect upon the text that is being translated. In other words, translation effectively constitutes an assertion of power on behalf of the translator.

When, as is commonly the case, non-English texts are translated into English to make them accessible to the widest group of readers, the problematics of power are fairly obvious. As Spivak asserts, this practice ‘is merely the easiest way of being “democratic” with minorities. In the act of wholesale translation into English there can be a betrayal of the democratic ideal into the law of the strongest’ (182). By taking an English text and making it accessible to a minority language group, Jones’s translation of The Merchant of Venice effectively worked against this dominant pattern. Moreover, Spivak’s assertion that ‘[t]he status of a language in the world is what one must consider when teasing out the politics of translation’ (191) is particularly pertinent in relation to The Maori Merchant of Venice, given the relative cultural status or power in the world of, on the one hand, Shakespearean English, and on the other, te reo Maori. The act of translating Shakespeare’s texts can be seen as a disruption of traditionalist conceptions of these texts as literary icons that should be kept in their ‘pure’ form. James Bulman argues that when Shakespeare is ‘den[ied] ... his language altogether’, the (Eurocentric) cultural authority of the Shakespearean text is subverted (7). The subversion of this authority through translation implies its replacement by the cultural authority of the translating language. In this light, it is necessary to consider the ways in which the text of The Maori Merchant of Venice, by imposing a Maori context on to Shakespeare’s play, operated in relation to Maori cultural interests.

The authorial ideological position of Shakespeare’s The Merchant of Venice is impossible to define precisely, as is Shakespeare’s own attitude toward the Jewish moneylender so central to his play. However, it is almost certain that his text, despite its complexities, was shaped by an element (at least) of naturalised anti-Semitism. Like any appropriator of Shakespeare, Jones — a Maori living in mid twentieth-century New Zealand — brought a different set of cultural frameworks and attitudes to bear upon the story from those of Shakespeare. Perhaps not surprisingly, Jones’s main conceptual departure from Shakespeare relates to the power relations and prejudices enacted in the play. Neill asserts that Jones’s translation ‘presupposes an audience that will sympathize with the Jew as representative of an oppressed minority’ (vi).

It is, of course, reductive to describe this sympathy with the oppressed as a Maori cultural sentiment; yet Selwyn, taking up the prerogative of strategic essentialism, asserts that The Maori Merchant of Venice’s ‘ethnic elements — the majority Christians and the minority Jews’ are issues Maori ‘can readily
recognise' (qtd in ‘The Bard’ 15). Waihoroi Shortland, who played Hairoka in the film, agrees with this, asserting an affinity for his character that is grounded in his own Maori identity: ‘Playing Shylock from a Maori perspective is the easiest role because you know something about what it is to hang onto your identity and to deal with prejudice, some of it overt, some of it not so overt’ (‘The Maori Merchant’ 13). Shortland adds that he sees Hairoka as ‘acting not only for himself, but ... on behalf of his people’ (‘The Maori Merchant’ 13). Selwyn’s and Shortland’s understandings of themes and characters are evidently informed and consolidated by their personal experiences of being Maori within contemporary New Zealand.

Several critics observed that the enactment of Jones’s Maori text catalysed specific semantic effects. Benedict Reid describes the impact of the translation: ‘the Shakespearean text is forced to resonate on a completely new level. The issue of race, always central to this play, becomes much more complex and harder to define’ (np). Philip Matthews asserts that in the film, Shakespeare’s play is transformed into ‘a Maori play about oppression, prejudice and the pursuit of bloody revenge’ (52). These observations illustrate the degree to which the film was able to position itself within a Maori cultural and political context informed by the experience of cultural marginalisation. This can be seen to corroborate Bulman’s assertion that ‘translation does ideological, ethnological, and cultural work that can only be achieved extra-linguistically in productions which remain “faithful” to the authorized text’ (8).10

The Maori used in Jones’s translation is reminiscent of whaikorero, a classical, rhetorical variant of the language used in the formal marae oratory.11 Shortland identifies the often highly rhetorical and poetic language of Shakespeare as being ‘synonymous with whaikorero’ (qtd in White 115); both, he explains, are well suited to theatrical presentation, and are vastly different from contemporary speech. Critic Peter Calder discerned this from the actors’ style of delivery: ‘In the mouths of a large cast the text becomes a thing of musical beauty, fixing on the rhetorical and declamatory characteristics rather than seeking to cover it with a veneer of naturalism’ (np).

Along with Shortland, Selwyn observes that both the Maori of Jones’s text and the English of Shakespeare contain a strong poetic element, adding: ‘Today there’s a tendency for us to lose the poetry of our language — Maori and English’ (qtd in ‘The Bard’ 15). He argues that by providing a Maori equivalent of Shakespearean linguistic images, Jones’s text, within the film, will encourage more Maori to ‘have faith in their own language, in the indigenous language of this country’ (qtd in ‘The Bard’ 15). Echoing Selwyn’s views, Shortland is concerned that the teaching of Maori tends to focus upon practical usage, and that this is having a limiting effect: ‘We’re losing the colour, the passion, the intellectual ability of the language, the philosophical use’ (qtd in White 115). He observes that the film challenged its cast members to use Maori less colloquially, and cites an anecdotal
instance where one of the younger actors delivered Jones’s translation of Portia’s ‘quality of mercy’ (4.1.179) speech at a wedding. The speech uses the word ‘aroha’, which translates to ‘love’ as well as ‘mercy.’ Shortland asserts that it had an inspirational effect on people at the wedding: ‘everyone sat up and listened’ (qtd in White 115). So for both Selwyn and Shortland, The Maori Merchant of Venice’s educational role is not merely a functional one of basic Maori language acquisition, but also that of fostering a particular usage of the language.

The idea that Jones’s translation will enable Maori to rediscover or re-access the beauty of the Maori language is somewhat problematic insofar as it suggests that Shakespeare’s plays offer a mode of expression superior to and more complex than what is possible nowadays via Maori stories. Lefevere brings up this issue with the question: ‘why is it necessary to represent a foreign text in one’s own culture? Does the very fact of doing that not amount to an admission of the inadequacy of that culture?’ (1). In his defence, Selwyn does claim that contemporary English has, along with Maori, lost much of its poetic beauty; however, his use of Shakespeare as a conferrer of poeticism may amount to an ‘admission of the inadequacy’ of Maori storytelling (Lefevere 1).

As well as risking the implicit devaluation of Maori cultural texts, Selwyn’s belief in Shakespeare’s beneficial effect upon te reo Maori effectively acquiesces to the cultural status and power of Shakespeare’s texts. Widespread cultural acceptance of this status means that it cannot be separated from the cultural politics of Jones’s translation; certainly, it underlies the following comment by critic Margo White: ‘Cleaving an endangered language to some of the most famous and complex poetic verse in the English language can only be a good thing’ (115). By suggesting that the Maori language needs to insert itself into the textual frameworks of canonical English literature in order to survive, White’s observation situates the latter in something of a custodial or facilitative position in relation to future Maori expression. This Shakespearean power goes beyond the issue of linguistic status or hierarchy and extends to the practical implications of Maori creative production. As Mark Houlahan asserts, ‘it seems part of the scandal of Shakespeare in settler societies like ours [New Zealand] that it took Shakespeare to provide the occasion for the first full-length Maori film’ (121). While Houlahan points to the role Shakespeare’s cultural capital may have played in the genesis of the film, Jackson considers the effect that the film may have had on this capital: ‘Selwyn appropriates The Maori Merchant of Venice for Maori, while serving Shakespeare well at the same time’ (159). Jackson does not elaborate on precisely what it means to serve Shakespeare, but one can assume that he is referring to the act of bolstering Euro-imperialist cultural authority.

However, as far as Selwyn is concerned, to question the validity of Maori engagements with Shakespeare on the basis of the latter’s association with Eurocentrism limits Maori creativity: ‘We have to ... accommodate the range of European and Maori writers because only then are we going to be able to have
a kaleidoscopic view of what we have to offer the rest of the world. Otherwise there’s a tendency for us to be locked down in clichés’ (qtd in ‘The Bard’ 16). Selwyn is effectively advocating an acknowledgement of the diverse textual spaces within which Maori creativity can occur.

The companies that created and funded The Maori Merchant of Venice evince the central importance of Maori language revitalisation to it. The film was produced by He Taonga Films, an Auckland-based Maori film and television production company that was established in 1992 by Selwyn and Ruth Kaupua Panapa. The company developed from a film and television training school directed by Selwyn. It produces Maori, English, and bilingual work for film and television, with the aim of fostering and providing opportunities for Maori artists, and enabling the telling of Maori stories (‘The Maori Merchant’ 35). The significance of a company like He Taonga is contextualised by Mita’s observation:

Because of the monocultural domination of the media and related industries, there has been an absence of Maori technicians, directors, producers and production houses that would concern themselves with Maori projects and aspiring Maori film makers. Using history as a guide, it was clear we would have to be our own teachers, and determine our own place in an industry that had firmly locked its doors on us. (49)

He Taonga is precisely the sort of recuperative initiative to which Mita refers, being a company that has effectively created its own doors to the New Zealand film and television industry.

Despite its clearly defined position and focus in terms of Maori creative and cultural interests, He Taonga does not operate in an exclusionary manner in relation to non-Maori artists. It claims to make a point of ‘select[ing] its crews on a racially-inclusive basis’ (‘The Maori Merchant’ 35). The Maori Merchant of Venice employed a crew from a range of cultural and ethnic backgrounds. Of this, Selwyn comments: ‘We’re not about excluding people. It’s wonderful to work with people who have so much experience in film, and you know you can trust them’ (qtd in ‘The Bard’ 16). In contrast, indigenous Australian director Noel Tovey frankly acknowledges that his employment of non-Aboriginal artists in the crew of his 1997 stage production of A Midsummer Night’s Dream was due to necessity rather than choice; he asserts that he would have ‘love[d] to have used all Aborigines [in the crew] but they are not there’ (qtd in McCarthy 3). Evidently, for Tovey, the desire to produce a play that employed only Aboriginal artists constituted a not-yet-attainable ideal. Of course, it is impossible to ascertain from Selwyn’s diplomatic comment whether the non-Maori artists he employed in the crew of The Maori Merchant of Venice possessed skills that he could not find amongst Maori artists. Yet, it is probably fair to infer that he was operating from a secure and well-established cultural base in terms of the Maoritanga of He Taonga (and the film), so that the involvement of non-Maori artists in the crew did not constitute a cultural compromise.
Moreover, while Tovey’s work was produced under the auspices of the Sydney Theatre Company, an institutional structure that operates within a framework of largely non-indigenous cultural interests, *The Maori Merchant of Venice* received the vast majority of its funding (NZ $2.4 million) from Te Mangai Paho (White 114), New Zealand’s national funding body for Maori language films, videos, television and radio programmes, and music CDs (*Te Mangai Paho* np). Te Mangai Paho is a Crown entity that was established in 1993 in recognition of the Crown’s obligations under the 1840 Treaty of Waitangi, which guarantees the preservation of Maori taonga, or treasures — of which language is central. Te Mangai Paho aims to foster the advancement of the Maori language, increase opportunities for the acquisition and use of Maori, and promote Maori-English bilingualism as a valuable part of New Zealand society (*Te Mangai Paho* np). Being funded almost entirely by a Maori entity, *The Maori Merchant of Venice* was underpinned by Maori interests at a corporate level.

The very existence of Te Mangai Paho signals the kind of economic autonomy and access to the international market that are probably practical necessities for genuinely operative Maori creative authority. As Mita points out, one of the major issues faced by Maori filmmakers is ‘the criteria of a white male-dominated value and funding structure’ (49). Being substantially funded by a company not governed by such a structure, *The Maori Merchant of Venice* was not oriented towards typical commercial concerns; as Calder observes, ‘the running time may be daunting for some; the project was conceived with aims other than quick commercial appeal in mind and so the text was untouched’ (np). In other words, the filmmakers’ imperatives in relation to the Maori language were not delimited by the dominant commercial criteria to which Mita refers.

The enduring nature of the filmic medium means that *The Maori Merchant of Venice* has ongoing meaning and significance, which has implications for both Maori language revitalisation and Maori creative and corporate autonomy. Film operates differently as an object of cultural circulation, both geographically and temporally, to theatre, which is received and generates meaning within a particular time, place, and performative context (although, as far as its initial entry into the public sphere is concerned, *The Maori Merchant of Venice* shared similarities with a theatrical text: it was launched via a series of charity premieres throughout New Zealand that were attended — generally in costume — by several of the actors. Since film is a permanent medium that is more widely and easily accessed than theatre, *The Maori Merchant of Venice* will be received long after its moment of creation, in New Zealand and elsewhere; in other words, its cultural work or effect will continue.

*The Maori Merchant of Venice* will exist as a linguistic resource for future generations, and can therefore be seen as part of larger, continuing project. Simmons-Donaldson points out that a Wharekura secondary school journal showcasing Selwyn and the film has already been written, and that other
educational resources are being developed (np). This concerted focus upon school-age audiences points to the fact that the film’s producers were conscious of the film’s future cultural effect. Not surprisingly, this awareness of ongoing effects extends to the way in which the film’s production company operates. With a view to the long-term development of Maori production, He Taonga Films has a kaupapa, or philosophy, of employing young Maori trainees (‘The Maori Merchant’ 11). In other words, works such as *The Maori Merchant of Venice* are made with close reference to the anticipated future of Maori film and television production, and serve in many ways to lay the groundwork for this future.

Being made in an easily transportable medium, *The Maori Merchant of Venice* has the capacity to be circulated in a range of receptive contexts in years to come. Indeed, although his primary focus was upon Maori audiences, Selwyn is by no means ambivalent about the film’s potential to disseminate Maori linguistic and cultural expression internationally; he acknowledges that one of his ‘reason[s] for making it into a film is that more people can access it’ (qtd in ‘The Bard’ 15). At the end of 2002, *The Maori Merchant of Venice* was screened at the Hawaii International Film Festival in Honolulu, where it received an Audience Award for best feature (Ryan np). In April 2003, it was screened at the Shakespeare Association of America’s annual meeting at the University of Victoria, British Columbia. The film has also been released in both DVD and video format internationally, and has been subtitled into various languages. The cultural capital of Shakespeare is in all probability a factor prompting this degree of circulation; as Houlahan comments, ‘the tactic of using Shakespeare to broadcast Maori throughout the world seems astute, for the film will certainly get air play’ (121).

Don Selwyn’s *The Maori Merchant of Venice* is a film with complex cultural implications; an undeniably groundbreaking work, its unorthodox integration of Shakespeare’s narrative and cultural image with the Maori language and Maori culture embroils it in questions of cultural and social value and social power. The film is likely to continue to generate debate due to the fact that its social, political, and cultural effects are still being enacted. This is largely due to the nature of the filmic medium, though not entirely so; the film’s creators made the film with a view to its future ramifications, intending that it would foster Maori creative and technical artists, encourage the ongoing revitalisation of the Maori language, and serve as a source of cultural inspiration for Maori people, now and in the future.

NOTES

1 Each of the following works were performed before predominantly non-indigenous audiences, and explored issues of racism within their respective national contexts: Oscar Kightley and Erolia Ifofo’s popular New Zealand play, *Romeo and Tusi*; Simon Phillips’s 1999 and 2001 Queensland Theatre Company / Melbourne Theatre Company productions of *The Tempest*; La Boite Theatre and Kooemba Jdarra’s collaboration on a 1999 production of *Romeo and Juliet*, directed by Sue Rider; and Bell Shakespeare Company’s 1999 production of *Romeo and Juliet*, directed by Wesley Enoch.
Maoritanga is Maori culture and Maori way of life/worldview.

Muru is a renowned Maori artist, and was also co-producer of *The Maori Merchant of Venice*.

Turia made the comment in a speech to the New Zealand Psychological Society Conference in August 2000, where she spoke on the psychology of colonisation. Remarking on the research that has been conducted into the trauma suffered by the Jewish survivors of the World War II holocaust, as well as by Vietnam War veterans, she argued that the experience of Maori and other indigenous groups has not ‘received similar attention’ (Turia np).

One of Clark’s key concerns about Turia’s holocaust comment was that it might alienate Pakeha; as reporter Victoria Main observed, Clark was concerned ‘to salvage middle-ground support for the Government programme aimed at closing the gaps between Maori and Pacific Island communities and the rest of New Zealand’ (2).

*The Maori Merchant of Venice* had its world premiere in Waikato on 15 February 2002. The Auckland premiere occurred several weeks later (Jackson 163).

In this way, *The Maori Merchant of Venice* has to be placed within a different category from several recent Shakespearean film adaptations, such as Michael Almereyda’s *Hamlet* (2000); Baz Luhrmann’s *Romeo and Juliet* (1996); and Richard Loncraine’s *Richard III* (1995), all of which employed popular actors and modern settings — features that facilitate broad appeal and box office success.

Further details on Te Kohanga Reo can be found at the comprehensive website: <http://www.kohanga.ac.nz/index.htm>.

Maori Television was founded under the Maori Television Service Act 2003, and is funded by the New Zealand Government and by Te Mangai Paho, the Maori broadcasting funding agency (‘Maori Television’ np).

Neill has observed of Jones’s translation: ‘It may be true, as the cliché has it, that something is always lost in translation; but the work of translators like … Pei Te Hurinui Jones ensures that (as Salman Rushdie has insisted) something is also gained’ (viii). It might even be argued that whatever was lost in Jones’s translation is of little significance, since for Selwyn, and presumably several of the other artists involved in the film, the language of Shakespeare was familiar. In other words, their engagement with Jones’s text would have differed from the norm in translation, inasmuch as the original text functioned as an additional cultural referent.

In an interesting parallel with *The Maori Merchant of Venice*, Maori playwright Briar Grace-Smith’s successful play *Purapurawhetu* has a character employ Shakespearean English, which is intended to be reminiscent of the imagery of whaikorero (Huria 4).

The Maori version of the Treaty of Waitangi also states that Maori shall retain tino rangatiratanga, or absolute control, over their resources, and, as Derek Tini Fox explains, ‘Like the land, the public broadcasting system is a vital present-day resource, and as such Maori are legally entitled to an equal share of it’ (126).

*The Maori Merchant of Venice* received marketing assistance from the New Zealand Film Commission (‘The Maori Merchant’ 11).

In this way, *The Maori Merchant of Venice* generated an artist-audience interaction akin — though not equivalent — to that of theatre. The filmmakers cultivated this sense of invading theatrical territory; in the film’s official media release, the charity launches are likened to a ‘touring theatre show’ (‘The Maori Merchant’ 3).
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Since the Nineties, postcolonial literature has become an increasingly popular specialism in academic institutions in the UK. The growing critical respect afforded to the cultural production of previously marginalised Anglophone nations is, of course, to be celebrated. However, the increasing institutionalisation within English departments of postcolonial studies ironically risks reinforcing the centrality of ‘white’, metropolitan English culture, and presenting the Anglophone world as peripheral and monolithic. If postcolonialism is nothing more than a means to revising canons and reading texts in departments of English, it might be viewed merely in terms of changes in the structure and constituencies of universities; but the claims of postcolonialism reach much further than curricular matters. Thus the question of changing constituencies within universities points to larger forces at work.

As the field of postcolonial studies grows, and as teachers with varying degrees of preparation are pressed into its service to meet diversity and global studies requirements, my endeavour is to explore the degree of postcolonialism’s and, as a consequence, the Western University intellectual’s complicity with and/or rejection of neo-colonial practices and discourses. As teachers of postcolonial theory and literature within a postcolonial framework we are caught up in a discursive force field. The practice of our teaching is largely governed by a tension that characterises both curricula choices in particular and the engines of English departments in general. The normalisation of the unequal curricular space provided to Anglophone literatures within the academy subsumed under the framework of postcolonial theory has a material effect on the teaching of these literatures.

First of all, as a general rule, UK universities normally hire one postcolonialist to teach literatures that emanate from different countries, therefore holding the academic accountable for covering a diverse body of cultures and literatures. Although we live in an age of intense specialisation, specialists in African or Indian literature are rarely given the opportunity to teach their area of study and are supposed to teach two-thirds of the world while their colleagues teach such specialties as ‘The Renaissance’, ‘Romanticism’, ‘The Victorians’.

Secondly, courses such as postcolonial literatures involve cutting across national lines, language barriers and time boundaries by offering a grab-bag of
canonical texts from five or six regions. What would the student learn about the 'shared experience' of postcolonial societies in a ten-week course that teaches a maximum of three texts from each region under the framework of a post-imperial theory? Despite postcolonialism's claim to deconstructing master narratives in favour of localised identity politics, the material conditions informing the teaching of postcolonialism in the Western academy seem to deny this claim. Our institutional position, most of the time, forces us to accept homogenising theories that create a unitary field out of disparate realities.

Thirdly, the institutional circuit of consumption in which postcolonial pedagogy is located is responsible for assuring validation to the field of postcolonial literature. The 'necessary practicalities' Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak refers to (62), seem to determine the way postcolonial literature is being taught in the UK. What is worth studying, teaching and talking about appears as what can best be parcelled out into a ten-week format, what the best available textbooks are (where best and the production of the best are seem to replicate the current demands of the international marketplace), how well this literature can be integrated into the English curriculum without disturbing the distribution requirements, what the most manageable topics in the university education system are, what projects are likely to be funded and so forth. Educational legacies of imperialism live on strongly with us and within our institutions.

Fourthly, the 'postcolonial' is broadly inclusive. Postcolonialism's spatial indeterminacy as to the regions to be considered as 'postcolonial' generates confusion among practitioners. Just as there are some who might prefer a rigidly structured postcolonial space that excludes settler nations, there may be also some who are looking for an answer to what kind of story is emerging from the postcolonial condition and advocate a global, open space, where a symphonic blend of voices that includes the Irish, native Americans, Koreans can be heard. If on the one hand, the replacement of Ashcroft, Griffith and Tiffin's definition of Postcolonial literatures ('all the cultures affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonisation to the present day' 2) with a social and political conceptualisation of postcoloniality (San Juan 16) and the dismissal of race as a determining factor in who can have a voice in a postcolonial dialogue should be acclaimed, on the other, this amalgamation of voices and locations under the rubric of postcolonial theory poses both theoretical and practical problems to the teacher of postcolonial literature in terms of themes, temporal dimensions, time constraints and expertise.

On a theoretical level, since there are no clear temporal or spatial boundaries, this usage of postcolonial abolishes any possibility of drawing distinctions between the present and the past, or the indigenous oppressed and the oppressor settlers. The expansion of the historical scope of postcolonial studies succeeds by confounding many different colonialisms and suppressing others. On a more practical level, it is utopian to believe that teachers can know all the regions
equally well and be able to teach their literatures effectively, unless they are willing to become 'credentialed tour guides'.

As postcolonial literature is normally considered to be literature of the 'margin' and as the margin is usually defined in its relation to the centre in most postcolonial discussion, then postcolonial literature will be heavily invested in making the colonial experience its central premise. Texts from a variety of cultures are lumped together under the aegis of a unitary theory that while proclaiming commitment to difference and radical alterity, tends to obsessively insist on similarities among societies, and literatures as product of those societies. These same similarities, which are defined in terms of a limited set of themes and formal aspects, legitimise the current pedagogical arrangements of the academy. No doubt these themes do occur in some of the texts. However, the problem is that the theory only highlights those texts where these themes occur, thereby ignoring a vast quantity of work that would call the theory into question. The colonial experience is only one aspect of the history of what are known as postcolonial societies and postcolonial literature cannot only be taught in terms of 'writing back' but, in Dionne Brand's words, in terms of 'writing home'.

Postcolonial theory and, as a consequence, courses taught under its aegis, closes off several lines of inquiry that may be addressed to this literature in favour of the one that reads it as 'resisting' or 'subverting' the centre, the coloniser, the West, thus offering metropolitan powers a mirror in which their own reflection might be included. Starting from these premises, the imperative is to discuss and explore how the empire writes back not whether it writes back. Vijay Mishra and Bob Hodge's suggestion that 'the native is always oppositional and the settler always complicit' (277) remains problematic. A perception of postcolonial literature as part of a global contest against colonial hegemony does not take into account that this politics normally intersects with another type of politics, that is, 'internal colonisation'. Writers critical of the colonial heritage simultaneously attack concepts and ideas within their local cultures that serve to reproduce and/or reinforce colonial frames of reference and practices in the guise of nationalist sentiment. Besides the inequalities produced by colonialism, there are other, older inequalities of race, caste, class and gender which must be investigated in our reading/teaching of literatures from these societies. Instead, postcolonial practices in the academy rarely engage with texts that deal with internal dissensions within a region. Scant attention is paid to unequal divisions of resources in postcolonial societies, aboriginal and settler relations, religious and ethnic turmoil, conflicting class interests within postcolonial political formations and international alliances forged by the new indigenous ruling classes, pre-colonial history. As a result of institutional mechanisms and globalising market-oriented strategies, the radical potential of specific histories and cultures is usually erased. Thus, we now have a canon of postcolonial literature in which poetry, drama and popular fiction that are usually more deeply conditioned by local forms and contexts are not likely to be included in the canon. The postcolonial theory and literature canon then
participates in a system of selections and elisions that replicates the technologies of power it is charged with exposing.

For all these reasons, the privileging of the postcolonial theoretical framework in the teaching of postcolonial literature is itself reinvigorating a continued Western imperium in a number of ways, so much so that postcolonial critics, teachers and practitioners may become more often than not complicit in the consolidation of hegemony in the very process of questioning it.

The rapid institutionalisation of postcolonial studies in the UK has been enabled by the material conditions of the world outside, the outside having defined the inside, so to speak. The commodity status of postcolonial studies is no secret to anybody. Those engaged in the field of postcolonial studies in Western universities operate de facto within the institutional and capitalist economy of exchange even as they celebrate the radicalism ‘contained’ in the postcolonial. The postcolonial text functions within a circuit of desire, production, consumption and exchange. Given the dominant trends in the production and consumption of postcolonial literature: ‘one might speculate that the market economy orients the text toward the centre, casts the student as consumer and the teacher, willy-nilly, as purveyor, facilitator and credentialed tour guide’ (Bahri 284).

The functional economy and orientation of the postcolonial text are issues that are as important for pedagogy as they are for postcolonial studies. Graham Huggan has commented on the postcolonial as ‘sales tag’ for the international commodity culture of late capitalism (24). Within this economy, the value of commodity A (that is, African text) acquires validation, certification and objective existence through reference to commodity B (that is, the novel, or European standards in terms of form and theme), which then becomes the value of A. In other words, European culture would select an aspect of African culture that it can embody and express. The writings from postcolonial societies are then judged by conformity to standards of the mainstream novel, which is the form most likely to be directed at and published for a world-wide audience.

Paradoxically then, if the postcolonial involves the breaking down of Eurocentric codes and the recognition of indigenous voices in the formation of postcolonial culture, it also manipulates peoples, boundaries and cultures to appropriate the local for the global, to admit ‘difference’ into the realm of capital only to remake it in accordance with the requirements of production and consumption. The global in a sense incorporates the local in its project only to the extent in which the local meets the global requirements by providing a difference that is neither too alien nor too threatening. Elleke Boehmer is right to assert that ‘it is significant that postcolonial writers who retain a more national focus who don’t straddle worlds, or translate well, do not rank high in the West as do their migrant fellows’ (239).

An excessive interest in the fiction of migrants is contributing to a further marginalisation of partisan and resistance literature, especially of those narratives that explore other resistances and subversions and are normally written in local
languages. A hierarchy of margin is then created with ‘local’ narratives that are deemed uncongenial to metropolitan taste and therefore untranslated and largely undisussed within the academies at the bottom, and migrant narratives at the top. The preference within postcolonial discussion for hybrid, ‘mestizo’ or creolised formations privileges a fissured postcolonial identity and marginalises the inventions of the local, the indigenous (Brennan). According to Benita Parry, ‘the use of “diaspora” as a synonym for a new kind of cosmopolitanism that is certainly relevant to writers, artists, academics, intellectuals and professionals can entail forgetfulness about that other, economically enforced dispersal of the poor from Africa, Asia, Latin America, the Caribbean’ (72).

The globalising tendency of postcolonial theory and pedagogy results in an over-valorisation of deterritorialised, border-crossing elites as the possessors of some special kind of truth at the expense of other unsettled diasporas. The grouping of migrant writing like Rohiton Mistry’s with aboriginal writers in postcolonial literature courses has further erased the difference between documents produced in non-Western countries and those others produced by immigrants at metropolitan locations. ‘With the passage of time’, Aijaz Ahmad worryingly asserts, ‘migrant writing will be the only authentic document of resistance in our time’ (91). Postcolonialism’s versatility and global intentions become problematic if not seen in tandem with the realities of struggles within specific postcolonial locations. Courses based on universalising vocabulary and symbols like ‘mimicry’, ‘hybridity’, ‘the marginalised’, only replicate strategies of ‘cultural imperialism’ by reducing highly differentiated histories and cultures to the standardising drive of metropolitan capitalism. For Cathryn McConaghy ‘the need is to understand how particular textual strategies and particular portrayals of postcolonial subjectivity are used to legitimate certain interests and to achieve particular social formations’ (266).

Ironically, even if postcolonialism seeks to homogenise populations globally, it enhances awareness of the local, pointing to it as the site of resistance to capital. This celebration of the local is problematic too as the local is not always the site of liberation but may also be a site of oppression and is generally characterised by internal inequalities and discrepancies once associated with colonial differences, now aggravated by global forces at work which may condition the local in the first place. The local is valuable as a site for resistance to the global but only to the extent that it also serves as the site of negotiation to abolish inequality and oppression inherited from the past.

The imposition of a Western mono-cultural academic discursive paradigm calls for attention to intercultural insensitivity. Postcolonial studies’ complexity and multidisciplinarity would appear to be ideally suited to studying Anglophone cultural production. Yet, postcolonial theory’s insistence on similarities rather than on interdependent interactions fails to recognise that Anglophone literary production is situated at the intersection of different historical, linguistic and
social phenomena where synthesis must be negotiated. What Ahmad bewails is the postcolonial denial of history, specifically the histories of peoples with their distinctive trajectories of survival and achievement. As Carol Boyce Davies points out:

Postcolonial theory emphasises the importance of historical context, cultural relativity and geographical specificity, yet as a body of literature, it represents the daily interactions of ¾ of the globe. As a result, it erases crucial differences within and between Third World locations, although it proposes a process of de-colonisation. (81)

More integrative views between postcolonial theory's assumptions and applications and Anglophone literatures' diversified contexts and specificities are therefore needed. In this respect, the study of the interplay of numerous different elements and factors inherent in the teaching of postcolonial theory and literature is a crucial and on-going process. Postcolonial theory and consequently, courses based on that theory, need to engage more deeply with internal hierarchies and divisions in postcolonial societies. They need to focus on the texts' engagement with the material conditions and cultural ideologies prevailing in the social formations these texts belong to while simultaneously paying attention to global issues and concerns. Historically specific struggles with their own infinitely variegated strands of residual, dominant and emergent formations need to be configured within the world-system of 'actually existing capitalism' (San Juan 22). The very operation of capital has created new opportunities but also new dilemmas and contradictions that have brought about the local and the global to the forefront of political consciousness. In this sense, then, under the circumstances of global capitalism the local cannot be conceived without reference to the global.

If the understanding and reception of postcolonial literature are on the one hand linked to new global mechanisms of production and consumption, on the other, local issues of place and ethnic identity are increasingly challenging Western norms. Although global market forces are guiding, and in some cases, dictating the process of canon formation, and though we are all engaged with the new, truly global empire that globalised capitalism has created, we must be able to ground our analysis in the power of both the local and the global. The inclusion of the local within the global must be accompanied with the realisation of the danger of absorbing the outsider into well-defined and convenient categories and of treating oppression and exploitation as academic subjects in the pejorative sense. Meenakshi Mukherjee's warning against 'making the specific configuration of circumstances in particular regions subservient to a global paradigm’ (7) points to the danger of universalising ambitions and the pressures of globalisation in the academy. Micheal Hardt and Antonio Negri insist that regardless of where we are, whether in core or excluded zones, 'we are all engaged with the new, truly global empire that globalised capital has created; and although we may see ourselves as operating from sites of local resistance to empire, we must ground our analysis in the power of the global multitude’ (46).
Although 'no education is politically neutral', (hooks 37) and, as Spivak rightly states, 'we are in our everyday, agents of exploitation', (1996 84) it also true that one can set the limits of complicity. Complicity also does not mean intentionality. Our responsibility as teachers involves recognising those structures — social, cultural, economic and so forth — that both enable and contain our activities. There is undoubtedly a pressing need not to abandon the terrain of postcolonial studies simply because of its imbrication with the hegemonic. Rather, many critics, teachers and scholars agree that it is crucial to acknowledge that a 'critical postcolonialism' may be able to draw forth the potential for resistance and change within the academy and society at large (Giroux). One way of doing this would be to start considering strategies for radical interventions at both theoretical and pedagogical levels, to formulate practices of resistance against the system of which the postcolonial canon is a product. A critically postcolonial canon should be always in revision and contestation, its critics conscious of both its historical and ideological constructedness and their pedagogical goals.

A 'critical postcolonialism' explores the fissures, tensions and contradictory demands of multiple cultures, rather than only celebrating the plurality of cultures by passing through them appreciatively. Within the specific domain of the current uses of postcolonialism within the academy instead, the reading of postcolonial literary texts may be taken as an occasion for the negotiation of difference, the fusion of horizons, the creation of individuals ‘educated’ as to the proper negotiations of race, gender, class, ethnicity. More precisely, the reading of postcolonial literature may be seen to set a stage for a performance of difference — material history is reduced to an influence on the author’s work, race relations are made manageable and students are able to ‘relate’ to highly diverse experiences by reducing difference to individual encounters via ethnic texts and literary texts assume their status as authentic, unmediated representations of difference. As Hazel Carby notes:

Even teachers who would normally eschew the use of filmic, televisual or fictional literary texts to solve real-life problems can find themselves arguing that the use of texts which represent blacks positively somehow reflects the needs of ethnic minorities and would allow teachers to combat racism in the classroom. (66)

Although the use of such materials in itself is not necessarily counterproductive, what demands attention are the pedagogical and political assumptions of such decontextualised representations. Barbara Christian, Renato Rosaldo and others have noted how the critical operations of contemporary literary discourse have had the effect of objectifying diverse ethnic cultural texts as minority discourse in ways that collapse particular modes of articulating resistance within singular theoretical frameworks (Christian).

Chandra Talpade Mohanty, too, addresses the particular problematic of the use of ethnic literary texts as ‘representations’ of specifically designated groups and notes the rise of:
[a] pedagogy in which we all occupy separate, different and equally valuable places and where experience is defined not in terms of individual qua individual, but in terms of an individual as representative of a cultural group. This results in a depoliticization and dehistoricization of the idea of culture and makes possible the implicit management of race in the name of cooperation and harmony. (195)

Thus, under these types of pedagogical arrangements, students are able to partake of the postcolonial ‘experience’ through the careful guidance of the tutor — obstacles to understanding are cleared away, tensions explained and social harmony is established in the end. The basic operation of many educational apparatuses is still to manage and neutralise conflict, channelling it into more ‘productive’, that is, non-threatening subject formations. Institutions often wish to accommodate and thereby neutralise and manage the ‘race question’. Henry Giroux notes that in this operation, the ‘problem’ of race and ethnicity is largely identified within the racialised Other, and the ‘white’ is largely erased. ‘Whiteness’ instead should be considered as one ethnicity among others and should be included in any postcolonial class discussion. In the classroom, one must therefore be willing to bring conflicts and debates to the table and engage students in conversations about the reason for the containment of ‘national’ literatures within postcolonial courses, the purpose of such modules, their expectations from such courses and the limitations that we face together. A ‘progressive’ pedagogy would maintain a constant mode of revision and re-evaluation, that is, any formulation or study of the postcolonial canon should be attentive to the complex and often contradictory status of its texts as marginal to and yet inserted within the academy by particular and non-homogeneous interests. The reduction of such texts within the economics of pedagogy (within a fixed term of study, serving particular institutional requirements and having to be read in conjunction with other texts to the exclusion of others) should not be covered up but queried and rethought with students. It is in recognising the historical complexities and contradictions of inserting postcolonial literature into the curriculum and questioning a ‘manageable’, mainstream diversity that we begin to productively engage postcolonialism.

Educators then should promote readings of postcolonial literature that attempt to account for diverse and contradictory modes of interpretation and critique within the specificities of history, national cultural politics and transnational movements of people and cultural objects. One should then argue against the insertion of this literature into the canon via a simple reading of common themes and issues, and for a mode of critically understanding multicultural texts within a complex set of relations. In this sense, we should argue for readings that favour a more complex understanding of historical contingency, cultural politics and ethnic identifications. When postcolonial literature programmes focus on comparisons and commonalities, they often overlook the fact that postcolonial literary texts do not only speak to the empire but that they are also in conversation with those on
the home territory. Also, it is necessary to consider how the texts of a particular ‘group’ may occupy specific institutional positions. Turning to specific texts, one needs to critique how ethnic ‘voices’ are constituted within the interstices of dominant aesthetics and ideologies of postcolonial discourses.

Designing courses that focus on a single region or at most two is also essential as many have recognised that the problem with postcolonial literature courses is likely to be ‘insensitivity to historical materialities’ (Dirlif 331). As the postcolonial literary text depends on the totality of the symbolic resources of the culture and the history the text emanates from, the teacher’s task will be to alert students to the culture-specific aspect of these symbolic codes. The growth of such awareness ought to be the result of his/her teaching. The final goal is to move students away from the fake universality that denies differences that are irreducible to known formulae, only because it projects its own ethnocentrism on the other. The teacher of postcolonial literatures then is called to develop vigilance against systemic appropriations of the ‘margin’ rather than continue to pathetically dramatise ‘victimage’. In order to do this, the teacher should be able to ‘reverse, displace and seize the apparatus of value-coding’ (Spivak 63). A way to realise this project is to start thinking about the implications of the naming, the structuring of the so-called ‘field’, the position from which one speaks/teaches. Arun Mukherjee is right in urging Third World teachers of postcolonial literatures in the West to acknowledge their ‘contradictory’ location as mediators between the metropolis and the periphery:

We lack power in the western academic set-up in comparison with our colleagues who teach English or American literatures but we exercise tremendous power in terms of our position as mediators between third world writing and its readers in the first world…. Until the material conditions surrounding the teaching and theorising of postcolonial literatures are brought to light, until their contradictions are acknowledged, the teaching and theorising of third world literature remain yet another gesture of objectification of third world cultures and societies, despite the theorists’ claims of radicalism. (15)

Following on from this point, what one needs to confront is the fact that not all marginality is equally marginal, that there is a world of difference between culture written from the perspectives of oppressed groups and culture written from the perspectives of diasporic (or settler colonies) intellectuals normally located in the First World but who, even when writing from the peripheries of nations and empires, are seated in the centres of global power. The insistence on uniformity should then be challenged by rejecting institutional practices and the capitalist logic that insist only on those differences that can be regulated.

Another radical intervention could be to argue for heightened vigilance against the exclusion from consideration of works that do not match profiles of postcoloniality in the West. In other words, setting a limit to the selection of texts for institutional reasons that promotes the view that the postcolony exists only within a relationship to the West. The aim is not merely to enlarge the canon
by producing a counter-canon which is still already heavily influenced by the market but to dethrone canonical method. One way to do that is by keeping an eye on the multiple and irregular movement of the local and the overall. So long as we are interested in hiring and firing, in grants and allocations, in budgets, in publishing radical texts, in fighting for tenure and recommending for jobs, we are in capitalism and we cannot avoid competition and individualism. Under these circumstances, essentialising difference may lead to unproductive conflict among ourselves. However, it is also imperative that authority is secured to specific cultural systems and historical agents. ‘Only then can we begin to put together the story of the development of a cosmopolitanism that is global’ (Spivak 278).

A focus on societies’ own internal centres and peripheries, their own dominants and margins, and not just on those aspects of a text that are likely to foreground its relevance and intelligibility for a British audience is also essential. Inasmuch as teachers and students are the consumers, we must be willing to opt for the most useful curricular choices for our needs instead of only the readily available ones by also exploring what small presses and clearing houses can offer us. Beyond a general invitation to cultivate vigilance, strategies must develop from a sense of the whole as well as the particular by reconciling the pressures of diversity and difference with those for integration and commonality.

Postcolonial educators should therefore advocate a reworking of both the courses and the theory by encompassing concerns about globalisation in terms of the changing role of international corporations, the changing patterns of migration and the influence of the new global reality on identity formation in postcolonial societies with insights into unsettling indigenous ways of thinking which challenge not only curricula but the shape and nature of Western society. Ongoing processes of economic and cultural globalisation are tending to wipe out local cultural identities and histories. However, as John Willinski rightly points out: ‘the world is still beset by struggles of ethnic nationalism, hardening of racial lines and staggering divides between wealth and poverty’ (1). The challenge of postcolonial pedagogy is to help students understand these two contradictory though intertwined historical processes and to consider them as operating simultaneously. A ‘progressive’ pedagogy then is the one that attends to the partial, specific contexts of differentiated communities and strategies of power, without ignoring larger theoretical and relational narratives; a pedagogy that embraces the local and the global and recognises the role of the global in shaping the local.

Furthermore, postcolonial theory should always be proposed or contemplated by educators not as ‘a coherent and self-contained critical model, separated from real differences and the problems that are being accounted for or discussed’ (Quayson and Goldberg 8). Postcolonial teaching involves helping students to identify and critique the different regimes of truth that characterise our social arrangements and to build positive identities that move easily between the local and the global. We need to learn and teach how to distinguish between ‘internal
colonisation' — the patters of exploitation and domination within societies — and the various different heritages and operations of colonisation in the rest of the world. Thus we must negotiate between nationalism (uni- or multi-cultural) and globality. To remain anchored to a mere ethnic pride and a basically static ethnicity is to confuse political gestures with an awareness of history.

The way in which to understand the complex interactions between the global and local is not to see them in mechanical terms of hard and fast polarities, but rather in terms of overlaps, and even the overlaps themselves have to be complexly grasped. Difference as contradiction still exists amid globalisation but the point is to rearticulate it within a differentiated concrete totality. Unity and diversity then, would not appear as opposite concepts but as complementary perspectives. In this way, the local and the global would be able to share a place within a multiply specialised discipline such as postcolonial studies.

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Negotiating the Local and the Global


Dreaming an Identity between Two Cultures: The Works of Alootook Ipellie

In *Arctic Dreams and Nightmares* Alootook Ipellie argues that the harsh reality of life in the Arctic landscape has been a deciding factor in the development of Inuit literature, for Inuit ‘live in the remote Arctic, relatively isolated from the rest of the world’ (xiv), and have therefore been able to retain much of their language and culture. He goes on to suggest that the resilience of the Inuit and a pride in their tradition have helped them to retain their traditional mythology and preserve it for future generations.

Ipellie’s own writing is a literature of cultural pride and of resistance to dispossession and artistic regulation. His work crosses a range of genres and his use of magic realism in his writing, and of often graphic violence in his pen-and-ink drawings, are in stark contrast to the most common examples of commercially available Inuit art and literature, namely soapstone carvings, prints and memoir. In the context of a half-century of European intervention and dispossession, it is little wonder that Ipellie has chosen to focus his work on shamanic figures who mediate complex and conflicting worlds. Ipellie’s work deals with the conflicts and confluences between traditional spirituality and Christianity. His work typically fuses figures from the traditional belief system with those from the mainstream literature, culture and religion. Ipellie primarily negotiates this space between worlds through the use of shamanistic trickster figures. As a writer and activist, Ipellie is primarily concerned with presenting his culture as a living, developing entity; not a quaint and archaic culture which needs to be partially preserved or relegated to museums of anthropology. He is effectively writing *himself* as a modern-day shaman; he is like his grandfather, a wordsmith and composer of powerful messages. The characters he creates have
access to, and power from, both the body of wisdom necessary for survival in the Arctic, as well as those of the imported hegemonic culture.

The shaman is a figure of superior intellect with an extraordinary ability to negotiate complex power struggles, a being that gains his or her supernatural powers through the crucible of extreme initiation. Joseph Campbell notes that the shamanistic crisis ‘yields an adult of greater physical stamina and vitality of spirit than is normal to the members of his group’ (Campbell 253). This observation is true of the narrator of Arctic Dreams and Nightmares, who gains his powers through extraordinary means. This particular shaman, however, draws still more power from a second crisis — that of colonisation.

ARCTIC DREAMS AND NIGHTMARES: THE LIFE

Alootook Ipellie was born in a hunting camp called Nuvuquq on Baffin Island, then known as Frobisher Bay, in 1951. He was born prematurely and, in the absence of medical attention, remained a frail infant. The small family’s troubles were further compounded by his father’s death in a hunting accident later that year (Ipellie 1992 25).

When Ipellie was four, he and his mother and stepfather abandoned their semi-nomadic lifestyle and moved into the township of Iqaluit. The establishment of this township was part of a federal government initiative to create permanent Inuit settlements in the North, as a means of both educating children and stopping the spread of introduced diseases. Transplantation as a result of colonial practices has been a key feature of Inuit life over the past sixty years, and has been a significant influence in the life of Ipellie.

Shortly after his fifth birthday, Ipellie was diagnosed with tuberculosis. Separated from his family for the duration of his illness, he was expected to learn and use English as his primary mode of communication whilst staying at the Mountain Sanitorium in Hamilton. Ipellie notes that he was ‘one of the lucky ones’ because he returned home ‘when many of [his] fellow Inuit ended up buried in Hamilton’. In a cruel irony, his mother was diagnosed with the disease after Ipellie’s return, and ‘was gone for several years, but not more than three’ (Ipellie 1974a 48). His stepfather, Alivutak also succumbed to the illness during Ipellie’s childhood years. So began a pattern of familial separation and movements between the North and South. Historically, there has been a far greater incidence of alcohol abuse in the arctic per capita than elsewhere in Canada, and this impacted directly on the young Ipellie. As he explains:

My stepfather was someone who could be good and treat me like a son when he was sober, but he was a drunkard. When he got drunk he physically abused me. And very often I don’t think he realised what he was doing when he was drunk. When he was sober he was one of the nicest men around. And for that reason, I had to run away from home, my real home, with my Mum and my half-brother, his real son. And my stepfather used to say, ‘Why is this boy, who’s not my real son, staying with us?’ when he was drunk (McMahon-Coleman, 2005 1)
Many of Ipellie's cartoons and, to a lesser extent, his writing, deal with the introduction of alcohol and alcoholism to the Arctic. His stepfather, Alivuktak often became violent under the influence of alcohol. This led to Ipellie's decision to move out of home and stay with various friends and relatives. When he was ten, an uncle took him onto the land to go hunting. In a 1995 interview with Canadian academic, Michael Kennedy, he noted the importance of this time spent establishing a relationship with his environment, arguing that it is the defining characteristic of the Inuit people: 'You have to have that spiritual connection with [the land], otherwise you’re gone, you’re not a people anymore' (Kennedy 158). When the group returned to Frobisher for supplies, his grandparents offered Ipellie a home. He notes that he ‘felt peace’ when he had the security of a place to sleep, regular meals, and ‘people who cared enough about me to accept me to their home and look after me’ (1974b 82).

The stability he found in his grandparents’ home was to be short-lived, however. When he was fifteen he was once again removed from Iqaluit, this time under the auspices of a billeted secondary schooling system. Ipellie was enrolled in a school in Ottawa in 1967, and required to board with an English-speaking Canadian family. He describes himself as ‘no longer an Innumarik’ — a real Inuk (1993 vii) — as a result of this experience. The culture shock he experienced was acute and Ipellie used his creativity as an outlet to combat his shyness and feelings of dislocation. Following the academic success of his first year in Ottawa, he asked to be enrolled in a Vocational Arts course. His state-appointed counsellor did not view art as an appropriate career choice, and attempted to dissuade Ipellie from pursuing it. After eighteen months, his homesickness became overpowering and Ipellie insisted on returning to Iqaluit. Unfortunately Iqaluit did not have a buoyant economy in the early seventies, and Ipellie was unable to find employment (1993 viii). He enrolled in upgrading classes at the Adult Education Centre with a view to returning to Ottawa and Art School. Instead, he was relocated to Yellowknife to continue his secondary studies. As he recalls, he ‘hated living in the student hostel there and asked to go back to Ottawa. Miraculously, they listened’ (1992 27). This time, his guidance counsellor was adamant that Art was an impractical means of making a living in the Arctic. Ipellie was enrolled in an academic high school program, which he quickly abandoned and he returned once more to Iqaluit.

Ipellie battled depression, and was unable to find employment, other than a three-month stint for CBC radio. He did, however, manage to sell three pen-and-ink drawings, and had some poetry, stories and drawings accepted in North/Nord, a publication of the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs, and Inuktitut, the journal of the Inuit Tapirisat, before returning to Ottawa in 1972, in search of more reliable work. He began to spend time in the offices of the Inuit Tapirisat. The editor of Inuit Monthly, Peter Itinnuar — who would later become the first Inuk Member of Parliament — commissioned Ipellie to complete some drawings for the magazine. Ipellie’s role at the magazine gradually expanded,
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with a regular cartoon strip, 'Ice Box', beginning in 1974. He worked for the magazine for some six years, as a writer, designer, photographer, translator and cartoonist, and served as editor from 1979 to 1983. During this time he also collaborated with Robin Gedalof on an anthology of Inuit writing, *Paper Stays Put*, contributing illustrations, poetry and stories. From 1984 to 1986, he edited *Inuit* magazine, which was published by the Inuit Circumpolar Conference; and from 1991 to 1993 he was the managing editor of *Nunavut Newsletter*, which was published by the Tugavik Federation of Nunavut, the organisation responsible for the creation of the Nunavut territory and government on April 1, 1999. He later authored a column called 'Ipellie's Shadow' for *Nunatsiaq News*, a Nunavut weekly newspaper.

Ipellie’s drawings and cartoons have been exhibited in Canada, the United States, Norway, Croatia and Greenland. He continues to contribute to *Inuktitut* magazine on a freelance basis, providing illustrations and, occasionally, poetry and essays. He has recently been a visiting speaker at the Sydney Writers’ Festival, is a founding member of an Inuit Writers’ Association, and is currently working on a children's book, *Inuit Inventions*; but perhaps his most significant achievement to date is his first book — the first single-authored collection of stories by an Inuk. Published to critical acclaim in 1993, *Arctic Dreams and Nightmares* fused verbal and visual images from Euro-Canadian 'pop' culture, traditional Inuit folklore, and Ipellie’s own dreams. Ultimately the shamanic narrator of the stories explores the clash of cultures in the era since arctic colonisation.

**ARCTIC DREAMS AND NIGHTMARES: THE TEXT**

Christianity has traditionally been one of the key tools of Western colonisation, and the experiences of the Inuit in the Arctic are no exception. Literacy was introduced to the Inuit by Christian missionaries, and consequently almost all reading material available to the Inuit in the early years of colonisation was religious in nature, and many of the earliest written accounts by Inuit authors were testimonials of their conversions to Christianity. Indeed, Ipellie recently illustrated an English-language translation of what is believed to be the first example of Inuit autobiography, *The Diary of Abraham Ulrikab*, which recounts the ill-fated journey of a neophyte Christian Inuit to Europe in 1880. Christianity has remained an enormous influence on the writings of Inuit, and the conversion of Ipellie’s family to Christianity had an incalculable affect on the course of his life. His works demonstrate an ongoing suspicion of Christianity and evangelism that is reflected in the opening sequence of stories in *Arctic Dreams and Nightmares*.

The Christian missionary influence is explicitly critiqued in three of the first four stories of the collection: ‘Self-Portrait: Inverse Ten Commandments’, ‘Ascension of My Soul in Death’, and ‘I, Crucified’. The other story, ‘Nanuq, the White Ghost, Repents’ explains the circumstances that led to the narrator’s death and rebirth as a shaman, and provide a counterpoint to the Christian trinity of tales in which it is embedded. Seen as ‘an essential element in the production
of citizens’ by colonial powers (Armitage 4), conversion to Christianity was encouraged among Inuit people and required the complete renunciation of traditional religion. In placing these stories together, Ipellie is challenging the doctrine that the two religions cannot co-exist. Given that polar animism has its ‘basis in dreams, visions and other experiences’ (Merkur 1), Ipellie’s stories, based on dreams and written from the point of view of a shaman, are a reconfiguration of traditional religious beliefs. The inclusion of Christian tropes in the collection emphasises the possibility of co-existence between the two belief systems albeit with Christianity in the minor role.

The opening story, ‘Self-Portrait: Inverse Ten Commandments’ tells of the narrator’s vision of himself in a devilish guise as he approaches Hell’s Garden of Nede. An anagram of Eden, Nede is a kind of anti-paradise. The narrator recounts his feelings of horror when he finds himself ‘literally shrivelling’ in front of an image of himself as ‘Satan Incarnate’ (6). Despite his local minister’s prior promises that maintaining his ‘good-humoured personality toward all mankind’ (6) will assure him a place in the Christian heaven, it seems that the opposite is true. This vignette allows for the possibility that the promises made by missionaries may not be the ‘Truth’ that they are purported to be. The theme of salvation is further questioned when the narrator is saved by a gesture which might be considered sacrilegious by many Christians, but which reflects the uncensored nature of traditional Inuit stories: he knees the image in the groin. At this point the vision ends abruptly. Even the narrator of the story is baffled by the incident, noting that ‘this was a revelation that I did not quite know how to deal with’ (9), but an ambiguous ending may be read as a feature of traditional Inuit storytelling. According to Agnes Grant, an ending without resolution is a common feature of Inuit stories (2). As an Inuk explained to the early arctic explorer, Knud Rasmussen, ‘it is not always that we want a point to our stories…. It’s only the white men that want a reason and an explanation of everything’ (qtd in Petrone 2).

On reflection, the narrator finally decides that his soul has travelled through time and space to discover a ‘safe passage through the cosmos. The only way any soul is freed is for it to get rid of its Satan incarnate at the doorstep of Hell’s Garden of Nede’ (8). He has saved himself, without the agency of the Church or its ministry.

In his poem, ‘Walking on Both Sides of An Invisible Border’, Ipellie explores the difficulties of being an Inuk, forced by the history of colonisation to participate in two disparate worlds. Here, the voice of the poem longs to participate in both societies as easily as the polar bear or the shaman negotiate these boundaries. Ipellie evidently feels that this poem encapsulates his position ‘between’ white society and the traditional Inuit lifestyle, for he has published it in the Indigenous writers’ journal Gatherings; as a preface to his interview with Michael Kennedy in Studies in Canadian Literature; and he also chose to read it at the 1988 First Peoples Arts Conference at the Canadian Museum of Civilisation, entitled ‘To
See Proudly, Advancing Indigenous Arts beyond the Millennium’, and again at the Canadian High Commission in Canberra in May 2006. This idea of a position ‘between’ is further examined by Ipellie in the introduction to Arctic Dreams and Nightmares, where he comments that ‘Once embedded in a southern environment, I was trained largely to cope with the white, Anglo-Saxon, Euro-Canadian culture’ (vii). In the poem, Ipellie likens his position to that of ‘an illegitimate child/
Forsaken by [his] parents' (ll 4–5). He writes that continually negotiating the line between cultures ‘is like/having been sentenced to a torture chamber/Without having committed a crime’ (ll 14–15). In the context of the removal of children to residential or foster care to further their education, this becomes even more poignant; juveniles are ‘detained’ elsewhere in order to receive what is considered a basic right for most families. The voice of the poem survives his predicament through a process of ‘fancy dancing’, inventing new dance steps when the border ‘becomes so wide/that I am unable to take another step’ (ll 37–38). This becomes a metaphor for his writing, which is Ipellie’s means of ‘Trying ... to make sense/ Of two opposing cultures’ (ll 50–51).

In sharp contrast to the voice of this poem, shamanic figures in the story ‘I, Crucified’ negotiate life between two worlds with a casual arrogance that is considered to be a common feature of Inuit shamanism. Bragging and competitiveness, which are valued forms of interaction in Inuit society, are tested in competitions between rival shamans. The last story in this sequence, ‘I, Crucified’, is a prime example of Ipellie’s mixing of Christian stories and symbols with traditional Inuit practices in order to create an original tale. The narrator, a newly-initiated shaman, discovers his ability to travel through time and finds himself in the past, ‘hanging on a cross, crucified’ and surrounded by tundra wolves (21). The symbols of the original crucifixion have been replaced with tools of everyday life in an Inuit camp: the shaman is fixed to a whalebone cross and held in position by arrows and a harpoon. It transpires that the crucifixion is the result of the jealousy of other shamans who are unable to effectively compete with him. They set a trap, using his own ego and the quest for additional power as bait. The shaman then has to wait a thousand years to be reborn, as the contemporary narrator of Ipellie’s stories.

The narrative implies that Christ was one of many shamans the world has seen, and that the article of belief central to Christianity — that of Christ’s resurrection — can be explained through the traditional Inuit belief in reincarnation. Ipellie critiques the efforts of Christian missionaries to eradicate traditional beliefs in favour of their own, a tendency which led to his own grandfather rejecting his shamanistic powers and converting to Christianity. By intertwining the genealogies of the transplanted and Indigenous religions, he reworks the binaries of religion that the evangelical Christian colonisation created. Ipellie’s response to the difficulty of these two conflicting belief systems is to draw upon the defining features of the shaman in order to create a narrator of great power who is able to negotiate relationships with key figures of Christianity.

The shaman’s psychic or spiritual powers allow him to survive in unfamiliar environments. Rajan and Mohanran argue that ‘Literature and art are reflections of a culture and can serve ... to test limits of colonial influences’ (2). In Ipellie’s stories, the shaman represents the outer limits of colonial influence; in his transformations, he does not forego any of his traditional power, but rather adds
to it through his contact with the dominant culture. Ipellie sets up a complex relationship for readers of the dominant culture to negotiate: his shaman represents an ideology counter to that of the Euro-Canadian hegemony, yet his relationships with figures from within that ideology simultaneously authorise the shaman's viewpoint. In this way he is able to cater to readers from both cultures.
The final story in the collection, ‘The Exorcism’, also deals with the conflict between traditional and imported religions, this time depicted as a battle between two powerful shamans, named Kappia — meaning ‘Sacred’ — and Guti, the Inuktitut word for ‘God’. Guti is an evil shaman with whom Kappia has long battled for control of the camp. The concerns with Guti stem from his abuse of power ‘to gain material things for himself’ (177). Kappia accuses Guti of abusing women and adolescent girls in return for substandard shamanic services. After a long struggle and much bloodletting, Kappia is finally able to mortally wound Guti (177-78). With his dying breath, Guti curses Kappia’s family with ‘eternal punishment’ (178). As Guti dies, ‘the colour of his brown eyes turn[s] white’ (178). Here, ‘whiteness’ is associated with both physical and spiritual death.

Kappia’s relief that the abuse and lies will die with Guti is shortlived, however, as the curse comes to fruition. The shaman-narrator is called on to exorcise Kappia and his family. The trauma experienced by those involved in the ten-day long process is clearly evident. The shaman records that ‘there were many nights when one or two of them and sometimes all at once had horrific nightmares. More often than not, most of them would come out with terrible fevers and it was not unusual to witness members of the family vomiting their food several times a day’ (179). This is reminiscent of a detoxification process, which invokes one of the main thematic concerns within Ipellie’s body of work: alcoholism among the Inuit. This symbolism also implies that for some, Christianity has been an addictive toxin.

Kappia’s wife and the mother of his ten children is the last member of the family to be exorcised. She is divested of her clothes, and the horned Guti appears in her birth canal, as though he is an infant being born — or in this case, reborn. The shaman-narrator cuts off Guti’s hands so that the being cannot hang on to Kappia’s wife (180). The demon hisses like a snake when he appears. Both the hands and the hissing recall the first story in the collection, ‘Self-Portrait: the Inverse Ten Commandments’, in which the shaman-narrator’s fingertips are transformed into small beings which hissed out the anti-commandments, ‘Thou shalt’ (6). The ten-day time period involved and ten offspring also relate to the opening story, suggesting the completion of a cycle. The role of the mother and the apparent immaculate conception involved in Guti finding his way into her womb are also references to Christian beliefs, as is the incongruously-placed crucifix around the demon’s neck. The presence of horns on the being not only invokes traditional representations of the devil, but also of the horned seal in the illustration which accompanies ‘After Brigitte Bardot’, another story in the collection. Moreover, the irony of a shaman named ‘God’ being evil is foreshadowed in the humorous ‘When God Sings the Blues’, in which the Christian God calls himself ‘Satanassee’⁴⁶, the Inuktitut word for ‘Satan’. As the final piece in the collection, ‘The Exorcism’ ties together many of the images and concerns outlined throughout the book. It certainly makes clear the deeply-held suspicion of Christianity which
'The Exorcism', *Arctic Dreams and Nightmares*, p. 177.

permeates Ipellie’s work, and both the violently descriptive language contained within the story, and the artwork which accompanies it, conform to traditional Inuit representations rather than the conventions of mainstream publishing. Ipellie’s ability to utilise traditional storytelling practices for a contemporary non-
indigenous audience is one of the strengths of his work. He also draws upon his familial shamanic tradition as an inspiration for his stories.

The spiritual functions of Inuit shamans are explored in a number of the stories, including ‘The Public Execution of the Hermaphrodite Shaman’, ‘Summit with Sedna, the Mother of the Sea Beasts’ and ‘SuperStud’. In the first, a shaman named Ukjuarluk (meaning big, bearded seal) travels to the sea bottom and negotiates the end to a famine with Sedna. As numerous social anthropologists have noted, one of the shaman’s primary functions was to engage in mystical journeys to ‘commune with celestial powers in order to advance the interests of his fellow man’ (Lewis, 1986 80. See also Mircade 289). Typically, in times of famine or illness, a shaman would be asked to enter a séance and negotiate with Sedna, the Mother of all Sea Beasts, a positive outcome for the community. (Lewis 1986 92). When Sedna was appeased, the animals would be released. Often shamans were paid in kind, and in this story, Ukjuarluk is offered a night with the hunter’s daughter, a beautiful young woman by the name of Piu. Piu, whose name means pretty, overwhelms the hermaphrodite shaman, and ‘during the height of their expression of mutual passion ... Ukjuarluk would lose all care for his top garment’ (29), revealing the breasts which mark his hermaphrodisim.

The following morning, Ukjuarluk finds the camp deserted. He returns to his own camp, only to be accosted by his friends and family, and publicly disrobed. It is the women of the camp who are given the ‘honour of executing the shamed hermaphrodite shaman’ (31). The concept of a hermaphrodite is a valuable one in that it suggests two kinds of being in one; an alternative hybrid figure. Yet, while shamans are permitted certain transgressions, the idea of a male being imbued with female features and hence, presumably, female power, is clearly presented as unacceptable within the context of traditional Inuit camp life. Justice is swift, harsh and meted out by those whose power has been appropriated. Located between ‘I, Crucified’ and ‘Summit with Sedna, the Mother of Sea Beasts’, the story highlights that shamanic powers are, to some degree, mediated by the power of the common Inuk.

Sedna, the Sea Mother is, in the words of Taivitialuk Alaasuaq, the ‘most powerful and dangerous of the ancient Inuit spirits. All the animals of the land and sea originate with her, and if she is angered, starvation will surely follow’ (qtd in Gedalof 94). The name Sedna, meaning ‘the one down there’ (Merkur 104), is attributed to the Baffin Island band of Inuit known as Ooqomiut. According to legend, the young Sedna was travelling in a kayaq with her family when a storm started. Her parents blamed her for the storm and threw her overboard. In most versions of the story, Sedna is said to have clung to the edge of the kayaq as her father severed her fingers knuckle by knuckle. The pieces of her fingers were transformed into the sea creatures that the Inuit hunted in order to survive (Merkur 133). When traditional observances are not kept, Sedna’s hair becomes dirty with the sins of mankind and she withholds the sea animals, necessitating
a séance or a visit from a shaman. Ultimately, she is the most powerful figure in Inuit mythology because a slight against her leads to famine.

Sedna appears in the stories of all Inuit peoples, but it is interesting to note that the biggest variations — largely because of Christian influences — appear amongst the Baffin Island people, Ipellie’s cultural grouping. Ipellie further adapts the figure, altering both her appearance and her motivations in his version
of the story. For example, the illustration that accompanies the story clearly shows that she has an extra eye in the palm of each hand, in contrast to the Baffin Island version of the story in which she has only one eye, perhaps suggesting that such a powerful figure sees more than ordinary humans. Ipellie further changes the common trait of her inability to walk, transforming the handicap that prevents movement on land into a mermaid’s tale that draws on Western classical mythology. Sedna is an important character to invoke in these stories since, like the pervasive influences of the colonising cultures, she is a force both unfamiliar and powerful, with whom negotiation is critical. Ipellie is not interested in reproducing the European-influenced narratives, but neither does he feel bound to excavate and reconstruct the pre-contact stories. Instead, he specifically resists any sense of Inuit culture as ‘fixed’ or ‘past tense’ by continuously rupturing the accepted versions of the tales, transforming features of each. Like the shaman, this transformative power allows him to negotiate cultures.

The account of the shaman’s visit to the Sea Bottom closely follows the traditional sequence of events as described in theologian Daniel Merkur’s *Powers Which We Do Not Know: The Gods and Spirits of the Inuit* (113–14). The successful song composition and the ease with which he passes the sea dogs indicate that this is an extremely powerful shaman. Similarly, his attempts to placate her by combing and braiding her hair closely follow the traditional patterns of observance. In this instance, however, Sedna is not withholding the sea animals because of Inuit transgressions, but because of her own frustrations. She agrees to release the sea animals on the condition that the shaman helps her achieve orgasm, a task at which all others have failed. Forewarned of this possibility by his discussions with other shamans, the narrator has joined with them to create ‘our version of Frankenstein’ (41).8 This creature begins a chant which transports Sedna into a ‘forced-sensual-dream-trance’ where she ‘finally meets her match … her male equivalent, Andes, a god of the sea, who presides over all the sea beasts on the other side of the universe’ (41). Their coupling releases both her frustrations, and the sea beasts. For the narrator, it is the ultimate happy ending, since ‘his reputation as a powerful shaman remain[s] perfectly intact’ (42), reflecting the competitive nature of shamans, who traditionally engage in song duels to prove their worth as spiritual leaders.

In some Iglulik, Baffin Island and Polar versions, a final dimension is added to the story when Sedna’s father feels remorse and joins her at the bottom of the sea. These three groups are also the only ones whose shamans are believed to enter a light trance through a séance, allowing them to travel to the Sea Mother’s dwelling, comb her hair and appease her. Shamans encounter her father, Anguta, who is the active ruler of the dead. His role is to carry souls to the sea-bottom, and then torment the unworthy by pinching them. The door is guided by a dog, believed to be Sedna’s husband, which steps aside only long enough for Anguta to pass. This idea of Sedna living in her father’s house, where he has the role
'Summit with Sedna, the Mother of the Sea Beasts', *Arctic Dreams and Nightmares*, p. 34.

... of tormenting sinners, seems to have parallels with Christian stories. Indeed, Merkur argues that the accretion of Christian iconography is so extensive that it is impossible to recover the pre-contact role of the father (138).

Ipellie’s shaman does not draw authority solely from spiritual iconography. The shaman’s role, while spiritual, is also that of the wordsmith; a shaman would be expected to excel in song contests, and to know a number of stories about his
or her community. Ipellie further draws on the authority of William Shakespeare, often hailed as the greatest storyteller in the English literary canon. In ‘The Five Shy Wives of the Shaman’, Ipellie’s shaman-narrator meets with a man whose family includes five masked wives who are revealed to be gorgons. Taken into the confidence of his fellow-traveller, he is told that the shaman is a sympathetic soul who pities their families and thus feels obliged to marry gorgon daughters wherever he finds them. The masks replicate the dramatic iconic masks of tragedy and comedy. Again, there is a double impact to this literary choice; the narrator is once more imbued with a seemingly unquestionable authority, and yet, by re(-)presenting this in an altered way, Ipellie is interrogating the hallowed position occupied by certain writers within the Western literary canon. Shakespeare, as the hallmark of ‘good’ English language literature, is both cited as a literary authority, and undermined by being (dis)placed in the Arctic, and represented as one among many shamans, and perhaps as one more fallible than most because of his sensitive and ‘artistic’ nature.

Finally, the eponymous story ‘Arctic Dreams and Nightmares’ depicts the harsh realities of life in the Arctic, which Ipellie describes as ‘a world unto itself’ (133), and summarises a number of Ipellie’s key concerns and influences, including the conflicts between cultures and religions; the interdependence between man and beast in the Arctic; and the effect of alcohol — and potentially alcoholism — on the life of an individual Inuk. The alter ego shares with the author a desire for solitude, and is keen to explore the alternate realities of the dreaming state. Specifically, he seeks to create his own version of paradise, which he dreams is ‘Just around the next mountain’ (126). In the dead of winter, however, life is at its most tenuous and dreams give way to nightmares (127). In the dream he recounts how he becomes the ‘incredible shrinking man’ after ‘inadvertently [drinking] water from a small lake’ (129). Here Ipellie’s Inuit narrator has a moment which is clearly reminiscent of Lewis Carroll’s Alice, even though he argues elsewhere in this story that different cultures breed different types of dreams (128). This suggests that the accretion and hybridisation of cultures in the years following colonisation have been pervasive. In fact, forced to live a solitary and vegetarian existence, the shaman-narrator claims to be able to relate to other figures as diverse as k.d. lang and God in his Heaven (130).) In this state, the shaman-narrator has a nightmare wherein a huge eagle emerges from his chest [see cover image]. The pain and damage of this experience are described in detail, culminating in the eagle breaking free and flying away (131). After some weeks of reflection, the shaman is able to decode the meaning of the dream. The eagle, he decides, is representative of his unconscious mind, begun as a blood cell that became disenchanted with the amount of alcohol consumed by the shaman-narrator. After twenty years of planning, the cell had mutated, rallied a trillion others, and organised their spectacular escape when the narrator was at his ‘most vulnerable [on a] restless night in the middle of a great storm’ (132). The body which is left
behind is described as 'just another vegetating dead human being' (133). Thus the eagle embodies ideals of freedom, intelligence and strength, and these are presented as being essential for a meaningful human existence.

Potent, adaptable and resilient to the excesses of colonising cultures and capitalism, the writer-shaman is depicted by Alootook Ipellie as a figure capable
of negotiating the difficult circumstances of Inuit life. The ‘world unto itself’ of *Arctic Dreams and Nightmares* is a negotiated space in which powerful iconography drawn from both cultures represents and gives voice to the living Inuk.

NOTES


2. Personal correspondence, 21/10/04.

3. Now known as the Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, this is the national Inuit organisation.

4. Later known as *Inuit Today*.


6. For a detailed analysis of this story, see McMahon-Coleman in *Australasian-Canadian Studies*, 23.2 2006.

7. This contemporising strategy has been used by a number of Inuit writers in an attempt to reconcile old beliefs with the new belief structures and technologies that have accompanied white settlement. Taivitualuk Alaasuaq’s story ‘The Half-Fish’, in Gedalof’s *Paper Stays Put*, is a further example of this.

8. Ipellie often uses bold type to highlight concepts from Western culture, as an inversion of the common practice of italicising words or concepts from Indigenous cultures.

WORKS CITED


Dreaming an Identity between Two Cultures


ROBERT BALFOUR

The Jeweller

In summer the city feels like a body swollen in the heat and thick with the oily grit of humid air. At night the swelling subsides; folds of flesh curve upon each other, and reveal the bones surprisingly near the surface. Thankfully, as far as I am concerned, much of this underside remains hidden. Shadows and the sea. Some nights a visible thick penumbral orange pall hangs with threatening dissolution around sulphur lamps and between buildings. It covers city obscenities for the visitor, dazzled momentarily by the lights. It is hard at night to feel the heaviness of the city’s quirky neo-classical and art deco architecture. Powerful lamps set into flowerbeds vault upwards into a bruised sky. The beds themselves ‘set’ midst plains and contours of crazy paving. In the squares the lamp-stands hang with baskets of limp flowering plants that drip an oily moisture around midnight. On some pavements, especially near the Indian quarter, the air is heavy with smells of fruit pressed into cracked paving by passing footfalls. Not too far away, modern skyscrapers seem full of dull rectitude. The city, laid out as it is on one huge settled dune, resembles a wave, piling up at its height with hospitals, universities, schools and parks, sloping down into a gentle suburban plain of red tiled roofs and broad leafy tress, until breaking into clusters of flotsam and jetsam: the used car dealerships, the escort agencies, the bars, brothels, bakeries and flea-markets, before reaching the beachfront hotels. By day, when the heat rolls up this dune and settles again into its cusp to shrink everything into pinpoints of light, all of this seems unlikely.

The night brings the city a false glamour. Flashing lights, neons which strobe and follow the lines of older facades, and more recently powerful beams which, in groups of four, range over the porous sky to signal the location of some spot devoted to pleasure’s consumption. There are other lights of course; those of cars, less numerous on the streets, but more visible and variable. Their lights — if seen from the hills that enclose the city, forcing it to wrap itself along the beachfront — appear to chase each other and dissolve into one another and form long streams which end in the sea. It is almost as if these long lines of red tail lights pour themselves into the sea only to emerge in the opposite direction as another bright line of phosphorous white light streaming back towards the dune. But the lights and quick-moving neons atop buildings belie their own fantasies. Go down from the hills, quiet and rustling with dense green foliage, into the streets, and the lights lose their coherence, become as bits of brightness, scattering and chasing madly, between the homeless and other creatures, hungry, and destitute which lie in menacing bundles under bridge, or between layers of cardboard and plastic.
around busy traffic junctions. Those braver and younger hang around the doors of escort agencies and cafes. Under the light they seem in passing to be animated, purposeful. Slow down a little and look carefully and many seem to be sleeping while standing; leaning on each other beneath the flickering yellow, green, and electric blue arrows.

In my car, I adjust my collar. My hair is clean but already oily at the end of the day, and I pat my stomach down. Sitting leads to slouch and pouch *dit rym net soos my geldsak, gereed vir dans, kerk, en werk!* Locking the car door and juggling the keys on chains I make my way through the drizzle of people milling about the Milky Lane. Here a black girl offers soft serve ice cream to a fat *Boer* type — socks and khaki — he flicks the serviette at her and leaves the ice cream there. Service is too slow! I smile at her and say: ‘People are so rude, and I would like that ice-cream *very much*’. She smiles. Are young Zulu women like young Japanese women; demure, soft, serving? ‘Thank you … that man … I just don’t know’.

I leave Milky Lane, get the car and drive, ice-cream in one hand, the wheel in the other. On the periphery of the city, at its main junctions or course ways — Victoria Embankment, Warwick Junction, or Ordinance Road — the visitor in the late hours will see people the colour of sulphur shadows pushing trolleys, sweeping streets, or walking at a leisurely pace, in no particular direction. They appear not to proceed beyond these points since the streets are empty near the centre. You do not see these people by day; they are effaced by colour which changes everything.

At night you are the colour of the light you walk or drive beneath: now orange, now that peculiar green fluorescent white, now grey or yellow. Even the people in cars seem either to rush or slow down, not certain of their direction, and in no hurry to find it. A soft pull forward, followed by a lurch. While driving I think that Pitlochery Road (where I live) is too far from here, yet it is hard to resist the pull of half-empty streets in the centre.

I drive on, one man in a car with three empty seats. Driving in the city does nothing to erase the isolation of what a friend described as ‘that one egg-cup and plate in the kitchen sink’. I think of it better as that one dent in the double bed. Odd that I am here again. My depressive solitude is subsumed beneath the nervous energy of what might happen tonight. The place is addictive. You seem not to be alone; all dyed the same colours, all seemingly without direction and purpose and in no hurry. We share a certain identity that evaporates as surely as the bright light of day pours white light into the world so much that nothing can make sense anymore, no patterns seem evident. At night everything is a pattern of dark and light. The outside folds inside.

Anxiety growing, I accelerate and head back towards the beach, but this time far north of Milky Lane. There are times when the direction you take matters. Like tonight, I feel that to head directly to the beach from the city is too sudden. I need the pleasure and anticipation to postpone that sense of surprised discovery, even
though I have been here many times before. So I drive from the Embankment to Gillespie Street, and then onto the Marine Parade where the women argue with men outside bars, and taxi drivers drive across multiple lanes in diagonal lines. The further north, the quieter the road becomes, and the slower the car. To see clearly you have to slow down. In the dark, the ways of seeing are different since all shape emerges from peripheral vision; things become from the night, and tones are tones of each other, movement is detected only by shadows. Unlike the day, the night-light is constant and artificial, monochromatic and somehow clean.

Yet, even the day is not anything like the place where I work. It’s light and air and the smell of popcorn, perfume, and syrup on the pan. No natural light enters there, the maze of levels, and columns, of escalators and huge potted palms, their leaves turning to dust, envelops us all. It is not the place you visit in order to be alone, or to look into the eyes of people who want to see your face. No, in this merchant Mecca, the gaze of everyone lands inevitably on the things they wish to acquire, piled in huge displays of glittering excess.

At work she said: ‘Has my ring had been repaired yet, the one with the green stone?’ Mrs Chigego is a short woman, rotund but with a beautiful slightly lined, and smiling face. Her hair is always pulled back into a modest braided bun, and invariably she wears a satin scarf over her shoulders.

I smile: ‘Mrs Chigego, how are you? Yes, it’s almost done but there is the matter of how you want the stone cut’.

‘I’ve changed my mind. I thought we should cut it down into three smaller stones which I’d like to have shaped into an S, that is for my daughters names: Sara, Susizwe, and Sbongile’. Mrs Chigego, a divorced teacher with three children, scatters the contents of her bag onto the glass top. All manner of colours pour from it, brown notebooks, gold and silver credit-cards, keys with Mickey Mouse hanging forlornly under a sign which he holds up: Disneyworld. The lipstick sheaths, patterned with paisley designs in gold, and pens and nail files settle after a moment. These items obscure the plain gold rings and chains which lie flat under glass on a black silk lining. Mrs Chigego filches through the rubble and lifts, with quick magpie like movements, a seven set engagement ring. ‘Look I brought my engagement ring with me as well. I think you can remove the stones there and place them into the three rings. I have no use for it anymore’.

I look at the ring, the ‘diamonds’ which surround the larger stone, possibly a white sapphire, appear to have been pushed deep into the crown, possibly evidence of many hours kneading or folding doe, or catching hard objects. The central stone looks more promising and I explain to Mrs Chigego that it probably makes more sense to also cut the larger stone into several smaller ones.

There is a pause before she says: ‘Hey, that man, I knew he was on something else even before he knew me. The little ones are not diamonds? This won’t happen to my children…! You can’t trust men with nothing. That shit’.
I look at her. Yes, I think. You can’t trust men. ‘My father always said never trust anyone’. I offer as sympathy this platitude. He took it evidently to heart and was tried several times for fraud.

‘Ja…’, the woman sighs and leans forward. Though aged, her skin wrinkled dark between deep tones of brown, her breasts are ample, a generosity which seems to me to be love itself.

We imagine her grandchildren. She fixes me with a firm and warm smile which she plays on him now: ‘You aren’t married are you?’

‘No, not married Mrs Chigego. I haven’t been here long enough, and haven’t met the right person’. This time my smile is resigned. I know already the questions to follow, and anticipate the fictions to suit. Mrs Chigego braces herself to give me a talk. Her hands straddle either side of the counter. Each finger is ringed with large colourful stones, pearls, and filigree work. There is only one ring I’d like to look at. Its on her thumb and is a squat black onyx with the initials NY engraved in red gold; the kind fashionable in the ’50s.

‘Where does that unusual ring come from?’, I ask to distract her from my status as a single white (gay) male (a sw*m) and past the respectable pause where questions ought not to be asked. She examines her thumb, turns the ring right the way round and says:

‘That is my father’s ring. I inherited when he died many years ago. He said it was agate but that “NY”? I don’t know. For all I know it could mean New York — maybe another girlfriend before he married my mother. Its actually Suziwe’s favourite and she likes to wear it when she goes out’. Mrs Chigego laughs, gives me the ring to examine, and we finish talking about the new rings for the girls.

Here I am, driving to the beach but now with waves of exhaustion leaving their oily traces that cannot be wiped away with fingers. I don’t know why I come here when I am so tired that I cannot think. My eyes bum from the sweat and oil which has accumulated under the skin and which secretes itself in ever thickening layers. I drive and I am not myself; I am someone else on the hunt for soft serve ice-cream on skin. In darkness colours will take the tone of night onto themselves; reds become as orange, and the back tarmac becomes a grizzled grey under white light. The leaves of palms and conifers also change at night. No longer are they penetrated by light, nor do they render the world beneath them that shade of cool freckled green. Instead all are tones of orange, fluorescent white, and black green. The textures harden and become as crepe would sound if twisted in the wind. You cannot imagine the translucence of objects at night. A leaf is as solid as a stone is as flexible as a branch. All movement is the chase of fleeting light as it passes before cars driving past. I too ease past, not knowing, aware and unaware of how I have come to be here. I have come to be delivered here. I am not myself. My needs become simple, the flight, the speed, the chase and dissipation which hunt my ugly dreams down.
There are at least eight cars in the lot — and women strolling about. There are gusts of wind that whip otherwise limp trees into life. The city’s beaches are awash with grit and the sand piles up quickly against the wooden fences — a desert in the making. Waves of sand are lifted and turned like blankets in the wind before being rushed in fitful gusts to accumulate against the next wall. A new Citi Golf enters the lot, makes a sharp turn to the right and drives up to the row of parking bays in front of the public. There it rests momentarily, before the white reversing lights flash on, and the car shifts back into a space between two cars behind it. We look at each other. We look away. I pull the baseball cap further over my forehead and lean back into the seat. Beneath the shadows of banana trees and the double helixes of beach sand in the wind, the night draws us deeper into its tired self and waves of exhaustion pound the beach.

A girl leans against the lamp pole. The boy in the car next to me leans back as well and turns to see whether a glimpse of the man in the next car is possible. It’s difficult to see much in this half light, the orange of the lamps is also the orange of her skin, and though the satin of her blouse may read as gold to any casual observer walking by on an evening such as this, it could just as easily be considered a pastel peach or even a silver grey. She leans back, (and as on other nights in his company alone in the half-empty flat, its two armchairs and dining room table visible through the bedroom door in the blue moonlight), unbuttons her blouse a little and allows something to show. I watch the boy.

And, as on nights like this, the wind dies down. The woman relaxes, eases back, unbuttons a little more and waits. She looks; he looks away to me. I’m caught in the embarrassment of my gaze. The world is made in darkness, flat and limited, a place where the terrors of the day are reduced to cut-outs of trees and monochrome and facets of cardboard structures.

The cut-outs are like those the jeweller remembers from stage rehearsals of West Side Story. Yet, she is young, too young for this. For what she is doing, her background too simple, her language too good, nature too gentle, too careful, for this. Yet she is here, and in the dark it is not possible to see the movement of the fingers as another button (the second, counted by the jeweller) is undone. When the jeweller turns again to catch the glimpse of the boy in the car beside him, he becomes aware of other men watching. His window has been wound down to let in just enough sound should he decide to speak. The only difficulty, a difficulty which befuddles the boy, the girl, and the jeweller alike, is how to see each other clearly enough, given the uneven light which is washed in manic directions by the wind through the trees. Their faces disappear into darkness, only to reappear, their eyes curiously frightened and surprised by the light which finds them in unexpected blinks or turns of the head.

She thinks back to her flat in a suburb of Durban considered still to be chic enough by some, and on the tawdry side by others. There are no areas of Durban which escape the changes of fate and fortune. Since it is a coastal industrial city,
with major industry to both the North and South, all must yield, inevitably to the realisation that once elite areas are inevitably tainted by the intrusion of small business (security firms to start with, but followed with equal certainty by rising incidents of hi-jacking, and newly raised and fortified walls). She thinks back to this set of four rooms with their parquet floors. The insufferable heat is owed no doubt to earlier tenants, or perhaps even to the elderly owners (now living, she believes, in Ballito). If she’s left alone in the morning, she must draw the chintz curtains — a bright yellow in the one room, a dark green where she sleeps — to keep the sun from frying the listless plants that are kept in the corners of the rooms in order to better obscure the absence of furniture. By day, when the flat is empty and the wind forces itself between the window frames and weather strips, the plants move in gentle unison with its gusts of air, its whistling and howling songs. The plants grow despite the drawn curtains, or maybe because of them. She knows that sometimes another woman will use the place, leaving ‘items’ behind that must be washed and collected on another occasion. Their clothes, like hers are dark or lustrous, speckled here and there with sparkles. She asks no questions about why she is here; she doesn’t need anything other than the thrill; the wanting to be away from the suffering stuffed pillows of her mother’s place, heavy draped curtains, the wall unit, its TV, its polished brass dolphins, horses and framed pictures of her father, mother, the little girls … before he left.

Her parents were country people, ‘mixed’, living closer to Butterworth than some might now consider prudent. Her father had been a farmer who, late in life, married her mother, a bright smiled round woman from Johannesburg. Her mother, who had dreamt in her youth of being a beauty consultant (before such people even existed in the proper sense of the term), became, on the matter-of-fact advice of her mother, a nurse. As far as the she knew, her father had only one ambition, to retire at the age of forty-five. He must by now be into his late sixties. With the vagaries of drought or was it politics, he left one night never to return. She and her mother found themselves too close to an expanding town of vagrants, poverty, and children made destitute by AIDS. They moved to Durban and her mother went back to work. Her mother is still a grandmother to several of these orphans and goes back every year. Her daughter cannot bear to return there and so she phones them occasionally; the same words exchanged over the phone in little variations each time.

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Other cars eased into the parking lot that night, turned around once, and left quickly only to return later. Occasionally they ‘pulled up’ to the cars in which the boy and the jeweller were lying, side by side, yet seemingly so far apart so as not even to hear the strains of music as one or other track played out on the radio station; was it East Coast or Lotus? The women who sell their bodies by night, always the same two under the lamps near the toilets, walking disconsolately
up and down the pavement, waiting, waiting, hands moving gently, or resting on their bags. One of these looked as if she might be coloured, or perhaps even Portuguese. The shorter of the two was black, but even then by the fluorescent light that poured out of the toilets (barred and secured as one might expect) it was hard to tell whether she was local or foreign. Zulu women tended to be dark, as dark as the southern Indians brought here to labour a century ago. He thinks she could be from Sotho, or somewhere from the northeast. The wind dies down, and with it all the debris it has gathered, settles; its rush no more. Watching the women and the boy, the jeweller is overcome with heaviness, his mind collapsing in on itself. On the other side soldiers emerge briefly from the regiment gates as a truck pulls up. The gates open and the truck moves in, its light off, into the gaping darkness where the figures of the men cannot be made out. It is another world set midst the pleasure of the beach; its heavy façade of pillars, sash windows, and cream mortar remains obscured to the thousands of holiday-makers whose cars throng the pavements, spilling inevitably onto the regimental lawn and into the regimental gateways.

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I'm at risk here. Almost asleep I turn my head again to see whether the boy in the white car has left; to want him wanting the girl. I don't know what I'm doing here, so tired, so tired. The rawness of my nerves in this place has built itself into a pain which sits in my groin and lower stomach. I lean forward and see that the boy has not moved. Looking at me he raises himself slightly. His hands have moved lower than the level of the window. I know where those hands are. I am not myself, I cannot think and the air is so thick now that it becomes difficult to breathe. I nod briefly as I shove my hands down the front of my trousers, to find in their warmth that I am hard and feeling as nervous as the day I walked onto the stage in primary school to model a shiny suit made of dark green chintz. He smiles, looks away at the girl and nods and her smile seems as a relief to me because I know that soon I will be able to return home and sleep ... without this waiting. There is a book on my desk, midst the small knives, solder, and miniature gas torch used to fashion the rings for Phumi Chigego. In the book, which grips my attention as I eat lunch in the backroom, a man acknowledges to his friend: 'men don't pay prostitutes to sleep with them, they pay them to go home'. I turn over and open the door of my car so that the boy can see inside. Carefully I examine the surrounds to make sure that no-one, no uninvited delinquent, is passing by too close. There are no cars in the lot now, it's too late, and those who rested here did so only momentarily when they realised that he and I were waiting for each other, alone in our private cubicles of darkness.

He raises himself and walks around to my side smiling and nonchalant looking always towards the girl. Once level with the window he turns slightly towards me
and in the half and broken light I see him clearly. In the dark patches of light I see that the girl’s hair is braided expensively. Her clothing suggests care.

It happens with many encounters like this that a man will reach a point when the fantasy will need translation. To be made real. It cannot last between two or three people and will dissipate into nothing unless taken to a conclusion of some kind. The boy and I watch each other and realise that extending this moment, when every other possibility has played itself out, is no longer possible. Both lock into a sequence in which the possibilities for closure are ever reduced. I realise that nothing more can happen in the windswept space of the lot. The boy leans over towards me and speaks first: ‘Do you want to follow me home?’, he says.

I say: ‘Might as well. You want me to bring the girl?’. The girl has turned away: is the game over?

The boy says: ‘Bring her with; why not?’.

The jeweller does not drive too fast; he does not want to lose them, but he knows she knows where he lives. Yet he is also in a hurry, his mind filled earlier with the stupor of that paralysing energy, collapsing in on itself and dark with the shadows of fumbled movements, is now preoccupied with the morning. The gems that need to be set, the rings awaiting the fragile fingers of Mrs Chigego’s daughters. They are there; the head lights captured neatly within the frame of his windscreen.

As they drive towards the hills, the city, its lines of light and height, recedes and the unfilled darkness of the horizon of the sea and sky becomes more prominent and threatening. The boy thinks about a recent trip to New York, where briefly he stayed with a friend in Queens. Surrounded by all those massive towers he could never see a horizon unless he went up high, perhaps even to the twin towers before their obliteration, and only then would a horizon of sorts reveal itself, lines upon lines of buildings, irregular in the uppermost parts, but all confined to regular shapes along a predictable grid. Because of the hills in this African coastal city, the lines are themselves irregular except where, from certain angles, great streets of light seem to disappear into the darkness. The hills ensure that any grid must itself conform ‘irregularly’ to nature’s shape, the ancient dunes buried beneath the solidified respectability of colonial suburbs like Glenwood, Morningside, Musgrave, Westridge, Westville, Umbilo. Whether there were ancient trading routes, maintained by the enterprising Chinese or Egyptians, will never be known now. People are still curious about occasional finds of Ming porcelain or Ramsaic inscriptions on fragments of stone, but the truth is that any collective remembering of this time becomes impossible. Like the towers of America, the history of Africa’s frequent contact with the East has been obliterated by more urgent and recent needs for labour and land.

The jeweller leads them in. They smile at each other but there is little to say. The fantasy of the unknown is suddenly muted and shy in this domestic space. It is like all such spaces, no matter how much filled, how emptied out, or adorned.
'Humans live here' it breathe, and even a thousand years from now, if and when stone and glass have ground themselves down into the same shimmering fragments of light, someone passing will still feel, as one does among ruins, the crushing weight of privacy and ritual; a frail human banality exudes from the walls. The man looks around and his looks make no excuses for the solitude of the plate and glass left carelessly on the counter in the kitchen.

He finds he is unexpectedly and quite suddenly comforted by the predictable and chaotic activity of the ants which scurry over bones and congealed fat. In the front room, he kills the light and offers the boy and girl a seat in one of two armchairs, covered with white sheets, that face the city. He sits on the floor facing them and lights a beedie which he passes round. She sees again from this great height the mottled darkness, its bruised porous clouds with underbellies tainted by white or orange light, spans the horizon thick and far. And, at this time the movement of light from the streets settles and all that remains, almost as if the light had cut itself into the grid, are long straight hollows coloured an orange and sulphurous glow; the colour of her skin.

I am not sure how to touch him since they are seated facing outwards to the blinking city. I move to kneel down on the heavy pile carpet between his legs. He stretches out and leans back into the chair. Turning away from the lights to my back I divine his shadows and curves and bone. His legs tense as I unbutton his jeans. It's only when I take him, that I happen to glance up and notice, with his hand resting on my head tentatively pressing down, to see that she has moved to straddle his chest. She shifts her hands behind her to remove the blouse, and there on her smallest finger is a ring; the stone as black as night, the glinting initials, NY, fixed without any meaning we can know, into an unrelenting surface.
The spread of modernity — that is to say, of the ideas and practices which evolved in Europe from the mid-seventeenth century onwards — has, paradoxically, been both advanced and retarded within the colonising process as it has taken place in most of the countries which have been studied within the discipline of postcoloniality. In the course of the establishment of a state, the colonist has been compelled to allow to the indigene a degree of education and limited exposure to the technology which has been imported from Europe or the United States. Typically, however, and for reasons which will be made clearer in this essay, in the context of South Africa, the colonist has wished to limit or altogether refuse to the indigenous peoples the body of ideas which he brought with him, or later imported, for the most part associated with the Enlightenment. To a lesser extent he has wished to limit the spread of technology into indigenous societies. This has been partly for simple economic reasons: the indigene, to the extent that his or her services are required in the modern sector, must feel the need to offer them as a temporary labourer in the modern sector. No viable modern society, in fact, must develop separately from that of the colonist. A second, and no doubt equally cogent, reason why modernity has been refused or grudgingly allowed to the indigene has been that literacy, the cornerstone of entry into the modern world (as is amply demonstrated in Rewriting Modernity), has the potential to offer access to the body of ideas which Attwell enumerates:

[modernity] refers not only to technology and the emergence of an administered and industrialized society, but also to that fluid and powerful system of ideas that we inherit from the bourgeois revolutions of Europe in the late eighteenth century — ideas such as personhood, rights and citizenship. (4)

The last phrase in this definition helps us to understand why colonisers strove at times to emphasise how unsuited the indigene was to be allowed participation in the modern world: that entry would inevitably lead to demands for a full, and — given the numbers of blacks in South Africa — a frighteningly influential share in the polity. At the same time, the definition suggests the changes in world view that are experienced by the pre-modern subject who moves into the modern.

The term 'pre-modern' may require definition: Attwell is using it to refer to societies that are illiterate and which have no, or almost no, access to technology other than that of the simplest kind. It is of course difficult, if not impossible, for
a pre-modern society to coexist with a modern society: the advantages of modern medicines will become apparent and be sought by pre-modern peoples, as will the devices and conveniences which such people have encountered in visits, or temporary residence in the modern sector of their countries. Access to a high degree of literacy, especially in the language or languages in which modern ideas are transmitted, is usually the hardest-fought issue in the passage of modernity from colonist to colonised, and so it has been in the South Africa of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries into which Attwell offers us windows.

Attwell begins his project with a claim that South African modernities are entitled to special attention because of the nature of South Africa’s colonial experience, which was long in duration and involved two major waves of colonisation, Dutch and English, as well as other minor but important waves of immigrants. The decolonising process was complex: in 1910 the Act of Union officially brought to an end the power of the British parliament (though not of the Crown) in South Africa and, as Attwell says, ‘brought about a coalition of Boer and Briton in a white colonial state’ (2). In 1960, in a referendum in which only whites could vote, it was decided that the country should become a republic and in 1961 it left the Commonwealth. Throughout the twentieth century, until 1994, although the government and the enormous majority of the electorate were white, the majority of the inhabitants were, as they are now, black. The segregationist policies applied throughout the history of the country had the purpose and effect of maintaining the power of the white minority. The denial of the franchise to almost all black people continued throughout the twentieth century, and segregation was intensified from 1948 under the Nationalist government, until the collapse of the regime in 1990 and the first democratic elections in 1994.

Attwell points out that the ‘aggressive modernisation’ (2) of South Africa began early: by the 1880s the mining industry had begun to mechanise, and the gold and diamonds which were to support the economy for the next century were extracted by means which involved the importation of modernity. It was at the same time policy to refuse modern conditions of life to indigenous South Africans and people of neighbouring states — Lesotho, Swaziland, Botswana,1 and Mozambique — who were required to migrate temporarily and labour for low wages in the mines, before returning to a pre-modern way of life.

Attwell is aware that apartheid, the process of separation and policed inequality between racial groups, attempted to confine blacks to the pre-modern even more strictly than had been the case in the past. Prior to 1948 it had been understood, at least by the more liberal section of the white population, that black people might in some future period qualify for full citizenship in a modern South Africa. The proponents of apartheid denied that an indigenous population could ever be included in an imported modernity. Attwell writes nevertheless of a process, already underway prior to apartheid, of ‘social confluence’ (3) in which industrialisation, with its accompaniment, urbanisation, was slowly breaking
down the differences between black and white lifestyles. It was this process that apartheid sought to reverse.

The point from which Attwell looks back is that of the post-apartheid era, and he replies to objectors who might claim that too little has changed in this era that ‘the basic script … has fundamentally changed’ (6), a claim which cannot be denied. He claims that the African National Congress (ANC) ‘was always in possession of a code of modernity that would eventually be triumphant. It always held the right cards’ (3). At this point the South African reader tends to reflect on the pleasures of hindsight and to fear that too many of the shaping factors of black modernity in this country will be obscured. The story that Attwell tells us is as much conditioned by the will of white colonisers to refuse entry into modernity to indigenous peoples as it is by the will of indigenes to embrace it. Knowledge that the determination to exclude black writers from modernity would culminate in a master plan of complete and permanent exclusion, which will endure for forty years, must influence our understanding of their achievements.

The concept of ‘transculturation’ — a term coined by Fernando Ortiz, in the 1940s, though translated much later into English to describe the process of cultural exchange that necessarily takes place between colonists and colonised within a colonial or postcolonial state — is crucial in this work. Attwell claims that transculturation has occurred in South Africa from the beginning of the colonising process. He concedes that Ortiz, writing about Cuba, was dealing with a population from which the purely indigenous culture had almost disappeared, whereas in South Africa this is far from being the case; but the term is essential, because the exchange which it implies between cultural groups need not be equal, and includes the possibility that the exchanges that occur may be violent.

For most foreign readers of South African literature the names of Nadine Gordimer and J.M. Coetzee overshadow all others, especially those of black writers, who have tended to be preoccupied with the struggle to gain the access which was denied them. As Attwell says, theirs has been ‘a literature in extremis’ (13). Although the black writers on whom he focuses in his first five chapters have encountered barriers between them and entry into the modern world, they have been equally preoccupied with the production of what Attwell calls, after Charles Taylor, ‘alternative modernities’ (22); that is to say, the fusion, necessarily selective, of their African heritage with the influences that were reaching them from Europe.

The first chapter, on Tiyo Soga, gives an account of the writings of a mid-nineteenth century Xhosa Protestant clergyman who, in the course of his short life (he died of tuberculosis on a remote mission station at the age of forty-two in 1872), translated the first part of Pilgrim’s Progress into Xhosa. Soga was educated partly at Lovedale, the famous missionary settlement and school in the Eastern Cape, and partly in Scotland, where he was ordained and married a Scotswoman. He returned with his wife to work as the ‘first black missionary’ (29) in the Eastern
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Cape and on the voyage out began the private journal that he kept from 1857 to 1870. A younger, white clergyman, John Chalmers (who, as his biographer, would take liberties with the story of Soga’s life), argued in the Lovedale newspaper, *Indaba*, that the Kaffir race was doomed to extinction because of innate moral and intellectual weaknesses. The effect of this attack was to provoke Soga to write a considered reply consisting of a survey of the history of African and post-African peoples, and an assertion that the black people of southern Africa would survive and uplift themselves, as had black people elsewhere — that, in Attwell’s language, they would make the transition into modernity. Chalmers, however, seems to have been a convert to the popular evolutionary thinking of the later nineteenth century, a problematic position for a man committed to missionary activity amongst black people. Attwell’s description of Soga’s lonely grave with its obliterated inscription, as of the distorted version of his life which descended to posterity through Chalmers’s biography, suggests that neither the Xhosa nor whites were ready to value this ‘man of two worlds’ (46).

The second chapter begins with a hyperbolic claim by Rudyard Kipling in 1904 that South Africa will soon be prosperous: ‘[a]ll the poor will become rich, and for every poor man planted in South Africa, there will be reaped a crop of millionaires’ (51). John L. Dube, founder-editor of the Zulu newspaper, *Ilanga*, was angered by this claim, because it implied inaccurate assumptions about the distribution of wealth and ignorance of the country’s economic problems. It seems to me that neither Dube nor Attwell places enough emphasis on the word ‘planted’. Kipling is thinking only of the prospects of colonists, and though he is wrong about them too, he is unaware of the important group to which Dube himself belongs — the *amakholwa*, or Christianised blacks, whose entry into modernity was resented by many whites. Attwell discusses the doubts and ambivalences of the *kholwa* group about entry into modernity, since it seems to involve the abandonment of so much of the past, and the hybrid nature of this modernity as it is manifest in the texts that they produced. A famous example cited here is Sol T. Plaatje’s *Mhudi* in which the paradisal picture of pre-colonial (*XQ-mfecane*) life, and the depiction of traditional law and justice are set in a narrative strongly influenced by Shakespeare.

The concerns of two eminent black authors, H.I.E. Dhlomo and B.W. Vilikazi, as they are discussed in chapter three, exemplify the debate about African written literature in English and indigenous languages and the degree to which European literature can be allowed to influence the indigenous. Vilikazi experiments with rhyme; Dhlomo thinks rhythm more suited to poetry in Zulu. The duration and intensity of the debate serves as evidence of educated middle-class Africans’ concern with the kind of modernity which that they will evolve and its literary modes. Both men felt the inadequacy of contemporary, ‘ethnographic’ and condescending criticism of black literature (82) and knew that traditional forms must expand and alter if they were to survive. Eventually Dhlomo accepted that
the need to address a wide audience could best be served by the use of English. Vilakazi did not abandon Zulu, but felt that its evocative capacities could be extended and improved by contact with the European literary world, which would allow black writers to adapt and modernise tradition. As Attwell points out, the debate was made more poignant by the fact that the period (the 1930s) was that of increasing legislated segregation, designed to build insurmountable barriers between black tradition and ‘white’ modernity.

Es’kia Mphahlele’s long career as an author, thinker and teacher gives Attwell the means of considering a modernity evolved in contact with the cultures of late twentieth-century Africa and the African-American diaspora. Attwell says earlier that he does not intend to focus at any stage on the *Drum* group of writers, which has been extensively discussed elsewhere, but they are present in this chapter as the influence which allowed Mphahlele to understand that his form of Africanness was urban and modern, that he was not interested in the narrowly ethnic and was ‘opposed to medieval clannishness’ (126). Driven out of South Africa by the apartheid government, which could not tolerate the idea of an intellectual and oppositional African, he was eager for the contact with other African and post-African peoples, but did not simply adopt any of the ideologies which he encountered in exile. Attwell’s account of Mphahlele’s growing sense of his difference from Nigerians and Kenyans and later from black Americans is a fine description of the forces which coalesced to form his own Africanness. This understanding of himself brought him to the great decision and the painful compromises which he made when he returned from exile to South Africa in 1977.

Those compromises are over, but the sense that the identity of a black South African is distinct, that it combines the cultural influences of the African past with those of a prolonged and interactive encounter with the forces of modernity, has been with him for many decades. What is moving in this chapter is that Mphahlele’s intellectual journey can now be seen as the original and painful precursor of a process that is underway amongst the leaders of this country: the gradual understanding of the degrees of affinity with and differences from the other nations of Africa. This necessarily involves a definition, unstable though it must be, of what it means to be a South African.

Attwell turns from Mphahlele’s journey of discovery to another part of the same time period, in South Africa, where the group later to be called the Soweto poets moved in their poetry from the lyric and personalised form that they had derived from the literary influences of their Europeanised education to an ‘epic’ strain that was more in keeping with the Black Consciousness movement of the 1970s and early 1980s. Attwell summarises the lyric’s link to the modern, calling it ‘a vehicle for expressing selfhood and autonomy, key features of modern, post-enlightenment thought’ (152). In the 1970s and later — the Soweto Uprising and its aftermath, the violent struggle of the 1980s — the purely personal form of expression moved into ‘the historical and national’. Mongane Serote, whose
poetry is the main focus here, began from 1975 when he was engaged in the writing of *Behold Mama, Flowers*, to use what Attwell calls the ‘heroic and representative subject of epic’ (156). His novel, *To Every Birth Its Blood* (1981), in which the protagonist, or rather the hero, may be said to have been the ANC, showed a variant on the same tendency: persons are weak, or at least vulnerable; the ‘Movement’ is strong. What Attwell calls ‘[t]he mixed success’ (163) of Serote’s later work raises the interesting question of whether great or even good poetry can be written by people deeply involved in revolution. The stirring but ephemeral performances of the oral poets Mbali and Madingoane may well be the form of expression suited to such circumstances.

In his conclusion Attwell asks whether South African writing, extricating itself from its obligations of solidarity with the Movement (or with any movement) has achieved its own modernity, as distinct from the modernities of Europe and America. The figures on which he focuses are Njabulo S. Ndebele and Zakes Mda: it is a pity that this work was completed too early to allow for consideration of Ndebele’s latest work, *The Cry of Winnie Mandela* (2003), since his volume of short stories, *Fools and Other Stories* (1983) was written under apartheid when there seemed little reason to believe that literature would in the foreseeable future be freer of constraints. Ndebele’s critical work, *Rediscovery of the Ordinary* (1991), makes the suggestion that the work of black writers is impoverished by the obligation that they feel to what he calls ‘the spectacular’; that is to say, the extreme and the horrifying, which was becoming a kind of orthodoxy of subject matter.

Mda, whose novels have appeared in the 1990s and the recent years of this century, has asked in his most remarkable work, *The Heart of Redness* (2000), what the modernity would be that would allow Xhosa people to retain connection with their past to the extent of resolving the painful conflicts that occurred in the mid-nineteenth century. Both he and Ndebele have been accused of a humanism, which, it is alleged, leads to misconstruction of present-day people and conditions. Attwell leaves the verdict on the best of post-apartheid writing in doubt. The ‘necessary reinvention’ of South African writing which follows the collapse of the old regime, and the obsolescence of older modes of writing, at least as regards the interests of the present, may or may not, he says, lead us towards ‘the enactment of human rights in practice’ (204).

Useful and indeed inspiring though the work undoubtedly is, it suffers from an omission that has been too general in the revisionist histories of the South African post-apartheid period. Attwell quotes Rosemary Jolly as complaining that *Rewriting Modernity* deals with ‘the boys’ game’, but claims in his own defence that ‘the project of defining modernity may well be inherently masculine’ (23). Perhaps this is true in the early stages of the movement of black people into print culture, though it is not ‘inherently’ the case but the result of social conditions and beliefs. His claim that his ‘readings of the texts are reasonably gender sensitive’
(23) may be allowed: he recognises, for example, the masculinist bias of Black Consciousness evident in Serote’s writing. He claims that ‘the relationships between gender, race and modernity require a different and distinctive kind of treatment’ (23), and instances Women Writing Africa: The Southern Region (2003), where women’s emergence into print culture is documented.

The truth is that it is because women have either been excluded from modernity or their participation has been effaced that the project of defining modernity remains ‘masculine’ for much of the period of which Attwell writes. Nontsizi Mgqwetho, the Xhosa woman poet who published a considerable body of poetry in the Johannesburg newspaper Umteteli wa Bantu between 1920 and 1929, has disappeared so completely from public knowledge that nothing of her life is known. Noni Jabavu, whose book The Ochre People (1963) amounts to a fictionalised survey of what it was and what it could be to be Xhosa in the twentieth century, and focuses strongly on the tensions created by the move into modernity, goes unmentioned. The most important omission however from Rewriting Modernity is that of the black women of the seventies and eighties, of whom the first was Miriam Tlali, who published in 1975 the fictionalised memoir Muriel at Metropolitan, and whose complaint it was that since she was a black woman, writing (and still more, publication) was made very difficult for her. This, as Attwell says, was the period of Black Consciousness, when the obligation of solidarity with the freedom struggle was felt strongly, and the figure of the freedom fighter was unambiguously male. Ellen Kuzwayo, in Call Me Woman (1985), and the other black women autobiographers of the 1980s managed with difficulty but without breaching that solidarity to write accounts of their lives which celebrated their ‘personhood, rights and citizenship’ (4), and achieved recognition in their own community as well as in South Africa as a whole. It is also a pity that the autobiographical works, stories and novel of Sindiwe Magona in the 1990s and 2000s are completely omitted.

The defence will no doubt be advanced that Rewriting Modernity is necessarily selective in the figures that it explores, and the most significant have been chosen. No one could claim that Nontsizi Mgqwetho has received the notice that Serote has attracted. Of course the extent to which a work of this kind can remedy previous neglect is limited; but to confine discussion of women’s writing, and especially their role in the movement towards modernity, to gender-specific works like Women Writing Africa, the special project of which is to commemorate lives and reproduce voices that might otherwise be forgotten, is to deny women their proper place in the history of the South African nation.

Rewriting Modernity does not claim to offer completely satisfying accounts of the literary figures that it features, though references are made to biographies in which such accounts can be found. What it does is to offer an episodic history of black modernity in South Africa, through the literary figures that have been crucial in the shaping of that modernity. As I suggested earlier, it does not attempt
comprehensiveness, nor does it work through representative figures, but prefers the exceptional and memorable. Only in the case of Tiyo Soga (about whom the reader of South African texts will nevertheless be happy to know) is the chosen figure less than crucial to the way in which modernity eventually developed in South Africa, and it is easy to understand Attwell’s wish to include such a man, so undeservedly forgotten.

NOTES
1. For simplicity’s sake I have used the modern names for these states rather than those which were used in the nineteenth and early twentieth century.
2. A term now regarded as pejorative but relatively neutral in the period.
3. See Craig Mackenzie & Cherry Clayton, *Between the Lines*.

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Recounted Remembrances of Times Past: Relics of the Raj, Stayers-on and Anglicised Indians

In urban folk narrative, somewhere between the ‘urban legend’, which is melodramatic fiction, and the ‘family story’, which is of interest only to the family, lies what I call ‘hardened gossip’: outright inventions, embroidered ‘factual’ stories and stray dicta that outlive the usual fate of ephemeral tittle-tattle. Across a fairly wide social ambit, these tales become set-pieces in ‘standard conversations’ when familiar topics arise (for example, childhood, servants, ghosts). I listened transfixed in my childhood to such talk on ‘the Old Days and their Legacy’ — that is the Aftermath of the British Raj. Here is something of what I heard.

THE SAHIB’S BATH AND THE CHAPTI

The claim to fame of my father, Ajoy Sircar, is that he is the model for the character of Kabir in A Suitable Boy. ‘Everyone,’ so he said, ‘knew of how the English memsahib thought she was telling the servant to bring a two-annas’ worth of lakri [wood] for [the fuel for] the sahib’s bath, when she actually said, “Bring a two anna larki [girl] for the sahib’s bath’”. Or how she wrote home, ‘They have wonderful unleavened bread here called chaprasi-s’, meaning ‘peon’, the Indian word for letter-carrier (chapra-si, ‘from Chapra District, Bihar’), a mistake for chapati-s, unleavened Indian wheat tortillas.

MONGYELS AND MAIDENS

Brigadier Apcar, permanent resident of the Ootacamund Club in the south, was married to Ilka, Countess von Kalmbach, who was from a ‘mongyel Euyyopeyan family’ but who didn’t use her title because it ‘puts the p’ice up’, and who was said by her relatives to say ‘mwevy’ for ‘ve’y’. They were ‘ve’y B’itish’ indeed, though ‘Apcar’ is an Armenian name. The family had owned Sunny Park, in Calcutta, a glorious row of beautiful nineteenth-century European houses, one of which was replaced with a large vulgar Hindu temple in the 1970s. The brigadier told of Maiden’s Hotel, Delhi, when it was one of the showcases of the Raj, and of visiting nieces from the U.K. sending a telegram in desperation to their uncle in the provinces: ‘UNABLE TO STAY MAIDENS ANY LONGER UNLESS YOU SEND MONEY.’

PISSPOTS AND GARDEN VEGETABLES

My father and Mr Brian St. John Conway, English public school product, resident at the Saturday Club, Calcutta, and the St. Paul’s Cathedral organist,
told of ‘Roman remains and Russian aristocrats’. In the 1940s, as the Raj was ending, the Calcutta Statesman reported that a Russian resident, one U. F. Uckov, Esq. had found a Roman remain, (relic), so to speak, a vessel with a Latin inscription ‘Is est matella’. When translated it proved to read, ‘This is a pisspot’. That may have been a dig at credulous Indian lack of Latinity, unlikely to have actually appeared in the newspaper, but long after independence British prejudice sometimes remained strong as did a corresponding Indian resentment about it. In the 1970s, for example, Said Aporajita ‘Pinky’ Bagchi Zachariah chortled, ‘And, said Madam British Council,’ the wife of a dignitary in that institution, “Oh, I never eat local vegetables — I grow my own!” in her garden, which counted in her mind as ‘the soil of Blighty’. This gem spread like wildfire.

NAMING OF DOGS AND DAUGHTERS

Middle-class Bengalis, Anglophone and non-Anglophone alike, said jocularly that dogs are traditionally unclean, and ‘sahibs’ pets; so all dogs understand English’. Indeed, Indians’ pet dogs were more often than not given English names spoken to in English. Quite apart from dogs, in the British period and only in Bengal, perhaps under the influence of George Eliot, came the middle-class adoption of European ‘Romola’ as a Bengali proper name, on the analogy of ‘Kamala’ (pronounced ‘Kom-ola’ in Bengali), and ‘Rama’ (Pronounced ‘Romma’ in Bengali), both names for the goddess Lakshmi. From at least the early twentieth century, Bengalis have adopted and naturalised English nicknames, mostly female, sometimes male. ‘Nelly, Dolly, Baby, Ruby’ were common nicknames, as were ‘Daisy, Milly, Mini, Polly’. By the late 1950s, Hindu Bengalis were calling their daughters ‘Tinka, Jolly, April’ — all the given names of girls in college with me in the early 1970s.

ENGLISH POETS AND POETRY

At Presidency College, Calcutta, Bengali was the language of tutorials and conversation, and English the language of lectures. There, conveying a mild racial pride at an Indian being honoured in the U.K., Mr Asoke Kumar Mukherji told generations of students of Manmohan Ghose, the man who apparently chose the decoration for the title page of Palgrave’s Golden Treasury. ‘Manmohan’ means ‘mind-entrancer’. When he was at Oxford, Ghose was introduced at tea to Oscar Wilde. Wilde heard the name, and was duly entranced, murmuring to himself, ‘Man-mohan, Man-mohan,’ at its sheer beauty; then he flung his arms around him. Mr. Mukherji told this tale in heavily Bengali-accented English, because his first language was Bengali, but he was an M.A. (Oxon.) and was said to repaint the word ‘OXFORD’ on his trunk every year. Manmohan Ghose’s poetry appears in Primavera: Poems by Four Authors (1890) along with that of Laurence Binyon, Arthur S. Cripps, and Stephen Phillips. The students sometimes privately made risqué remarks about the arm-flinging. Our generation (mid- and late- 1970s) used to smile, ‘Oh, haven’t you heard that our teachers X and Y, with
their firsts from Oxford, courted each other by discussing Holinshed’s *Chronicles* on the bus? When they marry, the offspring will be called *The Golden Treasury* — punning on Palgrave and such Bengali phrases for children as ‘golden-moon’ and ‘treasure’.

**Ducks and Bananas**

Indians may have laughed at British linguistic mistakes; they also laughed at their own. My father said that it was a hoary old Independence-era chestnut that a Pakistani dignitary said to a British diplomat’s wife, ‘Madame, I do so admire your ornamental buttocks,’ for *batak* is the Urdu for ‘duck’. Indians also made bilingual puns. Said Arun Karki:

What did one banana say to the other?

‘Marry me, I’m a-kela’

*Kela* is the Hindi word for ‘banana’, and *akela* is the Hindi word for ‘alone’.

**Simple Fare, Simple Code**

Anglophone Indians sometimes mocked our own ‘native’ pretensions. The Indian Manager of the Jiajuri Tea Estate in Nowgong District, Assam, had worked up quite a routine. (Affectedly): ‘We’re having very simple fare tonight: wheat handcakes, spiced lentils and daai.’ Chapatis, dal, and *dahi* (curds), are indeed very simple traditional ‘fare’ dressed up in fancy translation.

My father, and absolutely independently, Moyna Khan, said that a specifically Indian Christian ‘Code of Hospitality’ had it that if there were guests to dinner, the murmur ‘FHB’ meant ‘Family Hold Back’ and ‘MIK’ meant ‘More in Kitchen’. (Though, if the code was so commonly known, wouldn’t the guests know it too?)

**The Lorgnette**

During World War II, members of the US army were stationed at the Darjeeling Club. It was built on land donated by the Maharajahs of Burdwan and Cooch Bihar, and the members were always racially mixed. In the 1970s Mrs Susheila Rao told how an old Indian dowager stationed herself in the dining room early each morning before the officers came into breakfast, and scrutinised them all with a lorgnette. The affect was comically grotesque — one eye screwed up, as that side of her face went down, the other eye glaring wildly as that side of her face went up. One day, the officers bribed the bearers (waiters) to let them in earlier than her. When she entered, with perfect military timing, up went their porridge spoons over eyes as glaring as hers. She never used the lorgnette again.

The Raos moved in Calcutta High Society, and Mrs Rao told the story very well, and did the dropping of one side of the face as she raised the lorgnette with a skill worthy of Margaret Rutherford. Partially at least, though probably unconsciously, the story conveys racial pride. Whites may have been top-dog, and may have won in this case, but the Indian Grande Dame, whose name was given but which I have forgotten, was not subordinate to them. It might have been
some other club, and I am sure that in the 1990s, I heard or read of this as a joke or urban legend outside India too.

FANCY DRESS
Mrs R.: Do you remember how Bulbul Arnold carved out a permanent place for herself in Society annals by using her status as a white sahib’s brown wife to never wear a blouse? Not that you could see anything, for her sari was always carefully all pinned up round her.

Mrs S.: Speaking of ‘Fancy Dress’, there was Kutty Ramanair, a wild slacks-and-trouser-wearing socialite at a time when Indian women, even Anglicised ones, did not wear these as a matter of course. Her husband, ‘Baby’, was an engineer and he designed her blouses.

Mrs R.: Was she really so deformed as to need the services of an engineer — wouldn’t an ordinary brassiere have done?’

Mrs S.: Kutty won a fancy-dress party competition simply by announcing for months beforehand that her costume would be so fabulous that she would win it. The costume itself was very disappointing, consisting of a piece of gauze over her face, for she said she had come as The Painted Veil, after the Somerset Maugham novel.

Me: But how was the gauze painted?
Mrs R. (smilingly): The veil was not painted; Kutty may have been painted underneath, and probably more than made up for it.

Mrs S: And I myself won a fancy-dress party competition over much more elaborate costumes, at the Shirley and Charmaine da Silva’s, by taking in an empty matchbox and going in as ‘The Matchless Matchmaker’ in about the same period. Those were the days!

THE LORD’S CHAIR
Mrs Amrita ‘Trixie’ Handique told of ‘The Lord’s Chairs’. The Lord Sinha family, her first cousins, she said, had a pair of special chairs that went by ship to the U.K. for all Royal Occasions, from the Days of the Good Queen-Empress onwards, for them to sit in. Just like The Prince and the Pauper, said Calcutta, special dispensations to Sit in the Presence of the King! Even on the occasion of the ill-fated wedding of Prince Charles to Lady Diana Spencer, just like the old days, the two chairs went round the Cape of Good Hope for the Royal Wedding, and Lord and Lady having attended it, they all came back again. This would have evoked amusement at the pretensions and passé colonial conventions of the Aristocracy even in its twilight years. That world is gone now. My parents had known the late Lord from the 1940s, the days when he was merely ‘the Hon.’, as they said. And the lord’s relict, Lady Anju Sinha, rushed into my father’s arms at a British High Commission drinks party in the 1980s. ‘Oh Ajoy, how lovely to see you!’ she cried. ‘There’s so few of us left!’
The study of literature in India has suffered two losses in recent times: firstly, through the death of Prof. C.D. Narasimhaiah in April 2005; and secondly, in Dr P.K. Rajan’s fatal accident this January (2006).

Prof. Narasimhaiah will be known to many as a major innovator of the university English curriculum in India, owing to his introduction of American and then Commonwealth writing into syllabuses. A staunch Leavisite with allegiances to traditional Hindu aesthetics, ‘C.D.’ maintained high standards for the evaluation of literature and promoted scholarship through his dedicated efforts in publishing *The Literary Criterion* over several decades.

He also founded a study centre, ‘Dhvanyaloka’, in his home-town of Mysore, where he established a valuable research library and conference venue. Many younger academics owe their qualifications to gaining access to these resources, and to C.D.’s own writing and edited collections of critical essays. Prof. Narasimhaiah was of the same long-living generation as the writers he wrote on in his landmark book *The Swan and the Eagle: Raja Rao, R.K. Narayan and Mulk Raja Anand* (1969), and he was given a felicitation ceremony at the Hyderabad ACLALS conference for his 90th birthday not very long before his passing.

Perhaps less well known internationally, but also playing a significant role in the development of critical rigour in Indian literary studies, P.K. Rajan was Head of Department at the University of Kerala for twelve years. There he edited the journal *Littcrit*, a major vehicle for bringing new theoretical models into discussions of Indian literature that had been for a long time largely based on formalist close reading.

Dr Rajan went on to become the Vice-Chancellor of Kannur University from 2000 to 2004; during that time he built the university into a national research institution. Some of his own work is collected in *Contexts and Conflicts: Essays in Criticism* (2001) and he also edited the work of others, as in *Indian Literary Criticism in English* (2004). Prof. Rajan fell from from a train while travelling to a conference; he was 60.

Sympathies are extended to the families of both scholars and they will be greatly missed by all who work in Indian writing in English.
NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

ROBERT BALFOUR is Associate Professor and Head of the School of Language, Literacies, Media, and Drama Education at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (South Africa), where he teaches courses in Applied Language Studies and Literature in Education. He holds degrees from the University of Rhodes, Natal, and Cambridge respectively. Currently living in Durban, Robert is a published poet, writer, and painter.

MONICA BUNGARO has lectured at the University of Birmingham, England for several years and now teaches at the National University of Ireland, Maynooth, Ireland. Her main research interests are in African, Caribbean, Black British writing and more generally, in postcolonial studies. She has contributed to a number of anthologies including, *The Historical Companion to Postcolonial Literatures in English* (2005) and *Gender, Body and Sexuality in African Cultures and Literatures* (2005). Her book *Images of Women in Recent African Fiction in English* (New York, Peter Lang) is forthcoming.

EMMA COX is a PhD student at the Australian National University. She is currently researching recent Australian writing and theatre by and about asylum seekers. Her work has been published in journals in Australia and the United States. Emma is also a theatre critic for the Queensland *Courier-Mail*.

MAC FENWICK graduated from the University of Ottawa and Queen’s University and now teaches at Trent University in Peterborough, Canada. He has published and presented articles on Frederick Philip Grove, J.R.R. Tolkien, Drum magazine, Ngugi wa Thiong’o, Edward Said, Wilson Harris, Derek Walcott and Salman Rushdie. He is completing a book on the relation of local and global in postcolonial literature.

M. DOLORES HERRERO is Senior Lecturer in English and Postcolonial Literatures at the Department of English and German Philology at the University of Zaragoza, Spain. Her main research interests are Cultural, Film and Postcolonial Studies, and Australian and Indian Studies in particular. She has published a number of essays focusing on different literary and cultural issues in those fields and has co-edited, with Marita Nadal, *Margins in English and American Literature, Film and Culture* (1997). She has been the editor of *Miscelánea: A Journal of English and American Studies* since 1998.

MARGARET LENTA is an emeritus professor and senior research associate at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. Her research areas are eighteenth-century women’s letters and diaries and contemporary southern African writings. She has published many journal articles on contemporary South African fiction and co-edited *Momentum: On Recent South African Writing* (with M.J. Daymond & J.U. Jacobs, 1984) and *The Cape Diaries of Lady Anne Barnard, 1797–1798* (with
Basil Le Cordeur, 1999). A popular abridgement of these diaries will be published this year, under the title, *Paradise, the Castle and the Vineyard* (Wits University Press). Margaret is currently working on the novels of the Batswana author Unity Dow and on an analysis of the records of Cape slavery.

MAX LOMAS was born in South Australia and has lived in Singapore and the Pacific. He has worked as a hay carter, hardware storeman, gardener, book packer, grape picker, musician and teacher and currently lives in New South Wales, Australia.

KIMBERLEY MCMAHON-COLEMAN teaches at the Shoalhaven Campus of the University of Wollongong where she is completing her PhD part-time. Her thesis examines the use of shamanic figures in the works of Canadian and Australian Indigenous authors, including Alootook Ipellie and Sam Watson. Kimberley’s work has recently been published in *Australasian-Canadian Studies*, and she is a co-editor of the Association for Canadian Studies in Australia and New Zealand (ACSANZ) newsletter. She is also mother to a neurotic goldfish, two cats and two children.

MATTHEW MEAD, a PhD student at the University of Nottingham (UK), is currently researching the relationship between theories of postcolonial diaspora and models of transnational migration. Within this context, he is looking at how memory and the imagination inform the construction of home in literature of migration, particularly in the works of W.G. Sebald and Kazuo Ishiguro.

RON MORRIS’s poetry has appeared in the *Australian Weekend Review*, the *Atlanta Review* and *Southerly*. She has been awarded prizes in the Gwen Harwood and the Josephine Ulrick poetry competitions and is currently working on the collection, *Cold Water Coast*. She lives in Sydney, Australia.

SRILATA RAVI is a Senior Lecturer in European Languages and Studies at the University of Western Australia. She has published widely on Francophone Literatures and Cultures and is the author of *L’Inde dans le genre romanesque français depuis 1947* (1997) and co-editor of *Asia in Europe, Europe in Asia* (2004). She is currently writing a book on ethnicity and identity in Mauritian literature in French.

PAUL SHARRAD, Associate Professor in the English Literatures Program at the University of Wollongong, Australia, has published articles on Indian English writing in a range of postcolonial journals and has published a book on Raja Rao. He spent time in India at Dhvanyaloka and at the University of Trivandrum with Prof Rajan.

SANJAY SIRCAR is an independent scholar in various minor and marginal areas of literature and culture: folklore, nursery rhyme, folktale, art-fairytale, fantasy fiction, children’s literature, missionary novels, feminist revisioning novels and experiences of racial hybridity. His work has appeared in *Austria, Australia, Estonia, Germany, Italy, India, Japan, Singapore*, the U.K. and the U.S.
OUYANG YU, a published poet and novelist, is now Professor of Australian Literature in the English Department at Wuhan University, China. His forthcoming book of non-fiction, *On the Smell of an Oily Rag: Speaking English, Thinking Chinese and Living Australian*, will be published by Wakefield Press.
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