

1989

## On Eurocentric Critical Theory: Some Paradigms from the Texts and Sub-Texts of Post-Colonial Writing

Boidun Jeyifo

Follow this and additional works at: <https://ro.uow.edu.au/kunapipi>



Part of the [Arts and Humanities Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Jeyifo, Boidun, On Eurocentric Critical Theory: Some Paradigms from the Texts and Sub-Texts of Post-Colonial Writing, *Kunapipi*, 11(1), 1989.

Available at: <https://ro.uow.edu.au/kunapipi/vol11/iss1/13>

---

## On Eurocentric Critical Theory: Some Paradigms from the Texts and Sub-Texts of Post-Colonial Writing

### Abstract

As quiet as it is kept, the realisation is gaining wide currency in literary circles around the world that the volume of writing now coming from the non-Western, Third World countries far outstrips that emanating from the 'First World'. Moreover, it is also increasingly being recognized that this vast harvest, this cornucopia from the Third World contains some of the most interesting and innovative writing in contemporary literature. Think about it: if, with 'Anglophone', 'Francophone' or 'Lusophone' writing from the non-Western world you include writing in the most prominent literary languages of the Third World say, Arabic, Bengali, Chinese, Urdu, Gujarati, Swahili and Amharic, you can begin to get a grasp of the shifts in the densities and concentrations of the literary map of the world. But parallel to this phenomenal reconfiguration of the global balance of forces in the production of literature is the view also prevalent throughout the world, that the most penetrating, the most seminal criticism, metacriticism or 'theory' is coming from the metropolitan centres in Europe and America. Just how prevalent this view of a new international division of labour in the world of literature and criticism has become is afforded by a recent short but thought provoking article in no less a publication than *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, written by W.J.T. Mitchell (April 19, 1989). Mr. Mitchell is a professor of English at the University of Chicago and moreover, is editor of *Critical Inquiry*, one of the most influential academic journals of contemporary criticism and literary theory in the English-speaking world. Let me quote some salient observations from the article:

# On Eurocentric Critical Theory: Some Paradigms from the Texts and Sub-Texts of Post-Colonial Writing.

As quiet as it is kept, the realisation is gaining wide currency in literary circles around the world that the volume of writing now coming from the non-Western, Third World countries far outstrips that emanating from the 'First World'. Moreover, it is also increasingly being recognized that this vast harvest, this cornucopia from the Third World contains some of the most interesting and innovative writing in contemporary literature. Think about it: if, with 'Anglophone', 'Francophone' or 'Lusophone' writing from the non-Western world you include writing in the most prominent literary languages of the Third World say, Arabic, Bengali, Chinese, Urdu, Gujarati, Swahili and Amharic, you can begin to get a grasp of the shifts in the densities and concentrations of the literary map of the world. But parallel to this phenomenal reconfiguration of the global balance of forces in the production of literature is the view also prevalent throughout the world, that the most penetrating, the most seminal criticism, metacriticism or 'theory' is coming from the metropolitan centres in Europe and America. Just how prevalent this view of a new international division of labour in the world of literature and criticism has become is afforded by a recent short but thought-provoking article in no less a publication than *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, written by W.J.T. Mitchell (April 19, 1989). Mr. Mitchell is a professor of English at the University of Chicago and moreover, is editor of *Critical Inquiry*, one of the most influential academic journals of contemporary criticism and literary theory in the English-speaking world. Let me quote some salient observations from the article:

The most important new literature is emerging from the colonies – regions and peoples that have been economically or militarily dominated in the past – while the most provocative new literary criticism is emanating from the imperial centres that once dominated them – the industrial nations of Europe and America.

Horace noted long ago that the transfer of empire from Greece to Rome (the *translatio imperii*) was accompanied by a transfer of culture and learning (a *translatio studii*). Today the cultural transfer is no longer one-way. But what is the nature of

the transference going on between the declining imperial powers and their former colonies, and between contemporary literature and criticism?

Professor Mitchell's views and positions in this important article come from the liberal critical vanguardism of the American literary establishment, one that is particularly responsive to new currents, new directions from the 'non-canonical' traditions of both literature and criticism. Moreover, Professor Mitchell advances the view in this article that powerful and increasingly desperate and hysterical neo-conservative critics and scholars are up in arms against the 'reconceptualizations' and 'reconfigurations' now emerging in the world of literature and criticism and that an alliance, 'a positive, collaborative relationship between post-imperial criticism and post-colonial literature' might be needed to stave off this projected neo-conservative redoubt. This is an important, weighty observation and I would like to frame my reflections in this short essay around what I perceive to be its many ramifications.

The call of Professor Mitchell in this article for collaboration and solidarity between 'post-colonial literature' and 'post-imperial criticism' no doubt comes from a genuine, enlightened solicitude which relates itself to serious areas of cultural politics, even if the designated terms and entities of the collaboration – 'post-colonial literature' and 'post-imperial criticism' – are not so unproblematic [But more on this later]. The journal which Mr. Mitchell edits has been an important forum for important interrogations of canonical orthodoxies and exclusionary critical practices which ignore texts and traditions other than the hegemonic literary production and critical discourses of Europe and America. One can only wish that more journals and institutions would, like the one Mr. Mitchell directs, and which are strategically located in the apparatus of theoretical inquiry and critical discourse, be more responsive to, or even be more aware of developments and trends beyond the concerns and obsessions of a self-cocooned Western canonical enclave.

But it must be recognized that the solicitude and enthusiasms of many Western critics and scholars for non-Western, post-colonial literature, have behind them a problematic history which is encapsulated by that troubled, loaded buzz word 'Eurocentrism'. For if Eurocentrism has often expressed itself, in different forms of cultural racism, as a denial of, a supercilious condescension towards non-Western literary traditions, it is also often conversely expressed as a generous solicitude, an authenticating embrace which confers what it deems a badge of authenticity, for the non-Western

text, writer or whole literary traditions, only to be accosted with charges of paternalism and subtle forms of prejudice and will-to-domination.

At this late stage of the history of debates over imperialism and its discontents, one states the obvious by pointing out that Eurocentrism is a vast cultural and intellectual phenomenon which subsumes its more local and particular expressions in literary criticism, and now 'theory'. The work of contemporary writers like Aime Cesaire (*Discourse on Colonialism*), Eric R. Wolf (*Europe and the People Without History*), Edward Said (*Orientalism*), Johannes Fabian (*Time and the Other*) and Talal Asad (*Anthropology and the Colonial Encounter*), among others, show the dispersal of the phenomenon among disparate disciplines and fields of inquiry. All of which goes to demonstrate that without having the models and standards of the exacting scholarship and broad, capacious vision of these scholars in mind, one enters the terrain of discourse and counter-discourse on Eurocentrism at the risk of gross simplifications and unsuspected discursive traps. And need I add that this last observation is intended not only as a general cautionary nudge to literary criticism, which often purposes itself as a substitute for all of critical thought, but also as a reminder to myself about the lurking pitfalls of *this* discursive terrain.

It will thus be readily appreciated that I have chosen to approach the subject in this essay by way of a calculated detour through the discourses on Eurocentrism embedded in some selected literary texts. In such contexts a host of textual strategies and rhetorical mediations absorb and defamiliarize the tensions and sensitivities that discussions of Eurocentrism almost always generate. In particular I have chosen two texts of Derek Walcott, *Dream on Monkey Mountain* and *Pantomime* as paradigmatic deconstructions of the two types of Eurocentrism broadly hinted at above: the Eurocentrism which withholds, which excludes, which disdains; and that which embraces, invites, gives.

The distance covered in contemporary post-colonial writing in the debunking, the demythologization of Eurocentric claims to the embodiment of absolute Truth or Knowledge, especially of non-European peoples and societies, is, I believe, provided by the paradigmatic move in the dramaturgy of Derek Walcott from *Dream of Monkey Mountain* (1967) to *Pantomime* (1978) concerning the respective emblematic explorations in these two plays of the response of the 'native' as the Object of Eurocentric discursive, signifying and explanatory systems. A savage, iconoclastic, mythoclastic assault on the ethical-universal postulates of the Western intellectual traditions, and specifically the objective, positivist human sciences (like jurisprudence)

marks what we may identify as the epistemological theme of these plays, where 'theme' is an inaccurate, inadequate conceptual representation of these aspects of both Walcott's dramaturgy and a host of other post-colonial writers, from Achebe to Coetzee, from Soyinka to Rushdie, from Mariama Ba to Ama Ata Aidoo. We see this common iconoclastic impulse particularly in the characters of Corporal Lestrade and Moustique in *Dream on Monkey Mountain* and Jackson Philip in *Pantomime*. What powers this impulse is the thinking that 'white' domination is not only political and socio-economic, it is also, or aspires to total effectivity in the naming of things, in signifying and explanatory systems; in other words, it seeks to be an *epistemic* order of control and manipulation. Corporal Lestrade and Jackson Philip in particular deploy a surfeit of brilliant, witty conceits and tropes to debunk this epistemic, nomenclatural hegemony. But there are important, even decisive departures in the respective overall demythologizing impulse and postures of these two plays, and it is this pattern of differentiation which commends them as suggestive paradigms for the debates on Eurocentrism and critical theory.

Between Corporal Lestrade and Moustique in *Dream on Monkey Mountain* what we encounter is the 'native' who, having rejected both Eurocentric discursive colonization *and* autonomous indigenous epistemologies and ritual beliefs, can only lapse into a desperate cynicism, charlantanism, and in the case of Moustique, a convenient opportunism. The powerful 'healing' dream scene of Act One of the play renders this aspect of Moustique's vocation as an 'explainer', who, despising both the colonizer and the colonized and their respective panoply of signification, appeals to a Transcendent, omniscient Spirit [God] outside, beyond and above the contest, a Spirit in whom Moustique does not believe but only deploys in order to manipulate the colonized 'native' population:

#### MOUSTIQUE

Ah, ah you see, all you.

Ain't white priest come and nothing happen?

Ain't white doctor come and was agone still?

Ain't you take bush medicine, and no sweat break?

White medicine, bush medicine,  
not one of them work!

White prayers, black prayers,  
and still no deliverance!

And who heal the man?

Makak, Makak!

All your deliverance lie in this man.  
The man is God's messenger  
[He opens his haversack and holds it before him]  
So, further the cause, brothers and sisters.  
Further the cause,  
Drop what you have in there...  
God's work must be done  
and like Saint Peter self,  
Moustique, that's me,  
is Secretary-Treasurer

The logic of this cynically opportunist, self-cancelling, double assault on both Eurocentric epistemologies and signifying systems *and* the countermanding nativist response reaches its most brilliant, relentless articulation in the famous Apotheosis scene of the play [Scene Three, Part Two]. Walcott indisputably wrote this magnificent cautionary allegorization of the natives' revenge against what Gayatri Spivak has theorized as the totalizing 'epistemic violence' of imperialism with the spirit of Bandung active in his creative consciousness, the heady spirit in the Fifties and Sixties of 'emergent' Africa and Asia coming into their own and settling scores with their former colonial overlords. The allegorical power of the scene derives, I think, from Walcott's frank, unflinching engagement with the violence of Eurocentric signifying practices and explanatory systems, in their imbrication in the objective of imperialistic domination. It is indeed useful to note that Walcott has the following quote from Sartre's famous Introduction to Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* as an epigraph to Part Two of *Dream on Monkey Mountain*, the movement of the dramatic action of the play which brings the nihilistic confrontation with Eurocentrism to a head:

Let us add, for certain other carefully selected unfortunates, that other witchery of which I have already spoken: Western culture. If I were them, you may say, I'd prefer my mumbo-jumbo to their Acropolis. Very good: you've grasped the situation. But not altogether, because you aren't them – or not yet. Otherwise you would know that they can't choose; they must have both. Two worlds; that makes two bewitchings; they dance all night and at dawn they crowd into the churches to hear Mass; each day the split widens. Our enemy betrays his brothers and becomes our accomplice; his brothers do the same thing. The status of 'native' is a nervous condition introduced and maintained by the settler among colonized people with their consent.

Only against the background of this phantasmic but deadly serious agonistic encounter does the arraignment and trial of the whole of 'Western culture' in this scene make 'sense', a 'sense', a logic which in fact was later

to be acted out by Idi Amin in his gratuitous antics against some of the most resonant colonialist symbols and tropes of Eurocentrism such as the famous enactment in which he was borne aloft in a litter by four white men, this as a parodistic signification on the 'White man's burden'. It is, I think, necessary to quote from the scene at some length:

[All have assembled. The CORPORAL steps forward, then addresses MAKAK]

CORPORAL

Inventor of history! [Kisses MAKAK's foot]

MAKAK

I am only a shadow

CORPORAL

Shh. Quiet, my prince.

MAKAK

A hollow God. A phantom.

CORPORAL

Wives, warriors, chieftains! The law takes no sides, it changes the complexion of things. History is without pardon, justice hawk-swift, but mercy everlasting. We have prisoners and traitors, and they must be judged swiftly. The law of a country is the law of that country. Roman law, my friends, is not tribal law. Tribal law, in conclusion, is not Roman law. Therefore, wherever we are, let us have justice. We have no time for patient reforms. Mindless as the hawk, impetuous as lions, as dried of compassion as the bowels of a jackal. Elsewhere, the swiftness of justice is barbarously slow, but our progress cannot stop to think. In a short while, the prisoners shall be summoned, so prepare them, Basil and Pamphilon. First, the accused, and after them, the tributes.

[The prisoners are presented]

Read them, Basil!

BASIL

They are Noah, but not the son of Ham, Aristotle, I'm skipping a bit, Abraham Lincoln, Alexander of Macedon, Shakespeare, I can cite relevant texts, Plato, Copernicus, Galileo and perhaps Ptolemy, Christopher Marlowe, Robert E. Lee, Sir John Hawkins, Sir Francis Drake, The Phantom, Mandrake the Magician [The TRIBES are laughing] It's not funny, my Lords, Tarzan, Dante, Sir Cecil Rhodes, William Wilberforce, the unidentified author of The Song of Solomon, Lorenzo de Medici, Florence Nightingale, Al Jolson, Horatio Nelson, and, but why go on? Their crime, whatever their plea, whatever extenuation of circumstances, whether of genius or geography, is that they are indubitably, with the possible exception of Alexandre Dumas, Sr. and Jr., and Alexis, I think it is Pushkin, white. Some are dead and cannot speak for themselves, but a drop of milk is enough to condemn them, to banish them from the archives of the bo-leaf and the papyrus, from the waxen table and the tribal stone. For you, my Lords, are shapers of history. We await your judgement, o tribes.

TRIBES

Hang them!

'Their crime, whatever their plea, whatever extenuation of circumstances, whether of genius or geography, is that they are ... indubitably

white'. The utter seriousness, the implacable, crystalline logic of this absurd arraignment – Shakespeare and Al Jolson, Galileo and the KKK – can only be grasped if we pluck from its dispersal in disparate semiotic contexts and signifiatory locations the coding and re-codings of 'white' as the unmarked marker, 'white' fetishized as ultimate repository of Beauty, Reality, Value: 'Whites Only', 'Honorary Whites' (a term officially accorded the Japanese in South Africa, but not other Asian national groups like the Chinese and Indians), the white-robed and hooded 'Knights of Klu-Klux-Klan', the white anthropomorphic iconography of divinity and sainthood in Christianity, white bleaching creams. All these interfuse with more specifically *epistemological* coordinates: Western 'white' civilization *racialized* (and not only by the Nazis) and encoded as the ultimate marker of Truth, Knowledge, Rationality in the elaborate constructs of 'the great chain of being', as Arthur O. Lovejoy informs us in his famous treatise of that title. Derek Walcott is barely in control of the relentlessly parodistic smashing of icon and fetishes in this play, given the utter negativity of the epistemic revolt, itself a response to the unstinting negation projected by *this* particular paradigm of a Eurocentrism which withholds and excludes absolutely. At the end of it all, Makak has exorcised the demons and phantoms of his bewitched, schizophrenic subjectivity; but he does so away in the mountains to which he now withdraws completely, into a private space of subjectivist autarky. He cannot be the 'King of Africa', the 'Conquering Lion of Judah' of his dreams since he has seen how hollow that turns out to be in a world never quite free of both Eurocentric 'epistemic violence' and the giddy paroxysms of nihilistic revolt and manipulation which it engenders: *aut ceasar, aut nihil*.

Although it has a much smaller cast of characters, *Pantomime* encapsulates a much more engrossing and dialectical frame of referents of epistemic Eurocentrism and its demythologization than *Dream on Monkey Mountain*. The dramaturgic 'trick' employed to achieve this seems derived from the principles of dramatic form and performance styles developed by Athol Fugard and the South African anti-apartheid theatrical movement of Barney Simon, John Kani, Winston Ntshona, the Market Theatre and others; small casts of two or three characters constantly changing roles, constantly constructing and deconstructing, totalizing and detotalizing social wholes, social macrocosms and their fragments and microcosms. A 'perfect' formalistic vehicle for a drama which seeks the epistemic deconstruction of the texts and signs of Eurocentrism.

The figural, metaphoric strategy which establishes *Pantomime* as a decisively different paradigm of epistemic demythologization than *Dream on Monkey Mountain* is that the 'text' deployed in this play has been devised out

of Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, a classic 'megatext' of Eurocentrism. Moreover, the roles are now reversed, a reversal significantly voluntarily proposed and *demande*d by the white character, Harry Trewe, a retired British actor who has removed himself from personal, domestic and professional disasters and decline in Britain to the island of Tobago in the Caribbean. Here he establishes the 'Castaway Guest House' and hires a retired Trinidadian calypsonian and carnival maestro, Jackson Philip, as his 'factotum'. So as to draw guests to his decrepit establishment Trewe devises an improvisational script reversing the roles, the identities, the figural binarisms of Defoe's classic text: the white Trewe will play Friday; the black Philip will play Crusoe. But Harry Trewe's project comes only partly out of business calculations; he is also a liberal, a progressive who insists on the eddifying potentiality of such an entertainment for both the white tourists to the island and the local black creole community:

JACKSON

That is white-man fighting. Anyway, Mr. Trewe, I feel the fun finish; I would like, with your permission, to get up now and fix up the sun deck. 'Cause when rain fall...'

HARRY

Forget the sun deck. I'd say, Jackson, that we've come closer to a mutual respect, and that things need not get that hostile. Sit, and let me explain what I had in mind.

JACKSON

I take it that's an order?

HARRY

You want it to be an order? Okay, it's an order.

JACKSON

It didn't sound like no order.

HARRY

Look, I'm a liberal, Jackson, I've done the whole routine. Aldermaston, Suez, Ban the Bomb, Burn the Bra, Pity the Poor Pakis, et cetera. I've eventried jumping up to the steel band at Notting Hill Gate, and I'd no idea I'd wind up in this ironic position of giving orders, but if the new script I've been given says: HARRY TREWE, HOTEL MANAGER, then I'm going to play Harry Trewe, Hotel Manager, to the hilt, damnit. So sit down! Please. Oh, goddamnit, sit ... down ...

(Jackson sits. Nods)

Good. Relax. Smoke. Have a cup of tepid coffee. I sat up from about three this morning, working out this whole skit in my head.

(Pause)

Mind putting that hat on for a second, it will help my point. Come on. It'll make things clearer.

(He gives Jackson the goatskin hat. Jackson, after a pause, puts it on)

JACKSON

I'll take that cigarette.

(Harry hands over a cigarette)

HARRY

They've seen that stuff, time after time. Limbo, dancing girls, fire-eating...

JACKSON

Light.

HARRY

Oh, sorry.

(He lights Jackson's cigarette)

JACKSON

I listening.

HARRY

We could turn this little place right here into a little cabaret, with some very witty acts. Build up the right audience. Get an edge on the others. So, I thought. Suppose I get this material down to two people. Me and ... well, me and somebody else. Robinson Crusoe and Man Friday. We could work up a good satire, you know, on the master-servant – no offense – relationship. Labour-management, white-black, and so on ... Making some trenchant points about topical things, you know. Add that show to the special dinner for the price of one ticket ...

Things do not, of course, work out the way Trewe's script envisions a revision of *Robinson Crusoe*. For one thing, Trewe's revision does not go far enough for Philip. Philip renames Friday Thursday. He renames all the props and paraphenalia of survival and 'civilization' that master and servant, colonizer and colonized have to share. And he disagrees violently with Trewe over what spiritual qualities sustained Crusoe on the island and allows him to establish dominion over it, its flora and fauna, and Friday. The twists and turns, the explosive negative racial and cultural material thrown up by this encounter are made bearable and commensurable only by the powerfully enabling and metaphorically suggestive fact that both men have been actors, performers, entertainers. The performance idioms of the English music hall and the Trinidadian calypsonian carnival become vehicles of thorough going textual revisions of Defoe's classic novel and deconstructive assault on a vast array of cultural systems and codes which have defined the encounter of the colonizer and the colonized. At the end of it all, Trewe finds that the 'pantomime' cannot be played innocently; there is too much at stake:

HARRY

Look, I'm sorry to interrupt you again, Jackson, but as I – you know – was watching you, I realized it's much more profound than that; that it could get offensive. We're trying to do something light, just a little pantomime, a little satire, a little picong. But if you take this thing seriously, we might commit Art, which is a kind of crime in this society .. I mean, there'd be a lot of things there that people .. well, it would make them think too much, and well, we don't want that ... we just want a little ... entertainment.

JACKSON

How do you mean, Mr. Trewe?

HARRY

Well, I mean if you ... well, I mean. If you did the whole thing in reverse ... I mean, okay, well, all right ... you've got this black man .. no, no ... all right.

You've got this man who is black, Robinson Crusoe, and he discovers this island on which there is this white cannibal, all right?

JACKSON  
Yes. That is, after he has killed the goat ...

HARRY  
Yes, I know, I know. After he has killed the goat and made a ... the hat, the parasol, and all of that ... and, anyway, he comes across this man called Friday.

JACKSON  
How do you know I mightn't choose to call him Thursday? Do I have to copy every .. I mean, are we improvising?

HARRY  
All right, so it's Thursday. He comes across this naked white cannibal called Thursday, you know. And then look at what would happen. He would have to start to ... well, he'd have to, sorry ... This cannibal, who is a Christian, would have to start unlearning his Christianity. He would have to be taught ... I mean ... he'd have to be taught by this – African ... that everything was wrong, that what he was doing ... I mean, for nearly two thousand years ... was wrong. That his civilization, his culture, his whatever, was ... horrible. Was all ... wrong. Barbarous, I mean, you know. And Crusoe would then have to teach him things like, you know, about Africa, his gods, patamba, and so on ... and it would get very, very complicated, and I suppose ultimately it would be very boring, and what we'd have on our hands would be ... would be a play, and not a little pantomime ...

JACKSON  
I'm too ambitious?

HARRY  
No, no, the whole thing would have to be reversed; white would become black, you know ...

JACKSON  
(Smiling)  
You see, Mr. Trewe, I don't see anything wrong with that, up to now.

HARRY  
Well, I do. It's not the sort of thing I want, and I think you'd better clean up, and I'm going inside, and when I come back I'd like this whole place just as it was, I mean, just before everything started.

JACKSON  
You mean you'd like it returned to its primal state? Natural? Before Crusoe finds Thursday? But, you see, that is not history. That is not the world.

HARRY  
No, no. I don't give an Eskimo's fart about the world, Jackson. I just want this little place here *cleaned up*, and I'd like you to get back to fixing the sun deck. Let's forget the whole matter. Righto. Excuse me.

The play however does not end on this note of a return to a 'colonial' *status quo ante*, at least on the individual, person-to-person, existential level. Indeed, Trewe and Philip both ultimately abandon completely the distance, formality and protocols of employer and employee, 'white' and 'black', English and Creole that had prevented them from playing the revised text of *Robinson Crusoe* to the bitter end. And that is precisely the 'point' of this play (is it?): There is a history of Eurocentrism; Eurocentrism is also *in* history, including significantly, present history; we can neither innocently

re-enact the text(s) of the 'old' history, nor shake the texts of the 'new' history completely free of the old texts. I think Walcott is suggesting that if this is the case, the point is not to lapse into despair or mutual isolation but to find the integrity to acknowledge the violence of that history. All the same, it is significant that both Trewe and Philip (and Walcott) back off from a complete engagement with the logic and dynamics of the *power*, or more appropriately, the will-to-power, that inheres in both the constructions of Eurocentrism and the deconstructions of oppositional nativist texts, codes and languages.

The two paradigms of the interrogation and contestation of Eurocentrism that we see in *Dream on Monkey Mountain* and *Pantomime* do not by any means exhaust the range of the literary exploration of epistemologies and discourses of colonization and decolonization in contemporary post-colonial writing. Where do we, for instance, place Achebe's *Arrow of God*? Ezeulu instantly recognizes the connection between the new religion, the new teaching and the incipient reconfigurations of power relationships generated by the new colonialism and its peculiar regime of peripheral, *administrative* capitalism (as distinct from the *settler* capitalism of colonialism in other parts of Africa). Ezeulu decides to send one son into tutelage of the new 'teaching', to be on the safe side. But Ezeulu loses both ways: the new colonialism completely marginalises the great store of knowledge and wisdom that Ezeulu's priestly vocation and function draws upon (including lunar observations and calendrical calculations); it also presents him with a son, who having served his tutelage, comes with a dislocated subjectivity, an alien 'soul'. And where also, for another important text, do we place J.M. Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians*? The protagonist, the Magistrate, is a scion of a humane, skeptical, courageous and conscientized rationalism. As he contemplates the present history of (a particular) Empire running to its conclusion, he also ruminates on History. He does this by trying to unravel the message or meaning of the cryptic scripts and writing that his excavations of the ruins of a previous empire have thrown up. Yes, he muses, the 'barbarians' will outlast 'us', defeat 'us' (we deserve defeat); but will 'they' have the capacity and the inclination to understand or interpret 'us' the way we have done 'our' predecessors? One wonders what Ezeulu and the Magistrate would have had to say to each other if the accidents or contingencies of history or literary creation had brought such types into direct contact.

I see the value of these two paradigms as indicating some *sub-texts* for critical theory's engagement of Eurocentrism. One can only indicate these in a very general, condensed and schematic fashion here. First, *Dream on*

*Monkey Mountain* suggests a nativist moralism in which the rejection of 'Europe' and Eurocentrism is taken to its extreme limit. It is perhaps not unfair to see this as analogous to certain forms of the 'Black Aesthetic' rubric of the Sixties and early Seventies in the United States, and certain expressions of the 'decolonization' poetics in Africa in the Seventies and early Eighties, especially that associated with Chinweizu, Madubiike and Jemie in their famous (or notorious) book, *Toward the De-colonization of African Literature*. The underlying impulse here is a total change of nomenclature, models, inspiration; the call for an autochthonous, pristine, originary aesthetic is so total that *any* trace or influence of European techniques and forms in literature, and any European critics and schools in literary criticism is condemned *ad initio*. I think *Dream on Monkey Mountain* effectively dramatizes the falsity and pitfalls of the 'decolonization' claimed by this form of nativism.

*Pantomime*, I think, implies a radical relativism in its complete deconstruction of both Eurocentrism and nativism; this evidently recalls certain forms of post-structuralist and deconstructivist assault on essentialism and the 'metaphysics of presence' in the canons, and the celebration of indeterminacy. As analogically dramatised in *Pantomime* this position invites its own 'deconstruction' and interrogation: what is the value of a radical relativism which carries out a necessary demythologization of essentialized Eurocentrism and nativism but evades or occludes the violence of the power relations between them by tacitly assuming an equivalence of either actual power consolidation between them, or the will-to-power of their pundits and adherents? Let us reinscribe this interrogation into its concrete articulation in the global balance of forces of world literature study at the present time: what differentiated consolidations and sedimentation of power do we encounter in the world of global institutional cultural politics between, say, Derrida, de Man and the Euro-American deconstructors and post-structuralists on the one hand, and Chinweizu and his 'de-colonizing' nativists on the other?

## The Texts of 'Mother India'

'For the first time in world history, mechanical reproduction emancipates the work of art from its parasitical dependence on ritual'.<sup>1</sup> So wrote Walter Benjamin in his brilliant essay entitled 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction'. The question of the primacy of an original fades into insignificance as a wholly new concept of 'reproducibility' comes into existence. The question is no longer one of 're-presentation' but essentially one of 're-production'. With a deft shift in emphasis Benjamin suggests that mechanical reproduction now irrevocably replaces ritual by politics. Reformulated, the mystery surrounding the original, which is traditionally conceived as shrouded, removed, in short an Other, is replaced by an involvement in the processes of reproduction and response. Where the reproduction of a painting is read through an original, perceived or absent, the filmic text is the origin of its meaning, for it represents nothing other than its own self: there is no image beyond the filmic shot, no 'real' (the authentic, ritualistic presence), no godhead or ultimate source of meaning, a perceptual signified, behind the image. It is constructed through the lens, and exists only because of it. Not surprisingly, it was seen as a travesty of art, a subversion, essentially, of the mimetic principle which gave art a point of reference and even a legitimacy. The sort of studied, careful response that art demanded is replaced now, as Benjamin argues, by an ever-changing movement. He quotes Duhamel's reactions to film as being typical of high culture's barely concealed uneasiness on the subject. Instead of that difference which marks art, the difference, that is, of historical 'placement' and detachment, the film now makes it possible for art to enter popular culture and collapse its dichotomies. Its real antecedents are not painting but architecture and the epic poem, forms which have a participatory function in culture. Their aesthetic qualities are, in short, functional. Benjamin cites Duhamel again:

[the film is] a pastime for helots, a diversion for uneducated, wretched, worn-out creatures who are consumed by their worries ... a spectacle which requires no concentration and presupposes no intelligence ... which kindles no light in the heart and awakens no hope other than the ridiculous one of someday becoming a 'star' in Los Angeles.<sup>2</sup>