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Abstract
KUNAPIPI

VOLUME XIV NUMBER 2
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Kunapipi is a tri-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. Manuscripts should be double-spaced with footnotes gathered at the end, should conform to the MHRA (Modern Humanities Research Association) Style Sheet. Wherever possible the submission should be on disc (software preferably WordPerfect or Macwrite) and should be accompanied by a hard copy.

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COVER:
Peter Minshall: The Merry Monarch (He Who Laughs Last), the sardonic king of Carnival is Colour (1987).

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

I wish to thank Victor Chang for agreeing to be guest editor of this issue. The idea was to present the highlights from the recent International ACLALS conference held in Jamaica in August 1992, of which Victor was one of the co-organisers. We had expected to be able to include more material but the twenty-minute papers given at the conference turned into 40-45-minute ones when they were sent! So we agreed to make this a special Caribbean issue and include the other papers in the next issue of *Kunapipi* which will follow very quickly after this issue. This means that the special issue on women’s writing will be the first issue for 1993. More details of the contents of the women’s issue will be included in the next issue of *Kunapipi*.

ANNA RUTHERFORD
Ian Adam

XAYMACA
— for Lorne Macdonald

The slave ship called at Ocho Rios.

My wife is in the photograph, the ship is steaming away to the right of her shoulder, heading towards the horizon as she poses in the warm Caribbean sea.

Behind me as I snap the picture Dunn's River waterfall, jammed with people climbing the ledges up its 600 feet, holding hands in chains.

'What did you think of Jamaica,' asked Linda Cameron.

The ship was enormous in the harbour a hotel containing the vacationers whose vacation was the ship. It squatted, the ship. It was an angel food cake. Layered with stories. It crushed the harbour sweetly. Inside were the rituals of captivity.

In Ocho Rios the human chains climbing the waterfall, in the town market chains of those too poor to ever leave the island selling to cruise ship vacationers, captive of the tour.

The tourists see those living off tourism, the locals see the tourists.
It's all authentic.

'What do you think of it here,' asked Claire Harris.

In the National Gallery Edna Manley's 'The Sun Goes Down' is a magnificence neither head nor nature a brown humanoid sun whose face is both rays and night, ours and not ours,

strong as Henry Moore or Giacometti but too female, too Jamaican, for fame.

A mobile also there, unauthored, grit dirt floor cig-butted littered leads counter-clockwise through corrugated iron panel walls covered with torn posters and graffiti ('lie down girl me stick it in') to a dead body and cast-off bottles lying in rubbish: a vicious spiral, anonymous, Jamaican, unrecognized.

Thirty percent of Kingston population is squatters. A sign in shanty town reads 'MAN WHO STEAL HERE, HIM GET HEAD CHOP OFF.'

'Don't you always see me laughing?' said Eduardo the Kingston driver, as we planned the excursion to Ocho Rios.

he gave jolly comments on points of interest all along the way.

The sugar cane grew thick, fibrous, higher than men. It was harvested by slaves
captive to a money chain.
It crushed the harbour with sweetness.
It was a vicious circle.

Matthew 'Monk' Lewis
author and slave-owner
wrote a story about Jamaica,
'The Isle of Devils.' The devils
are not plantation owners,
but blacks. His blacks. His story
multi-layered
dark sugar.

He dies of yellow fever
en route to England.
Buried at sea
his body does not sink,
is last seen
floating back to Jamaica. Lewis
circles back
to the Ocho Rios ship.
His story
sugar, white-layered.

Eduardo had smoked ganga at Ocho,
I could see it in his eyes,
he drove silently and viciously back to the hotel.
Inside Passage

Only once in my whole life I travel a far distance by sea. Is when I make the voyage out from Trinidad to university in Ireland; from a way of seeing everything ‘double’: so one part you see the African-Trinidad way; the very same time you see story-book British. You cultured. A good word when you think what is milk culture. Thing so automatic, seem so necessary to respect you ain’t even know you doing it, eh. Still it got this sour aftertaste. I move from that to seeing myself as ‘other’. I telling you straight; was a singular experience. Take ten days or so from Trinidad to England. It begin a trip what carry me five hundred years. So when I hear the theme of this conference ‘voyages’, what come to mind is plunging seas, a grey ship, coming home. Talking my talk here today, it going be only about them seas. I dividing this into two: 1) How all them voyage I take, that emigration, how I suspect it shape what I writing; 2) That word, - woman, how it come too too clear aint no accident it mean what it mean. That also kneading the work.

Ever since I know myself, everybody take it for granted I going be a writer. So how come it take me 16 years to get start? I come from that class a West Indian what never really take this race thing serious. On the whole they behave like is somebody belch at table; they too polite to notice. I remember when I about eleven I tell them home about some Expat teaching at the convent. My father first he laugh, then he say the world full of fools why should she be different. Then he get serious and he say nobody what anybody really good leave England to come to a dot in the Caribbean. Is what I needed then and I grateful to him. But looking back from now, I see this ambivalence. Every body else live at the centre of they world but not us. Still my parents was fierce in they pride, so it take a while for me to accept that along with all the classist stuff I absorb, it have so much what bound to be racist.... I get to Ireland and pretty soon I want a language; I want Gods; I stop writing.

Now this culture thing: Is a real callalloo of myth, religion, language, ethics, economic pattern, science and art all bubbling together, you know. And we right down there in the pot bubbling along with it. We an everything else relate, an is all-a-we, an it aint have no way to escape. Body and mind you is what you culture is. It become a kind of seasoning the whole world taste of it; and the world aint have any other way to taste.
body else use water from they own well to make base. In these island, what ever we class or race, we using water for-so from a European well. Is so we ending up hand in hand with a culture what try to reduce we to nothing. Is so sometime, somewhere, we bound to find weself obozkee. Allyuh see this all all the time at these conference when all them idea- logical, them critical terms is always an everytime something other people come up with. Now is how any a we could think that European rules of organising ain’t consciously or unconsciously going wipe we out, especially where topic and style ups an reflect what actually going down? On the other side we trap in a economic reality. Some of we, what want to eat, aint got no choice, cept irony.

But it have a worse thing: I cant imagine a writer what aint love language, but this language I love, aint sweet on me. No matter how you look at it the more real we be, we Africans in the Americas, the more we out there on the edge. It clear is time for we to start thinking for we self about we self in the world, laying down we own string and following it to the end. For those of we what cant eat in the Islands, and is more and more of we, is the most important thing. Because I telling you straight, out there where it aint have anything to hide behind, we got nothing to tell the children. They aint dumb; they see the ole talk aint working anywhere. Is time we reinterpret the signs. Otherwise is another generation we risk ing. And dont bother mamaguying yourself; it aint have nothing to do with class.

Any how, yes, my mother used was to say never play game by anybody else rule. Meaning if I aint play slave no body could play master. I begin to see I get a real opportunity here with this language thing/this interpretation thing ... it take awhile before I could use it.

Now it aint possible to write serious without choosing. People what born with a deep down proud, they can’t Naipaul. In fact any kind of victim shuffle, it out. That only leave you with one choice and that is the choice to know for youself. Knowing for youself mean you have to know not only who you really is but where you really is. Now after Europe I aint know nothing that count except that one thing... (I better say right here eh, nobody beat me up; nobody spit on me; this landlady do me a real favour, tell me I in her house under false pretence: Claire Harris couldn’t possibly be your real name.) After Jamaica I know a little more. Mostly what I aint going to do. In Trinidad, I realize nobody ready for me. (In 1965 I say I making a rule in my English class... unless youself white I aint marking no story with white hero. Them days, you read children story in those elite school and all the people have blue eye. Well is uproar in the staff room. They say I racist; I crushing chile.) Eventually I pick myself up an I leave. I did get a job in New Zealand but life take a tum in me skin and I end up in Canada.

Now is one thing to live in a country as student, is another thing to enter they market place. Is a worse thing when people see you propose to eat
you food/drink you music/and dress you dress. I learn living there. 1) A West Indian person living away got to decide for she one self what in the callaloo matter to she. 2) It aint have no way of being other than as member of you own group. And whether you like it or no you place in opposition. Now it have oppositional site an oppositional site. If you talk you private life, if you want to scream racism, that’s fine. They custom to that. If you want to write about Trinidad that is fine too. Be real real careful if you start looking deep at the society; be even more careful if you start laughing. Though in true laugh is only a way of dealing with this looking business. This looking close is the hardest part; mostly what you find it terrifying. Anyway I start to read serious because I had was to find for myself the source of all them crazy ideas about Africans these societies have. And the even crazier ideas about themselves. I start traveling with me eyes open. I remember this idea lamblassing me that what I write have to be different. Still it have this whole cloud of dead white man complete with Austen, and Eliot hanging over one shoulder. They grow me up in a house full of books and female ancestor stories. Grandmother, Aunts, Great Aunts everybody proud for so and full of words. So this even more demanding cloud of dead black women on the other shoulder waiting to see what I go make with what they win for me. I was paralyze. Finally, I take a year off for Africa. Was 1974.

I only had was to land, three weeks later the dam burst. I start writing. So when I meet up with John Pepper Clark it had this sheaf of trembling poems clutch in my hand. He mentor me for long enough. Looking bade, I did really need Africa. Them people aint have a clue what it mean to lose you self. And I find out I have a world view; and I find out just how much water it had in my wine. I’se a West Indian; I descend from people what had to create themself in the West, eh. For me it come clear. There aint no way to graft a Yoruba self onto the West Indian self; You got to surrender to Africa completely. By then I did have enough surrender; enough of other people culture. I finally free to begin finding the New World African. Of course I return to Canada full of Africa. And proud as hell. I soon see is contain I cant contain all that in 20 or 40 lines. Is so I begin journeying with the long poem. Is just fact that thousand mile of prairie, sky gone to forever out side my window make the outer landscape mirror the inner one.

I start myself up as a public poet. I want to say this is what it mean to be alive today. This is what it mean to be human. Everybody like they shock about what going on now they decolonise the rest of Europe. Aint no surprise to me. Is not the same thing happen in India, in Africa? Is not that civilisation what haul we here to lock we down in they stink all the way from Africa? Aint they wipe out whole peoples in the Caribbean, in Africa? God know where else! (And is guns I talking not disease.) Aint civilisation wipe out half the European Jews? Aint it the other half of
those self-same European Jews what wiping out Palestinians? Aint half the world confuse technology with something special they call ‘civilisation’.

My subject, it seem to me, this minute (notice all them weasel words I throwing at you) my subject is what different between that superior moral image, all that moral philosophy all them colonising societies fool themselves with. (And is all I really mean: the usual suspects, plus most of them in the Americas, Far/Near/Middle East, Ethiopia and all the rest of them in Africa, the Zulu and so) and how violent, how in truth it uncaring; how it anti-life. How it most primitive in it basic tribal insistence. And when I say primitive here I mean peoples what still think any woman/and the man over the hill aint fully human. Boil down what happening all over the ‘developed’ world that is what it truly is. That primitive. In such a space I ain’t got nothing to lose. Cept myself. So I set up to counter all them image of Africans, all them image of women, all image of ‘civilisation as we know it’ what they re-colonizing the globe with, for image what a little closer to what I myself see really happening.

Now this feminism thing: is a matter of ownership. All over the world societies feel they owning they women. They think it natural as breathing. What difference, it only in degree. In the Americas is one in four have the subtlety of the fist.

It have judge what say a man could rape you, and you bound to carry he thing. It have judge what say domestic violence different; like domestic science I suppose is part of homemaking; It have judge what lock up woman to protect she foetus, but any man could damage he sperm: drink, drugs, chemicals, you got to carry it. It have politician talking ‘family values’, what they mean keep woman in the market place, preferably part time, that way you just dont bother with fair payment. That way as a langniappe you get control. It have politician what fraid to outlaw automatic weapon; so the next maniac could shoot 7 women engineers instead of fourteen. An I aint even going get started on Anita Hill; or on them so what raping they girl child.

Voyaging through these things what is one thing, what like the sea and cant divide, what is me/African/female/of the Americas, lead to charge my poetry overtly political. Is like saying I make poetry out of words. It have anybody who work aint political? Some of we overtly support the status-quo, and some of we don’t. A more real point is me own participation in Canada, it hegenomic role. (After all what I doing is teaching people, who thinking I cant really influence, how to use the verbal tool like a boss. And I teach them because is live well I like to live well.) Some of this insinuate itself into the work.

If I could, is rupture I would want to rupture this world and make it back safe for all-a-we. But as I dont believe in omelette, so I trying to rupture the idea of limits, of expectation in form. I does always talk story; even so I write a layered kinda poetry. I like to fool around with words, I like even the way they line up, the way they look on the page. I like to
see the way they different ways of meaning on the line support what I wanting to say deep inside, an still leave space for the reader to create she own thing. Is so I move in to the poem as a ship I buy for meself. I plant my flag where I feel like. And I take it over.

Vincent O. Cooper

1733: ST. JOHN, DANISH WEST INDIES

A conch shell declares
Their destiny
Drummers echo crisp commands;
Two bussals and creoles blend
Thirty tongues
In martial orchestry,
Defying Babel’s curse.

No confusion of African tongues here;
No blueprint of Popul Vuh.

Legba’s supreme sorcery
Cheats Werewolf of his prey.

Ancestral
Drumbeat of Atsime
Dub-bl-talk of Assortor
Rap and rim of Hounto:
Open our ears;
May we hearken to Bilal’s call to worship;
May we hear Askia’s call to build ...

December, 1990
MAHOGANY (I)

For centuries
My race has been
discovered
Cut up into colonies
Trucked to riversides
Fettered and floated downstream
To labor on golden calves of Western Idolatry:
Machine
Computer
Tank
IMP policy;
Yet my race stands tall like the ceiba
Its sculptured roots
Wedded to a destiny of soil

(1987)

MAHOGANY (II)

sins taim befoo
dem a diskova aawi
dem a kot up aawi
ina kalani
put pan dat
dem a put aawi pan truck
an a tek aawi a rivasaid
an a cheen aawi
to machin
to kompuuta
to tank
to IMP palisi
to mek aawi swet
an krai lang waata
bot insted a dat
aawi stan op street and stang laika CEIBA trii...

(Aug. 18, 1992)
MAHOGANY (III)

It have century
moe still
they discovering us
cutting us up
into colony
moe still
they trucking us
to belize an demerara river
fetter us
to machine
to computer
to tank
to IMF;
we sweat all
for dem and
moe still
in spite of that
we uncurl we spine
moe still
we stand up
tall like the Ceiba
and look in sky face.

(Aug. 18, 1992)

Claire Harris and Vincent O. Cooper are joint authors of 'Mahogany (III)'. 
CRY LONG WATA

Cry, Tegreman¹, cry long wata;
You let Sir Thomas² tek way you daughta.
Cry, Tegreman, whenever you in de mood;
You let Vulture come and tek way you food.
Bawl blue, bawl blood;
Just like when Wingfield river³ flood.
Ton Sukunya⁴; ton vampire;
Suck the blood and set him pon hell fire.
Whistle in de mountain;
Babble in de brook;
Rustle in de trees;
And possess de bees.
Sting and bite;
Torture fo' spite
Crawl in he bedroom;
And into he bed,
Nip him whenever he put dong he head.
Haunt him by night.
Harass him by day.
Mek him know dat fo' he sins he must pay.
Cry, Tegreman, Cry long wata;
You let Vulture come and tek way you Knife;
You let Vulture come and tek way you Wife;
You let Vulture come and tek way you Life!
Cry, Tegreman, cry long wata;
You sure meet you doom wid dat Man Warner.

NOTES

1. Tegreman – the Carib cacique living on St. Christopher/St. Kitts when the British colonists, led by Sir Thomas Warner arrived.
2. Sir Thomas Warner, first Governor of St Kitts, Marina Warner’s ancestor.
3. Wingfield River – here poetically associated with the massacre at Bloody Ghut in which the last organized resistance effort of the Caribs was crushed.
4. Sukunya – local version of the legendary vampire figure.
The Voyage of the Good Ship ‘Commonwealth’

An Allegory

The good ship ‘Commonwealth’ was launched from an expansionist dockyard in the 1960s and set sail with an enthusiastic crew and excited passengers. Thirty years on, both passengers and crew are wondering if their vessel is not something between Noah’s Ark and a tramp steamer unsuccessfully trying to work off a cargo of toxic waste into the mangroves.

In the wheelhouse, opinion is divided between sailing anywhere to stay afloat and to keep the rigging in good repair, and not sailing any further until it becomes clear where the ship is, where it should be going, and why. Many on board have decided they never did like the Company much, the stern is disfigured with the graffitti of successive attempts to rename the vessel, the nationalists are homesick and sneaking off to their bunks, while octopus-like creatures, *(euroamericus opportunus)*, keep slithering over the gunwales, so that it is no longer clear who is on board and who is not. Worst of all, the ship is constantly tacking to avoid being rammed and sunk by a huge, sinister, spectral vessel named *La Postmod*.

If we look back almost thirty years to the launch of Commonwealth literature we find a discipline marked by an energetic and expansionist enthusiasm. Ontologically the discipline was represented by a collection of texts written in English from countries which bore the linguistic, cultural and economic impress of a declined Britain. Methodologically the discipline preserved the current domestic approaches to British literature with a new emphasis on thematic and tropic comparison and a greater (although by no means always adequate) sense of cultural relativity. Just at the time when sardonic comments were being made about the futile repetition of work on canonical writers demanded by the suddenly expanded PhD programmes of Western universities, Commonwealth Literature offered an extensive adjunct to the available material for study. Moreover, it was a material which could be loosely said to promote cross-cultural understanding, so the discipline came with demonstrable social
utility. Travel was broadening, and Commonwealth Literature showed English Departments *en voyage*.

For those crewing the vessel there were some adventitious benefits, for part of the founding energy of the discipline of Commonwealth Literature came from the nostalgia of British academics who had done their tours of duty in the colonies and were now faced with ten years' hard grey at Leeds or Stirling. Moreover, the policy of the Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies of rotating its triennial meetings around the Commonwealth offered the younger membership a chance of regular and congenial exposure to the countries whose literatures they were reading. On the negative side, though, there were Senior Common Room sneers about the insubstantiality or non-existence of the literature, avuncular warnings about how this might be a worthy sideline, but one's real career lay in Milton, and a recurrent isolation marked by a lack of texts and of bibliographical and collegiate support.

The isolation was partly overcome by alliances with nationalist critics, in fact Commonwealth literature often looked like the Foreign Affairs Department of literary nationalism. The links and overlaps between the two disciplines have persisted. Ganesh Devi has even argued that Commonwealth literature is really a phase of national literary traditions. But this overlap which initially facilitated the institutional development of Commonwealth Literature, has come to look more like a fundamental weakness in its theorization, and the lack of definition of both its scope and its methodology have loomed as increasing problems for a discipline which is attempting to maintain its purchase in crowded and noisily competitive institutional structures. Moreover, nationalist criticism has withdrawn to some extent from the alliance, fearing that a blurring of categories might prejudice its chances for national Arts Council funding.

There is no diminution of activity under the umbrella of Commonwealth literature and with the expansion of publishing in English in most areas, Commonwealth literature is in no danger of running out of material to discuss fruitfully. But with the demand for a more self-conscious literary practice, the plenitude of Commonwealth texts no longer carries a sufficient defence against charges that the discipline is too diffuse and ill-considered to constitute a rigorous study. Nonetheless, richness and diversity remain the watchwords of those who feel the traditional formulation is most adequate. The new editors of the *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* say that they are 'committed to the diversity of Commonwealth Literature' and are sceptical about the formulation 'post-colonial literature' because it 'runs the risk of ... conflating the diversity of the literatures studied into a single category'.

As Alastair Niven has recently commented, discussion of the adequacy of the name, 'Commonwealth literature', has been going on for twenty-five years and is both tired and unresolved; but as he also rightly says names do matter because 'each carries its own ideological banner'. (He could
have added, ‘and methodology’). The real question is not what we call the discipline, but what sort of activities are conducted under its aegis.

The name, ‘Commonwealth literature’, didn’t give clear directions about what was to be done, but it did say (a little misleadingly) what texts were to be read. These were texts in English from any of Britain’s present or past colonies except the United States, and Ireland. Britain herself was also excluded. These exclusions were quite blatantly protectionist, to give the newer literatures room to breathe; they were never argued on a theoretical basis. The same loose inclusiveness as characterised national literature formulations was used. V.S. Naipaul could live in Britain for sixty years and would remain a ‘Commonwealth writer’. D.H. Lawrence could visit Australia for two months, write a novel set there, and that would be a ‘Commonwealth text’. Moreover, in practice no one ever stood at the door checking countries for formal membership of the British Commonwealth. Virtually any sort of literary or cultural study – formal, generic, historical, bibliographical, textual, linguistic, cultural – found a place under such a commodious umbrella. The initial sense of ‘Commonwealth’, then, was simply an aggregation of individual national literatures broadly and inclusively conceived. Consequently it is not surprising that much ‘Commonwealth’ work could equally well be regarded as work on a national or regional literature, say, New Zealand literature or West Indian literature.

Some attempt at stiffening the critical backbone came with the attempt to encourage or enforce a comparative stance in the work. Commonwealth literary studies then became not any critical activity which used a Commonwealth text, but rather a critical activity conducted across two or more national traditions. This is a paradigm which says, ‘the English language has been used in these two (or more) different environments. Let us see what we can learn about the social mediation of the language by comparing these examples’. This type of activity found an early model in John Matthews’ *Tradition in Exile*.

A variant on this comparative paradigm is the replacement of one pole of the comparison by the critic’s own distanced position. That is to say, a Nigerian critic studying Nigerian literature is taken to be working in a national framework, but a Canadian critic working on Nigerian literature is taken to be working on Commonwealth literature. One meaning of ‘Commonwealth literature’ has thus been literature from one or more Commonwealth countries excluding one’s own: a non-British, non-US, English-language literary Other.

Commonwealth Literature proceeded fairly satisfactorily in this latitudinarian way for two decades. But when university practices swung towards more politicised uses of literature, and when university cafeteria started serving theory with everything, the formulation began to seem not
The Voyages: f the Good Ship 'Commonwealth'

liberating (attacking traditional curricula which privileged British literature) but rather reactionary (reinscribing the power structures of Britain by endorsing the political Commonwealth) and naive (inconsistent in its choice of texts and insufficiently cogent in its attitudes to language and politics.) It did no good to point out that British literature was (slightly illogically) excluded from the field of study, so could hardly be said to be monopolising the attention of Commonwealth literature scholars; the name 'Commonwealth' was 'anglophilic and sub-imperialist', and with breathtaking syntax, Homi Bhabha daubed Commonwealth literature a normalizing, revisionary, expansionist, academicist, egoistic, and 'expansionist epigone' of history and nationalism.

The one thing which had provided even a tenuous cohesion to the discipline was the use of English (or Englishes), and this now came to be seen as one of the markers of colonial oppression. Prominent writers like Ngugi repudiated English to write in local languages; English-dominated contextualisation was attacked as impeding the adequate cultural siting of the texts being considered; and the deliberateness with which English language and literature had been implicated in colonial control was exposed. Caliban using the master's own language to curse him has become talismanic, and The Tempest, (the only Shakespeare today's Commonwealth scholars will admit to reading), has become a sort of cult text, with its readers cheering for the Indians.

In the face of this upheaval, a fairly widespread move has been made to develop a more coherent and more political critical practice under the name 'post-colonial literature'. It is important to see this as a change in practice rather than simply a change in name, for it marks a concentration on a particular activity which is only a part of the amorphous and joyful busyness of Commonwealth literature. It may also be misleading to see an evolution of Commonwealth literature into post-colonial literature (as is implied by the title of the Proceedings of the 25th anniversary conference of ACLALS itself, From Commonwealth to Post-colonial). Although many scholars and critics who would have regarded themselves as having a commitment to 'Commonwealth literature' ten years ago would prefer the term, 'Post-colonial literature' today, there are strong arguments that a post-colonial critique neither is nor should be the only method of approaching this literature. As Thieme and Chew say,

'post-colonial literature' promises a radical reassessment of the subject and in many ways offers this, but clearly runs the risk of being perceived as a new hegemonic discourse, conflating the diversity of the literatures studied into a single category and (even more regrettably?) defining them in terms of their increasingly distant relationship to colonialism.

Post-colonial critique would not, of course see the relationship to colonialism as becoming an 'increasingly distant' one, for colonialism does not end with political independence, but Thieme and Chew are probably
correct in implying that a post-colonial approach makes its own map from the range of Commonwealth literature by selecting and returning to only those texts which respond to appropriate tropic, allegorical or counter-discursive readings. This does raise the spectre of 'a criticism ... that celebrates predictable heroines and rounds up the usual suspects, that finds confirmation of its values wherever it turns'.

Both the formulations, 'Commonwealth literature' and 'post-colonial literature' involve texts, writers, readers, and a matrix of socio-political events outside of these. But whereas Commonwealth literature anchored itself in facts of past and present political alliance, post-colonial literature postulates as its starting point a psychology that results from the experience of colonialism. 'The post-colonial desire is the desire of decolonized communities for an identity.' Commonwealth literature identifies certain societies as having a political (but really cultural) and linguistic distinctiveness (present or former membership of the Commonwealth and English-speaking) and on that basis sets out to explore their literatures. Post-colonial literature identifies societies which have a certain historical experience and a linguistic distinctiveness (ex-colonies of Britain and English-speaking) and proceeds to investigate the implications of that experience in the literatures. It may, then, be helpful to think of 'Commonwealth' as inherently referring to a collection of literatures and 'post-colonial' as inherently referring to a way of approaching some texts within those literatures; or, as Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin phrase it, 'a reading practice'. "Post-colonial literature(s)" is then an imprecise but convenient term which conflates a method and a group of texts. This conflation, however, has proved controversial. Tying down post-colonialism is a little like the story of the blind men and the elephant, but as Paul Sharrad says, 'One constant in all theorizing of post-colonial literature is the centrality to both literary creation and its criticism of involvement in historical process.' The idea that the 'post-colonial' is situated anywhere near the 'pastoral' and the apolitical belongs in the mirror-maze of euporabble.

The domain and activity of a post-colonial approach to Commonwealth literature have been extensively discussed by Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin in The Empire Writes Back. Where objections have been made to their thesis, they have usually been about the homogenising of the approach with the literature as though post-colonial readings were innately and exclusively appropriate to deal with it. This also recalls the caution of Thieme and Chew mentioned above. The question is whether colonialism is such a major constituent of late twentieth-century consciousness that it conditions all literature from formerly colonised countries. Or are there some texts which do indeed reflect such a consciousness and reward a reading from that position while others do not? Is post-colonialism offering itself not only as a synecdoche for all oppression, but also as a refraction of all experience?
There are two issues at the intersection of the post-colonial and Commonwealth literature which I wish to take up at this point; one is the place of comparison in a post-colonial practice, and the other is the question of binaries. As mentioned above, the exploring of parallel literary traditions and their social geneeses was the first step away from treating Commonwealth literature as a collection of individual national literatures. Comparing texts from different traditions seemed a fertile critical practice. For the critic, as well as offering a flexible operative stance, the method implied the social utility of cultural relativity and cross-cultural awareness. For writers it offered the extension of a readership outside their own geographical area.

The implicit concept of literature behind this activity is that literature mirrors social reality. The point of comparing the literary texts in this way is to gain insight into the similar-yet-different generating societies, and into the way language and culture mutate in different social environments. But post-colonial theory proposes that the reality perceived by the colonised subject has been constructed for him or her by the linguistic structures of colonialism, and are distortions of what would otherwise be a felt reality. So all that can be available through a comparison of Commonwealth texts is one distortion set against another. We cannot arrive at a comparative sociology through a comparative post-colonial analysis, merely a comparative pathology of neuroses. If we are to maintain a comparative framework in post-colonial critique, we need then, to reformulate the reasons for doing so. This theoretical difficulty has not, however, stopped at least one critic from marrying a post-colonial impetus with a comparative methodology in order to energise an institutional politics.

The challenge for the critic is to find an alternative power base to that which has traditionally fuelled imperialist academic endeavour. That base lies in recognising the potential power of comparative post-colonial studies to pose an alternative to traditional English studies.\(^{22}\)

Much of the work now being conducted under the label of post-colonial literature does in fact draw examples from different traditions, but it has relinquished the idea of comparing one real social ethos to another real social ethos via the mediation of two literary expressions. Instead a post-colonial approach identifies a shared consciousness characterised by a fractured epistemology and an oppositional stance towards past and continuing experience of colonialism. This offers a tidy and coherent formulation which identifies a leading (presumably the leading) impulse in the writing, and a pedagogical and social programme that proceeds from it. I said that a post-colonial approach identifies ‘a shared consciousness’. This consciousness is no doubt deducible from historical records and a theory of atavistic recall, but post-colonial theory would be on stronger ground if it could identify and codify markers of colonial fracture and/or
post-colonial resistance in the texts. Otherwise it is open to the charge that it is reading practice which creates what it wants to find. A good deal of work is being done across Commonwealth literature offering post-colonial readings of pairs or groups of texts, and arguing for the innateness in post-colonial literature of motifs, tropes, and rhetorical strategies such as the house, the journey, allegory, irony, magic realism and so forth. There is, however, no taxonomy of traces or markers found exclusively in post-colonial literatures. And yet, drawing up such a taxonomy should not be an impossible task. Texts which yield to a post-colonial analysis must do so through internal markers which exist before and independent of the actual reading. It ought to be demonstrable that such markers are present in texts from, say, New Zealand, India, and the Caribbean, but are not present in texts from Britain. This is a crucial question because it focuses one of the most complex and sensitive problems in Commonwealth literary discussion of recent years: whether the colonial mindset of the settler colonies can be meaningfully associated with that of the black or brown Commonwealth. The post-colonial literature position is that it can and must. As Diana Brydon puts it, ‘We colonised form a community, with a common heritage of oppression and a common cause of working toward positive social change.’

The question of where the US fits in relation to post-colonial theorization remains a fascinating one. As a colony of Britain, presumably at one time the US was exactly comparable, as far as its colonial consciousness went, to a stage in the development of consciousness in settler colonies like Canada or Australia. Once again it ought to be possible to demonstrate this by inspecting its early literature for traces comparable to those that demarcate the colonial consciousness in texts from other places. But the US raises other questions: if the US’s is not still a colonial consciousness, at what stage did it lose that consciousness, and how did it do so?

Given that post-colonial criticism starts from a postulation of a shared fractured consciousness, it is not surprising that much of its energy has been displayed in a boisterous denunciation of European colonial and neo-colonial practices, and a demonstration of how contemporary texts from Commonwealth countries escape, expose, interrogate, allegorise, refute, subvert, mimic, counter the discourse of, ironise, refuse, or resist European hegemony. Set up in this way, post-colonial criticism is devoted to the construction of a writerly practice which counters political and cultural control inscribed in European texts, especially those which have been privileged through educational or publishing empowerment. While this has done much to explore the interpellative structure of colonial education and has produced some splendidly imaginative readings of familiar texts, the process seems to me to contain two dangers. In the first place there is a reductive lumping of all European thought (and often all European and American thought) into a monolith of negativity while the particular post-colonial text being called on to counter the Euro-American
episteme is examined in sympathetic and subtle detail. This is reverse orientalism – one European theory looks just like all the others; only the non-European has features.25

One of the sins of Europe according to post-colonial theory is that its thought is fashioned on a binary system, of which self-Other is the focal instance. Paradoxically, this is answered by post-colonial theory itself setting up a further binary between Europe’s inveterate pattern of binary thought on the one hand, and a claim for a post-colonial moment of escape from, or transcendence of, such binaries on the other. Qualities of hybridity, fluidity, carnivalesque reversal, magic realism, postmodern relativity and so forth are all identified as being markers of the post-colonial. The argument is usually clinched by reference to the work of Wilson Harris, but it remains to be demonstrated that Harris’s work is either typical of the post-colonial text or representative of its quintessential burden. It is also still to be demonstrated that such markers cannot equally be read from works which emanate from contemporary Britain.

The second reservation I have about the virtual definition of a post-colonial approach as a denunciation of Europe is that this leads in practice (although not inevitably) to a rather whingey self-inscription as victim. In several current literary discourses there is an enthusiasm for grounding claims to attention not in what is achieved in the writing, but in what is suffered or allegedly suffered by those claiming, (sometimes rather desperately), connection with the real-life brutalisation. Post-colonial critique has unfortunately not always avoided the ‘my marginalisation scar is bigger than your marginalisation scar’ slang-off, and some of the posturings of powerful, wealthy academics shrilly declaring their deprivation or their identification with deprivation are simply risible.

If a post-colonial approach to literature is worth pursuing it is worth pursuing for what it reveals in the literature’s articulations, whether they are read as mimetic, expressive, subversive, mimicking, parodic, healing, synthesising or whatever; not for the catalogue of wrongs, dispossessions, psyche-fracturings, oppressions, interpellations, deprivations, marginalisations, otherings, subaltern-izations, abjections, and worldling-izations, to which its proponents sometimes triumphantly lay claim. As Diana Brydon says, ‘Caliban quickly tires of cursing Prospero. His speech is most compelling when he celebrates his own skills and love of place, and when he transforms himself from European creation into an autonomous indigene.’26

I suggest, then, that the unsatisfactorily-named discipline of Commonwealth alias post-colonial literature is lurching in different directions at the moment. Part of it is eager to preserve the inclusiveness and expansiveness of the early Commonwealth literature brief and, despite the theoretical problems of representation thus incurred, maintain radio contact with the sociologists. Another part seeks a more coherent and theoretically-rigorous discipline by developing the historico-political valency of a
smaller range of texts under the banner of post-colonial critique. Ultimately it may be impossible to fuse these projects, and we shall each have to go one way or the other, sawing the boat in two. My own preference at the moment is for a wider, less-focussed field, largely because it seems to me to allow access to texts which do not answer well to a post-colonial reading. But post-colonial critique may continue to develop its already formidable strategies to circumvent this and to demonstrate that the fact that 'imperialism has penetrated the fabric of our culture, and infected our imagination more deeply than we normally realize' \(^\text{27}\) does result in textual resonances which are systematically demonstrable, and politically potent.

NOTES

Thanks to Helen Tiffin and Stephen Slemon for constructive comments on an earlier version of this paper.

2. Many panels at ACLALS conferences consist of papers which show no comparative bent, and which could equally well have been presented at conferences on the national literatures.
7. The theme of the conference was 'Comparative Approaches to Commonwealth Literature'. The succeeding conference in Fiji in 1980 emphasized a different way of crossing divisions with its theme of 'Commonwealth Literature in Multi-Cultural Contexts'.
13. Among several studies which explore the resiting or rewriting of *The Tempest* are: Diana Brydon, 'Rewriting The Tempest', *WLWE*, 23.1 (1984), pp. 75-88, and Chantal
15. Thieme and Chew, op. cit. p. 2.
25. Significantly, one of the foundational texts of post-colonial studies was titled *Europe and its Others*.
That 1492 marks a double event and a watershed in European civilization and world history, is inescapable to all serious recent commentators and interpreters of that year and the subsequent half millennium. One witness to the events of 1492 later in a letter to his employers remembered how ‘on the second day of January, I saw the royal banner of your Highnesses raised, by force of arms, on the towers of the Alhambra ... and, thereafter, in that same month ... your Highnesses, as Catholic Christians and ... foes of the sect of Muhammed and of all idolatries and heresies, thought of sending me, Christopher Columbus, to the regions of India ... and your Highnesses ordered that I should not travel overland to the east, as is customary, but rather by way of the west, whither to this day, as far as we can know for certain, no man has ever gone before’.¹ Felipe Fernandez-Armesto in his recent biography of Columbus tells this ‘irresistible and incredible’ part of ‘the Columbus romance’ in a rather more ironical way: how for instance ‘Columbus made the first leg of his Atlantic journey by mule to Granada’ (the mule in fact a great privilege in those times of war).² But even Fernandez-Armesto sees the siege of Granada as little more than a theatrical backdrop to the decision, long deliberated, about sending Columbus out on to the Western ocean.

I wish in this paper to disentangle background and foreground in that picture: to put the conquest of Granada and the subsequent expulsion of the Jews and the Moors from Spain on the same conceptual level as the voyage of ‘discovery’ to and conquest of ‘the New World’, the genocides and deportations and the destruction of the Aztec and Inca empires, which were to follow within a generation. However, I am not directly going to address the moral implications connecting the discovery and conquest of ‘an exterior Other’ in the New World with the expulsion of ‘an interior Other’ from the organism of Spain and Western Europe – nor so much the semiotics of cultural encounters in which the moral deliberations of Tzvetan Todorov in La conquête de l’Amérique or Stephen Greenblatt in Marvelous Possessions have been couched. Rather I would like to examine some of the spatial and temporal paradoxes that have arisen from the
great coincidences of 1492 within what I call the conceptual geography and historical cosmology of European and American and World civilization. These paradoxes, I believe, are even inscribed on the world map we inhabit in our minds, a map which is still a record of the European imperial expansion that really burgeoned after 1492. They are paradoxes which not only leave us with silly and supercilious misnomers for a whole world from ‘turkeys’ to ‘Indians’, but which invade for instance Greenblatt’s analysis of the problem of ‘seeing the face of’ and ‘reading the signs of’ the Other, so that the confrontation of colonizing Europeans and ‘Indians’ is turned round in space and time and becomes that of Zionist Israel and Palestinians.

In other words one might say that this is an attempt to come to terms with the conceptual roundness of the earth, which leaves the realm of mathematical speculation and becomes practical fact after 1492. My argument is that conceptual geography and historical cosmology have never come to terms with this globality or sphericity, at least not in Europe. And I am not just thinking of that two-dimensional Mercator’s Projection we see in our minds when we think of the world, and which may be our most insistent imperial/colonial preconception. Far more radically, I do not think we have really followed scientific cartography out of the traditional flat-earth image of a ‘cosmos’ surrounded by ‘chaos’, ‘civilized people’ surrounded by ‘barbarians’, which Europe inherited from Greece and Rome, though it is essentially a traditional tribal habitat cosmology shared by, as far as I know, all ‘primitive’ and ‘high’ cultures. When we think of history in relation to geography, when the earth becomes a conceptual cosmos, we still think in terms of a modified form of the old Roman four-continental world order centred on the Mediterranean. ‘Europe’ sets itself off from two ‘others’: the ‘New World’ and ‘the Orient’, which is the old Roman province of ‘Asia’ extended eastward all the way to Japan, and ‘Africa’ hovers strangely in between the two ‘others’. Even the ‘New World Order’ of the Global Market emerging in the 1990s is most often thought of as consolidated into four blocks: ‘America’, ‘Europe’, ‘Japan and East Asia’ and ‘The Third World’ (that sometimes both patronizing and dismissive term for ‘all the rest’).

This is demonstrably not just a feature of the conceptual maps of ignorant economists or politicians. Nor do I believe such conceptual maps are spatial expressions of a dominant ideology or prejudice in quite the way that Edward Said sees them in Orientalism or Mary Louise Pratt in Imperial Eyes, a recent study of the genre of travel writing which is also a critique of what Pratt posits as the overarching ideology of ‘Euro-expansionism’ correlating imperialism, racism and sexism, slavery, Linnean botany and the growth of the modern state. Without doubting the historical connection between all these kinds of European hegemony-thinking, I see the conceptual map exercising an even more fundamental shaping influence on the ideologies than the other way round. Among
other things, the conceptual map allows us to see the continuum and the gradual distinctions between what may be properly termed ‘ideology’ and simple ignorance and stupidity.

The map I am talking about shows the conceptual dimensions of a European social space of exactly the same kind as the ones analyzed by the Vietnamese-French anthropologist Georges Condonimas among hilltribes in Indochina and the inhabitants of Madagascar. Condonimas argues that the notion of social space should replace our notion of culture, because it is our notions of space and time which correlate our conception of the world from the smallest to the largest (Condonimas gives an almost Whorfian example of a Malgasy pointing him to ‘a small crumb at the southern corner of your moustache’). There is, Condonimas shows, a basic spatio-temporal correlation between notions of religious transcendence and architecture, between ideology and the conception of economics and material survival.

What I am dealing with here is really very simple in that context: the position of history in regard to geography, of time in regard to space on the European conceptual map of the world after 1492. This is the map of European imperial expansion – but even more profoundly, I would argue in both conceptual and ideological terms, it is the map of Progress, the underlying temporal impetus to expansion. Progress is claimed by all factions in European social space which in this respect may have become nearly global – but we may have reached a point where it is unsustainable ecologically and geopolitically, and progress shows itself to have been based on expansion. And not just the relationships of power within European-Imperial social space, but the contours of that social space itself cope better with spatial and social contraction than with the possible death of the idea of Progress. It is hard to judge the limits of the spatio-temporal continuum from within which we are addressing each other. It is hard to question the basic dimensions of the map; moreover, our questions are determined by – or rather the possibilities of our questioning are limited by – our position on the map.

But we can easily discern the way Progress, or a historical development conceived as Progress, has been inscribed on geography, on the conceptual map. As the arch-theoretician of progressive history, Hegel himself put it: ‘The History of the World travels from East to West, for Europe is absolutely the end of History, Asia the beginning.’ Africa in this view is ‘unhistorical’, but what of America, to many the embodiment of Progress, of the westward movement of manifest destiny? That is one of the many questions raised in the following, as I probe the conceptual map a little from two opposed perspectives: that of Europe moving into an Other, European travel writing on the Middle East – and that of a social space partly in partly outside of the European, contemporary Caribbean literature.

Around 1492 Europe began a project of defining itself and the rest of the world through travel. The cosmology of Western European civilization
became geographical to an unprecedented extent, though civilizations have perhaps always had a higher degree of geographical consciousness (as distinct from other ‘cosmological’ levels such as the relationship of earth to stars, or local topography) in phases of imperial expansion: of Greeks, Romans, Arabs or Chinese. Not only did European travellers and explorers provide several waves of culture heroes from Columbus and da Gama through Raleigh and Drake to Cook, Livingstone, Amundsen/Scott — and even the cosmonauts and astronauts in recent times; it was also the expansion of knowledge by travel that gave rise to the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, Romanticism and the Space Age.

It is only after 1492 that we can begin to speak of ‘travel writing’ as a genre — growing out of medieval ‘books of marvels’, ‘topographies’ and accounts of pilgrimages to the Holy Land. European ‘travel writing’ from the Renaissance onwards has precedents in the ‘chorography’ of the ancient Greeks, where ‘tourists’ such as Herodotus or Pausanias expressed their experience of different places in a ‘theoria’ or overview, and like all other civilized features this was passed on to the European Renaissances by the Arabs, particularly the work of Ibn Battuta. But perhaps neither Greek nor Arab ‘travel writing’ came to enjoy the same popularity or centrality in their culture as European tourist theory, especially in the 18th and 19th centuries, fading into the 20th.

Travel writing is the most tied to Empire of European literary genres. It has provided both a major part of the justification and some of the critique of European imperialism. So it is striking that travel writing about the Middle East has often been found to present the largest interesting and readable body of work. For the Middle East is also one of the places where Western European imperialism met with the least success, except at the very end. But of course, it is where it was all heading, from before Columbus. Both the ‘books of marvels’— Mandeville’s and Marco Polo’s— which Columbus brought with him and modelled himself on in his literary endeavours were works about Oriental travel.

To the Middle Ages the only serious travel destination was Jerusalem, the centre of Biblical cosmology. The Holy Land and Holy City were the object of Western European religious and geo-political aspirations; their names provided the geographical ground-note for the auditory imagination and eschatological nostalgia of Christian liturgical culture from the 9th to the 19th century. Fernández-Armesto points out how the thought of Jerusalem always came into Columbus’ mind ‘when his conscience was uneasy and his confidence low’; it conjured at once penance and reward. Jerusalem was the fons et origo and the oriens, the beginning and orientation of the world in time and space. The Earthly Paradise was known to lie somewhere beyond (to the east of?) Jerusalem. And really all European travel writing begins as a prolongation of the journey towards this point of origin and fulfillment.
The whole development of European travel writing about the Orient, moreover, could be seen as variations on the theme of ‘lost origins’. Every journey is a retracing of past routes, a rediscovery of places once known, of forgotten wisdom or error. Oriental travel is the exploration of history; the Orient is represented as continuous with the past, but a past from which the West may often see itself as discontinuous, in both positive and negative ways. In fact, I would argue that most of the best travel writing tends to emphasize the positive sides of this ‘pastness’, which is often used directly or indirectly as part of a cultural pessimist critique of the West. Many of the most interesting travel writers are outsiders from their own culture: ideologically, sexually, experientially. And this is part of what makes their writing a sensitive register of the demarcation of self and other. The double strings of the personal and the cultural often set up strange reverberations: one need only mention T.E. Lawrence.

The search for lost origins is also a search for a lost self, or part of the self. And the most popular quest of a certain age reflects, I suspect, invariably the most fundamental level of conceptualization of the prevailing cultural self-image. A perfect example would be the way the old search for Prester John, the Christian prophet king whose lands (variously situated in Asia and Africa) had been dissevered from the rest of Christendom, was replaced in the late nineteenth century by a search for lost Aryan tribes. No thrill was greater for the Western traveller, nothing more mysterious than the meeting with fair-haired, blue-eyed Asians speaking Indo-Aryan languages. Nuristan, rather than Jerusalem, became the heart of longing. And after Nuristan, in our own time in fact, Ladakh, heart of spiritual wisdom – and the other few places more or less untouched by Western civilization; the search turns towards the lands beyond Coca-Cola signs, where people are more genuinely ‘themselves’ than in the West, whether this authenticity has socialist or primitivist overtones. The heart of mystery in the quest comes to look conspicuously like the core of ideological beliefs – and on the other hand may be dismissed as escapism. But that is of course too easy: the reflexivity and reciprocity is inevitable, tied up with thinking and language – and with Western historical consciousness.

Though the idea of an Orient is nonsensical on a round earth, it has remained a cardinal direction of Occidental historical cosmology, the journey to the source of civilization: Jerusalem, Egypt, Mesopotamia, India, China, the Central Eurasian homelands of the Indo-Aryans. Indeed every source, every tracing of origins, becomes in some way Oriental, orientalizing, or assimilated to Orientalist fantasies: the search for the sources of the Nile, the Niger, or even the Orinoco or the Amazon somehow or other gives rise to imaginings about lost civilizations, which the European imagination always tends to connect with Egypt or Mesopotamia, whether by theories of diffusion or simply by comparison. Or such quests are orientated towards myths of El Dorado, which begin where the myths of
Cipangu end. ‘True East’ remains a magnetic force on the travelling Western imagination, even as its position on the globe changes through the annals of travel writing from the era of pilgrimages and crusades through fantastic and scientific accounts to the nineteenth century’s ‘personal narratives’ by practically-minded explorers, picaresque adventurers and Byronic heroes – and the increasingly aestheticizing historicist, primitivist and naturalist writings of the twentieth century. The basic orientation is sustained even in contemporary ‘meta-travel writing’ like Philip Glazebrook’s _Journey to Kars_ and Charles Glass’s _Tribes with Flags_, both heavily intertextual with previous travel writing; let alone in the nomadic-evolutionary metaphysics of human existence as a journey presented by the work of Bruce Chatwin, which takes its point of departure in Oriental travel, both in fact and in literary models. For Oriental travel has always been serious about its learning: from A.W. Kinglake’s journey into classical allusions in _Eotu_ and Sir Richard Burton’s into long footnotes on sexology to Robert Byron’s pioneering appreciations of Islamic architecture, Freya Stark’s collages of descriptive travelogue and popular history, and Paul Bowles’ musicological exploration of Morocco, as well as the many travel books written by archeologists as popular accounts of their findings.

The route east, as befits a learned, consciously ‘counter-historical’ journey back to the source, involves several kinds of almost antipodean reversal. Greenblatt has pointed out how these are imagined into a complete system of opposed culturo-geographical form and meaning centring on Jerusalem in the work of Sir John Mandeville, who in all likelihood never went anywhere. But also much later writers, who performed feats like Burton’s penetration into Mecca during the Haj, T.E. Lawrence’s coordination of the Arab Revolt, or Wilfred Thesiger’s crossing of the Rub’ al Khali, rely on, delight in and even seem to need such reversals of narrative, psychology and conceptualization when they enter the mysterious, escapist space which is the Orient to Western eyes. Adversity seems to be a condition of travel writing. But in European-Oriental travel, an almost equally recurrent feature is disguise. Lady Mary Montagu praises the anonymity and camouflage of C18 Oriental women’s dress for the freedom of movement it allows; Burton uses disguise so matter-of-factly and with such Romantic glee that it is a tribute to the culture he has energetically assimilated so that he can penetrate it en masque; and in T.E. Lawrence the dressing-up assumes mythic and psychological proportions quite out of his and subsequent commentators’ control.

The travellers assume ‘the other’ as self in order to see and penetrate the other culture. Seeing becomes spying: a constant accusation against European travellers from Marco Polo to the most recent journalistic travellers in the Middle East like Charles Glass or Robert Fisk. Disguise paradoxically confirms the ownership of the inhabitants to the lands they live in, which the traveller can no more than probe. The Orient is a space on the other side of a gateway metaphorically visible in the name of the Sublime
Porte and in the gateways and doors which become important motifs in
the ‘Orientalist’ paintings of the nineteenth century either as elaborate
forms in their own right (especially in the work of David Roberts) – or as
something we look beyond into the forbidden space, the Harem. Or even
into Paradise itself, that ‘enclosure’ (‘pairidaeeza’ in Avestan Persian)
which is the fundamental metaphysical spatial orientation of European
civilization, but which also has a physical manifestation in the form of the
garden, whose history in Europe is directly traceable to the Orient and
Granada, and which is perhaps the fundamental idea round which New
World space came to be structured.

‘On the other side’ of the gateway, which the traveller moves through on
his camel against the perceived movement of time, are other rules defined
by another social space in everything from manners to language and phys­
cical measurements. A secret or treasure from this other space motivates
the travel, orients the narrative and defines the mask which the traveller
must wear, and which becomes essential because much literary travel is
really self-exploration. The confrontation with the Oriental ‘Other’ is trans­
lated into a discovery or confirmation of the self – whether personal or
cultural – within the time-space of the travelling probe. Generally, of
course, one is never more oneself than when travelling; detachment from
normal ‘social time’ leading to renewed powers of spatial observation, but
also to a contraction of identity to one’s own body, which seems to con­
firm the time-frame of self. And because the Orient, which is here the per­
ceived outside environment as well as a conceptual point of origin, is
conceived as a spatialized past, the travelling self becomes an experiencing
consciousness and experiencing present floating free in what is both a
museum of archaic structures and a timeless world, where one day is like
the other, and dates often have to be consciously separated in diary form,
to keep track of journey and identity. Thus there is really no end to the
mirror effects in Oriental travel: whether it is Mandeville imagining a re­
versal of the Christian Mass set in Tibet; Doughty constructing his peculiar
puristic English out of the ambience of half-translated Arabic; Robert
Byron finding his ‘alternative Renaissance’ and ‘Orient without an
inferiority complex’ in Afghanistan. Let alone the mighty mirror myth of
Seven Pillars of Wisdom, where a Romantic scholar of the crusades and
agent of the British Empire loses himself in a resurgence of Muslim prop­
hesy and Arab nationalism, which propels him into an irresoluble personal
identity crisis at the same time as it promotes him to the stature of
imperial legend.

The Orient is a reflecting Other to the European imagination because of
its present-pastness, but also because it is always seen as inhabited.
Doughty in his Travels in Arabia Deserta is never alone for a minute, every
danger he faces is human, practically every page of the book contains
dialogue. But when Reyner Banham alludes to Doughty in his Scenes in
America Deserta, it is to point up just this contrast: Banham’s book is about ‘natural architecture’; it is uninhabited except by its author. This is a basic notion about ‘the New World’ which Mary Louise Pratt in Imperial Eyes traces to its most influential statement in Alexander von Humboldt, whose ‘planetary consciousness’ in many ways still underlies both the scientific and popular conceptualization of geography:

In the Old World, nations and the distinctions of their civilization form the principal points in the picture; in the New World, man and his productions almost disappear amidst the stupendous display of wild and gigantic nature. The human race in the New World presents only a few remnants of indigenous hordes, slightly advanced in civilization; or it exhibits merely the uniformity of manners and institutions transplanted by European colonists to foreign shores.

Where the Orient is always historicized, if not sunk into a static, degenerate backwardness (in comparison with European contemporaneity), the New World of America is naturalized, denied a history and a culture of its own (in comparison to the Old World). When it is allowed a history it is ‘natural history’ both in the normal sense, and in the sense of providing a touchstone as to how history arises out of its natural environment, both in the Humboldtian theories of geographical determinism applied to the Aztec and Inca monuments, which Pratt analyzes, and such American theories of history as the ‘Frontier Thesis’. Almost inevitably the ‘New World’ is seen as a space in which history arrives or has only partially inscribed itself – and this is often perceived as hopeful, at the same time as it seems to carry an inevitable rawness in the confrontation of culture and nature, self and other. It is perhaps telling in this connection that Claude Lévi-Strauss’s theories are based on American field-work.

Even the most recent (1990s) explanations of the Orient turn towards the past: thus Charles Glass, before he sets out on his journey into the background to the contemporary Middle Eastern conflict, seeks the advice of Albert Hourani, the Lebanese historian, and Stephen Runciman, the historian of the Crusades, who both advise him to follow the old crusaders’ routes. And his contemporary journalistic explicator Robert Fisk similarly, though more unwillingly, is forced back into old patterns of travel in a baffling, ‘Orientally’ inverted world as he negotiates his way between barricades and militias in war-torn Beirut, where the mighty ‘otherworld’ of Asia has contracted to a city, the experience of danger in crossing a street has expanded in space and time to match the crossing of a desert, and the explanations similarly have to turn to painstaking detail to unveil ‘the historical truth’. But the journey towards the truth, strikingly, begins in Auschwitz – and in the terra nullius argument for establishing a Jewish state: Palestine was largely uninhabited, undeveloped and historically ‘unclaimed’ until it became Israel – according to a great deal of Zionist propaganda.
Now the *terra nullius* idea is a New World myth, largely an American conception, at least in its modern implications. It grows from the absurd scene, analyzed by Greenblatt, where Columbus plants a flag, and since nobody ‘contradicts’ him, claims the New World for the Catholic kings of Castille and Aragon. Modern Israel, conceptually, is part of the New World. But it is also the original *orien*s of the double movement of travel and conceptualization through which Europe has traditionally justified and explained itself: the ‘pilgrimage’ whose other side is ‘the history of civilization’. And it was the stated ultimate destination of that voyage where Columbus, to everyone’s consternation, turned up in the Caribbean.

A central ambivalence has been here from the beginning in the conceptual geography of history. History is inscribed in New World space as an absence, yet implied as a presence: the ‘New World’ implies the ‘Old’; the ‘West Indies’ imply the East. But there is no simple line of passage along these lines of implication, as centuries of exploration have made clear; there is no simple backward historical probe towards a spatial axis which coordinates the past in the present, whether centred in Jerusalem, ‘the Orient’ generally, or in Europe. The ‘New World’ blocks the European-defined geographical passage to the back door of the Orient, which was to replace the Oriental-defined historical routes like the Great Silk Road.

As a consequence, America and the other parts of the New World are perceived as beaches on which the driftwood of history turns up to create a kind of collage of time-capsules, a new pattern of simultaneity, a multiple perspective of spatially disconnected anachronisms, multi-historical as much as it is multi-cultural. This is the concomitant side to denying the aboriginal inhabitants of ‘the New World’ a history. A fault-line has emerged in cultural conception, which can perhaps only be comprehended through metaphor. Between a Native American ‘Old World’ and an Immigrant American ‘New World’ is a continuity in physical space, which is not a continuity in social space. The ‘New World’ sense of history tends not towards the *longue durée* but towards patterns of wave diffusion, towards Whitman’s sense of all historical epochs and loci as contemporary with himself, towards the ‘Hartz thesis’, meta-history or even science fiction (which is really spatially projected history).

It is characteristic that when travel writing about America, quite recently, develops a mode akin to the ‘historical pilgrimages’ of Oriental travel – along with the two classic modes Mary-Louise Pratt describes: the post-Humboldtian books of natural marvels and the ‘capitalist vanguard’ writings which see only blank space waiting to be improved – they become books which stress the multi-layered and the discontinuous in their perception of history, and the personal quixotic element becomes almost a kind of ‘egotistical sublime’. This happens whether they are books by Englishmen like Bruce Chatwin’s *In Patagonia* or Jonathan Raban’s *Old Glory* or by North Americans travelling South like Paul Theroux’s *Old Patagonian Express* – or even the great criollo pilgrimage of Alejo Carpentier’s *The Lost*
Steps. The axis of orientation in these books is geographical; the journeys are not retracings of a historical route to a point in space where the past has continued into the present, but cruises through a space where various points of the past have become isolated, encapsulated and contemporaneous. The ‘truth’ found is first and foremost one of place and personal identity, not of ‘European civilization’, even when the object of the pilgrimage is an audience with Jorge Luis Borges (Theroux), the place of discovery of the pelt of a giant sloth (Chatwin), or the most primitive musical instrument (Carpentier); the steps are irretraceable, discontinuous.

Geography, space and place, intercedes as a barrier to the wished-for historical reconnection – as did the unpredictable reality of the Americas to Columbus. But to some people the ‘New World’ is history, and not a spatially projected future – as it still appears, deep down, for most Europeans. And it is probably no coincidence that some of the most profound questionings and reformulations of the conceptual geography of European historical cosmology have come from the oldest part of the New World: the Caribbean. Such revisioning has arisen not so much from a clash between conflicting social spaces (like Europe vs. the Arab world, or India, or Africa), but rather from a unique position both inside and outside European conceptions of social space and historical cosmology.

This is mainly, of course, a matter of race and slavery. But not exclusively: one of the first ‘revisionaries’ came from a line of former slave-owners and took the pen-name, which is not so odd in the perspective of historico-geographical cosmology, of ‘Prester John’, St. John Perse. His work attempted – ‘in a single breath, without caesura’ – to encompass the history of the human spirit as it unfolded across the continents and oceans. From a curious position both inside and outside, at the beginning and the end of this great movement, in the highest of high modernist idioms, Perse saw the great migrations of birds and of peoples from Central Asia, snowstorms, ocean currents, political exile and language itself in the image of some kind of cosmic wind, through which movement and stasis, time and space become oddly inverted. Whether the geographical setting is the great centrifugal Asian plains or the Atlantic coming up against the great barrier of the Americas, the whole space of history seems to move round a conceptual, temporal island – or ‘ex-isle’ as J. Michael Dash has termed the state of consciousness, the double movement which also Wilfred Cartey has found characteristic of Caribbean literature: ‘I Going Away, I Going Home’ (Cartey 1991).

Certainly Perse’s movement of inversion – and his extraordinary scope – seem equally characteristic not only of his later critic-follower Édouard Glissant, who very consciously embraces the whole project of reconceptualizing ‘history’ and ‘geography’, but also of the three great poetic reconceptualizers of the English-speaking Caribbean: Edward Kamau Brathwaite, Wilson Harris and Derek Walcott. ‘The Sea is History’, proclaims one of Walcott’s poems, in which the waves of European
colonization in the Caribbean are seen as the books of Biblical history ‘locked up’ in a ‘grey vault’ of submarine memory:

First there was the heaving oil,
heavy as chaos;
then like a light at the end of a tunnel,
the lantern of a caravel,
and that was Genesis.
Then there were the packed cries,
the shit, the moaning:

Exodus ...

Geography encapsulates moments of history which, isolated from their historical connections, acquire mythic or legendary stature – like the bottle encrusted with fool’s gold described early in Walcott’s *Omeros*. That bottle becomes an image for the ‘sea-change’ of history into myth, which the book enacts and celebrates as the post-colonial Caribbean poet’s reappropriation of his own history. Walcott is famously uneasy about history as concept and poetic inspiration. History must be repatterned as mythic formulae or geographically reconceptualized: ‘my own prayer is to write/lines as mindless as the ocean’s of linear time,/ since time is the first province of Caesar’s jurisdiction’ (*Midsummer* XLIII ii ‘Tropic Zone’).

The sense of self is geographical and mythical, history is an intruding other not only in Walcott’s poetic world, which *Midsummer* conceptualizes as the tropisms of South and North, Black and White, poles of consciousness and imagery – and *Omeros* develops into an almost systematic ‘reversible world’ along the meridian which bisects the triangle of the Caribbean, Africa and Europe. Also the poetic worlds of Brathwaite and Harris share this sense of exile through history rather than exile in geography, though Brathwaite’s world is modelled not as a magnetic cartography of memory, myth and metaphor, but is conceptualized as a rather more ‘conventional’ historical fabric stretched out between diaspora and creolization – and Harris’s geography of the world is psychologized as a cultural memory theatre of all races, a ‘Theatre of Dream’ which balances psychosocial tensions in a Jungian parallel universe.

In Harris’ most recent book *The Four Banks of the River of Space* he returns to the mythic river journey, which has sustained his own work since *The Palace of the Peacock* as well as European exploration, travel writing and imperial and post-colonial legend-making ever since sea-borne explorers turned inland in the wake of Columbus’ discovery of the continental nature of America. But the river journey, which has almost become an image of European civilization itself, of history’s geographical trajectory, is reconceived as quantum mechanical rhythms in space-time – or as Anselm, the narrator of *Four Banks* puts it: ‘a displacement of time-frames
to break a one-track commitment to history. The key to the reformation of the heart breaks the door of blind consciousness into shared dimensions' (59), where ‘conversation floated in space and time, present space and time, past space and time, re-voiced spaces, retraced echoes’ in a Ulyssesian ‘confessional fabric of a universal home-coming’ (85) enunciated by ‘a Voice that was attached to no absolute beginning, no absolute end, within alternative parallel spaces, sculptures of myth and history’ (94). Here, ‘in the quantum humour of paradox’, Anselm continues,

My mind was inhabited by questions of the architecture of birth and extinction, the locality and non-locality of ideas, questions of the origins of space (somethingness in nothingness) that I could not frame.

Yet an answer began to unfold on the third bank of the river of space through the memory of concrete Shadows that had visited me, or I them, on the first and second banks of the tilted rivers of the epic Guyanas, epic cosmos ... (94-95)

In my attempt to trace (or retrace) the cosmological developments which have ensued from the European attempt to encompass the globe by a westward passage from the meridian of Granada (and Greenwich) to the meridian of Jerusalem, it would seem that I have struck (in the work of Wilson Harris) the parallel latitude of El Dorado. But the oblique of that projection uncovers the many levels of shadows and echoes in Edward Kamau Brathwaite’s historical reading of the map of the Caribbean. In this palimpsest recomposed as a collage, the Roman and British empires are overlaid, the African diaspora is Orientalized, the river journey into the Heart of Darkness is inverted, and a creolized New World comes into Sisyphean reality where Columbus’ trajectory from Europe and the Middle Passage intersect in ‘X/Self’s Letter from the Thirteen Provinces’:

\[
\text{a cyaan get nutten really} \\
\text{rite} \\
\text{while a stannin up here in me years like i inside a me shadow} \\
\text{like de man still mekkin i walk up de slope dat e slide} \\
\text{in black down de whole long curve a de arch} \\
\text{i} \\
\text{pell} \\
\text{ago} \\
\text{long} \\
\text{long} \\
\text{ago} \\
\text{like a} \\
\text{tread} \\
\text{like a} \\
\text{tread} \\
\text{mill} \\
\text{or mile} \\
\text{stone} \\
\text{or pet}
\]
like a pet
like a perpet.
ual plant
or
plantation ... 

The moral shadow of history enters our conceptual geography, as indeed it must. But I hope to have shown how the conceptual map also provides a continuum which turns incompatibilities into complementary dimensions. The historicized space of the Orient and the 'geographized' time of the New World have stayed remarkably intact in conceptualization since that year in Granada when the Spaniards dispatched the Moors off to the East – and Columbus off to the West. After 500 years of European attempts to impose our own social space (our sense of history and geography, our religion and economy) on other realities of time and place, the time is ripe for a reconceptualization. It must however take the form of a reconsideration, and a recognition of historical associations firmly planted in mental geography, rather than a simple replacement of imperialist concepts like 'Orient' and 'New World' by another set of polarities in the self-boosting discursive formations of European-Imperial ideologies. That would be to enter another circle of televized virtual reality; we need to get back to earth. Both the history of travel writing and Caribbean literary geography urge us towards a complex contextualism which sees the passing historical shadows in the constant presence of geography. That space has its own time provides both orientation and hope for Walcott’s Achille at the end of Omeros: 'When he left the beach, the sea was still going on'.

NOTES

It’s all about ideology: there’s no discussion about art:
Reluctant Voyages into Theory in Caribbean Women’s Writing

All good conferences engender debate and argument, and the Second International Conference of Caribbean Women Writers, held in Trinidad in April 1990 was no exception. Sue Greene’s report on the conference mentions a certain amount of ‘wrangling’ between authors and critics as to which group should be shown ‘more deference’, even though the interdependence of the two was also clearly acknowledged (534). Personally, I feel such jockeying for position to be a wasteful and divisive exercise: given the continued tendency to ‘exoticize’ Caribbean literature in the international market, and to treat women’s writing as a trendy—but still marginal—subset within this corpus, our united task must be to give women’s literary voices the widest possible hearing.

In this task, critical scholarship is vital. It may be that authorial suspicion of the practice of literary criticism has to do with more than competing egos. Greene cites ‘a well-established author’ at the conference stating, ‘I’m never coming back to one of these things. It’s all about ideology. There’s no discussion about art’ (536). Presumably, this author had missed the many papers that dealt with what Greene terms ‘comparative, psychological, colonialist, structuralist, and feminist readings of texts’ (536). Surely a detailed ‘reading’ of a text, examining its mechanics, sources, influences and interpretations constitutes a ‘discussion about art’? Perhaps the author in question was concerned that such readings were informed by political messages, subsuming examination of literary technique to ideological exegesis? Whatever her actual misgivings, the complaint points to a paradigm I want to question here: the supposed dichotomy between art and ideology. Unfortunately, my discussion is limited to women’s fiction from the anglophone Caribbean, not being competent to make claims for other areas. Nonetheless, the issues are, I think, relevant for the entire region.

Greene (536) considers that ‘the relationship between art and ideology was not explored at this conference’. Well, perhaps not explicitly; but I doubt anyone could deny that Caribbean women’s writing is crucially informed by ideology. Indeed, Eagleton (22) maintains that ‘[l]iterature, in
the meaning of the word we have inherited, is an ideology. It has the most intimate relations to questions of social power. For him, ideology consists of ‘the ways in which what we say and believe connects with the power-structure and power-relations of the society we live in’ (14). Caribbean women writers too, inevitably interact with ‘power-structures’ in their societies (which happen to be post-colonial patriarchies) and, explicitly or otherwise, this interaction shapes what they say in their art. As Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin paraphrase Althusser (170) all ‘subjects are interpellated (called into being) within ideologies and ... this is inescapable’.

Indeed, several Caribbean women writers are not only aware of the ideological nature of their art, but expressly recognize – as does Merle Hodge (202) – that ‘there is no fundamental contradiction between art and activism. Acknowledging ‘the power of the creative word to change the world’ (202), Hodge is quite open about the political thrust of her fiction. Erna Brodber too, specifies the ‘activist intentions’ of her writing (164). Lauretta Ngcobo’s lines, which serve as an epigraph to an essay in *Motherlands* (ed. Nasta, 290), are appropriate here: ‘Out of our acrid neighbourhoods springs this rioting literature. It is not art for art’s sake; its vibrance and immediacy are intended to forge unity and wrench a new identity.’

And, as Toril Moi (1991, 82) suggests, ‘the study of a female tradition in literature ... is surely more than a methodological choice: it is an urgent political necessity.’ So critics, as well as writers, are ideologically motivated. Moi notes that a reader may find a work of art ‘aesthetically valuable but politically distasteful’; however, it is important to realize that ‘aesthetic value judgements are [themselves] historically relative and ... deeply imbricated in political value judgements’ (85). All readings then, are in some sense political. A feminist reading – which is one obvious way of reading Caribbean women’s writing – simply acknowledges this fact and seeks to deconstruct an opposition between the political and the aesthetic so that one becomes ‘aware of the politics of aesthetic categories as well as of the implied aesthetics of political approaches to art’ (86).

Nevertheless, it would appear that at least some Caribbean women writers resist political labels, seeing them as limiting or inappropriate. To be termed a ‘feminist author’ may offend a woman writer who considers that her political context is not adequately represented in certain schools of ‘international’ feminism. In addition, as Mordecai and Wilson point out, the short fiction in their anthology cannot be said to have straight feminist agendas, since issues of gender are clearly bound up with issues of race and class (1989, xii). Elsewhere (1988), I have attempted to explore political orientations in a sample of Jamaican women’s short stories, concluding that a strong feminist ‘agenda’ was held in common. However, this political orientation is one specific to the Caribbean: Anglo-American and European feminist theories sometimes neglect or make rigid pre-suppositions about cultural, nationalistic and racial concerns that are central to the work of writers in this region.
Thus, while I would wish to stress the impossibility of separating political ideology from aesthetic judgement, exploration of ideological currents - feminist and otherwise - in Caribbean women's writing must be sensitively aware of the specifics of the cultural context.

But there is a further implication in the quoted disparagement of 'ideology' which relates to authorial unease with critical presentations: a distrust of theory, particularly 'imported' literary theory. No doubt many writers would sympathize with Barbara Christian's reflection (xi) that 'when I read much literary criticism today, I wonder if the critic has read the book, since so often the text is but an occasion for espousing his or her philosophical [ideological/theoretical] point of view - revolutionary black, feminist or socialist programme'. While there is no doubt that there is bad, dogmatic criticism, one must still ask from what other perspective than 'his/her point of view' can a critic speak? Indeed, the introduction from which this quote is taken is itself a statement of Christian's own ideological/theoretical positions. After all, as Eagleton (194) reminds us, literary theory is 'indissociably bound up with political beliefs and ideological values', in spite of any pretence at offering 'objective' or 'universal' insights, literary theories are based on particular doctrines relating to the interests of particular groups. The idea that there are 'non-political' forms of criticism, he insists, is simply a myth used to further certain political uses of literature all the more effectively (209).

What are the objections raised to theory? Caribbean women's writing shares with other post-colonial literatures a distrust of the 'rarefied' nature of literary theory: as Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin observe with Lyotard (165), in some 'oral societies where narrative dominates, ways of knowing are legitimized as a product of actual social relations and not valorized and reified as a separate "objective" category above and beyond other categories'. In addition, they quote Soyinka censoring the native critic who adopts European theory wholesale, never stopping 'to consider whether or not the universal verities of his new doctrine are already contained in, or can be elicited from the world-view and social structures of his own people' (165). They note that European theory - even the idea of 'theory' - has been rejected as irredeemably Eurocentric (and, for feminists, male) in its assumptions and political effects (180). Finally, they warn of the dangerous tendency of theoretical reincorporation of post-colonial texts 'into a new internationalist and universalist paradigm' (155-6). Abruna (278) cites Ketu Katrak's reference to this appropriation of post-colonial texts as 'raw material' for the production of literary theory and warns against using 'prescriptive models' in interpreting West Indian women's fictions.

Lemmuel Johnson (119) voices the common accusation that most well-known feminist critics 'focus on white women in literature and theory' while Sylvia Wynter (355-6) rejects 'feminism' and 'womanism' as critical methodologies because of their Eurocentric bases, arguing instead the
primacy of the variable 'race' in Caribbean women's writing. Sue Greene's report on the 1991 conference (537) includes Cliff Lashley's charge that 'international feminism' may do as much damage to this writing as Marxist criticism has done, suggesting that both discourses can be guilty of 'the sin of self-reflexive neo-colonialism'. Indeed, Greene herself suggests (538) that 'for now, literary critics can best serve the study of Caribbean women's literature by expanding their concept of literature and by looking more deeply at the world from which it has arisen' than by applying critical theories of any kind'.

What emerges from these comments is a concept of literary theory as an 'objective', universalizing, monolithic system, taking no account of local exceptions to its rules, a system which is unreflectingly adopted by critics and which, because it is Eurocentric and thus antithetical to the cultural and epistemological context of the Caribbean, has no insights of value to offer; instead, theory simply absorbs literary texts, regurgitating them as so much statistical evidence for its pronouncements. No wonder Caroline Rooney (101) images critical discourse as a colonising or imperialist discourse: one which annexes its textual object in order to perpetuate itself, institutionalise itself and its attendant ideological assumptions ... [and] involves the subjection of not only the particular text but its 'world' or cultural and historical context to the homogenising standards and interests of the so-called 'first' world.

However, I feel such a view of theory does a disservice to both theoretical practitioner and writer in the Caribbean, implying a 'native' passivity and inability to engage with and, if necessary, resist domination by 'imported' critical models. The suggestion is that the critic either 'sells out' entirely to 'Western' theory, willingly internalizing the hegemonic racist/patriarchal foundations of the discourse, or simply refuses to engage with the colonizing, monolithic monster at all, thus allowing the dominant discourse unopposed rule in the face of silence. The text, for its part, is helpless to resist appropriation and has no inherent strategies for resisting this heavy-handed manipulation. Rather than accept this scenario of powerlessness, I would like to express some alternative views.

It is necessary, first, to address the indictment of feminism as an alien theoretical/ideological phenomenon. Rhoda Reddock (61) acknowledges that in post-colonial territories hardly any 'other word in modern times has been so vilified for its European origins as feminism', but she goes on to show that feminism is not a recent import into the Caribbean. Indeed, the 'modern women's movement in the English-speaking Caribbean is the continuation of a rich struggle for women's emancipation ... firmly based within the sociopolitical and historical context of this region' (63). By feminism, she means 'the awareness of the subordination and exploitation of women in society and the conscious action to change that situation' (62); different feminists vary in their understanding of the problem and on
the strategies necessary for the solution. For example, in the Caribbean the struggle for the amelioration of women has been traditionally linked to struggles for racial equality and human dignity (77). Greene’s reference (537) to Margaret Watt’s (in fact, she means Belinda Edmonson’s) presentation at the last conference – the only one that ‘analyzed with any thoroughness the concept of a peculiarly Caribbean feminism’ – underlines the notion that such a thing exists, and that feminist theory in the region is well on the way to indigenization.

Then there is the charge that contemporary ‘western’ theory – like deconstruction – is largely irrelevant to our post-colonial situation. But, as Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin point out (165), contemporary European criticism tends to ‘dismantle assumptions about language and textuality and to stress the importance of ideological construction in social-textual relations’, methodologies which find ‘echoes in post-colonial texts. The concerns of these discourses are therefore increasingly interactive and mutually influential’ (165). Further, both Caribbean feminist and deconstructive approaches share an insistence on questioning the received order, exploring political and other structures that support the dominant discourse, not least by interrogating the necessary rightness of binary opposites (man as presence/woman as lack). Finally, a theory like deconstruction which holds central the tenet that all discourses, including theoretical ones, contain the seeds of their own destabilization, can hardly be accused of being inherently monolithic and universalizing!

This leads on to the objection to theory as an alien, ‘objective’, scientific knowledge which may be at odds with the epistemology of some cultures, especially in oral societies. However, it seems to me that where contemporary European, post-colonial and Caribbean feminist theory overlap is in a constant investigation and relativizing of all ‘ways of knowing’. Bill Ashcroft (25), for example, questions the whole notion of an essentially female or ‘authentic’ national identity, positing instead that in a creole culture, the constant process of syncretism works to evade attempts at defining ‘uniquely distinguishing characteristics’. Going further, he suggests that this ‘openness to the continuing deferral of cultural identity’ (33) – the constant play between, say, race, class, gender, caste and class markers – leads us to consider the term ‘female’ (like ‘national’) as a fundamentally arbitrary designation, preparing the way for full recognition of plurality and multiplicity rather than ‘objective’, scientific categorization.

Toril Moi (1986, 212-14) makes a similar point, citing Kristeva’s refusal to define femininity as a necessary defence against essentialism. Instead, femininity is considered (as could ‘Caribbean’, ‘Third World’) as ‘that which is marginalised by the patriarchal symbolic order’ (212). Again, we see the insistence in contemporary theoretical orientations on the relativity of judgement: ‘What is perceived as marginal at any given time depends on the position one occupies’ (213). When women (or blacks) are marginally positioned in the symbolic order, and construed by patriarchy (or
Eurocentrism) as the limit, the border-line of that order—both necessary frontier between civilized man and chaos and merging with that chaos outside—they can be represented in fiction as possessing a pure innocent nature and as the 'heart of darkness'. Neither, of course, is essentially true of blacks/women (213); but only attention to the 'ways of knowing' that constructed them as such can de-privilege epistemologies and question fundamental presuppositions generally held to be 'true'.

Importantly, however, Moi introduces a practical note when she discusses Kristeva's refusal of the binary opposition of male/female as a matter of metaphysics: for 'as long as patriarchy is dominant, it still remains politically essential for feminists to defend women as women in order to counteract the patriarchal oppression that precisely despises women as women' (214). In other words, one can balance a radically transformative theoretical awareness of the metaphysical nature of gender identities (in order to avoid 'an inverted form of sexism', or essentialism) with conscious political awareness of gender inequality.

Hazel Carby (16), noting that black feminist theory 'shares a structural and conceptual pattern of questions and issues with other modes of feminist inquiry', insists on the rejection of 'essential and ahistorical' reliance for definition simply on common or shared experience. Carby too, calls for a theory that focuses on multiplicity and plurality, 'a feminist critical practice that pays particular attention to the articulation of gender, race and class' in 'the cultural productions of black women intellectuals' (17). Like Moi, her work repudiates simplistic categorizations of identity—'Black feminist criticism has too frequently been reduced to an experiential relationship that exists between black women as critics and black women as writers who represent black women's reality' (16) — while remaining rooted in a 'materialist account' of the 'social relations' that inscribe black women. We can see in common here a multicultural theoretical stance firmly indigenized in the material context of Caribbean women writer's texts. Such a methodology, it seems to me, escapes the dilemma outlined by Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (164-165): how to avoid 'the two extremes of a national or racial [or gender] essentialism ... and an international posture which denies "self-apprehension"'.

Finally, we must address the perception of imported theory as seeking to colonize Caribbean women's literary texts, aided by the naive critic who absorbs and disseminates 'foreign' standards and the writing itself as a malleable literary entity with no intrinsic powers of resistance to this manipulation and appropriation. I suggest the point made by Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (180) is a useful rebuttal of the above misrepresentation of critical practice: critical texts, they think, 'as well as creative texts are products of post-colonial hybridity. In fact, it is arguable that to move towards a genuine affirmation of multiple forms of native "difference", we must recognize that this hybridity will continue'. Their book is a cogent demonstration of the ways in which indigenous theories interact...
and overlap with other models, and of how critics in the Caribbean, among other territories, don’t simply assume the truth of ‘imported’ theory but adapt and modify it, argue against it, and force it into counter-discursive roles. Arun Mukherjee actually practices what she preaches (45) in her article, arguing the need to ‘dismantle the prison hold of binaries and work for theoretical perspectives that can come to grips with the pluralistic and heterogeneous nature of the ‘socio-ideological’ discourse of post-colonial cultures’.

In addition, it can be argued that certain theories – feminism and post-colonialism, for example – are essentially anti-authoritarian, and tend to be wary of reincorporating texts into intellectual orthodoxy (Ashcroft, 24). However, even if we do see theory misused as a ‘colonizing’ force, Caroline Rooney (112-114) shows that texts can resist appropriation, assimilation into critical orthodoxy by, for example, parodying the critical stance and thus preempting interpretation, or refusing to privilege and exclude categories. She demonstrates that certain women’s texts constantly and unpredictably revise themselves, reworking meanings and creating paradoxes that are not necessarily contradictions (118). The text then, can serve as a critique which interrogates that which seeks to interrogate it (121).

Claire Harris’s strong statement of herself as a writer who refuses appropriation and assimilation (306-309) is matched by the critical practice of scholars like Susheila Nasta, who insists that creative dialogue between theoretical currents and literary texts can exist: ‘Western feminist theories current in “First World” audiences need not simply appropriate these writings to elucidate their biases but ... can “illuminate” the texts’ (xvi-xvii). Indeed, she feels the give-and-take – the ‘double discourse ... often at work between the cultural values encoded in the text itself and the individual critic’s particular cultural baggage’ (xvii) – can be a mutually educational experience.

It seems to me that several critics of Caribbean and ‘diaspora’ women’s literature are working toward a similar theoretical position, one which paradoxically refuses rigid definition. Elaine Fido’s model of a crossroads space (30) from which writers and critics choose directions and chart their own paths, is similar to the model suggested by Claudia Tate (xvii) and echoes Mordecai and Wilson’s description of the ‘complex of ... criss-crossing valuing’ (1989, xiii) that characterizes Caribbean women’s fiction. As Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin see it (104) the inclusiveness of such literary vision is ultimately subversive of the status quo:

The syncretic is validated by the disappearance of the ‘centre’, and with no ‘centre’ the marginal becomes the formative constituent of reality. Discourses of marginality such as race, gender, psychological ‘normalcy’, geographical and social distance, political exclusion, intersect with a view of reality which supersedes the geometric distinction of centre and margin and replaces it with a sense of the complex, inter-weaving and syncretic accretion of experience.
Others have called attention to the inclusiveness of the Caribbean woman writer's literary tradition. Balutansky's review of *Her True True Name* makes the point that there can never be one single 'authentic' Caribbean voice, female or otherwise, and generalizations about Caribbean female identity must recognize the centrality of *diversity*. Like other scholars, she calls attention to the variety of voices and styles in literature by women of the region, women who 'may share a common history of colonialism, and many other experiences, but the interplay of these various heritages creates a new turn' in the way they each experience their world (546). Sue Greene admits that Caribbean women's writing defies easy definitions of any kind (536). Pamela Mordecai's 'prismatic form', an exciting concept she has been refining for some time, speaks to the type of inclusiveness described above. For Mordecai (1986), 'prismatic consciousness' is the disposition to perceive and construe experience in terms of (sometimes unresolved) pluralities; 'the impulse to pluralities [usually] restrained by a manner of knowing essentially linear' as she explains in her forward to Davies and Fido's *Out of the Kumbla* (viii). Mordecai feels that such a refraction of experience and perception, one that pays attention to the *multifaceted* nature of perception, is an important feature of Caribbean women's writing, although of course it owes much to the reality of syncretism which characterizes Caribbean societies. The fascinating way women writers slide across codes and registers of language, she notes, is one aspect of this many-sided vision.

What is evident here is an awareness of and attention to a special sense of inclusive, fluid diversity in Caribbean writing by women. Davies and Fido's introduction to *Out of the Kumbla* (17) notes a similar plurality in critical methodology among the contributors who are 'engaged multiple-voicedly with both the female condition and its affirmation as well as the critique of the politics of imperialism and marginalization' (18).

And so we return to ideology! It seems to me that Caribbean women writers, in general, are implicitly committed to an ideology of change, to the necessity for exposing and subverting inequalities in their societies and sometimes - suggesting ways in which transformations might come about. Their fiction *also* transforms consciousness, communicating a certain 'way of knowing' that deconstructs oppositionals on which imperial and patriarchal power largely depend for power: in their writing we see, with Rhys, that 'there is always the other side. Always'. I also feel that critics who read and study and teach this literature share the ideological goals of the writers, *and* the irreverent, 'deconstructive' way of thinking that adopts and adapts theoretical strategies at will in the service of such ideology. Recognizing this unity-in-diversity, I trust we can transcend the type of 'wrangling' mentioned by Sharon Chako (334): '[a]ccomplishment by other women seems to threaten our own little slice of the pie, and we draw apart in unhealthy rivalry.'
Further, given the multicultural nature of the region, the syncretism of our creole cultures and languages, and the disparate voices and songs of Caribbean women writers who are products of such a ‘mixed bag’, I suggest we apply a little more tolerance of theoretical experimentation. Understandably, writers distrust misused or rigidly appropriative criticism: such ‘colonizing’ tendencies are anathema to a fictional discourse that embraces pluralities and to which complexity is fundamental. So rather than attempt to construct one theoretical model or another, I have suggested the need for synthetic theoretical approaches which can and do take account of the multiplicity, complexity, and the intersection of apparently conflicting orientations which we find in the writing. As Moi (1991, 87) notes, feminists have politicized almost all existing critical methods and approaches; as theorists of Caribbean literature by women, a similar policy of unapologetic indigenizing appropriation might be recommended, an approach which combines methodological heterogeneity and ideological commonality while refusing to be ultimately formalized, boxed, labelled under any one ‘ism’.

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Many critics have pointed to Jamaica Kincaid as one of the most innovative and interesting of contemporary Caribbean writers, and there have been several articles engaging with her fiction through contemporary literary theory. Such approaches have tended to focus on the convergence of feminist and psycho-analytic theories which are centrally concerned, as Kincaid’s writing appears to be, with the mother-daughter relationship. In this paper, I wish to shift the critical axis away from the application of theory to Kincaid’s writing, in order to explore the way in which her writing itself could be seen as an alternative theory, a ‘literary’ theory which questions the assumptions within orthodox modes of interpretation, including feminist and psychoanalytic models. In other words, my interest lies with the ways in which post-colonial literature might help us to understand the limitations of certain theories, rather than with the ways in which theory can help us to understand post-colonial literature.

In the hope of suggesting a new perspective on the much debated nexus between Euro-centric theory and post-colonial literature, I wish to offer a close reading of Kincaid’s fiction, rather than staging a debate solely amongst critics and theorists. In her essay ‘The Race for Theory’, which also interrogates this somewhat tense point of crossing, Barbara Christian has stated that:

people of colour have always theorized – but in forms quite different from the Western form of abstract logic. And I am inclined to say that our theorizing is often in narrative forms, in the stories we create, in riddles and proverbs, in the play with language, since dynamic rather than fixed ideas seem more to our liking.

For those familiar with Kincaid’s writing, the strategies which Christian describes as characteristic of this theory – which I would not wish to posit as any kind of exhaustive or privileged model of ‘black theory’ – will almost certainly be recognisable.

As a focus for my reading of Kincaid’s creative theoretical strategies, I wish to look at the way in which she problematises and theorizes popular cultural and intellectual narratives of the late twentieth century by
rehearsing them through the eyes of Lucy, her latest Caribbean female protagonist in the novel of that name. I shall look at the characteristically American ideal of arrival, which in Lucy’s experience is also closely associated with exile, often seen as a classically West Indian phenomenon, in order to explore how this cultural or national narrative has been constructed. I also wish to examine how the narrative offered by feminism and particularly Anglo-American feminism relates to Lucy’s experience as a Caribbean woman, and finally I shall discuss the whole debate concerning the ideology of the aesthetic and the way in which it is culturally determined.

My argument is that by playfully engaging with given or naturalised narratives of nationhood and self – those stories through which we feel we know ourselves and others – in Lucy, Kincaid draws our attention to the cultural politics which are subsumed within certain modes of storytelling and interpretation. She presents us with conventional narratives in such a way that they interrogate their own conventions. She offers us familiar tales and then de-familiarises them. Dreams of the Middle Passage and of slavery disrupt Lucy’s arrival in America, memories of her mother’s life back in the Caribbean unsettle the Anglo-American feminist discourse with which she is presented, and her perception of the divide between the aesthetic and ideological becomes politicised, as it is constantly in conflict with that of her employer.

In Kincaid’s earlier work, Annie John, the narrative ostensibly ends with the final stage of Annie’s journey towards emotional maturity and away from cultural security, as she leaves her mother and her small place to sail for the mother-land. In many ways, Lucy may appear to begin from where Annie John concludes. This latest fiction chronicles the arrival of a nineteen year old woman from a small West Indian island to the United States of America where she takes employment as a nanny. However, it is a significant difference that instead of travelling to England, the imperial motherland, Lucy has journeyed to America, its contemporary rival. Indeed, I would argue that much of the novel bids for a strong reading of America’s positioning in relation to the Caribbean in terms of economic, cultural and intellectual neo-colonialism.

For Lucy, her arrival in the United States is not to be the entry into Eden, or opportunity for personal genesis, which she had anticipated. Instead, she enters a land which is situated, both seasonally and morally, after the fall. America, in its wintering phase, presents profound disappointment to Lucy who had dreamt of a land where ‘all these places were points of happiness to me; all these places were lifeboats to my small drowning soul.’ Lucy has been betrayed by colonial indoctrination into believing the imperial narrative which couples ‘discovery’ of a land with self-discovery. Yet, even her body language articulates the ambivalence which she experiences at the moment of arrival in America: ‘at first it was all so new that I had to smile with my mouth turned down at the corners’
(p. 4). As the narrative develops and Lucy’s new life as a nanny to a white, middle-class, nuclear family – who represent the crumbling facade of American civility and liberalism – unfolds, it becomes evident that she has not, after all, arrived in any personal sense. Rather than being an act by which to forget and to separate past from future, Lucy’s arrival only serves to heighten her awareness of herself as exile. ‘Oh, I had imagined that with one swift act – leaving home and coming to this new place – I could leave behind me, as if it were an old garment never to be worn again, my sad thoughts, my sad feelings, and my discontent with life in general as it presented itself to me’ (pp. 6-7). The binary opposition collapses, neither exile nor arrival are complete, and, as migrant and minority Lucy is left without belonging. America is indeed a poor shadow of her dream.

In a text which constantly denies us the happy endings which feed our cultural imaginations, it is made explicit that the closure or fulfilment of that old colonial tale which depicts the ‘other’ land as the site on which to achieve aspirations and desires inaccessible at home is still dependent upon economic and social power. The dinner party guests of Lucy’s employers had been, seen and consummated their fantasies of fun and frolics in ‘the islands’, but, journeying in the opposite direction, she is not so comfortably accommodated in her new environs. Although warmly embraced by the family for whom she works, Lucy remains acutely aware of her positioning within all structures of American society, including the home.

The room in which I lay was a small room just off the kitchen – the maid’s room. I was used to a small room, but this was a different sort of small room. The ceiling was very high and the walls went all the way up to the ceiling, enclosing the room like a box – a box in which cargo travelling a long way should be shipped. But I was not cargo. I was only an unhappy young woman living in a maid’s room, and I was not even a maid. (p. 7)

While the spacial configuration of Lucy’s room evidently denotes containment, it more specifically evokes the iconography of the slave ship in which the captured Africans were transported as chattels across the ocean to America. This representation is suggestive of the fact that Lucy’s respectable position of service as a nanny is a not so distant echo of her ancestors’ enforced servitude in this land.

Yet as the reality of American society intrudes upon Lucy’s dream, so other dreams begin to intrude upon her reality. The subsumed slave narrative emerges most dramatically within Lucy’s dreams, one of which she relates to her employers, Lewis and Mariah, one evening at the dinner table.

Lewis was chasing me around the house. I wasn’t wearing any clothes. The ground on which I was running was yellow, as if it had been paved with cornmeal. Lewis
was chasing me around and around the house, and though he came close he could never catch up with me. Mariah stood at the open windows saying, Catch her Lewis, catch her. Eventually I fell down a hole, at the bottom of which were some silver and blue snakes. (p. 14)

Images of plantation life and slave capture emerge alongside that of the yellow brick road to present a montage of the colliding and conflicting messages within this ambivalently informed cultural imagination. The conflation of seemingly opposing cultural signifiers, of desired future and denied past, of hope and fear, signals the complex matrix of competing claims within a migrant consciousness informed by both metropolitan expectations and ancestral histories.

As well as revealing the America of oppression buried beneath the dream of the land of the free, Lucy's dream and the response of her American employers to it, 'Lewis made a clucking noise, then said, Poor, poor Visitor. And Mariah said, Dr. Freud for Visitor, and I wondered why she said that, for I did not know who Dr. Freud was', point to the way in which Kincaid's fiction foregrounds the limitations of Western theoretical models. I would suggest that the description of Lucy's dream actually serves to question the value of dominant Western psychoanalytical theories, which see dreams only as ciphers for issues of sexual difference and conflict. While the heavily inscribed Freudian imagery of holes and snakes might seem to invite or endorse this reading, the images of running naked and of cornmeal clearly signify that cultural difference and conflict are also primary determinants within this consciousness. The denial of issues of cultural difference in the development of psychoanalytic theory means that the proposed Dr Freud would be, at best, an inadequate model through which to interpret the dreams of an adolescent Caribbean female. Evidently the cultural context of the Caribbean makes the baffling nature of the already 'dark continent' of female sexuality even more inaccessible to Freudian interpretation.

In terms of the theorising narrative, the depiction of Lucy's dream collapses or de-constructs the space which Western theory often seeks to construct between ideas of cultural difference and sexual difference, in order to present the way in which these two models of differentiation are intimately bound within the construction of a female post-colonial subjectivity.

It is this same denial of cultural difference which also necessitates Lucy's resistance to the discourse of Anglo-American feminism within the novel. Mariah, Lucy's supposedly liberal and liberated white employer, who constructs her as the 'poor visitor' and in need of rescue attempts to offer her this through the supposedly more authentic voice of a feminist language.

Mariah left the room and came back with a large book and opened it to the first chapter. She gave it to me. I read the first sentence. 'Woman? Very simple, say the fanciers of simple formulas: she is a womb, an ovary; she is female - this word is sufficient to define her.' I had to stop. Mariah had completely misinterpreted my
situation. My life could not really be explained by this thick book that made my hands hurt as I tried to keep it open. My life was at once something more simple and more complicated than that...' (p. 132)

To Lucy, the text is meaningless and burdensome as it refuses context. Lucy must reject the language of the surrogate mother because it rejects her specific cultural and historical positioning. The language of the text, like that of Mariah herself, speaks to middle class white women, with little awareness of its exclusivity. The generalised statements concerning gender, which Mariah’s feminism advocates, do not correlate to the cultural differences between women which Lucy has already observed.

Although I would not wish to deny the very real marginalisation, which the novel clearly reveals, that Lucy does experience as a woman within her home society, her Caribbean cultural heritage is clearly womanist/ feminist both in ethos and in practice. Baffled by American women’s obsessions with ageing and beauty, Lucy asserts her own code which confidently articulates a positive female subjectivity: ‘Among the beliefs I held about the world was that being beautiful should not matter to a woman, because it was one of those things that would go away, and there wouldn’t be anything you could do to bring it back’ (p. 57). From her childhood in the Caribbean, Lucy has also learnt of the herbal abortifacients from her mother and thus is in possession of one of the primary objectives of the early American women’s movement – control over fertility. Moreover, her Caribbean upbringing has instilled into Lucy the significance of solidarity amongst women: ‘It was my mother who told me that I should never take a man’s side over a woman’s.... It was from her own experience that she spoke’ (p. 48). As well as exposing the alienating ethnocentric bias of a certain type of Anglo-American feminism, Lucy’s simple statements seem to suggest that within Caribbean women’s lives theory and practice are not discrete, as Kincaid juxtaposes gender politics which are to be lived with those which are to be argued.

Here and throughout the novel, Lucy’s thoughts and dreams testify to the ways in which certain intellectual spaces still remain colonised within Western thought. It is Mariah who is trapped within the monologic narrative unable to negotiate the differences between language and living and self and other, not Lucy. It becomes clear that the narratives of opportunity and belonging (of having arrived) and of liberation (here through feminism) have been transculturally marketed in versions which are deeply ethnocentric and exclusive, and which, moreover, with a certain cultural complacency, deny the coexistence of alternative models, such as those which Lucy brings with her from the Caribbean.

However, as well as revealing the cultural biases and blind spots within existing theoretical models, Kincaid’s novel also explores the basis upon which we evaluate, by rehearsing the way in which we judge our notions of the aesthetic and the ideological. This process is staged most crucially
within the narrative when Mariah initiates Lucy into the joys of Spring by telling her of a field of daffodils.

She [Mariah] said, 'Have you ever seen daffodils pushing their way up out of the ground? And when they're in bloom and all massed together, a breeze comes along and makes them do a curtsy to the lawn stretching out in front of them. Have you ever seen that? When I see that, I feel so glad to be alive.' ...I remembered an old poem I had been made to memorize when I was ten years old and a pupil at Queen Victoria’s Girls’ School. I had been made to memorize it, verse after verse, and then had recited the whole poem to an auditorium full of parents, teachers, and my fellow pupils. After I was done, everybody stood up and applauded with an enthusiasm that surprised me, and later they told me how nicely I had pronounced every word, how I had placed just the right amount of special emphasis in places where that was needed, and how proud the poet, now long dead, would have been to have heard his words ringing out of my mouth. I was then at the height of my two-facedness: that is, outside false, inside true. And so I made pleasant little noises that showed both modesty and appreciation, but inside I was making a vow to erase from my mind, line by line, every word of that poem. (pp. 17-18)

Mariah’s admiration for this seemingly simple field of flowers acts as a powerful catalyst for Lucy’s memories of cultural imperialism. What is essentially an aesthetic experience for Mariah constitutes a powerful ideological situation for Lucy. Her retrospective vision of reciting Wordsworth’s poem works as both a literal example of colonial education and as a metonym for the colonial apparatus’ promotion of an aesthetic which is ideologically motivated in its very essence of seeming to be devoid of ideology. ‘Daffodils’ was promoted pedagogically as an apolitical text and yet becomes highly politicised when analysed within the colonial context in which Kincaid places it. The poetic subject (daffodils) signifies the forced adoption of the motherland and the attendant suppression of difference. In addition, the process of learning by heart further supports the hegemony’s underlying need for mimicry which Lucy publicly performs but privately attempts to negate.

Her double consciousness, or two-facedness as she calls it, is testimony to her ambivalent position as black and female in relation to colonial cultural authority, which is represented by the poem, the poet, and the institution of the school. By appearing to subscribe to the version of aesthetics pedagogically promoted, but internally reacting against it, Lucy has clearly politicised and resisted the stifling appropriation of a culturally inauthentic voice. Indeed, when Mariah at last takes her to see the daffodils, which she had so carefully and painfully eulogized as a young girl, Lucy’s reaction is a spontaneous and most vehement desire to cut them all down. ‘It wasn’t her fault. It wasn’t my fault. But nothing could change the fact that where she saw beautiful flowers, I saw sorrow and bitterness. The same thing could cause us to shed tears, but those tears would not taste the same. We walked home in silence’ (p. 30). Although Mariah’s and Lucy’s bewilderment at the situation may be mutual, from her analysis of their
conflicting responses, it is evident that Lucy experiences and comprehends the politics of cultural difference in a way her American employer cannot. Nevertheless, within the narrative, Lucy does attempt to communicate to Mariah the consequences of cultural and historical positioning upon ways of seeing. On a very American train journey, Mariah again attempts to invite Lucy into the beauty of her world.

Early that morning, Mariah left her own compartment to come to tell me that we were passing through some of those freshly plowed fields she loved so much. She drew up my blind, and when I saw mile after mile of turned-up earth, I said, a cruel tone to my voice, ‘Well, thank God I didn’t have to do that.’ I don’t know if she understood what I meant, for in that one statement I meant many different things. (p. 33)

As before, aesthetic and ideological are revealed as relative states. In this instance, Lucy’s historical affiliation is with the labour which ploughed the fields, whereas Mariah’s is with those of leisure, and thus visual pleasure. While the politics of this situation may seem clear to us as readers, this perception cannot be so confidently assumed by Lucy, for whom the task of communicating across a widening cultural chasm is deeply problematic. However, Kincaid does not appear to be bidding for a reading which emphasises the aesthetic as simply a frivolous position, an Anglo-centric luxury denied to, and irrelevant to those outside the dominant economic group, as later in the book she neatly inverts the line of judgement. As Lucy watches Mariah and her adulterous husband posture romantically, she notices how ‘She leaned her head backward and rested it on his shoulder (she was a little shorter than he, and that looked wrong; it looks better when a woman is a little taller than her husband), and she sighed and shuddered in pleasure’ (p. 47). Lucy’s observation that it is aesthetically pleasing for a wife to be taller than her husband is a particularly playful and incisive context for the inversion of the divide, as this is a statement which Mariah, with her criteria of Western feminism, would clearly interpret as ideologically motivated.

The aporia which divides Lucy and Mariah testifies to the culturally constructed nature of value systems and therefore questions the whole basis upon which we make judgements about ourselves, each other, and literary value. By re-presenting and unravelling the politics of certain national and intellectual narratives, Kincaid reveals that a Caribbean or a post-colonial female subjectivity is too complex to be articulated simply by feminist or colonial discourse theories or by national allegories, all of which are too often predicated on a belief that the other can easily be understood by the methodologies constructed by the self in order to ‘discover’ difference, and which further have a tendency to theorize that other into the self.

By arguing for a more complex subjectivity, both syncretic and shifting, Kincaid’s novel Lucy not only offers a compelling and engaging presentation of the Caribbean migrant consciousness, but it also makes us question
our confidence in making judgements which fail to encompass a consideration of cultural and gender orientation, although it very clearly does not deny the significance of working through the process of cross-cultural communication.

NOTES


3. Jamaica Kincaid, Lucy (London: Jonathon Cape Ltd, 1991) p. 3. All subsequent references are to this edition and are included in the text.

4. It is interesting to note that the text which Mariah offers as this ‘catch-all’ revelation of gender politics is Simone de Beauvoir’s The Second Sex. Her unproblematic presentation of this text supports both the insensitivity towards issues of cultural difference and the neo-colonial appropriation of others’ voices for the purposes of a self-as-other denial of difference which clearly inform Mariah’s feminist position within the novel.

5. The root of Lucy’s problematic relationship with her mother, which in one sense forms the ‘heart’ of the novel, is traced to the fact that her mother had privileged and inflated her sons over Lucy. The positive role model which her mother presents to Lucy in terms of gender is compromised by her patriarchal attitude towards her only daughter which seeks to severely limit Lucy’s opportunities (pp. 130-131).

6. Womanist is a term adopted by many African-American and Caribbean critics who wish to distinguish their own gender politics from those of mainstream Western feminism, especially with regards to the positive promotion of female attributes.
Columbus’s arrival in the so-called New World has given rise to a number of divergent and sometimes debatable interpretations. However, there remains the indisputable fact that the Genoese sailor’s crossing of the Atlantic shaped the societies that make up today’s American continent, among others the Caribbean. It determined the racially kaleidoscopic nature of its population and, more importantly, triggered off a vast, wide-ranging and often painful migratory phenomenon which in turn led to an almost ‘infinite rehearsal’, to use Wilson Harris’s by now famous phrase, of the initial collision between two worlds. Whether forcible or voluntary, displacements and encounters with otherness have always been at the very heart of the Caribbean condition.

If Columbus is the man who has come to stand symbolically as the prime catalyst of the most seminal changes in Caribbean history, he is also sometimes regarded, in a very ambiguous way, as having a lot in common with the displaced humans that were to people the Caribbean islands as a result of his voyages and conquests. In an article entitled ‘The Caribbean Writer and Exile’, in which he highlights the centrality of the exilic experience in contemporary Caribbean literature and reassesses early Caribbean history from the point of view of the colonized, Jan Carew portrays Columbus as ‘a schizoid being, a Janus astride two worlds, one medieval the other of the Renaissance’1, a kind of forerunner of the archetypical Caribbean migrant: ‘Columbus led an early life that was very similar to the one that future Caribbean artists, vagabonds, sailors, writers and immigrants would lead centuries later.... His whole life ... was ... a journey into new illusions.’2 Even if this admittedly arguable point requires some qualifications, the ambivalence of Columbus’s role as both alienating agent and, eventually, alienated subject – as his well-known later history indicates3 – somehow prefigures the duality of Caribbean experience that has so often inspired the best literature from the area.4

Two recent novels written by Afro-Caribbean writers, Caryl Phillips’s Cambridge5 and Jamaica Kincaid’s Lucy6 focus on this paradigmatic duality in the context of a journey into another culture, an echo of Columbus’s original confrontation with the unchartered realities of a new world. Situated at different points of the Caribbean historical spectrum, Cambridge at
the beginning of the 19th century, and *Lucy* in the late 20th century, both centre on experiences of otherness that are as much fraught with the contradictory mixture of lucidity and conscious or unconscious delusion as Columbus’s entreprise was. Relying on what Helen Tiffin called ‘a dynamic interaction between European hegemonic systems and peripheral subversion of them’, the two novels suggest a dismantling, or at least a calling into question, of the traditionally binary categories of self/other, slave/master, victim/victimizer making up the ‘“Manichean aesthetic” of post-colonial societies’ which, according to Fredric Jameson’s theory of the text as symbolic act, narrative fiction simultaneously articulates and deconstructs. The appropriation of power and the corollary deception necessary to maintain that power which have characterized the colonial venture from Columbus’s arrival onwards are inscribed but also questioned in the very structure and title of Caryl Phillips’s novel *Cambridge*. Set in a 19th century Caribbean plantation, the novel centres on two characters: Emily and Cambridge. Emily Cartwright is a 30-year-old Englishwoman who has been sent to the Caribbean by her father to survey the plantation he owns there, and Cambridge is an African slave, both a Christian and an emancipationist, who lives on the Cartwright plantation. Significantly, Emily’s narrative dominates the novel by its volume and the place it occupies: the prologue and the epilogue expressing her point of view frame the three chapters that make up the core of the novel. The first and longest chapter is Emily’s own journal, which gives an account full of unconscious ironies and understatements of the young woman’s encounter with the unknown. The third chapter consists of a very brief semi-official but glaringly biased report of the events described in the previous chapters. Cambridge’s life story, which is also his spiritual testament delivered before his hanging for killing the plantation manager, is wedged between Emily’s journal and that report. It is a relatively short chapter apologetically opening and closing with the words: ‘Pardon the liberty I take in unburdening myself with these hasty lines’ (pp. 133 and 167), as if intruding into the Euro-dominated narrative. It nevertheless occupies the central position, whereas the colonizer’s enclosing narratives actually make up the margins of the novel. The centrality of Cambridge is also reflected in the title, suggesting that the history of the Caribbean is rightfully his in the first place in spite of European appropriation.

Emily appears at the start as a relatively enlightened person for her time, who seems to be, in principle, against ‘the iniquity of slavery’ (p. 8) and is critical of the system of absentee landlordship represented by her father. She resents her powerless position as a woman: she feels she has been ‘sacrificed’ (p. 3) to the avarice of her father who has promised her
to a wealthy fifty-year-old widower she is supposed to marry on her return from the West Indies. At the mercy of her father’s authority and reduced to silence, she experiences a mild form of the paternalism that African slaves have to suffer at the hands of plantation owners, a parallel made all the clearer by her father’s view of women as ‘children of a larger growth’ (p. 4). However, Emily never truly realizes what she shares with the African slaves, whom she herself patronizes. Incidentally, by a kind of ironical inversion, Cambridge too reproduces on the domestic level the paternalism he has to endure at the hands of the plantation managers. Speaking of the wayward behaviour of his wife Christiania, he concludes: This caused my heart to swell with both sorrow and anger, for, as is well known, a Christian man possesses his wife, and the dutiful wife must obey her Christian husband’ (p. 163).

Emily’s journal, which she first intends as a kind of report for her father, is an example of what Gordon K. Lewis has called the ‘Middle Passage of systems of values and thought’. Although her journey to the island colonies is also for her an escape ‘from the lonely regime that fastened her into backboards, corsets and stays to improve her posture. The same friendless regime which advertises her as an ambassadress of grace’ (p. 4), she finds it difficult to get rid of her mental constraints and not to perceive the new world through the lens of her education and social prejudices. Two contradictory trends contend in her diary, which is a masterpiece of unreliability and ambiguity.

In order to escape the intoxicating effect on her senses of the ‘careless beauty’ (p. 17) of this ‘dark tropical unknown’ (p. 18) and to keep clear of what she perceives as the surrounding chaos and savagery, Emily classifies and categorizes the things and people she comes across. Two slaves on the plantation, Christiania and Cambridge, escape her taxonomic control because they challenge her myth of the happy-go-lucky black who leads ‘a happy hedonistic life’ (p. 67). With her magico-religious obeah rites Christiania embodies the ancestral African roots of the slaves and the non-rational character of the tropics which threaten Emily’s European cartesianism. Cambridge too undermines Emily’s supremacy by his knowledge of the Bible and his mastery of the English language: ‘The curious behaviour of this over-confident, Bible-reading slave demanded immediate attention…. He seemed determined to adopt a lunatic precision in his dealings with our English words, as though the black imagined himself to be a part of the white race’ (p. 120). Emily’s compulsive attempts at sounding rational and objective surface in the way she introduces her pseudo-scientific truths with expressions such as ‘I am led to believe that…’ or ‘It should be clear that…’. She plans to do a lecture tour on the Caribbean islands when she returns to Britain or possibly publish a pamphlet ‘framed as a reply to the lobby who, without any knowledge of life in these climes, would seek to have us believe that slavery is nothing more than an abominable evil’ (p. 86). As a would-be scholar Emily never
fails to mention her sources, whether slaves themselves (p. 37) or fellow colonisers, whose euphemistic explanations of the extermination of native Indians, for example, she swallows uncritically: ‘The gentleman informed me, in a short but edifying lecture, that the true natives of this region were of Indian origin (hence the name ‘West Indies’). Sadly they were discovered to be too troublesome and unused to European ways and had to be dispatched. However, this proved no simple task ...’ (p. 24) Yet, in spite of an apparently rational wrapping, her subjectivity is betrayed by the very words she uses to formulate her conclusions. For example, blacks are consistently associated with vocabulary normally used to describe animals: they live in ‘nests’ (p. 67), their children are ‘black wolf-cubs’ (p. 64), their skin is a ‘hide’ (p. 102) and their hands are ‘paws’ (p. 111). It is not exaggerated to say that her journal gives an almost complete inventory of the anti-black prejudices that have been perpetuated since slavery time and still feed today’s racism.

In stark contrast to her graphic descriptions of plantation life and her unsuccessful pretence at objectivity, Emily gets enmeshed in a complex network of omissions, misrepresentations and double standards of judgment which the reader is left to unscramble. This is especially true of what touches her emotionally, in particular her relation with Mr Brown, a brutish man who has usurped the manager’s authority on the plantation. Quite ironically, Emily, who is so eager to spot moral depravity, hypocrisy, laziness and general corruption in the black population, is blinded and beguiled by one of the most unscrupulous men on the island. Mr Brown, who becomes ‘Arnold’ without a warning from p. 100 to p. 101, seduces Emily before deserting her pregnant. Emily alludes only very indirectly to her pregnancy and desertion; whites have to keep up appearances. Yet, with Mr Brown’s death at the hands of a humiliated Cambridge, the end of her diary bears the cracks of her coming disorientation, and the epilogue, which opens with Emily giving birth to a stillborn baby, sees the collapse of a carefully built edifice. The continuous flow of her journal has been replaced with the fragmented and cyclical structure of a third person narrative. She has changed and has become physically and mentally closer to the African slaves she used to observe at the beginning, some of whom have to have amputation when a small insect called chegot cannot be extracted from under their feet: ‘Her lightness of step had gone as though her foot had been chopped off. Her body had become leaden, but her vision had begun to pulsate with a new and magical life, her mind had become a frieze of sharp stabbling colours’ (p. 182). Significantly, too, she has moved away from the Great House, an obvious symbol, to live with her servant Stella in Hawthorn Cottage, a small derelict shell of a house, matching her own physical and mental emptiness. Emily will always stay ‘the mistress’, yet her arrogance has been replaced by some degree of compassion for others whose plight she now shares to some extent. At one point she recites a prayer ‘dedicating [it] to those, like herself,
whose only journeys were uprootings' (p. 180). While at the beginning of her stay in the Caribbean, Emily simply posited 'otherness' as an object of observation, thereby precluding any relationship except one of domination, she has now finally started her true voyage into otherhood, and in her 'I am not sure of what I am' (p. 179) might lie the germ of some form of creolization – not the devastating Eurocentric creolization described by Emily as something that would 'soon replace all memories of Africa, and uproot such savage growths from West Indian soil' (p. 64), but rather the second stage of creolization which E.K. Brathwaite defines, in *Contradictory Omens*, as a cultural process involving acculturation but also interculturation.\(^\text{15}\)

While Emily had set out to tell 'the truth' (p. 4, italics mine), Cambridge tries to convey 'the truth as it is understood by David Henderson (known as Cambridge)' (p. 167), a statement that both confirms Cambridge's honest acknowledgement of his subjectivity but is also the sign of his tragic alienation.

Operating on a narrative rather than descriptive mode and avoiding generalizations, Cambridge's story is more reliable than Emily's with which, to use one term dear to Bakhtin, it 'dialogizes', in spite of Emily's refusal to exchange any word with this 'base slave' (p. 93). Not only does Cambridge's narrative fill a few blanks in hers, but the complexity of his story and the deeply human contradictions it contains also undermine Emily's pseudo-scientific discourse. Indeed, as Bakhtin wrote, 'the entire methodological apparatus of the mathematical and natural sciences is directed towards mastery over *mute objects, brute things*, that do not reveal themselves in words, that do not *comment on themselves*'.\(^\text{16}\) Besides, by providing a balanced account of the reactions of fear and surprise that naturally enough underlie a first intercultural encounter, Cambridge throws a different light on Emily's superior or disgusted comments on blackness. Remembering his first meeting with white men, Cambridge recalls that English 'at this stage, resembled nothing more civilized than the manic chatter of baboons' (p. 135). He was also shocked at the whites' physical appearance and used to suspect them of cannibalism: 'I wondered constantly if these men of no colour, with their loose hair and decayed teeth, were not truly intent upon cooking and eating us, for they seemed overly fond of flesh, carrying upon them pounds of salted meat for sustenance' (p. 135). However, Cambridge's narrative contains ambiguities that match the exceptional character of his life. Captured at 15 in Guinea as Olumide, he was then transported to England, via the Americas, to be the servant of an English gentleman who called him Thomas. After being taught what is to him 'the blessed English language' (p. 142) and converted to Christianity at his own request, he changed his name to David Henderson. Later, on his way to Africa as a missionary, he was captured again and sold as a slave to a Caribbean plantation, where he was named Cambridge.
In spite of his discerning analysis of the economic implications of the slave trade and its traumatizing effects on Africans, Cambridge fails to see its ideological dimensions, which he unconsciously condones as a Christian missionary who tours England ‘to present a spectacle of salvation and collect money for exploratory travels’ (p. 147) in the country of his birth. Adapting both the language and the religion of the conqueror, he also internalizes the allegedly liberal view of Africa as a place associated with barbarity and paganism and of Africans as devils and heathens. The confused identity brought about by his Christian education appears clearly in one of the biblical quotes he uses in his sermons: ‘‘Did not He that made them, make us’’ (p. 148). One wonders who the pronouns ‘them’ and ‘us’ actually stand for. While he condemns the atrocities of deportation, he cannot help being outraged that he, ‘a virtual Englishman, was to be treated as base African cargo’ (p. 156). For Cambridge, the voyage into English otherness, mirrored in his successive names, entails a corruption or at least a silencing of his ancestral self. Like Caliban, Cambridge is Prospero’s ‘convert, colonised by language, and excluded by language. It is precisely this gift of language, this attempt at transformation which has brought about the pleasure and paradox of [his] exile. Exiled from his gods, exiled from his nature, exiled from his own name!” For Cambridge, as for Caliban, mastering English is both a blessing and a curse.

Unlike Cambridge, Lucy is a truly eponymous novel. It focuses on a nineteen-year-old Afro-Caribbean girl who has gone to the States to work as an au pair for a white family with four children. What strikes us from the start in Lucy’s narrative is her ruthless lucidity. None of Emily’s evasiveness and stylized 19th-century English here, but a deceptively simple prose and plain, undisguised clear-sightedness that, in spite of appearances, can also shelter deception. Early on in the novel, Lucy analyses her homesickness and her disappointment at realizing that the ordinary does not live up to what she has looked forward to for years. Yet, she writes home ‘to say how lovely everything was, and I used words and phrases, as if I were living life in a greeting card’ (p. 10), thereby helping to sustain the myth of the foreign metropolis as a land of milk and honey in the mind of her family and friends left behind in the Caribbean.

From the outset, too, Lucy is very much aware that she is locked in the destructive dialectic of history initiated by the ‘foul deed’ (p. 135), as she calls it, of Columbus’s arrival in the Caribbean. The historical subtext of the novel also hints at parallels between the Middle Passage of the slave trade and her own arrival in what is to her a new world. Soon after she starts living with her American employers, Lucy is nicknamed ‘the Visitor’ in a way similar to the slaves being given a new name on arrival in the Caribbean. Moreover, her room in Mariah and Lewis’s flat is ‘like a box—a box in which cargo travelling a long way should be shipped’ (p. 7).
Lucy realizes that her colonial past determines her perception of things, people and events, and so impinges on her freedom.

For example, experiencing and doing the things of which she so far knew only through literature do not cause the expected thrill, for Lucy perceives them in terms of her own history. Sitting in a dining car with Mariah she observes people and is unable to see them otherwise than in terms of masters and slaves (p. 32). She is also unable to share Mariah’s admiration for freshly plowed fields because they only remind her of plantation work. Similarly, Mariah’s fascination for daffodils as heralding spring only revives in Lucy painful memories. Obliged to memorize and recite Wordsworth’s poem about daffodils when she was ten years old, she has come to perceive these flowers only as a threat to her true inner self. So when Mariah leads her blindfolded to a garden full of daffodils and shows them to her for the first time, Lucy answers scathingly but then feels sorry that:

I had cast her beloved daffodils in a scene she had never considered, a scene of conquered and conquests; a scene of brutes masquerading as angels and angels portrayed as brutes. This woman who hardly knew me loved me, and she wanted me to love this thing—a grove brimming with daffodils in bloom—that she loved also... It wasn’t her fault. It wasn’t my fault. But nothing could change the fact that where she saw beautiful flowers I saw sorrow and bitterness. (p. 30)

For Lucy the only way out of seeing ‘hundreds of years in every gesture, every word spoken, every face’ (p. 31) is to put distance between herself and things, to avoid all emotional involvement. In the same way she keeps away from her mother, whose love has become ‘a burden’ (p. 36) because she wants to make her daughter ‘into an echo of her’ (p. 36). Already in Jamaica Kincaid’s previous fiction, *At the Bottom of the River* (1983) and *Annie John* (1983), the mother/daughter relationship is metonymic of the colonial condition, ‘a paradigm of the struggle between the self and the other’. As the author herself put it in an interview:

I’ve come to see that I have worked through the relationship of the mother and the girl to a relationship between Europe and the place I’m from, which is to say, a relationship between the powerful and the powerless. The girl is powerless and the mother is powerful... So it’s not unlike the relationship between the conquered and the conqueror.

Lucy’s will to achieve freedom from her colonial heritage and love/hate bond[age] to her mother dictates the behaviour she adopts in her voyage into Western alterity. ‘Very crucial to understanding Lucy is her name,’ says Jamaica Kincaid herself. Of her full name Lucy Josephine Potter, Lucy is the only part the heroine really cares about, the other two being related in some way to slavery. Although Lucy first appears to her as a name ‘without substance’ (p. 149), without the romantic appeal of names such
as Emily, Charlotte, Jane or Enid, she comes to appreciate it when she realizes that Lucy is short for Lucifer. Learning that she was named after Satan himself, Lucy comments: ‘I was transformed from failure to triumph. It was the moment I knew who I was’ (p. 152). Lucy is clearly aware of the subversive quality of this name from her reading of Paradise Lost and the Bible. But for the reader the apparently commonplace name also carries a load of ambivalent connotations that are a measure of the ambiguities bequeathed by Lucy’s colonial past.

Caribbean novels abound in examples of the alienating nature of colonial education. We all have in mind the teacher in Lamming’s In the Castle of my Skin who dismisses the existence of slavery or Ralph Singh’s teacher in Naipaul’s The Mimic Men who makes his pupils believe that the real world is in a traffic jam in Liège. In Myal, a recent novel by Erna Brodber, the main character has to learn Kipling’s ‘The White Man’s Burden’ by heart, which Helen Tiffin pinpoints as an example of ‘interpellated colonial subjects proudly witnessing against themselves from a British perspective’.23 The last line of the first stanza of that poem describes the colonized as ‘half devil and half child’. Clearly, by opting for the ‘devilish’ rather than the ‘childish’, Lucy lives up to the more ‘prestigious’ prejudice of the two, at least the one that leaves her pride unharmed and allows her more independence. But ‘Lucy’ is ironically also the title of one of Wordsworth’s poems, the self same author of the much hated ‘Daffodils’,24 suggesting that Lucy cannot really escape colonial tutelage and in some way also belongs to Wordsworth’s world, whether she wants to or not. Last but not least, the name ‘Lucy’ has now become famous as the first female human fossil that was found in 1974 in Ethiopia, a kind of African Eve challenging the Euro-imposed biblical ancestor who, with Lucifer, was said to be responsible for the loss of Paradise.

Lucy’s voyage is, of course, also a confrontation with a different system of apprehending reality. In the Caribbean world of her childhood, opposites could exist side by side and ‘there was no such thing as a “real” thing, because often what seemed to be one thing turned out to be altogether different’ (p. 54). The Western world, on the contrary, has a monolithic nature that accounts for its hegemony, but also its frailty. Mariah’s ideal and closely united family impresses Lucy, but collapses like a house of cards, whereas Lucy’s informal family circle endures better, in spite of violence and mobility. The disintegration of Mariah’s couple leads Lucy to ponder, while looking through the family album, on the mechanism of historical records that, as was the case for the history of colonisation and slavery, often leave out the most significant details and, under the pretence of comprehensiveness and objectivity, operate a purely subjective selection.

In the process of self-discovery that goes hand in hand with her exploration of another world, Lucy proceeds undogmatically:
But the things I could not see about myself, the things I could not put my hands on — those things had changed, and I did not yet know them well. I understood that I was inventing myself, and that I was doing this more in the way of a painter than in the way of a scientist. I could not count on precision or calculation; I could only count on intuition. I did not have anything in mind, but when the picture was complete I would know. (p. 134)

She also resists the totalizing trend of the new world which, for example, keeps referring to the West Indies as the islands (italics mine), but rarely bothers asking from what island she comes. Significantly too, Lucy rejects the wholesale theorizing about herself that Mariah presents her with through Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex*, the bible of feminism, another bible:

Mariah left the room and came back with a large book and opened it to the first chapter. She gave it to me. I read the first sentence. ‘Woman? Very simple, say the fanciers of simple formulas: she is a womb, an ovary; she is a female — this word is sufficient to define her.’ I had to stop. Mariah had completely misinterpreted my situation. My life could not really be explained by this thick book that made my hands hurt as I tried to keep it open. My life was at once something more simple and more complicated than that ... (p. 132)

The novel ends with Lucy crying over what she has started writing in a notebook given her by Mariah, again the colonized inheriting from the colonizer the means to express herself. But things are different now. The final ‘big blur’ (p. 164) on the page encompasses the numerous overlappings and dismantlings of traditional categories which recur in the novel and match the motif of the deceptiveness of appearances. One of the most telling examples of this is built around the figure of the painter Paul Gauguin and suggests that Lucy, like Columbus himself, is at once agent and subject of discovery. Lucy identifies with the French painter’s devilish search for edenic independence and she understands his ‘wanting something completely different from what you are familiar with, knowing it represents a haven’ (p. 95). In a way similar to the artist portraying the inhabitants of the tropics, she takes on the hobby of taking pictures of people walking on the street. But in turn she is herself the prey of someone else’s artistic exploration. Indeed, her boyfriend, also an artist named Paul, takes a picture of her on which she strangely looks like one of Gauguin’s vahines. ‘That was the moment he got the idea he possessed me in a certain way, and that was the moment I grew tired of him’ (p. 155) comments Lucy, who has come full circle from being a colonial subject to being an artistic/sexual one.

Western intrusion in the New World meant, among other things, the imposition of writing on essentially oral civilizations, a very ambivalent legacy indeed. Both *Cambridge* and *Lucy* illustrate the potentially hegemonic qualities of the written word: Emily’s diary, the Bible taught to
Cambridge, Wordsworth’s poem or even Lucy’s mother’s letters are cases in point. But, by denouncing the abuse of language as a means of taking control of the other and by disrupting the established colonial order on which the dominance of the written word relies for its effectiveness, the two novels testify that writing combined with imagination can also be a powerful tool of resistance.

NOTES

2. Ibid., p. 24.
9. Ibid. p. 171-172.
11. The novel obviously ‘writes back’ to the episode in Jane Austen’s Mansfield Park., in which the absentee landlord, Sir Thomas, visits the Caribbean.
13. It would be interesting to see how the same theme is treated in both Jane Eyre and Wide Sargasso Sea.
14. Whose names hint at Western religion and scholarship, two of the pillars of colonial oppression.
17. A characteristic he shares with Columbus himself.
19. The correct title of the poem usually referred to as Wordsworth’s ‘Daffodils’ is actually ‘I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud’.
22. Ibid., p. 22.
24. It is interesting to note that Wordsworth was also the author of a poem on Toussaint L'Ouverture, the famous Haitian hero, a poem which apparently was not deemed worth teaching to Caribbean children in spite of its obvious relevance to the history of the area.
Four months after Jesse left for Kingston to find a husband, Ma Lou’s grandson Devonshire came home from Colón. Strutted in, was more like it. He arrived in fullblown Colón style – a brown draped suit complete with watch chain with dangling charms and a fat gold watch inside his fob pocket, matching brown derby, yellow boots, and a walking stick with the head of a wolf carved in ivory on the handle. ‘Dev, what a sweet-man you turn into,’ Mama laughed when trailing the sweet smell of brillantine he came into the bedroom to pay his respects to her the minute he arrived. It was the first time in years Brid had heard her mother laugh.

Dev didn’t see Brid when he came for she shot out of sight as soon as she saw him approaching across the yard, but she had a good look at him; Brid was good at seeing through cracks in walls and half-pulled shutters, from behind closed doors and between floorboards. But Brid didn’t like to be seen.

‘How’s Jesse?’ Dev asked, ‘and little Bridget?’

‘Jesse is gone away my dear, gone to Kingston to stay with her Aunt Irene. Four months now she’s gone and left us. Brid is still around though by now she’s grown out of your sight, Dev. Just me and Brid left. And Ma Lou.’

‘Brid,’ her mother called in her weak, pale voice. ‘Bridget. Come Brid and look who’s here.’

‘Brid-get!’ Ma Lou yelled in her loud marketwoman’s voice.

But Brid who was peering through a crack into Mama’s room didn’t answer. She held her breath so they wouldn’t hear her and marvelled at Dev. How handsome he had become. He had grown almost a foot taller in the five years he was gone, and had filled out. Looked like a real grown up man. Dev was hardly much older than she was now when he left home. A real langillala skinny-foot boy he was. And look at him now. Brid was pleased to see Dev, for he’d been the closest thing she had to a brother. In the past she could always rely on him to play games with her, pick mangoes from the tallest branches or knock down the ripe soursops; he would dry her tears when she cried and frighten her with tales of duppies and Blackartman. But she wouldn’t come out and talk to him because she was dismayed to see the old Dev vanished and this impressive, self-assured stranger in his place. It was as if Dev too had let her down. His coming instead of making her feel happy as she had imagined, just
made her feel more ashamed. Ashamed of herself, her unfashionable hair and hand-me-down clothes, ashamed of the old house with the rotting verandah and falling shingles and peeling woodwork, ashamed of her mother who was perpetually ill, the smell of the sick-room, damp and decay, ashamed of their poverty and their pride. Or rather, Mama and Jesse's pride, for she had none, or so they told her.

Ma Lou wasn't too impressed by Dev - she didn't want a sweet-man for a grandson. She felt better when after a few weeks of walking up and down the whole district to show off his clothes, his Panama strut, his American accent and his Panama gold rings - like all the other young men who came back from foreign - Dev took off his good clothes and his jewellery, put on a pair of American denim overalls and one of his old shirts and went into the garden with his machete. Now that Ma Lou could understand, for fly high, fly low, she said after Dev left to get work on building the Panama Canal, there was nothing to beat working on the land. But Dev didn't really go into the garden to work; he just wanted to get into the feel of things again, to rid himself of the dust and the sound of dynamite blasting in his ears, the American straw-boss yelling and rain and the smell of damp clothes and mildew and dead things rotting in the streets.

'Dev looking for land to buy,' Ma Lou confided to Mama, as she sponged her body down and turned her in the bed. 'Want to put him money into land. And house. That Dev have him head well screw on,' she said with satisfaction, as if she had done the screwing, for she believed that whatever sense Dev showed in managing his affairs it was she who had beaten it into him. Dev's mother had come and placed him in her arms shortly after he was born and was never heard from again. Dev's father, Ma Lou's son, died soon after, when a tree he was chopping down fell the wrong way. So she had ended up with Dev for her very own.

'Maybe he could buy ours,' Mama said and laughed again, but Brid listening on the other side of the wall knew it wasn't a genuine laugh like the one she had greeted Dev with. This was the laugh of bitterness for Brid knew it pained her mother to see what she and her family had come to, while people like Dev whom they would never have counted in the old days, were now moving up in the world. Brid knew because it was all her mother used to talk about to Jesse.

Brid couldn't understand how Mama and Jesse could be so proud of their white skin when so far as she could see, there were no advantages to be derived from it. At school, it is true, the big girls would sit with their backs against the flying buttresses of the church (the school was in the same yard) and during recess take turns endlessly combing and plaiting her hair, praising her to the skies for how beautiful it was and how wonderful it was to have good, tall hair. But then during class the boys sitting behind would thread her long plait through the hole for the inkwell in their desk and tie it into a knot. So clever were they that sometimes she
wouldn’t even realise what was happening until the bell rang and she stood up and knocked the desk over, sending ink pots and slates flying while the bad boys dashed out of the schoolroom yelling with laughter and the other children shouted at her while she cried with frustration trying to free herself from the desk. So what good was that? She saw no advantage to having fair skin because everyone around her was black and she stood out, and she didn’t want to stand out, didn’t want them to notice her, because then they would notice her poverty, her house falling down, her bedridden mother. Everyone else around was poor too, ate turn cornmeal and shad just like them, or worse; had houses ten times worse than theirs, without floors even, and had no nice furniture like they had – the pieces that hadn’t yet been sold. But that was different. ‘Black people born to be poor,’ Mama said, ‘nobody expects any better of them.’

‘So why were we born poor?’ Brid asked Jesse in their room that night. ‘We weren’t born poor,’ Jesse said. ‘We’re only poor because Papa ran away and left us and there was nobody to look after the place after that. Mama got sick and everything.’

Brid knew this by heart; she had heard it many times before. So why didn’t they just accept their lot in life and stop behaving as if they were better than everybody else, she asked. ‘Bridget, you’ll understand when you’re older,’ Jesse said. ‘God gave you beautiful skin and long lovely hair and you should thank him for it and take care of it. Someday a man will come along who will appreciate those things and you’ll be glad then that you don’t have ol’nayga skin and picky-picky hair.’

That’s all Jesse lived for: for a man to come along. Meanwhile, she took good care of herself; rubbed cocoa butter into her skin every single night and brushed her hair a hundred times morning and evening. She used chewstick to clean her teeth every time she ate, rubbed annatto into her lips and cheeks and put charcoal on her lashes, washed her hair with aloe and rinsed it with rosemary, tried out a new hair style every day, twisting her head this way and that to see the effect in the tarnished three-way vanity mirror, though nobody ever saw her except Brid and Mama and Ma Lou.

When Jesse was twenty, she and Mama and Ma Lou realised that nobody would ever come along to notice her where they lived, since nobody ever came at all, so she was sent to Aunt Irene in Kingston.

Brid liked it when Jesse was around because then nobody made any demands on her. Jesse was the one who helped Ma Lou with Mama in the sickroom, who went and spent her time talking and reading to her. Brid hated going into the room, hated the smell, the way her mother looked, her querulous complaints. She never went in if she could help it. Now that she no longer went to school, she preferred to spend her time helping Ma Lou in the garden or the kitchen, places where Jesse hated to be.
When Dev left, there was no man to help them, except for Mass Ron who came to do the hard work as needed, like digging the yam hills and helping to plant and stake the yams, doing the ploughing and cutting and burning. Mass Ron was hired to do these things when there was money, or for a share of the crop, when there was none. When the land was cleared, Brid went out and helped Ma Lou with the planting, or reaping the cocoa, picking the coffee, peeling the ginger, or shelling the corn.

It was Ma Lou who arranged for her friend Miss Gertie who was still selling in the market to come and buy their crops. Without Ma Lou, Brid thought, they’d be nothing. Ma Lou lived in a little cottage at the back which Dev shared with her until he went away. Then Ma Lou came and lay down her bedding in the room beside Mama’s and slept there every night. Ma Lou was born in the cottage because her parents used to work with Mama’s grandparents, and even after her parents died, Ma Lou just stayed on. When Mama was born, it was Ma Lou who looked after her and then she looked after Mama’s babies. Ma Lou had been with them all her life; it was unthinkable that she should not be there for always. Ma Lou belonged to them as they belonged to her. Brid used to think that their lives and Ma Lou’s were intertwined like the Scotchman fig which grew on to the big silk-cotton tree, twisting and embedding itself into the trunk of the other to such an extent that it was hard to figure out which was the silk-cotton and which the fig. It was Ma Lou who made all the decisions now about the family; she who planted the crops and sold what needed to be sold to earn them a little cash, she who went to market to buy; she who fed them and looked after them, for Mama was now helpless as a child. Brid never understood what was wrong with Mama; she only knew she had taken to her bed after Papa left (which she was too young to remember) and hadn’t ever left her room again.

When Jesse went off to Kingston she promised to write, but it was three months now since they’d heard from her. In her first letters Jesse had told of the grand reception she had had from Aunt Irene and Uncle Cyrus and her cousins, about her new wardrobe, her new life. But then the letters ceased. Mama heard from Aunt Irene; heard that Jesse was getting on and fitted into the family, that they expected great things of her. But Jesse didn’t write again.

Brid could just imagine Jesse in her new wardrobe, with a fashionable hairdo, charming all the young men who came to call, having a hard time making up her mind, choosing which one to marry. Jesse had promised that as soon as she settled down, she would send for Brid, send her clothes to travel in, proper shoes and a suitcase. Promised to find Brid a husband too, though this made Brid laugh because she was sixteen and she couldn’t imagine anyone liking her much less wanting to marry her. Now Brid cried herself to sleep because there was no one to laugh with.

Dev never even saw Brid until after he had been back for a few weeks, because he had been so busy walking up and down showing off and
when he came back to the cottage at nights, they would all have gone to bed. It was only after he decided that he had been seen by everyone he wanted to see him and had put his good clothes away and stopped walking about that he saw Brid in the garden one day. She was in the garden helping Ma Lou stake tomatoes, with her thick black hair in one long plait down her back and her skirt pulled up at the waist to show her bare legs just like Ma Lou. But as soon as she looked up and saw him, she fled into the house. She never came back and he helped his grandmother to finish the job. He had been astonished to see her, to see that she was no longer the skinny little girl he had left behind, had turned into a fine young lady, better looking, he thought with satisfaction, than that Jesse who, even when they were small, was so full of airs and graces and who would never have gone into the yard without stockings, no matter how patched they were, and who would never pull up her skirt at the waist to show her legs.

'Brid turn into a fine young lady,' he said to his grandmother.

'Yes but God alone know what is going to become of that child. I never worry about Jesse. Jesse will get by. But that Brid. Not a one to mind her. And she wild like mongoose. What going happen to Brid?'

Brid never spoke to Dev at all, she was too shy; felt he had risen too far above her now, so she always managed to disappear when she saw him coming. Then she would rush to peek at him from behind the slatted shutters in the bedroom. She really wished she could talk to Dev, she wanted to find out all about his adventures, what had happened to him in the years he had been away; but she had to be content with the second-hand accounts she got from Ma Lou or listen through the wall when he came to talk to Mama.

Dev was disappointed that Brid no longer wanted to be his friend, to talk to him. Now he was back home, he felt restless and at loose ends, didn't know what to do with himself. He wanted to make something of his life, buy land, build a proper house for himself and his grandmother, for he was now a master carpenter, wanted to go into the housebuilding business. He could make it, he felt sure, for he had been taught by the Americans and nobody could beat them when it came to modern, efficient ways. The country was ripe for people like him, he knew. He was looking for land, yes, for a property, had money to burn, so he didn't know why he was still hanging around this yard like an angry bull tied to a post. He had been shocked to come home, to see the house with one side almost fallen in, to see the squalor in which they lived. He'd completely forgotten what it had been like. Only the land was as he remembered it, the hazy blue mountains in the distance, the greenness of everything, the freshness of the air, the brightness of the stars at night. He took it all as a benediction, after the hell of Culebra, of Colón.

He couldn't sleep and took to walking outside at night, to look at the stars, feel the cool air, and for a long time wasn't even conscious that he
always ended up standing in the darkness of the cocoa walk staring at the shutters of Bridget’s room. Brid saw him though, for she hardly slept either, and one night she had seen his shadow move in the cocoa walk, saw him standing there looking at her window. After that, she peeked through the shutters every night, stood by the window for hours, until she saw him. Didn’t know why it gave her such unimaginable joy to see him standing there, looking at her window, to stand there and watch him. Only when his shadow disappeared would she get back into bed, and feeling deeply secure, sleep soundly for the rest of the night.

The idea took a long time to crystallize in Dev’s mind, but when it did, it all seemed so right to him. He was now ready to take a wife, why shouldn’t he marry Brid? What was the use of building a house if he didn’t have a woman? Why shouldn’t he buy this house and land from them, so they could all continue to live together, for how could he separate his grandmother from Brid and her mother. Weren’t they all one family? He turned his carpenter’s eyes on the house, walked around and assessed it carefully, admiring its proportions, and came to the conclusion that the structure, built of the finest mahogany and cedar, was sound enough. It was not too far gone that it couldn’t be restored. He would need to add bathrooms with modern plumbing and a proper kitchen. The verandah could be enlarged. If they hadn’t sold any of the land in his absence, he knew it was some two hundred acres of reasonably good soil, just about what he was looking for. He would have to have a proper survey done, get an outsider to fix the price; he would never want anyone to say he had taken advantage of Brid and her mother. When he had thought it all through, he broke the news to his grandmother.

Instead of being overjoyed as he had thought she would be at this solution to their problems, for she spent all her time worrying about Brid’s future, his grandmother had nearly fainted; she had been so shocked she had sat down heavily on the bed in the cottage where he was talking to her.

‘You? Marry Bridget?’ she said. ‘Dev, you gone crazy or what?’

‘What you mean?’ he asked, genuinely confused.

‘Dev, you know oil and water don’t mix from morning. You go away is true and do well for yourself. I am proud of you. No woman could be prouder of her son and that is the Lord’s own truth. But that still don’t give you no right to think you can marry white people daughter. Don’t even bother to think of it. You want kill off Miss Carmel?’

‘Well, somebody has to marry Brid and what is wrong with me? You mean them old time something don’t break down yet? Look at Brid and Miss Carmel, poor as churchmouse. You’d think they’d be glad to have somebody that could take care of them.’

‘You see that now. You come in just like all them Colón man there. And I did think you have a little more sense in you head. Go to Colón and make a little money and you all come back same way – thinking you just
as good as everybody else. Wanting to change the whole world overnight. Out to create nothing but bad blood and confusion.’

‘Gran, what confusion you see me creating?’ Dev protested. ‘Why you so unfair? You behaving as if is something criminal I proposing.’

But his grandmother refused to listen to him anymore, threw her apron over her head and cried the living eye-water for his boldness. He had never seen his grandmother cry before except the time Mr Jasper went away, and he was so shattered that he put on his hat and left, went down to the village and drank rum and came home late and went straight to bed. Next day he took some of his clothes and went to stay with a Colón mate who lived not far away. But even as he laughed and talked with his paseiro, he couldn’t control his thoughts, began to wonder if he did right in coming back and if he should stay in this country at all, feeling that while he had gone away and been changed so much, nothing there had changed.

They had all wanted to come back home so badly, if they could survive blackwater and yellow fever, typhoid and malaria, the dynamite blasts and the train accidents, the snakebites and the floods and overwork, didn’t end up in the asylum or in jail, and if they ever managed to save enough money or win the lottery. Nobody wanted to live with Jim Crow on the American Canal Zone. But until you saved enough, you put up with it and swallowed your pride, accepted that you were ‘silver’, not ‘gold’ as the races were categorised – and paid, got into the habit of averting your eyes when the white American women walked by and smiling when they addressed you as ‘Boy’, got used to saying ‘yassuh’, ‘nosuh’ to everything their white husbands said, for they controlled your lives. You did the same as the Negroes from the States did. But the islanders knew that those men didn’t know any better, it came as natural to them as eating and sleeping to behave in this subservient manner and they viewed them with scorn. They didn’t have a home to go back to where the climate was natural instead of this endless rain and where you were a subject of the King of England. A British subject. Good as any man. Equal to any man before the law. British law.

Dev had to laugh now at how naive they all were, how silly in their belief that they were better off in their own country; for it wasn’t their country at all. It was a country just like the Canal Zone where the white man reigned supreme, and where people like him were expected to remain their semi-slaves and servants. Yassuh. Nosuh. Only there were no signs which said ‘Silver’ and ‘Gold’. Here, they were simply expected to recognise the invisible signs, to be born knowing their places. Dev thought wryly that with the opening of the Panama Canal to which so many black men had given their life’s blood, the Americans could see nothing incongruous about the motto they had chosen for their grand enterprise and cut in stone on their administrative building: ‘The Land Divided: The World United.’ But, he reflected, the world was united only to further the pur-
pose of white commerce. On other matters which hinged on the colour of a man's skin, the world would stay forever divided.

Yet while Dev could see the divisions in wider terms, nearer home he found it difficult to accept this cynical philosophy. Was his grandmother so right after all? For hadn't he played with Brid and Jesse from they were children, grown up with them like a brother? Granted that long before he left home, Jesse had ceased to have anything to do with him, but he never bothered much with Jesse anyway, she was always too full of herself. But little Brid now, hadn't she always been his little sister? The Jaspers were the only white people around, and because they were so much a part of his life, he had never really remarked on the difference in their colour. He was aware he was different because he and his grannie lived on the Jaspers' land, had no land of their own, were the Jaspers' servants, which is why they lived in a separate cottage instead of in the big house. But the Jaspers had come down in the world, his grannie was always saying, and after a while they were all poor together. Cooked together and ate together. Up to when he went away, sixteen and very young and foolish, he thought that poverty conferred equality.

Dev stayed with his friend for a while, thinking things through, and then he decided to go away again, perhaps to Costa Rica or Cuba this time, or even to the United States itself; at least you knew where you stood with the Americans. There was nothing for him here. But he couldn't get Brid out of his mind, her startled face as she looked up from staking tomatoes and saw him, her brown legs flashing and her long plait swinging as she dashed into the house. More and more he wondered if Brid had stayed away from him only because she was shy or 'wild' as his grandmother called her. Or had she become like Jesse now that she was grown up, seeing him only as black to her white? Was that why she didn't want to speak to him? He decided that he was going, yes, but first he had to know, had to call to Brid and make her look at him at least. Even if she never said a word; if she looked at him, he would read her like a book.

When Dev went off to stay with his friend, Brid had ceased to sleep at nights, stood by the window waiting for him till dawn. Cried the whole night through. Would he ever come back? Why did she feel so alone again now he was no longer there? She felt more bereft even than when Jesse had left her. Dev and his grandmother had had a quarrel, that much she knew, but what was the cause she could never find out, no matter how hard she listened. 'Dev go away and come back too full of himself ya,' all she heard Ma Lou say to her mother when Mama asked what had happened to him. So that didn't tell her much about where Dev had gone and when he would be back. And she had been so mean to him. Dev was her friend and she hadn't even bothered to speak to him; he probably thought she was a snob like Jesse. If Dev ever came back, she promised herself, no matter how difficult she found it, she would force herself to go
and speak to him, let him know she was glad to have him back, let him know – but she was afraid to admit anything else, even to herself. Dev came back and told Ma Lou he was going away again, and he couldn’t bear the look in her eyes. She said nothing but she went around singing mournful hymns all day even after he told her that he would spend some money to fix up the Jaspers’ house, so she and Miss Carmel and Bridget would at least have a solid roof over their heads. He made sure to tell her he was doing it for her, since he knew she would never leave there until her dying day. When she told Miss Carmel that Dev was going to fix the roof and the floors (without telling her the last part) she said ‘God bless Dev, he was always a good boy’ and turned her face to the wall and sighed.

In two twos, Dev measured up everything, arranged to buy the shingles and lumber and nails and get a few of his old Colón mates to come and help him once the lumber arrived. He wasn’t going to do the extensive refurbishing he had envisaged, just enough to keep the three women dry and stop them from flying through the rotten floorboards.

He was so busy arranging all this that he gave no thought to Brid for the first few days after he came back. It was only when everything was fixed and he was waiting, that he started to go outside again at night, and though he did not intend it, his feet invariably led him to the cocoa walk facing Brid’s room. He remembered his decision to confront her, to force her to give him some sign of how she felt, whether she too saw this unbridgeable chasm between them, but he wasn’t sure how he was going to achieve this. He hoped that all the excitement of the next few weeks, the hammering and the sawing, might draw her out of her shell.

Now he stood dumbly looking at her room, wondering why he felt so unbearably sad, until the cold night air drove him inside. The first night he came, Brid saw him, for she had been looking every night. He stood in the shadows of the cocoa walk but she knew he was there and she found it hard to control her heartbeats. The minute she saw him she had wanted to throw open her shutter, to let him know she was there. But though her hand reached countless times for the latch, she couldn’t bring herself to open it. Then he was gone and she climbed into bed no longer feeling consoled by his presence but overwhelmed by her cowardice. Every night it was the same; she reached for the latch, willing herself to open it, but could never find the will to carry the action through. Every night it was the same. But she was becoming easier and easier in her mind. She was wearing down the barriers, bit by bit, and one night, she knew, she would confound herself and throw open the shutters.
He was watching his sister coming up the hill to the house. Tall for her eighteen years and still unformed, she was wearing a lime green dress that didn’t quite suit her. Her skin honey coloured, faintly freckled; her hair touched with red. One day, with time, the right clothes, she could be beautiful. She had blue eyes. Only the slight curve of the eyebrow, the cast of the wrist revealed her father’s heritage. She had yet to learn to walk as a woman; at present hers was the long legged ambling of the school girl.

It was all familiar to him: the view across the vegetable garden; the red dirt road that curved on up the hill, dusty in the heat, viscous mud after rain. The hills in the distance didn’t change. Those clouds had been there all his life. His father had built this house: square cement blocks, pink washed, dark brown doors and louvres framed by hibiscus, red and beige floor tiles; and after thirty years his mother had still complained about the red dirt that splattered the walls, that washed down from the road, down the garden, red dirt that seemed to ooze through the very walls of the house, coating everything with rust.

The garden itself had always been full in season of pumpkin, beans, peas, yams, cocos, sweet and Irish potatoes. His mother had struggled to grow lettuce, but it shrivelled in the heat, or was eaten by grubs and insects. She had tomato plants near the porch, and a papaya. Each year they managed some bananas. It was hot this August afternoon, so hot that even the insects seemed too enervated to conduct their usual afternoon dance. From the hen house came an occasional tired cluck in answer to the lazy ring of a goat bell somewhere further down the hill. He was leaning against the great flame of the forest tree that marked the edge of their property, watching his sister come up the hill. The tree’s great pods hung from its branches, black and menacing, so many swords of Damocles, so many unknowns.

Donovan Brown did not like the unknown. At age twenty-four he was inexperienced, shy, uncommitted. Despite nine years from twelve to twenty-one spent studying first at Campion and then at UWI, he had accumulated no experience. There were possible explanations: his rural upbringing for one, his catholicism for another, but other boys manage to develop some opinions despite a quiet home life and a catholic education. To his mother, his passivity was a source of quiet irritation. Had she had more time for him, she might have seen that much of the root of his
problem could be traced to her. That is not to say that she had been a negligent, uncaring mother; neither by any means was she demanding or domineering. Far from it. In many ways, though, she had been an absence in Donovan’s life, for his father, a clerk in the Post Office, had suffered long and horribly from lung cancer, and much of Eileen Brown’s married life had been taken up with caring for her ailing husband until he mercifully released her by dying when Donovan was thirteen.

A clerk in the Jamaican Post Office does not make a large income, and pensions are not always sufficient to keep a widow and two children. The deceased Mr. Brown had left his wife the house, which he had built on land inherited from his mother, and her two children. Fortunately, when Mrs Brown had been Eileen Malloy of County Cork, she had ‘gone to the nursing’ in Liverpool and there she had somehow managed to earn an S.R.N. as well as meet Mr Brown: much to the shock of her parents and her seven brothers and sisters, she had married him. There were pictures at home of her and his father on their wedding day. Liverpool 1945. He was still in his soldier’s uniform, smart, the Jamaica tabs clear on his shoulders. She was in a tweed suit: a jolly, bouncing girl with bright eyes; her hair thick and dark under the veiled hat she wore. But Donovan could not remember her this way. Life had made her tired since her wedding day.

She had nursed a dying husband and had nursed in the private hospital in the town; it paid better than the government hospital. She had also had to make severe adjustments to her life in her new country. The heat in particular she had found even after thirty years to be oppressing. The red dirt was her personal curse. She had raised her two children – she thanked heaven it was only two she had, even though as she had assured the old priest when he asked her, she had done nothing to prevent more – with only Iris the slightly retarded daughter of the local dressmaker to help her. Iris washed, cleaned, scrubbed, and minded children with a bovine intensity. She was with them still, nearly forty, her mouth still slightly ajar, but totally dependable.

None of his mother’s life had any affect upon Donovan. With the introversion of the young, he had never considered his mother apart from her relationship to himself. Once when he was eight years old one of his classmates had called his mother a ‘porky bitch’. Fired by a rage that he didn’t understand then, and had never really understood, Donovan had hit the other boy hard, drawing blood. At that time, his mother’s whiteness was simply another manifestation of his own otherness. He neither rejoiced in nor hated his sense of separation; he held on to it, because it was recognizable, known, and therefore comforting.

At his high school there had been boys whose fathers were labourers and boys whose fathers were lawyers. He had never considered whether his family were rich or poor, but he sensed rather than knew that if his father had been richer, more than a minor official in the post office, then
having a white mother would not have been unusual. If his father had been a successful professional man, a doctor say, then perhaps things would have been different. If they had lived in Saint Andrew or Stony Hill, rather than in the bush. But his father had been a clerk in the post office, and his mother was Irish. And her whiteness, her Irishness, he began to feel, was unusual. She was not like the other white women he had seen. He was embarrassed by her. His mother was fat. Even her feet were fat; her hands were fat. Her wedding ring nestled in the folds of fat in her hand. Except when she wore her nurse’s uniform to work, his mother favoured large, flower printed tops and stretch pants. She thrust tired feet into rubber thongs.

He never considered why she might be suffering, and he never considered her own frustrations. He thought only of himself, so during his years at high school and in university, he held her in the background, something inexplicable, that did not fit a pattern. He carefully nurtured reticence, so that he did not have to explain, describe, account for himself. It was this habit of passive withdrawal that irritated his mother intensely. Though inarticulate, she was not insensitive. Although her life had been hard, she bore no sense of grievance, but she did begin to think that as her son grew to adulthood, she had the right to expect more of him than he gave her. She could find no way of discussing the matter with him, and no way of helping him overcome his sense of difference. So she found herself nagging at him to make something of himself, to do something, be something. Yet she knew that on the surface she had little to complain of; in his daily life Donovan was ordered, reliable, and respectful. Yet she could not touch him. She was afraid there was nothing to touch. She did not know her own son, could find no way to describe or define him, yet she could find no complaint to make against him.

Part of the problem of course was that Donovan was not essentially of an enquiring disposition. From childhood he had accepted what the world had given him; had never questioned the divisions he perceived. There was an inside and an outside to everything, and his place was outside. He had reached this decision before he took his Common Entrance exam and went to Kingston, and he had taken his separation as an article of faith: he believed in it; it consoled him for his sense of difference. It made life easy for him. He did not see it as arrogance. He held back from the opportunity of making friends, unsure of where he belonged, holding on to those things that didn’t change, trying to ignore those that did.

He accepted his degree the way he took everything else. It made little impression upon him. He had drifted into sciences because they appeared to demand nothing but memory from him. He remembered things, but made no commitment to them. He studied his subjects and passed exams. Yet he gained no distinction in his work, for he had no imagination; he could deal with what was already known, but had no desire to go beyond...
it, no desire to ask any question. He had acquaintances, but no friends, no
enemies. He desired nothing.

At twenty-one he came home to a job in the laboratory of the Agricul-
tural Division of one of the Bauxite companies: a good job paying more
than he could have earned in a government lab in Kingston. He bought
a car. He lived at home with his mother and his sister. He went to Mass
on Sundays.

He had thought when he came back from Kingston that he was return-
ing to a place that he knew, but he was wrong. Oh, the house and garden
were the same; the view unchanged. Iris still moved adenoidally through
the house, her face blank with benevolence. But his mother and his sister?
He found himself living in close quarters with two people who were un-
familiar to him. For most of his life, he had held himself aloof from his
mother, and now he cultivated a vague, embarrassed affection for her, but
it was tempered with distaste. The lard of her flesh disgusted him. Her
unspoken desires and demands irritated and shamed him. Whatever it
was his mother wanted from him, he could not give. He did not know his
sister, Maura.

She was six years his junior. When he had gone to Kingston she had
been but six years old. When he had come home for school vacations, she
had been a lanky, pale, female thing with frizzy braids who spent her time
first with dolls on the back porch, and then with girl friends from the
convent school where she held a scholarship. He did not know how to
begin to get to know her, so he did not try. Yet they lived side by side
amicably enough.

For the first time in his life, he began to feel dissatisfied with his
situation. His carefully tended habit of non-involvement had left him
totally without social graces. He was conscious of feeling unspecified
longings for something more, yet he had no idea what it might be. He was
lonely, yet he did not recognise the feeling as loneliness. He was bored.

At first, he had been content with his job, testing soil samples, working
with pesticides and herbicides, writing neat almost pedantic reports. But
as he became more experienced, he found it lacking in challenge, repeti-
tive. He worked quite well with his American colleagues — he was the only
Jamaican chemist in the lab — but he didn’t really know them. He didn’t
question the fact that they earned about a third more than he did for the
same job, simply because they were American. As always, he accepted. He
was too withdrawn to flirt with typists and lab assistants who worked
with them. He found the walk through the outer office to his work station
in the lab a daily torture, the girls in their company uniform dresses of
sunshine yellow, a minefield of clattering, chattering flowers. Some of
them had tried to be friendly to him, but he was unable to respond in
kind. He had never taken a girl out, and would have been surprised to
know that he had been regarded with many a fond hope by several of the
young women who worked with him. After all, he was unmarried, un-
attached, and by local standards well off. If he had known that he had been seen in this light, he would have been horrified. After a while the girls lost interest, for he was always so cold, so withdrawn, not impolite, just a shadow.

Perhaps if he had had some friends locally, but what acquaintances he had made in his childhood were mostly gone. From most of the local boys with whom he had gone to the little government elementary school, he was separated by the gulf of education. Few of them had finished school, and now they worked as labourers in the alumina plants. Of those people whom he had met at school and university, none had chosen to leave Kingston, unless they had gone abroad. The town itself was a town divided into bauxite workers and others, a town divided into locals and ex-patriots, a town divided into the exploiters and the exploited, and of the last two, no-one really knew which was which.

It had changed since the days when his father had been an official in the old post office. The town centre was still there: the old Anglican church, the Court House, and the new market still clustered round the green; the country buses still rumbled in to the centre of the town, but the life of the town had moved away, to the edges where new plazas had been built with American style shops. The Delgados had sold their old dry goods store on Nelson Street and built a modern supermarket in the new Shoppers’ Plaza. Businesses that didn’t modernize and put in glass and air conditioning found that their clientele did not include the Americans and Canadians, but that didn’t really matter, for everyone connected with the mines had money. The Nessims increased their inventory of refrigerators and freezers; hourly workers from the plant mortgaged their earnings for the next two years to buy electric stoves. Everyone had a car.

Donovan had money, but he found little to interest him in parting with it. There was little for a quiet, single man to do. Occasionally he went to the cinema, sitting upstairs. There were of course the bars, both in the town and the little one room shacks lit by gas lamps out along the roads outside the town. But he did not patronise them. Their dark secretiveness appalled him. The tall, young, black women with their large white teeth, heavy breasts and languid availability repelled him.

His life developed a rhythm of work and home. He appeared a model son, driving his mother to shop in the supermarket, driving her to work if their schedules matched. He sat at home in the evenings watching the television or listening to his new stereo. He bought them a freezer. He helped in the garden. Sometimes in the evenings he would sit out on the back porch and look out across the garden across the hill. The hill looked more alive at night than in the day time. He could see the lights of all the little houses. He could see the lights of the cars as they drove to and from the town, hear the distant laughter of people returning from work, hear the incessant beat of the reggae on the portable radios they carried.
It was on these evenings that his mother would endeavour, as best she could, to try to reach him. It seemed to her a long time since she had been the laughing girl in her wedding photograph, but she remembered something of the excitement of youth, of its idealism. She looked at her son, slumped in an old rocking chair, gazing out across the darkened hills, and was irritated and anxious. With the best of intentions, she upbraided him for having no friends, for not going out, for not bringing young people to the house as his sister did. She could not understand that he had no friends, and that if he did, he would never bring them here. He looked at his mother and saw her tired and fat in the other chair. Her blue eyes were losing their sparkle. He felt a hint of her anxiety, sensed something of her own loneliness, but he could do nothing. She was a burden to him still, something that would have to be explained, but he had no-one who needed the explanation. And she would purse her lips and sigh, ease her bulk into a more comfortable position.

Even breathing demanded energy these days. She would turn her tired eyes back to the television; her mind back somewhere in the Ireland of her youth, back in the shell-shocked streets of wartime Liverpool. This silence in her son, she could not explain it, had not wanted it, but could not fill it; whatever had been the time to know each other had passed. So she worried, and watched, and said nothing, and turned in towards herself again while her eyes watched the flickering black and grey shadows on the television.

Donovan took to going for long evening drives, out into the country, up the unpaved, winding rural roads, where he could catch glimpses of the country people, people who lived where the power company had not yet strung a power line, people who took their water from a community stand pipe, people who still spent their lives barefoot. He passed the stalls selling roast corn; he avoided running over scrawny chickens that wandered freely in between the houses that were little more than shacks. He looked out at the dark faces of the people, purple shadows in the oil lit dark of the villages, but he never stopped. He could see them dancing quite spontaneously, women displaying thick hairy armpits in torn cotton dresses, their wide feet stained red by the dirt, their hair in curlers. Some held babies to their breasts. The men were barefoot also, brawny, often missing teeth. They danced alone and with the women. He saw them all as creatures of the earth, unrelated to him, exotic moving pieces in the dark kaleidoscope of the evening. He saw the surprise in their great round eyes as they saw the unknown car; saw their dark mouths open in question. Then he was gone, and they forgot him, laughingly turning back to their own danse macabre. They were nothing to him. And the next morning he would go back into work and test soil for ph levels.

And what of Maura at this time? Maura worked and worked. Her effort resulted in eight O levels, and three A levels: all with distinction. And now he was watching her walk up the hill; tomorrow she left for Boston,
left for a Catholic Ladies' College, left for a scholarship won through her own work, obtained through the intervention of the nuns at her school. Tomorrow she escaped, escaped to a world Donovan suspected he could never know. She had been to Eileen's new grave, only a month old.

He leant against the flaming tree and surveyed Eileen's legacy to him. This house, this garden, were now his, and Maura's. But would she want it in Boston? And yet it was more than the house and the land that Eileen had left him. Now he was free of her, free of her weight around him and upon him, free of her sad blue eyes, reproachful but silent, free of all the things that she had never said to him and of the questions he had never asked her. Now he was free of her, he needed her.

Her death had been unexpected, or so he had thought, but then he had not really looked at his mother in years. Maura had seen the failing health, heard the failing breath, watched the dimming eyes, but she had said nothing to her brother. Maura in her silent determination to pass exams had seen her brother's absence and had felt unable to penetrate it. Maura had asked herself angrily for many years about the absence of her mother's family, why did they never write, never visit? Why had Eileen never gone back to Ireland to see them? Maura had looked at the picture of her father and had known the answer. And as Donovan had ignored his mother, finding her inexplicable, an embarrassment, Maura had pitied her isolation, but in her youth she had been unable to change anything. Unlike her brother, she had not seen Eileen's whiteness as foreign. Maura had accepted her own fairness with no surprise, no shame, no pride. She engaged with the world. She felt herself Jamaican, but more than that, she felt herself Maura. She had determined to succeed; she had thought somehow through her own successes to bring her mother back to light. She had hoped to compensate for her brother's absence, his lack of engagement. Now it was too late, and she accepted that too. She understood her powers, what she could and could not do. She was not one to waste energy in nostalgia.

In the last few weeks that their mother had lain in the hospital where once she had worked, brother and sister had sat together by her bedside for long hours. Their mother seemed gone already; this pale effusion of flesh and tubing bore no relationship to them. Donovan had been surprised at the number of people who had enquired for Eileen, who had sent gifts. He had been surprised that she had been remembered in the prayers at church. Maura had not been surprised. She had taken it for granted. Disengaged himself, Donovan had believed his mother placeless, part of that other to which he perceived himself belonging. He had been shown a mother who had had a place. She had been a member of the church, a known colleague at the hospital, a neighbour. People had cared about her.
As each day Eileen slipped further away towards whatever she believed in, Donovan grew daily more desperate to hold on to her, to attempt some explanation of himself, to ask for some guidance from her, but it was too late. Eileen had always been a creature of feelings not words. Her life had tired her, and now she felt for rest. At home in the evening, he would scan his own face in the mirror for her likeness. That which he had once resented became something to be proud of, to be held on to. Now it was his darkness that was a curse, a shadow that denied him opportunity, that had kept him from his mother. Eileen died of heart problems, diabetes, general ill health. She was not an old woman. Free of her presence, Donovan convinced himself he had broken her spirit. For the first time in his life he involved himself. He gave himself up to a wonderful self abasement in guilt. Attending Mass three times a week, he gloried in his own confessions. Father Simon, a bluff ex-marine who had come to the ministry in his late forties, told him to pull himself together, gave him a penance for the sin of pride, and told him to go out and enjoy life.

Maura treated him with a kind of maternal pity. She had grieved for the frustrations of her mother's life, but she could not grieve for her mother, dead. She accepted the challenge of her own future. Free of her perceived responsibility to Eileen, she looked forward to changes, to getting away. She packed her suitcases, made the last visits to friends. She was leaving.

Donovan, who had spent so much of his life cultivating solitude, viewed the future with an emotion very close to terror. He looked out at the landscape he had known since childhood. In the heat of the afternoon the hills were shadows of menace; the trailing plants were unfamiliar, strange tangled vines to trap him. There was no median between the light and the shade. The sun, bright, harsh bleached colour from everything it touched. The plants, the walls gleamed white hot. The shade was purple dark, hiding everything but the sound of weary insects. Maura passed into the house and he followed her. He recognised nothing but the picture of the Sacred Heart above his mother's empty bed and the red dirt upon the floor still resisting all attempts to wash it away.
Mervyn Morris

MALEFACTOR (LEFT)

So you is God?
Den teck wi down! Tiefin doan bad
like crucifyin!
Wha do you, man?
Save all a wi from dyin!

MALEFACTOR (RIGHT)

Doan bodder widdim, Master; him
must die;
but when you kingdom come, remember I.
When you sail across de sea,
O god of Judah, carry I wit dee.

CENTURION

I’ve seen it often:
when the pain gets harsh,
the fellow up there on the cross
will often cry for mercy. Usually
if he is lucid he will curse.
Sometimes when the pain gets harsh
the victim stops proclaiming
he is innocent,
and swears revenge.
But this man’s different: he forgave
the people who enjoyed his pain!
Never nailed a man like this before.
Surely this man was God.
Derek Walcott — A Personal Memoir

Derek Walcott, the Nobel Laureate for Literature, 1992, was born, along with his twin brother Roderick, on January 23, 1930, in St Lucia in the old British West Indies. His parents were Alix Walcott, a respected school teacher, and her husband Warwick Walcott, of the Public Works Department. Warwick died when the twins were one year old, leaving Alix the daunting task of bringing up the twins and their sister Pamela. Despite the early death of Warwick he, who had been himself a painter and producer of plays, was to have a great influence on the artistic career of Derek.

Because I was one of the main readers on Henry Swanzy’s BBC’s Caribbean Voices I was fortunate to come into contact with Walcott’s work as early as 1949, and I first met him in 1951 at the Colony Club, Jamaica. He was with an old school mate of mine, Tony Steer, who, Walcott tells me, later appointed himself a bishop of his own church somewhere in Central America.

Walcott was then an undergraduate at the University College of the West Indies, Mona. He was reading (or as we would have said in those days of colonial innocence, studying) the old combined honours degree: English, French, Latin. I was still a lecturer at the London University Institute of Education, and had returned to Jamaica, where I had been born in 1920, partly to look at the new University College. Later, in 1953, when I joined UCWI, as one of the few West Indian members of staff, Walcott was still a student.

I can remember Derek’s smile when, on that first meeting with Steer, I quoted the first of his verses which stuck in my mind: ...nursing neurosis like a potted plant... He did not smile easily in the early days at UCWI, and alas, sometimes gave the impression that he was in fact nursing neurosis.

My recollection is that I had heard vaguely of Walcott in 1946 from James (Sonny) Rodway on the crowded SS Jamaica Producer which was taking a whole batch of us, from the Caribbean, to pursue university - mainly postgraduate - studies all over the U.K. Rodway was from a distinguished Guyanese family but he had moved to St Lucia in the colonial education service to be an inspector of schools. One of Walcott’s earliest works is dedicated to him — because, says the inscription quoting Catullus, ‘You did not take my poems to be mere mist’ — ...namque tu solebas/ Mens esse aliquid putare nugas...
Much to my surprise Rodway knew the work of George Campbell of Jamaica, whom he then—1946—considered to be the leading Caribbean poet. (This came out as we were discussing some poems I had recently published.) I was surprised because at the time I hardly knew of St Lucia (its capital, Castries, had been raided during the war and heavily shelled); I certainly did not know of its poets. And although George was the leading nationalist poet of Jamaica, and a protégé of Edna and Norman Manley, I might not have known much about his work except for the fact that we had been students together at the Jesuit High School, St George’s College in Kingston. George’s work was also well known to another St Lucian, the painter and amateur anthropologist, Harry Simmons. And through Harry, Walcott was more influenced by Campbell’s work than he perhaps realised. This can be seen in Walcott’s Another Life where Simmons reads to Walcott Campbell’s well known poem Holy: ‘Holy be the white head of a Negro...’ and where in fact Walcott so took over the theme of ‘Holy be...’ that the subtitle of my forthcoming book on his poetry is ‘from exorcism to benediction’. For his concerns moved from those of cursing the vile things of his early experience to that of blessing the good things. The theme of Holy be runs through the whole of Another Life.

One of the other bits of his verse which I could have quoted at him in the Colony Club was ‘You in the castle of your skin/ I the swineherd...’ The persona in that poem feels that he has been rejected by his ‘Princess’ because he is clearly too dark, and she is pictured as safe in her ‘fine castle’, looking down on him and banishing him to the pens of the swine, a mere swineherd. There is little doubt that in his early days Walcott was much concerned in his poetry with themes of colour, discrimination and rejection, of being on the periphery. He seemed also in his personal relations and aura to have been prickly, morose and deeply worried. The wife of a colonial official once said about him, as a young man, that she knew no one who so strongly gave the impression of being disturbed and bleak. When I relayed this remark to a scholar from Trinidad he said ‘She ought to know all about that, and the reasons for it—she is not from St Lucia?’

One of his remarkable achievements—most suitable to a Nobel Laureate—has undoubtedly been his movement from exorcism to benediction. He had much to reject in the time and place of his birth, but he has been able to move from the necessary rejection of ‘the works and pomps of Satan’ to the acceptance of, and the building on, all that was positive: his great gifts, his family’s nurture, the ‘good colonial education’ which he received, the care of such people as Harry Simmons and the Irish brother who introduced him to Joyce and Yeats and Irish ballads.

Few people could have moved as he did from his early feelings of rejection to his wonderful taking over, in Another Life, of Francois Villon’s ‘I have swallowed all my hates’.
From the culture of St Lucia into which Walcott was born another Nobel Laureate also came: the late Sir Arthur Lewis, the economist. And one of Walcott’s close friends and colleagues of his early days, Dunstan St Omer, is an outstanding painter, as was Harry Simmons in a smaller fashion. This island country, of 180 square miles, also accounts for an outstanding musical genius, Luther Francois, and outstanding entrepreneurs such as the late Sir Garnett Gordon, and many writers. In fact the cultural life of the place, despite poverty and prejudice, is a cause for wonder.

The cultural factors which first would have made any gifted person such as Walcott uncomfortable, dissatisfied and rebellious, and which he was later, with the touch of a true alchemist, to transmute to gold, are alluded to by the shabine, the main character in, and narrator of Walcott’s The Schooner Flight:

I’m just a red nigger who love the sea,
I had a sound colonial education,
I have Dutch, nigger and English in me,
and either I’m nobody, or I’m a nation...

Walcott’s mother was his connection with the Dutch, through the tiny island of Sint Maartin. His father’s father was from Warwickshire in England. Two of his grandparents were black; two white – an expression of the cultural mixture of his island home. St Lucia itself had been battled for by the French and English for some two centuries: in the days of sail it controlled a wind route direct to the Main. Fourteen times it changed hands between England and France. Just off its shores, at the battle of the Saintes (1793), the fate of France in North America and India was decided by Rodney’s victory over De Grasse – this is one of the starting points of Walcott’s remarkable terza rima novel/poem Omeros.

So while the population was genetically African with a fair sprinkling of Carib and European, the cultures which were brewing together were Trans-Atlantic African, French (Pre and Post-Revolutionary) British (mainly through schooling and the English language it taught), heavily Roman Catholic, with a small but staunch Methodist presence. Both Walcott and Lewis came from Methodist families. By the time Walcott was growing up, English was the language of the schools and civil service; French Creole the language of the countryside and the streets; French of the Creole families who had escaped from the Revolutionary islands, and a Creole of English was spreading. Of this mélange de tous your ethnic cleanser, white or black, Catholic or Protestant, Muslim or rationalist, would have despaired.

One of the marks of Walcott’s greatness, it seems to me, is that while many of us would have done our best to deny the ‘mixture’ generated in our culture through history and European geopolitics, and a few of us would have merely accepted it, Walcott used it and the experience that it brought, to make poetry of the highest quality. In doing this he has also
enriched that language which first came from England – that glorious and growing language which so many, who should know better, are now trying to persuade us, especially in the ‘United Kingdom’, stopped developing, even perhaps died, with Shakespeare and the King James translation of the Bible! He has also clearly shown by his art how the influence of the languages brought by brutalised slaves from Africa has been giving birth to new extensions of language throughout the Caribbean.

But Walcott’s greatness lies not only in his feeling for the whole of his spiritual/physical/intellectual environment, and his ability to work through all of it, but also in his dedication to work – the dictum of Horace’s about using the labor limae, he took whole-heartedly to his poetry.

But poetry is neither mainly a matter of concerns or of hard work; it is hewn, or in a few cases comes as if by magic, from a particular nexus of language and music. It combines a creative insight into tradition with an ability to experiment, to extend the confines into other regions.

So one must refer – one has not space to do more than that – to Walcott’s magical ability with language and his ability to handle many verse forms, and to extend them – whether sonnet or terza rima or quatrain. Note in Tales of the Islands his extension of the sonnet form and of end rhyme into internal patterns which create new richness in the use of assonance. From early on he revealed an ability to create meaning through the combination of varieties of not only registers but languages. In Schooner Flight Shabine, who is not only of mixed race and culture, but a Creole speaker, narrates the whole of the poem in an idiom not only suitable to creating verisimilitude but to communicating in a special way certain meanings not easily communicated in a monolingual display of ‘the STANDARD LANGUAGE’.

In one of his early poems he refers to ‘fishing the twilight for alternate voices his own voice’. And many a learned critic shouted pastiche as his youthful exuberance disclosed too easily his vast reading of both English and French poets. Soon he found his ‘own voice’. But certainly that is always at most half the battle. He also had some thing to say – something meaningful, not only to Nazareth but to Rome, Nairobi and New York – even to London, which is always a bit narky about him – after all he has deserted not only the negative understatement London so loves but also the Empire, and lives half the year in AMERICA! (the other half he spends in the Caribbean). Further, his great friends tend to be foreigners who do not understand that the only done thing, in showing that one is really ‘top drawer’, is to pretend that one has nothing to say and is indeed rather boring!

In one sense his medium can be seen as flowing against his ‘message’, for while the former appears to grow more and more transparent, the latter never forgets, or attempts to hide, the fact that it comes from a complicated situation – a situation as multicultural and ‘impure’ as it is possible to imagine.
I have referred above, by implication, in quoting the fleeing Shabine, to the cultural variety of Trinidad, his native land. But Walcott's situation in the land of his birth was no less complicated: in fact Shabine is very nearly an alter ego for Walcott.

The St Lucia of Walcott's birth, and formative years, bears little relation to what many European and Eurocentric pundits seem to predicate for a viable polity, and which ethnic cleansing, and much of the seeking of roots, really advocates. Walcott was brought up as a strict Methodist in a country at least ninety percent Roman Catholic by profession. His mother was the staunch Methodist; his father an Anglican; his teachers at St Mary's were Roman Catholic laymen and Irish Brothers. One of the laymen who influenced him greatly through his Latin teaching was a Barbadian. The Irish Brothers were mostly rebels, and rather anti-British: one of these introduced Walcott to Joyce's *Ulysses* when that book was still banned in the United Kingdom.

But he was also introduced by the Brothers to Yeats as well as to the then literary canon for British secondary schools. So that in 1952, when at the University College of the West Indies reading English, Latin and French for an Honours Degree, Walcott could write Henry Swanzy of the BBC in the following manner about his youthful Twenty Five poems (published when he was nineteen, and recommended to Swanzy by Frank Collymore) and which we had used on the programme Caribbean Voices:

...when I wrote the poems I was deliberately modelling myself on some known works, I mean for the form of them. I had written much more original verse before this [Twenty Five Poems]. I scrapped about a hundred poems, this is no joke, to select the twenty five, and had gone through my Miltonic period, which usually afflicts all of us in the Fifth Form, sculptured some very intricate and (I thought) powerful fragments of Jacobean verse, but my discovery of the Love Song of Prufrock and the witty off-the-face style of Auden all opened a new world to me.

Nor are the complications – or riches; it depends on your point of view – of Walcott's early environment yet exhausted. Walcott's strict and loving mother, Alix, was not one for encouraging Creole in her household; and all forms of any thing that was not considered 'Standard English' were prohibited at school, despite the Irish presence. Yet there was no way in which Walcott and his twin brother could have existed in that society, even though they would not have been encouraged 'to mix', without that French Creole which was the lingua franca of St Lucia.

So one grew up speaking the 'King's English', much influenced by the King James Version, French Creole and a Creole of English, and with luck French. The colonial power was Britain; the Governors General or Lieutenant Governors were British; the law courts were British, but the Code Napoleon was the rule in those courts. Many of the British colonial court officials would not have known in practical terms what was the meaning of the geopolitical fact that by the time of the treaty of Versailles (1783) St
Lucia had swapped hands fourteen times between England and France. Nor had they perhaps even heard of the Battle of the Saintes (April 1782) which took place within gunshot noise of St Lucia in which Rodney defeated De Grasse, and in so doing kept the British in the Caribbean, in Canada and in India, at the expense of the French.

This battle, as I noted early on, is one of the ‘starting points’ of Walcott’s latest and remarkable poetic work, Omeros. In this book (325 pages long) he extends his sympathies and concerns to the original populations of North America, to Polish refugees, to local fishermen and ‘witch doctors’, to all those who in the modern world have had to ask themselves over and over again Where is home? – a concern which Walcott developed quite early, starting with Tales of the Islands. And he does this in Omeros through verse that is often lyrical and is in the form of terza rima.

We who have often been tempted to despair as we survey our Caribbean homes, their violence, their exploitation, their falling for drugs, and we who know that mere survival is not enough – what is at stake is the quality of life however poverty stricken it might be – can only be grateful for Derek’s great gifts, for his husbanding of them so diligently, for his parents and all others who cared and nurtured even in circumstances of alienation and what others might have thought of as ‘deprivation’, some far from their own ‘homes’. And it is good to know that work of this kind, though its own reward, is not always ignored by those who have the wealth and power to notice it in a special way:

I sang our wide country, the Caribbean Sea  
Who hated shoes, whose soles were as cracked as a stone,  
who was gentle with ropes, who had one suit alone,

whom no man dared insult and who insulted no one,  
whose grin was a white breaker cresting, but whose frown  
was a growing thunderhead, whose fist of iron

would do me a greater honour if it held on  
to my casket’s oarlocks than mine lifting his own  
when both anchors are lowered in the one island...

(Omeros, 1990, p. 320)

I was eighteen then, now I am forty-one,  
I have had a serpent for companion,  
I was a heart full of knives,  
but, my son, my sun,

holy is Rampanalgas and its high-circling hawks,  
holy are the rusted, tortured, rust-caked, blind almond trees,  
your great-grandfathers, and your father’s torturing limbs...

Holy were you, Margaret,  
and holy our calm...
Anna, I wanted to grow white-haired
as the wave, with a wrinkled
brown rock’s face, salted,
seamed, an old poet,
facing the wind

and nothing, which is,
the loud world in his mind.  

(Another Life, Chap 22, V/VI; 1973)

No Florida loud with citron leaves
With crystal falls to heal this age
Shall calm the darkening fear that grieves
The loss of visionary rage.

Or if Time’s fires seem to blight
The nature ripening into art,
Not the fierce noon or lampless night
Can quail the comprehending heart...

(In a Green Night Cape, 1962; first published, 1960, New Statesman)

Distinctions and awards. A selection:

The Queen’s Gold Medal for Poetry; The Arts Council of Wales Award for International Poetry; The Mac Arthur Award given to those considered to be ‘geniuses’ in certain fields.

Rockefeller Fellowship to study drama and stage techniques in New York; Walcott’s plays have won ‘Off Broadway’ awards, and he has been commissioned on two occasions to write plays for The Royal Shakespeare Company of Great Britain, the latest being a version of the Odyssey which is now in production. This play is written in hexameters; most of his plays are in verse.

His most recent honour in Great Britain was to be made a Vice President of the Poetry Society for life. He is a Fellow of the American Society of the Arts.

Walcott’s Collected Poems runs to 516 pages; and contains material from at least ten of his books of poetry. His dramatic work is as extensive, and at present he has one play in London, and two others to be staged soon, one in Birmingham, and one in Stratford on Avon.
Derek Walcott – A Personal Memoir

Bibliography:

POETRY:

Selected Poems (1964)
The Gulf and Other Poems (1970)
Another Life (1973)
Sea Grapes (1976)
The Star-Apple Kingdom (1979)
The Fortunate Traveler (1981)
Midsummer (1984)
The Arkansas Testament (1987)
Omeros (1990)

PLAYS:

Henri Christophe (1951)
The Sea at Dauphin (1960)
Six in the Rain (1969)
Dream on Monkey Mountain (1970)
In a Fine Castle (1972)
Ti-Jean and His Brothers (1972)
The Charlatan (1974)
The Joker of Seville; O Babylon! (1978)
Remembrance; Pantomime (1980)
The Isle Is Full of Noises (1982)
The Last Carnival; Beef, No Chicken; A Branch of the Blue Nile (1986)
The Odyssey (1992)

At the time of the Nobel award the New York Times published the above bibliography, but it really contains only the books published by his supportive New York publishers.

It does not mention his In a Green Night (Jonathan Cape, London 1962),
nor the earlier 25 Poems (Trinidad Guardian Commercial Printery, 1948),
nor Epitaph for the Young: xii Cantos (Barbados Advocate, 1949).

The best bibliography of the earlier years is to be found in the excellent
A bibliography of published poems, 1944-1979, by Irma E. Goldstraw (aka Billy
Pilgrim; UWI St Augustine, Trinidad, 1979).

She points out that his first published poem appeared in The Voice, St
Lucia in 1944. Derek was then fourteen years of age.
Derek Walcott’s Omeros: The Isle is Full of Voices

Richard Rowan, the hero of James Joyce’s Exiles, explains at the beginning of the third act that while he was walking the length of the beach of Dublin Bay, demons could be heard giving him advice. ‘The isle is full of voices’, Rowan says, adapting a phrase from The Tempest, and this sentence aptly describes Joyce’s aesthetics. In his poem Omeros Derek Walcott may well have succeeded in doing for St. Lucia what Joyce did for Ireland and Dublin. And he has done so, not in the naturalistic or psychological mode of Exiles, A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man or Dubliners, but in the grand manner of the later Joyce’s Ulysses. The ambition of Walcott’s poem is clear: the poet measures himself against Homer, Dante, Shakespeare and Joyce. It is an ambition worthy of a Nobel prize.

Like Joyce in Ulysses, Walcott has given his epic a temporal framework: that of a single day from morning to evening. Yet this frame is constantly interrupted by a number of stories, each with its own chronology, its own flashbacks. One of these stories, that of the I-narrator’s writing of the poem, lasts three years, and another, that of Helen’s pregnancy which begins at the opening of the poem, is not finished when the book closes. The island of St. Lucia is the centre of the book’s action, although a few of the characters, most prominently the I-narrator, visit places in Europe and North America. But this is not limiting: the island is linked, explicitly and implicitly, with the Greek islands, with Ireland, with Africa.

Five different stories are told: a first tells of the wound of Philoctete which was cured by Ma Kilman, owner of the No Pain Café. A second is the story of the blind Monsieur Seven Seas, also known as Omeros, or ‘Old St. Omere’, who is a rhapsode, the singer and poet of St. Lucia. The third is the jealousy of Achille and Hector and their love for Helen, the most beautiful woman of the island. These three stories deal with the lives of the black fishermen in a village on St. Lucia and the links with Homer and the myths of Troy are clear and obvious. Philoctetes, Achilles, Hector, Helen and Homer are alive and well and living on St. Lucia. The story of Regimental Sergeant Major Plunkett and his wife Maud is less obviously linked, although the Major is an Odysseus sort, who has fought in the war and come back home to his wife Maud, who is a kind of Helen: just as Helen of Troy ‘was weaving a great web,/ a red folding robe, and work-
ing into it the numerous struggles/ of Trojans, breakers of horses, and bronze-armoured Achaians'; Maud makes a quilt that depicts all the birds of the island. The last story is that of the I-narrator, whose Greek girlfriend leaves him to go home. The poem records both his loneliness, and the healing of the wound that she has left. After a first reading, this seems to be the master-narrative: the I-narrator links the other stories and the respective characters: he knows Hector, Helen, Seven Seas, Achille and Philoctete. The Major was his instructor and he attends the funeral of Maud Plunkett, and at some point the narrator admits that he has given the two of them characteristics of his father and mother. On this interpretation the poem registers the attempt to heal the wound of the beloved's absence. It is only after a closer reading that we notice how the poem records the narrator's inability to exclude the real heroines of the poem, Helen and St. Lucia. Just like Ulysses and Finnegans Wake, the poem is unable to restrict itself to its theme: the linear narrative breaks down, and this failure is thematized in its own right.

It may seem strange to speak of failure in a discussion of a book that is so obviously an ambitious technical masterpiece. Few contemporary poets would ever attempt a 325-page epic in terza rima. Admittedly, Walcott does not employ Dante's very strict rhyme-scheme, but his verse is full of more recherche forms: although the length of the line and the number of rhymes vary from rime riche to assonance and eye-rhyme, and Omeros sometimes gives the impression that Walcott is offering us a catalogue of all the poetic possibilities available in English. At moments of great poetic or dramatic intensity, Walcott does come close to the terza rima:

'O-meros,' she laughed. 'That's what we call him in Greek,' stroking the small bust with its boxer's broken nose, and I thought of Seven Seas sitting near the reek

of drying fishnets, listening to the shallows' noise.
I said: 'Homer and Virg are New England farmers, and the winged horse guards their gas-station, you're right.'

I felt the foam head watching as I stroked an arm, as cold as its marble, then the shoulders in winter light in the studio attic. I said, 'Omeros,'

and O was the conch-shell's invocation, mer was both mother and sea in our Antillean patois, os, a grey bone, and the white surf as it crashes

and spreads its sibilant collar on a lace shore. Omeros was the crunch of dry leaves, and the washes that echoed from a cave-mouth when the tide has ebbed. (14)
Walcott gives the impression of simply reporting a conversation and the sentence structure is nowhere strained or difficult, but he manages a series of rhymes that is quite astonishing: ‘Greek’ and ‘reek’ in the first stanza are simple, ‘farmers’ in the second and ‘arm, as’ a bit more adventurous. But the crux is the link-up between stanzas: between the first two stanzas: ‘nose’ and ‘noise’. ‘Omeros’ rhymes with ‘mer was’ and links the third and the fourth stanza, the visual rhyme ‘crashes’ and ‘washes’ links the fourth and the fifth. The ‘shore’ in line 13 has to wait five more stanzas for its rhyme-word ‘floor’. And in the last two stanzas of the preceding chapter, Walcott has ‘waves’ and ‘wharves’ and ‘captains’ and ‘capstans’.

As is clear from the section above, rhyme is not Walcott’s only strength, his lines abound with alliterations: the b’s in line 2 or the sibilants in ‘the white surf as it crashes/ and spreads its sibilant collar on a lace shore’. The theme of writing or of language sometimes even takes centre-stage, when Walcott puns relentlessly (frieze-freeze, Seychelles-seashells, able semen, navel victory) or offers us descriptions in terms of orthographic conventions. Starfish becomes asterisks and two Englishmen in hell are described like this:

There were Bennett & Ward! The two young Englishmen
in dirty pith-helmets crouched by the yellow sand
dribbling from the volcano’s crust. Both were condemned
to pass a thermometer like that ampersand
which connected their names on a blackboard, its sign
coiled like a constrictor round the tree of Eden. (292)

And this is a cityscape under snow: ‘Turn the page. Blank winter. The obliteration/ of nouns fading into echoes, the alphabet/ of scribbling branches’ (218).

The structure of the poem gives the impression of being loosely chronological, but there is more to it than that. Walcott tells several different stories in a complex system of successive embeddings that he has borrowed from modern novelists. The continuity is maintained formally by the division into chapters and books: every chapter has three parts or movements, the poem has seven books varying in length from the first, which is the longest with thirteen chapters, to the fourth, with four chapters. There is a natural division between the first three and the rest, each group containing 32 chapters. Each book concentrates on one theme, which is introduced in the third section of the last chapter in the preceding book. The first book establishes all of the themes and characters, the second concentrates on Major Plunkett and his wife Maud. In the last chapter of Book Two, XXIV, we find Achille on a fishing trip, following a swift; Book Three chronicles his dream-voyage to Africa and the land of the dead. The last chapter of Book Three, XXXII, introduces the narrator, whose trips in the U.S. we follow in Book Four. Book Five chronicles the
narrator’s travels abroad, which were prophesied in chapter XXXVI, the last of the preceding Book. Chapter XLIII, the last chapter of Book Five, announces the return of the narrator to St. Lucia and his stay on the island covers the narration in Book Six. In the final book everything comes full circle, a movement announced in Achille’s ritual African dance in the final chapter of Book Six. The last section of chapter XXXII, which functions as a link between Book Three and Book Four, deserves to be quoted in full. In the chapter, the narrator has visited his mother and, returning at night, he has the impression that he is in Africa. When he enters his house he observes, ‘enlarged by the lamp, a stuttering moth.’ Then begins the third section:

The moth’s swift shadow rippled on an emerald lagoon that clearly showed the submerged geography of the reef’s lilac self, where a lateen sail held

for Gros Ilet village like a hooked butterfly on its flowering branch: a canoe, nearing the island. Soundless, enormous breakers foamed across the pane,

then broke into blinding glare. Achille raised his hand from the drumming rudder, then watched our minnow plane melt into cloud-coral over the horned island. (168)

The moth ‘above the taut sheet still fragrant from the iron’ in the narrator’s room at the end of the second section moves out of doors and becomes a plane whose shadow ripples on the lagoon. A view from the window of the plane is described, with the water, the reef, and a sail that is, with its own shadow, ‘like a hooked butterfly’ because it is day now. The surf is soundless from above, but it breaks ‘into blinding glare’ and it is only at this point that we realize that the perspective has shifted from the narrator up in the plane to Achille in the boat below. The boat’s rudder drums like the plane’s engine and Achille watches it fly away. The image has been reversed: in a plane like a moth, the narrator saw the boat as a butterfly, in his boat Achille sees the ‘minnow plane/ melt into cloud coral’. And that is not all: the plane’s shadow is ‘swift’, and this is the name of the bird that Achille followed across the Atlantic to Africa in the whole preceding Book. The first sentence of the first section of chapter XXXIII, the beginning of the next Book, is: ‘With the stunned summer going’ (169). This phrase represents the opposite of the idyllic scene in the Antilles and it carries a phonetic reminder of the ‘stuttering moth’. It must be clear that the overall structure of Omeros, with its interlocking sections, imitates the interconnected rhymes of the terza rima.

Language is never unproblematic in a post-colonial environment in which every idiolect is ideologically marked, as when the narrator talks to Major Plunkett, who gave him drill exercises when he was a boy. His
educated accent betrays him, because it is not marked by the local way of speaking, whereas the Major's is exposed as not quite up to standard.

'Been travellin' a bit, what?'
I forgot the melody of my own accent,
but I knew I'd caught him, and he knew he'd been caught,

caught out in the class-war. It stirred my contempt.
He knew the 'what?' was a farce, I knew it was not officer-quality, a strutting R.S.M.

Regimental Sarn't Major Plunkett, Retired.
Not real colonial gentry, but spoke like
them from the height of his pig-farm, but I felt as tired

as he looked. Still, he'd led us in Kipling's requiem.
'Been doin' a spot of writing meself. Research'.
The 'meself' his accommodation. (269)

But Walcott goes beyond mere verbal play and punning: he creates a web of metaphors and images that keeps his material together, both on the scale of the complete poem and in individual chapters. A good example of the process on the latter level is Chapter XLI, in which Walcott describes the practice of the Roman conquerors to acquire 'Greek slaves as aesthetics instructors/ of their spoilt children, many from obscure islands/ of their freshly acquired archipelago' (Walcott teaches in Boston). He mocks the American habit of calling its towns after Greek examples and the 'small squares with Athenian principles and pillars/ maintained by convicts and emigrants who had fled/ from persecution and gave themselves fasces with laws/ to persecute slaves' (206). The fasces are then mirrored in the image of the pillared façade

that looked down on the black
shadows that they cast as an enraged nuisance

which, if it were left to Solons, with enough luck
would vanish from its cities, just as the Indians
had vanished from its hills. Leaves on an autumn rake. (206-207)

We move from the fasces to the pillars-and-frieze, which leaves a shadow, and this shadow becomes an autumn rake. The rake is important because it is autumn by now, Indian summer more precisely, and the play of white and black is interrupted by an Indian red, pushed back 'by the Pilgrim's pitchfork' (207), another visual rhyme of 'fasces'. The device itself is not unusual, but the abundance of these cohesive images is; as if Walcott is offering us a masterwork in the original meaning of the work, as if he is trying to convince the reader of his mastery over the material.
Walcott’s most important structuring device, without which there probably would be no Omeros, is the intertextual reference to Homer. The dimensions of the reference to the Odyssey and the Iliad are at first sight prominent and obvious: Helen is the object of the love of two fishermen, Achille and Hector, who fight over her. Achille seems to have a lot of trouble with his heels, Hector dies when he crashes his taxi, their village is called an ‘antipodal Troy’, and of the island’s two political parties one is Greek, the other Trojan. Philoctete has a wound that will not heal, ‘Old St. Omero’ has sailed around the world and he possesses a manuscript that might well be that of the entire poem. Major Plunkett has a pig-farm and he realizes at some point that the inhabitants of St. Lucia are seen as pigs: ‘If History saw them as pigs, History was Circe/ with her schoolmaster’s wand, with high poles at the fêtes/ saint-day processions past al fresco latrines’ (64). Maud Plunkett, like Helen and Penelope, is a weaver, she embroiders quilts. On a larger scale, events in the poem mirror occurrences in Homer: Achille’s dream-voyage to the land of his forefathers is explicitly described in terms of a visit to the land of the dead, Odysseus’s descent into hell. Even the weather is not immune to homeric parallels: ‘The Cyclone, howling because one of the lances/ of a flinging palm has narrowly grazed his one eye,/ wades knee-deep in troughs’ (51).

But Walcott goes beyond simple correspondences between ancient epic and modern poetic material; unlike Joyce’s homeric heroes, more than one of the characters in the poem is aware of the parallels: Major Plunkett is actively looking for a mythological relevance in the island and its history. He tells his wife about the Battle of the Saints:

‘Look, love, for instance, 

near sunset, on April 12, hear this, the Ville de Paris

struck her colours to Rodney. Surrendered. Is this chance

or an echo? Paris gives the golden apple, a war is

fought for an island called Helen?’ (100)

As in Joyce’s Ulysses, the contemporary corollaries of Homer’s heroes function as not very complimentary comments on the state of our own time. Dublin’s Odysseus is an advertisement canvasser, Telemachus a failed poet, Penelope an adulterous singer and Walcott’s Helen of Troy, an ex-waitress and ex-maid, cannot choose between Achille and Hector, two fishermen. The narrator makes such a disparaging comparison between the classic epics and the modern reality in the passage quoted above: ‘Homer and Virg are New England farmers,/ and the winged horse guards their gas-station’ (14), where the two most important Greek and Roman epic poets are farmers and the winged horse Pegasus, the symbol of poetry, has become a sign over a Mobil gas-station. But such an interpretation would be mistaken: Walcott is not making fun of his characters,
he is not setting the ancient against the modern world in order to deplore the decadence of the latter, and neither was Joyce. In this respect, both writers differ fundamentally from the Eliot of ‘The Waste Land’, who imagined that he ridiculed the secretaries of the London city by comparing them to nymps. In *Ulysses* and in *Omeros*, Leopold Bloom and Achille are the real heroes, and they have their creators at their side. The reader of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* who begins to read *Ulysses* is forced to transfer his sympathy from the pompous poet Stephen Dedalus, who has so obviously failed in what he set out to do at the end of *A Portrait*: ‘to encounter for the millionth time the reality of experience and to forge in the smithy of my soul the uncreated conscience of my race’, to the all-round hero Leopold Bloom. Walcott too sympathizes with his modern hero; when Achille sails home again after his descent into hell, the narrator writes: ‘And I’m homing with him, Homeros, my nigger,/ my captain, his breastplate bursting with happiness!’ (159)

The most important character in this respect is Helen, an independent woman who does not need men to define her destiny. Although unlike Molly Bloom she does not get the privilege of her own voice, she is at the centre of the story and the author identifies her with the past and future of the island. St. Lucia is the real hero of *Omeros*, and for everybody in the poem, Helen is the island. Major Plunkett realizes with ‘a flash of illumination’ (103) that the island is Helen, and Achille observes the same thing when he sees her at the reggae-festival: ‘She was selling herself like the island’ (111). But Helen transcends any homeric type-casting; in Chapter XXIII she is compared to the tourist liner, ‘white as a lily, its pistil an orange stack’, after all, hers is the face that launched a thousand ships. But she has her black church dress on and she is pregnant, and is so in many ways the exact opposite of the virginal lily. When Maud wants to give her the money she had asked for, Helen ‘was down the track/ with the arrogant sway of that hip, stern high in the line/ of the turned liner’ (125). The trouble is that Helen transcends everything, even the homeric framework imposed on her: at the end of the poem, in Chapter LIV, the narrator realizes the futility of both Major Plunkett’s strategy of providing Helen and the island with a history, and his own of creating an intertextual web around her:

> There, in her head of ebony,  
> there was no real need for the historian’s  
> remorse, nor for literature’s. Why not see Helen  
> as the sun saw her, with no Homeric shadow,  
> swinging her plastic sandal on that beach alone,  
> as fresh as the sea-wind? (271)

*Omeros* is more than a modern version of the *Odyssey* and *Iliad*; the poem is the centre of an intertextual web that contains strands from all major
works of Western literature, from Virgil and the Bible to James Joyce. Virgil is present on a smaller scale than Homer, and he is emphatically absent as a guide in the Dantean descent into hell, but Walcott quotes the *arma virumque* that opens the *Aeneid* in Chapter XVIII. The major competitor to Homer in Western thinking and writing is the Bible, and in *Omeros* too the biblical and the homeric compete. In Chapter XVIII, Major Plunkett catches Helen when she is wearing one of his wife’s bracelets on her black arm. This makes her at once Helen of Troy, whose epithet in Homer is ‘of the white arms’, and the biblical Eve. The bracelet becomes the snake in Eden and he hears it hiss:

> Her housebound slavery could be your salvation.  
> You can pervert God’s grace and adapt His blessing  
> to your advantage and dare His indignation  
> at a second Eden with its golden apple (96-97)

Walcott juxtaposes the story of Paris and his apple and that of Eve and hers: the Major is afraid of the lust he denies for ‘this Judith from a different people’, he lives in terror ‘of age before beauty, the way that an elder/ longed for Helen on the parapets, or that bed./ Like an elder trembling for Susanna, naked’ (97).

Another major intertext is Dante’s *Divina Comedia*, which in its turn constitutes a meeting-place of biblical and classical references. Walcott takes from Dante the three-line stanza, the *terza rima*, the descent into hell of Achille, and the overall structure into chapters: 100 cantos (10 X 10) in Dante, 64 chapters (8 X 8) in *Omeros*. Minor references include the comparison of some of the island’s geography to Dante’s description of the Malebolge, the deepest section of his *Inferno*. In chapter X, Major Plunkett climbs the volcano Soufrière, and the description of the crater relies heavily on Dante’s description of the Malebolge in canto XVIII of the *Inferno*:

> ‘Holes of boiling lava/ bubbled in the Malebolge, where the mud-caked skulls// climbed, multiplying in heads over and over’ (59). Later, the narrator’s father explains the island’s history to his son:

> Hell was built on those hills. In that country of coal  
> without fire, that inferno the same colour  
> as their skins and shadows, every labouring soul  
> climbed with her hundredweight basket, every load for  
> one copper penny, balanced erect on their necks  
> that were tight as the liner’s hawsers from the weight.

The carriers were women, not the fair, gentler sex (74)

Joyce’s role in this epic is crucial; it is simply impossible to write a modern-day homeric epic without reference to *Ulysses*. The central
meeting with the shade of Joyce in Dublin is framed by a network of references to Joyce’s work. The Irish framework is introduced in the world of the poem in the person of Maud Plunkett, who is originally from Ireland. Her husband’s name has powerful Irish echoes: Joseph Plunkett was Director of Military Operations of the Irish Republican Brotherhood; he signed the proclamation of the republic in 1916 and was executed by the British for his part in the Easter rising. Walcott sets up a series of similarities between the two islands: they are both colonized nations, they are divided along religious, linguistic and cultural lines, and a form of English is spoken that is non-standard. Most of the references to Joyce’s works are only minor echoes: Maud is, like Bloom in *Ulysses*, described as a ‘bit of an artist’, and the beginning of Chapter XLIII, ‘Flour was falling on the Plains’ (213), echoes the lyric passage at the end of ‘The Dead’ which begins with: ‘Yes, the newspapers were right: snow was general over Ireland. It was falling on every part of the dark central plain, on the treeless hills, falling softly upon the Bog of Allen and, further westwards, softly falling into the dark mutinous Shannon waves’. But the majority of the references to Joyce fall into a pattern: they deal with the Stephen passages in *Ulysses*, more specifically those that involve Stephen’s relationship to his father. A first passage occurs in Chapter XII, which records the narrator’s conversation with the spirit of his father, who describes his interest in poetry, his early death and the survival of the narrator’s mother in terms of Shakespeare’s life and especially in terms of *Hamlet*, and he adds, ‘I believe the parallel has brought you some peace./ Death imitating Art, eh?’ (69), which echoes Stephen Dedalus’s Shakespeare theory in the ‘Scylla and Charybdis’ chapter of *Ulysses*. The end of this section, with the narrator’s father ‘patterned in the shade, the leaves in his hair, the vines of his translucent body’ (69), mirrors the last sentence of the second chapter of *Ulysses* when Stephen, as Telemachus, takes his leave from Mr Deasy, a very inconsequential Nestor: ‘On his wise shoulders through the checkerwork of leaves the sun flung spangels, dancing coins’. A similar moment occurs when the narrator leaves the museum in Boston in the first section of Chapter XXXVI: ‘Out in fresh air, close to a Bayeux of ivy,/ I smoked on the steps and read the calligraphy/ of swallows’ (183). This scene echoes an important moment at the end of ‘Scylla and Charybdis’ when Stephen leaves the Dublin National Library: ‘The portico. Here I watched the birds for augury. Aengus of the birds’. And a final scene occurs at the beginning of Chapter LVI, when the narrator watches the beach from the window of his hotel. He sees a coconut and a dog. When a cloud covers the sun, the coconut changes into the marble head of Homer, which changes in its turn into Seven Seas, who is in his turn transformed into a log. Then the cloud uncovers the sun and the log becomes a bust again: ‘They kept shifting shapes, or the shapes metamorphosed/ in the worried water’ (280). What is enacted here is ‘Proteus’, the third chapter of *Ulysses*, in which Stephen walks along Sandymount strand. Proteus is, according
to the story that Homer’s Menelaus tells Telemachus, the old man of the
sea: ‘At the time when the sun has gone up to bestride the middle of
heaven,/ then the ever-truthful Old Man of the Sea will come out of the
water under the blast of the West Wind’.⁵ When Menelaus manages to
catch him, Proteus keeps changing: ‘First he turned into a great bearded
lion,/ and then to a serpent, then to a leopard, then to a great boar,/ and
he turned into fluid water, to a tree with flowering branches’ (IV, 456-58).
But the inquisitive dog is Joyce’s: Their dog ambled about a bank of
dwindling sand, trotting, sniffing on all sides. Looking for something lost
in a past life. Suddenly he made off like a bounding hare, ears flung back,
chasing the shadow of a low-skimming gull’.

The meeting with Joyce in Chapter XXXIX is central to the story of Book
Five, which chronicles Walcott’s visit to Europe and to the origins of
slavery and colonialism. First he visits Lisbon, then London, where he
meets Omeros with his manuscript, but in both capitals of capitalism he
finds only the stone effigies that are left of decadent and dying empires.
The image of Glendalough which opens Chapter XXXIX is totally different:
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in a rich and punning language, the description of the abbey’s ruins in
County Wicklow is enlivened with images that remind one of St. Lucia.

The great headstones lifted like the keels of curraghs
from Ireland’s groundswell and spray foamed on the walls
of the broken abbey. That silver was the lake’s,
a salver held by a tonsured hill. (198)

The difference with Lisbon and London is that Ireland and Glendalough
do not belong to the conquerors but to the vanquished, the inheritors of
a disappearing language. Even the name of the place ‘echoed the old
shame/ of disenfranchisement’, and the political division of Ireland be-
comes clear when a rook flies north across the Ulster border:

   it would see a street that ended in wreaths of wire
   while a hearse with drizzling lights waits for an order
   in a sharp accent, making the black boots move on

   in scraping syllables, the gun on its shoulder,
   still splitting heirs, dividing a Shem from a Shaun,
an Ireland no wiser as it got older. (199)

The fight between Unionists and Republicans in the North is expressed in
terms of the warring brothers of Finnegans Wake, and in the second section
of the chapter the narrator notices the violence that is part of the natural
scene: ‘those fields which they inherit// hide stones white-knuckled with
hatred’ (200).

The third section describes the mossy embankment of the river Liffey in
Dublin, where the narrator imagines Joyce himself ‘with eyepatch and
tilted hat,/ rakish cane on one shoulder' (200), as in the famous pictures of Joyce on the banks of the Limmat in Zürich. Joyce does not appear, but 'in black cloche hat and coat' (200) is Anna Livia, ‘Muse of our age’s Omeros, undimmed Master/ and true tenor of the place!’ Anna Livia, the female heroine of *Finnegans Wake*, does not accidentally appear when ‘a stroke of light brushed the honey-haired river’, she is the river. The narrator goes to a restaurant where an air by Thomas Moore is played, a favourite of Maud Plunkett's.

And then I saw him.

The Dead were singing in fringed shawls, the wick-low shade
leapt high and rouged their cold cheeks with vermillion
round the pub piano, the air Maud Plunkett played,

rowing her with felt hammer-strokes from my island
to one with bright doors and cobbles, and Mr. Joyce
led us all, as gently as Howth when it drizzles,

his voice like sun-drizzled Howth, its violet lees
of moss at low tide, where a dog barks 'Howth! Howth!' at
the shawled waves, and the stone I rubbed in my pocket

from the Martello tower brought one-eyed Ulysses
to the copper-bright strand, watching the mail-packet
butting past the Head, its wake glittering with keys. (201)

This dense passage not only makes the link between this poem and Joyce’s work, between St. Lucia and Ireland, it creates a network of allusions to Joyce’s works that manages to include his whole oeuvre. The title of the last story of *Dubliners*, ‘The Dead’, is alluded to, and the sisters in ‘fringed shawls’ of that story take the place of Maud Plunkett. At the same time and in line with the implications of Joyce’s story and of the ‘Hades’ chapter of *Ulysses*, the dead stand for all the dear departed that haunt the living city. Howth is the peninsula guarding the North entrance to Dublin Bay, and Howth Castle and Environs is also HCE, the male protagonist of *Finnegans Wake*, counterpart of Anna Livia Plurabelle, ALP. But it is on the beach among the ‘violet lees/ of moss at low tide’ between Howth and Liffey, that Stephen Dedalus in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* discovers his calling as a writer, and at the other side of the Liffey Stephen watches the dog in the ‘Proteus’ chapter. The narrator has brought a stone from the Martello tower, the scene of the opening of *Ulysses*, and rubbing it brings ‘one-eyed Ulysses/ to the copper-bright strand’, which mirrors the appearance of Anna Livia earlier: she too was summoned by a stroke of light. This reminds us of the correspondence between Chapters 1 and 4 of *Ulysses*: when Stephen and Bloom see the same cloud cover the sun, the thoughts of both characters become gloomy until the sun appears
again and the light wipes away the desolate mood. The last image combines the end of *A Portrait*, the beginning and ending of *Ulysses* and the end of *Finnegans Wake* in the image of the mail-boat passing Howth. This is the boat that takes Stephen to the continent at the end of *A Portrait*, it is the boat that Stephen sees from the Martello-tower at the beginning of *Ulysses*, and the end of that book evokes Leopold Bloom’s proposal to Molly among the rhododendrons of Howth. *Finnegans Wake* begins and ends with the river run of the Liffey, its last lines describe the waters of the Liffey mixing with the salt water of Dublin bay: ‘We pass through grass behush the bush to. Whish! A gull. Gulls. Far calls. Coming, far! End here? Us then. Finn, again! Take. Bussoftlhee, mememormee! Till thousendsthee. Lps. The keys to. Given! A way a lone a last a loved a long the’. The keys that glitter in the wake of the mail-boat seem to be keys that originate in Joyce’s work and that can open quite a few doors in *Omeros*.

The image of the self-conscious postmodern poet who carefully chooses the writers he will borrow from is one that Walcott may have encountered in contemporary Irish poetry: quite a few poets have referred to the ghost of Joyce and Dante in their work, most prominently Thomas Kinsella and Seamus Heaney. From the context it is clear that Heaney is a crucial influence here. In his most Dantean cycle *Station Island*, Heaney describes a meeting with Joyce’s shade that is quite similar to Walcott’s Chapter XXXIX.

My emphasis on Walcott’s creative reading of the masters of the Western literary canon may give the impression that *Omeros* represents an attempt to become part of the European tradition, but this is not quite true. Carefully built into the texture of the poem is a counter-narrative that is openly and strongly critical of all Western traditions.

At the heart of the poem is the stated ambition in two of the protagonists, Major Plunkett and the narrator, to represent Helen and the island. The Major wants to give the island a sense of its own history. As a pig-farmer he realizes that History has been unkind to the islanders and as a man he is attracted to Helen: ‘So Plunkett decided that what the place needed/ was its true place in history, that he’d spend hours/ for Helen’s sake on research’ (64). Book Two represents his effort, and it is characteristic of the soldier’s perspective that he concentrates on the one major military event in the history of St. Lucia: he tells the story of a spy in Holland, a midshipman, gives the background of the Battle of the Saints, and describes the midshipman’s death by drowning. His research brings him to the museum and the ruins of the fort, but his central find is the son and heir in the past that he does not have in the present: the midshipman’s name was Plunkett, and he was nineteen when he died. When he is tempted by the bracelet that is also a snake, the Major denies that his research is not innocent: ‘He murmured to the mirror: No. My thoughts are pure./ They’re meant to help her people, ignorant and poor./ But these, smiled the bracelet, are the vows of empire’ (97). Plunkett and his
wife represent what is most decent of the British Empire, the ordinary people at the frontiers who fought the Empire’s wars: one of Plunkett’s ambitions was ‘to embark on/ a masochistic odyssey through the Empire, to watch it go in the dusk’ (90).

But there is another story, one that has no records and no place in the Empire’s official history and one that does not deal with military campaigns. It is the story of slavery, and its protagonists and victims are the people of the island. Their representative is Achille and Book Three tells his story. When, early in the poem, Achille had dived to the sunken ship, he found the skeletons of slaves that were killed in the crossing. Later, in a dream-like voyage, he follows a swift across the Atlantic to Africa, where he briefly becomes part of the life of the village where his forefathers were taken as slaves. The real epic is the crossing to America of Achille’s forefathers: ‘But they crossed, they survived. There is the epical splendour’ (149). The slaves on board the ship lose their identity, their creative abilities, their names, they become shadows. As shadows they enter the new land:

Their whole world was moving,
or a large part of the world, and what began dissolving

was the fading sound of their tribal name for the rain,
the bright sound for the sun, a hissing noun for the river,
and always the word ‘never’, and never the word ‘again’. (152)

This is the story that has no history, the true epic that has been forgotten, and the story of slavery and mass extinction does not stop there: the Aruacs, the Indians who originally lived on the island, have completely disappeared. After the reggae-party, it is Achille who, with the beat of the Marley song ‘Buffalo soldier’ in his head, imagines that he is a soldier, and he uses his oar as a gun:

slowly he fired the oar
and a palm-tree crumpled; then to repeated cracks

from the rifle, more savages, until the shore
was littered with palm spears, bodies: like the Aruacs
falling to the muskets of the Conquistador. (162)

Equally ironical is the fact that it is Achille again who digs up an Aruac artifact and simply throws it away. The killings, glorified both in Homer and in Hollywood movies, and the forgettings are part and parcel of the Western tradition that Walcott’s narrator is nevertheless part of. The narrator, like the island, is torn between Europe and Africa, between Plunkett and Achille: when the latter is helped out of his canoe in the African
village, the narrator briefly intervenes: ‘Half of me was with him. One half with the midshipman/ by a Dutch canal’ (135).

It is this double perspective that makes the poem such a powerful achievement: Walcott presents the two sides, the benevolent colonialism of the minor officials of the empire on the one hand and the descendants of slaves on the other, but as a poet he takes a stand. Of Maud and the Major the narrator says:

There was Plunkett in my father, much as there was my mother in Maud. Not just the morning-glories or our own verandah’s lilac bougainvilleas,

or the splayed hands of grape-leaves, of classic stories on the barber’s wooden shelf, the closest, of course, was Helen’s, but there in that khaki Ulysses

there was a changing shadow of Telemachus in me, in his absent war, and in an empire’s guilt stitched in the one pattern of Maud’s fabulous quilt. (263)

Woven into the tapestry of this poem are both the wars and wounds of the British and of any empire, and the loss of history suffered by the empire’s dispossessed. The initial impulse of the poem might have been personal; but the loss of the beloved, the width of the poem, its themes of loss and hurt break through the lyric into the epic. At the opening of the poem, the narrator can still write about Major Plunkett’s war wound: ‘This wound I have stitched into Plunkett’s character./ He has to be wounded, affliction is one theme/ of this work’ (28), but very quickly the real and historical wounds efface the literary or homeric ones. Walcott is aware that these wounds cannot be healed with art; he writes in Chapter XL:

The honeyed twilight cupped in long, shadowed squares, the dripping dungeons, the idiot dukes, were all redeemed by the creamy strokes of Velazquez,

like the scraping cellos in concentration camps, with art next door to the ovens, the fluting veil of smoke soaring with Schubert? The cracked glass of Duchamp’s

*The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors*; did Dada foresee the future of Celan and Max Jacob as part of the cosmic midden? (205)

The narrator’s father is right: the poet’s writing is like the women who carry coal to the ship:
There, like ants or angels, they see their native town, unknown, raw, insignificant. They walk, you write;

keep to that narrow causeway without looking down, climbing in their footsteps, that slow, ancestral beat of those used to climbing roads, your own work owes them

because the couplet of those multiplying feet made your first rhymes. Look, they climb, and no one knows them; they take their copper pittances, and your duty

from the time you watched them from your grandmother's house as a child wounded by their power and beauty is the chance you now have, to give those feet a voice. (75-76)

It is those feet and the proud women whom they carry that are the real heroines of *Omeros*. When we finish this poem we should at least remember the scene when Helen comes to Maud to borrow five dollars: Maud only comes out of the house to meet Helen when she starts to wrench some flowers off the vine. After Helen has walked away without taking the money, Maud picks up the flowers:

The allamandas lasted three days. Their trumpets would bend and their glory pass. But she'll last forever, Helen.

NOTES

1. All quotations are from Derek Walcott, *Omeros* (London: Faber & Faber, 1990).
CHRISTMAS BREEZE

Auntie would say ‘Ah! Christmas breeze’,
as the Norther leapt from the continent
across Caribbean seas,
across our hills
to herald Christmas,
ham boiling in the yard
plum pudding in the cloth
(Let three stones bear the pot;
and feed the hat-fanned fire).

This breeze in August cools a Summer’s day
here in England.
In December in Jamaica
we would have called it cold,
Cold Christmas Breeze,
fringing the hill tops with its tumble
of cloud, bringing in
imported apples, and dances
and rum (for older folk).
For us, some needed clothes, and a pair
of shoes squeezing every toe.
And Midnight Mass:
Adeste Fideles!

Some Faithful came –
and why not? – a little drunk,
some overdressed, but
ever faithful.
Like Christmas breeze
returning every year, bearing
not August’s end, nor October’s
wind and rain but, Christmas
and ‘starlights’
and a certain sadness, except for Midnight Mass
and the Faithful
(The Night when Christ was born’)

John J. Figueroa
I miss celebrations, but I miss most
the people of faith
who greeted warmly every year
the Christmas breeze.

WINTER NIGHT

From my window I could see
That silver ice had bent the birch
And forced it, cross-beam wise, to lurch
Against a coal-black tree.

On the hearth, as on a perch,
Sparrows of russet flame
Leapt in an aery game
As vigil lights in a midnight church.

A black gust shrieked its wrath,
The white birch, falling, sighed,
The sparrows gasped, then died
And left their grey ash cold upon the hearth.

STRAIGHT EDGES BREAK

For Aubrey Williams

Straight edges break
Straight edges break into
Into outer space
Straight edges break

The sea's edges break
Break into probes
Into the spread ellipses
Like constant lace
Like constant lace riding
The thighs of the bronzed
Horsewoman rocking rocking
Up the edges the sea horses
Climb like agile fingers
Probing until the rock shudders

Straight edges break
Away from cubes and pyramids
Like fire like fire
The edges break
The edges break into
The fire that I and edges share

Break into the fire
That white and smooth
Probes these rocks and those
Outer spaces probes
My inner fire solid fuel
Shifting its edges

The straight edge breaks into
The straight edge breaks
The straight edge of
The girl dancing edges
Nearer her partner and then breaks

Breaks into shattering motion
Like the fire of the sea
Around its granite blocks

The sea breaks
The sea breaks into
The sea recovers herself and pauses
Like the fire of the girl
Holding her arms to herself

Before and after dancing
Spokes of dusty light
descended from a hub above the trees
and pierced the black skin
of the river. Twin engines
of wheel and water
created an interior space
where memory now blooms
like the smell of time
in long-shut rooms.

Blue butterflies stitched the rare sunlight
to the jealous gloom of the overhanging trees
that shaped your womb of silence:
thus visual simplicities
constitute the reality
of rivers one must live by...
the way all of life, sometimes,
is reflected in an orchid – or an eye.

Men, like vivid butterflies, must
end by losing themselves
in the density of thought that surrounds you,
like those men in the beginning
(of my time, not yours) whose crude oaths
broke your silence, not your spirit,
as they searched in vain
your dark veins
for signs of Eldorado.

Yet it can not be true
to speak of silence and of you
in that same breath that stalks
the surface of your dream, like a spider...
I have only to think
of Amakura, and your distant vowels
enter my soul (inter
Heartland

my soul) – a cold seepage
from an old, old world – and help shape
my life-sentence: ever
to be apart
from your sacred sibilance
and the language of my heart.

HEARTLAND
(for Brian Stevenson)

We thought we had found it once
in a pool of resonant emerald
beneath an unnamed waterfall.

But who knows where, among the miles
of rotting and spawning green
is the smallest
of the concentric circles,
heart of growth or oblivion,
greenheart or granite
– and how secure
from the bleak eye of God
blue beyond the leaves?

The shifting premises of hope
wound the heart’s certitudes,
as heartland swims eternally beyond place,
drowns in seas over the horizon,
hides down the path not taken when
a parrot snake shuffled across its leaves.

The heart’s conception
and the heart’s deception
may occur in the self-same place,
where movements in the undergrowth
are more than a fugitive breeze
but less than the breath of God.

Although it often seems we live
so that reason can erase
the numinous glyphs of love
inscribed in every landscape,  
There is something there,  
after all,  
that is the central spider  
in our web of dreams,  
that weaves the net of Eldorado,  
that launches the drunken boat...

There is something,  
other than the setting sun,  
that catches the river afire.

BENEDICTION

...vitam sine termino  

nobis donet in patria.

The mangroves at the water’s edge,  
their plumbing exposed by the tide,  
deride my love for this drowned place  
of waist-deep mud and river so wide  
the very sun is often late  
for its daily death on the other side.

Yet roots and branches form the web  
woven by that spider sun  
to sift the alluvial souls of rivers  
and trap their sins as they run  
to the sea’s salt, purgatorial troughs  
where soul and substance become one.

And I am left on this near shore  
where all the dreams of heaven start:  
Who sifts the clotted sins of earth  
where land and sun and river part  
in obscene mangrove fingers, will find  
the trifling treasure of my heart.

– I come from this, in this I move.  
Blessed be this place I love.
Gull

My son brought home a seagull with a damaged wing; his mother and sister helped him fuss over it and feed the wild, ungrateful thing.

They treated the raw, unfeathered patch and tied the drooping limb to its body with a strip of cloth; deciding not to name him yet, they placed him for the night in a shoebox lined with an old towel complete with plastic tot of water and two smelly sprats, procured with difficulty at such short warning. The boy guessed all would be right, come morning.

In fact the thing died. When I checked before breakfast, it was stiff, and its rank death had already attracted a phalanx of tiny ants. My son said nothing; looked at it a while, then dealt it an almighty kick, box and all and sent it crashing into the opposite wall.

So much for the nameless bird. Sister and mother were aghast, upset he could be so uncaring, but I understood why he kicked it, and approved, beneath the mandatory frown.

I think it's right to kick at death, especially when you're young. He was not uncaring, what he cared for was life, the chance to see the creature mend, to release it and watch it soar; the lifeless form was cruel recompense for all the love and care he'd felt before - and so he wanted no business with dead things, his savage kick.
focussed his argument more sharply than these words, and I hope for him a life as fiercely free as he had wanted for that awkward, damaged bird.

OL’ HIGUE

You think I like this stupidness – gallivanting all night without skin, burning myself out like cane-fire to frighten the foolish?
And for what? A few drops of baby blood?
You think I wouldn’t rather take my blood seasoned in fat black-pudding, like everyone else?
And don’t even talk ‘bout the pain of salt and having to bend these old bones down to count a thousand grains of rice!

If only babies didn’t smell so nice!
And if I could only stop hearing the soft, soft call of that pure blood running in new veins, singing the sweet song of life tempting an old, dry-up woman who been holding her final note for years and years, afraid of the dying hum...

Then again, if I didn’t fly and come to that fresh pulse in the middle of the night, how would you, mother, name your ancient dread?
And who to blame for the murder inside your head..?
Believe me – As long as it have women giving birth a poor ol’ higue like me can never dead.
ENIGMA
(for Victor Chang)

The language you speak
is not the language
your characters must speak,
and yet they seek
identity, comprehension.

Apprehension
concerning those who must read
a language they do not speak
leads you to seek
compromises.
And the surprise is
that every sentence you write
is a sentence passed
by unexpected judges,
initiates of a different rite.

To right
the historical wrongs
of all traffic in tongues
is beyond the power
of sentence, story,

novel-writing – and yet...

Olive reading Summer Lightning!
And yet...Bob Marley’s songs!

INVITATION TO TENDER

(Project Eldorado, Phase I:
the felling of trees)

Place your ear to the thin wall of my chest,
gently – as on the rough bark of a tree;
listen to what my lips
can never tell: there is a deep down drum
that beats for you and me.
Place your thin lips, like a scar,
upon my cheeks – crisp as dried leaves
clinging to their stalks;
and ask then why I close my eyes and sigh:
you are the place where my fevered spirit walks.

Put your arm around the thick trunk of my neck,
and remind me that the flesh is warm
like the breathed vowels of your name;
then if you feel me sway beneath your touch
imagine I am bending in the storm.

Then swing your axe above my planted feet,
savour each stroke that severs earth from sky;
let the pain of love pierce your wooden hands.
And it is not for me that you must weep.
and it is not for you that I must die.
Marina Warner
Interviewed by David Dabydeen

DD: Marina, how important an archetype is royalty in English identity?

MW: The importance of the royal family has grown tremendously as a result of mass communication. The propaganda machine really got under way in the Victorian age, not just in the press but in pageantry. There was a tremendous growth. For instance the birthdays of Queen Victoria's youngest children were celebrated in private, as were their weddings, but by the end of her reign, any celebration connected to her children or grand-children or indeed her distant relations was celebrated with full public pomp. But it does have its roots, of course, in very distant symbolism and I think that this was very much helped by an accident of circumstance - that we had so many powerful Queens. It does seem that somewhere in the human imagination there is a very deep association between land, birthplace and the female body, so that in many different languages and many different cultures, in fact nations, motherland is as motherland suggests, feminine in gender. The idea of origin, the actual flesh in which you are born, becomes analogous with the terrain you occupy. Because someone like Elizabeth I ruled during a great period of British history, and identified herself symbolically and consciously with that power as Astraea - Britannia herself as it were - the foundations were laid down in the British psyche of regarding a royal individual as something far greater than an individual.

So in a sense what you're saying is that the female queen is the collective historical memory of the nation, she is the repository of a sense of land, a sense of values, a sense of continuity, a sense of nation?

Yes, but I would modify that by saying that this is truly a fabricated perception and very essential to it is an idea that the past is continuity. It does seem to be one of our national characteristics that we dislike to experience breakages, we tend to cover them up, whereas the French, for instance, are very keen to demarcate their differences and call all their republics by different numbers and actually mark these ruptures in the stream of their history. The English seem to have preferred to go for a seamless lineage, a seamless transmission in spite of the fact that, as we all know, there were many breakages. There was the breakage with Rome over the church, a very important schism. Then we had to import at
different periods of our history many different monarchs from abroad who didn’t even speak English. So although there was a lot of rumbling about George III being a German and Queen Victoria being a German this was always covered up.

Why do we feel the need to mythologize our past in terms of a continuity – is that sense of continuity important in consolidating another sense, which is that England has had a past that has had to do with progress, the growth into triumphantly civilized values?

Yes and it’s an idea of civilization based on something that is given, something that in a sense is destined and also something that is rational, calm and enlightened.

And in some ways backed by God, who in a way underpinned this progress, this destiny, as opposed to anarchy in other societies. The English progress is somehow underpinned by theology, by a sense of divine control.

You would have to go back to the Middle Ages to have a really strong sense of the King as God’s representative and I think that possibly one of the reasons that the monarchy has been so successful in England has to do with a secularization of the sacred at rather an early phase, so that though there is certainly a feeling that the Englishman’s destiny on the globe is ratified, approved by divine destiny, there is also a secular undertone. If you think how peculiar it is that the UK is the only country, I think, of its kind in Europe anyway, that is a theocracy, in the sense that the monarch is the head of the Church and this has gone on for a very, very long time, since the time of Henry VIII, in fact. But nobody saw Henry VIII in any way as a sacred king in the way they saw Richard II as a sacred king or indeed Charlemagne as a sacred king. There was never any suggestion that he might be sainted – we had a few medieval kings who were saints but not Henry VIII. So there was in a sense laid down in the very foundation of the new conception of the Christian church in England an idea of monarchy being of this world, as being secular. We are a deeply worldly state and have been for a very long time. It must strike foreigners as very odd that the Queen is head of a church that is resisting female priesthood. How can it be – this contradiction? Because the English are not au fond a spiritual people. So they can accept the Queen as head of the church in the way that the Italians could never dream of turning their President into a sacred figure. We have a low appreciation of the sacred, little thirst for the transcendental. Of course, I’m generalizing, and there are exceptions, the mystics, even recent 19th-century examples. But they don’t represent a mainstream in the British imagination. I think on the whole we are worldly, pragmatic, and promote a cult of reason that is of course irrational in itself. But it has been used to legitimise so much of the
march forward, the idea of progress of British letters, British power, systems, law, etc.

But in today’s society with contemporary royalty, do you think these grand ideas still have validity or are the royals, now so popularised that they are just show-biz characters?

One could argue that the less remote they become, the more unpopular they become, while still being in the public eye so very famous, very notorious. We are living at this moment through a period which is rather like the period just before Victoria with all the twelve wicked uncles, when people were actually getting very fed up with the spread of their extravagances and excesses of one sort or another. But, of course, the spectacle of it now, as it was then, is very delightful to many people.

In a sense, what I’m trying to ask is whether the lack of serious ideas attached to the royal family, in terms of their significance, is a reflection of the preponderance of trivia in contemporary England – are there any grand ideas left?

They don’t embody a grand idea at all, but a very pernicious and deep-rooted idea which runs against any idea of meritocracy or change. Indeed the aristocratic ideal, which really still obtains in many, many aspects of British life, is epitomised by the idea of the royal family. Think: you can become, with no education at all, the wealthiest woman, the wealthiest and the most powerful man, and this can be accomplished, as it were, by magic. There is no effort, there is no education needed; no skills, no gifts, no work, no generosity. It’s certainly true that the royal family lends a stamp of approval to the laissez-faire, neglectful, wasteful way that the government has indeed run the culture and the politics of the last fifteen years.

Marina, I read somewhere that the populace frequently dream about the royal family. What kind of psychological need does the royal family satisfy in us?

There’s a great pleasure in a kind of transgression and some of these dreams are to do with the same kind of pleasures, for example the photographs published by popular magazines of someone getting out of a Rolls Royce and showing her knickers or picking her nose. There is a claim to equality in the dream which only really underlies the acceptance of the inequality. Another aspect of it has, I suppose, to do with English attitudes to sex. We have to put in that ingredient because we are a very prurient nation in terms of our truly popular culture in terms of tits and bottoms in the mass media. But if you look at something like ‘Spitting Image’, which also in a way reflects dreaming, you can also connect it to a very robust sense of the ridiculous and the absurd, so there is a positive side
to the dreaming. I don’t think all this dreaming is just simply lascivious and erotic in a straight way. It’s an aspect of satire. When you see the Queen in curlers with Prince Philip in bed, it’s part of the seaside postcard humour which has been a strong resource of the British, and has roots in the carnivalesque – in the ritual of a day when you can put down your idols, turn the world topsy-turvy, and a slave can take the place of a king. But anthropologists have pointed out that this functions as a conservative means of actually giving the populace its pleasure, but denying them permanent rights and equality. It’s bread and circuses – but without even the bread. So the dreaming might actually reflect a kind of stagnation, a kind of status quo, an inability to change things. You dream of transgression from a place where you cannot actually make any change.

If royalty represents certain aspects of our past that have to do with destiny, divine direction, continuity, things that are mythic rather than real, do you think that to make a new start, to get a sense of realism, because after all we are moving into Europe and the world is moving ahead, that we ought to abolish these ancient ideas by abolishing the royal family?

I used to be a very strong Republican. I actually have come to feel with the return of Juan Carlos for instance, to Spain, that there is actually such a deep desire, for symbols without power, that in a way what is needed is more of a series of adjustments. I know that that is possibly a sign of middle-age but I’m tempering my radicalism. I also fear because of other developments that we might get a very difficult President. I think the actual task of choosing an alternative figure as Head of State almost cracks the bounds of what democracy can do, can achieve, and that’s to do with things like money. Who would have the money to spend on a campaign to be Head of State? This, I think, could lead us into very dangerous waters.

But why keep the symbols alive imaginatively when in reality those symbols have no relevance and in fact could have a pernicious effect on social action – for example – if we are to argue that in some ways the dream of the royal family is a substitute for political and social action, it allows people to fantasize about equality without making them realise that they can’t actually effect that equality – isn’t the act of keeping the symbols alive in some ways keeping people in their places?

Myth almost always has a very deep hinterland of quite practical, legal and economic circumstances. For instance, one of the things that could be done to lessen the grip of the aristocratic ideal, the monarchical ideal on people’s imaginations, and their attitudes to their own rights and equality, would be to reform the House of Lords. It is completely absurd that we have a hereditary house, it’s completely atavistic, antediluvian and it also
corrupts the idea of social mobility of any kind. I say this, in spite of the
fact that the House of Lords has actually resisted, in its feeble way, many
of the worst measures that have been taken by the government over the
last ten years, so that they have functioned rather well as a corrective to
some of the more extreme measures of the tories. But I don’t think that
justifies their continuing existence in their present form. I also think that
the monarchy should be extremely limited, that this continual periphera-
tion of princelings and princesslings has really gone far too far. It’s not
just a question of civil lists, it’s a question of things like taxation.
There are reformed monarchies which exist in Europe. One example is
the Danes, where the royal family is an extremely hard-working member
of the Chamber of Commerce – the Danish Queen’s role is to promote
Danish butter abroad and she does it very well because she is an intelli-
gent, hard-working woman who sees that her symbolic function can have
a propaganda effect for the good of her country abroad. So in a sense she
has divested herself of the regalia of power.
Another very important way of attenuating the grip of monarchy is
something that you and I are very involved in: that is, telling the story
from another point of view. This is where education, the teaching of his-
tory and literature comes in. Empire can only continue as a myth if it is
told from one point of view, the victor’s point of view, and that has been
eroded tremendously. I came across a work the other day that had been
published by the BBC to accompany a series on the Empire in 1972. The
Caribbean section opened with a paragraph which said ‘When the British
arrived in these islands, most of the population were cannibals.’ This was
1972. It is profoundly shocking to read that, to think that that was going
out on BBC television as a kind of received idea that nobody questioned.
But shocking as it is, it does at least show how far we have come. I think
that very few people today, I hope very few people, perceive that story of
imperial conquest as one of civilized men getting rid of a lot of cannibals.
I think people now know that this was a fantasy in the minds, first of all
of the conquistadors and then later in the minds of the other Empire
builders who followed.

When I was a boy in a cannibal colony as it were – we were given a day off
school and a flag, the Union Jack, to wave at the visit of Princess Margaret. Of
course, in those days, in our imaginations, the royal family had the status of gods
and goddesses. I wonder whether the decline in the status of the royal family is
not related to the loss of Empire and to the loss of the power and the mythologies
of power, the glamour that went with Empire. The royal family now is just news-
paper showbiz activity, because the Empire, and all those serious ideas that sur-
rounded Empire, have all disappeared.

Again one could introduce ideas about hard politics and hard economics.
It seems to me that the Empire and its mystique has declined because it
was so poorly managed in its withdrawal. I am constantly shocked when
I look at the extraordinarily feckless way Britain withdrew, not just from
its responsibilities, but from its relationships and shared history. In many
cases the abdication of responsibility was marked by a particular, political
event, with UDI for instance, Ian Smith's Rhodesian demarche. The Queen
intervened, obviously asked to by parliament, and was incapable of doing
anything. I think that symbolized that the general withdrawal had been
managed in such a way that there was no power there. There is a way in
which symbols can become hollow. It's important that this is seen to be
possible, as indeed it is. It runs against the idea of the archetype being, as
it were, a constant living power within everybody's spirit. The archetype
is not quite that, the archetype does have roots and they have to be
watered for if they are actually cut off by failures of moral or legal action,
they will wither and that is a very hopeful sign. For the monarchy to sur-
vive at all, it will have to alter its relations to our culture and the people
who still look to it.

To speak of the abdication of responsibility towards the colonies is to assume that
there was a sense of responsibility to begin with. I wonder what forms that sense
of responsibility took. Was it not just a disguise for something you've dealt with
in your novel, namely naked plunder?

I suppose I'm trying to say that there are commitments, caused by shared
histories, which should be kept faith with. For example the present prob-
lem about bananas. As you know, the EC tariff against the import of
bananas from the Caribbean is going to rise, and the single market eco-
nomics of some of the small islands, like Dominica – which has heroically
resisted going for tourism – and Santa Lucia – which is trying to with-
stand developers – are going to be devastated.

Your novel Indigo is the re-writing of The Tempest. Why is The Tempest
relevant in terms of contemporary Britain or how is it relevant?

I had seen quite a number of productions in which The Tempest was taken
as a colonial document and Prospero is seen as an enlightened, learned,
wise man who brings the order of art to an island where the only voice
still surviving – Caliban's – is presented as brutish and even speechless
before the invader came. Although a number of revisions – like Aimé
Césaire's Une Tempête – as well as these productions, radically contest that
view in a way that has influenced me very deeply, it remains a play about
enchantment, and one which has often enchanted me. So I experience a
combination of pleasure and acute discomfort watching it. And I came to
realise that I was principally uncomfortable because so many voices in the
play were silenced – especially women's voices – and that one never really
heard the other side of the story. It seems to me that that is a very good
mirror in which to see contemporary Britain, where we have many voices that are only heard a little or not at all. There is something about this grip of our historical destiny, our idea of ourselves that has not yet been shaken sufficiently for a new story to be told. I recently read, since I wrote the novel, an essay I liked enormously by Ashis Nandy called *The Intimate Enemy*. He is talking about the Raj in India and he says that the real task is to create the third way, the third language because what happens is that the oppressors, the empire builders bring not only their language but also their values, their sets of symbols, their ideals and their imagery, and all of this becomes so pervasive and so powerful that they generate an opposition in mirror-image. So that the warrior-terrorists, who withstood British rule in India, act as a kind of counterpart of British militarism, they respond to the British delight in aggressive, male authority that runs against quite a tremendously strong strain of Hindu philosophy itself. He then invokes a different construction of Indian history and Indian thought in which Indian identity and self can be recovered.

I couldn’t possibly do that in *Indigo* but I did want to give voice to the ordinariness of the culture that had been crushed. I wanted to show that it was a practical, working society, not a place of voodoo magic and cannibals. The ‘witchcraft’ which was seen in inverted commas was actually a knowledge of herbs and spices, a knowledge of the transformational processes that are in nature and are possible and available for use. It existed as a society full of emotions that are recognizable. There exists the possibility of a material sympathy that we can have with the Other as it has been constructed. So that Caliban or Sycorax, his mother in the play, don’t have to be seen as these horrendous, monstrous dreams of disorder and irrationality. I wanted to turn it around. I wanted to look at it from the other point of view which needs to be looked at. I try to tell another story to ourselves about who we are.

What I found remarkable about *Indigo* was the fact that it was a very powerful, West Indian novel written by a white English woman. I wondered how you managed to achieve this extraordinary intimacy with the other, how you managed to capture a very intimate sense of landscape as well as of the living characters of the West Indies. You’ve got that marvellous character, Feeny, the black maid, and you manage to not just get a sense of her speech but also of her ways of thinking, her ways of dreaming. How does one penetrate the other or how did you penetrate the other?

I was very carried away by the material. I think I was very shocked when I first discovered that my family had these West Indian connections, not shocked, struck. It had never been a part of the story that we were telling ourselves up to the point when I began investigating it. I knew that my grandfather had been born in Trinidad. I knew that he had been a cricketer. I knew that when I was a child we still had land in Trinidad and
my father went out there to sell the last bit of land that we owned there. When he came back he showed us photographs. Quite a lot of the people he had met there were our relations and they were black. We had never been told this before. In *Unbecoming Daughters* I've written about how my sister and I were excited by this as if it were a secret to be kept in a treasure drawer - especially when he showed us a photograph of someone he had rather lost his heart to, called Cousin Lucy. It opened up this whole idea of a past which had never been spoken of, which is the creole past, the world of inter-mingling. I think that it is important that the English, many of whom resent all the peoples of the Empire who have come here now, realize that there was not a complete glass wall between the white colonizers and the native inhabitants. This is a very false picture of what happened. I believe that these intermediate zones, creolization if you like, is a very good image for it. It happened in India, it happened in Africa and it's a story that musn't go on being gainsaid because it's a very hopeful and good story, even though, of course, in the historical practice there was such a lot of cruelty and violence around it as well. The Caribbean was probably the place where it was least frowned upon and where it was most hopeful, where there was the most inter-mingling and the most possibility of an idea of sympathy and lack of hierarchy - not that the novel, of course, goes into that because the novel is about exploitation and plunder.

In fact, the novel reminds me of Raymond Williams' description of English history which is, that history is a process of theft. One of the things that you have been very concerned with is exposing, if you like, the Heart of Darkness in England, in terms of rape, plunder, conquest, arrogance. Would you say that was a one-sided post-imperial view of England and its achievements?

Walter Benjamin said: 'Every history of civilisation is at the same time a history of barbarism,' and I suppose that was my starting point for *Indigo* - that I belonged in that history however unwillingly. And literature is there to make reckonings with the past in order to talk with the present - and even, if we want to be bold and optimistic and grand (but not grandiose, I hope) - with the future. Ibsen said, 'Every writer should sit in judgement on himself.' It's always seemed to me a good motto.


The above interview was part of a BBC programme series about Britain called 'Pak's Britannia'. Marina Warner was asked about the myth of the royals. Hence the focus on the monarchy. We plan on having another interview with Marina Warner in *Kunapipi* which will deal more directly with her own writing. Editor.
Michael Ondaatje: The Desert of the Soul

Readers who have enjoyed Ondaatje’s evocation of damp and hot New Orleans in *Coming through Slaughter*, the lush descriptions of his native Sri Lanka in *Running in the Family* or the depictions of life in cold and windy Toronto in *In the Skin of a Lion*, will be in for a surprise: the real heroine of *The English Patient* is the Libyan Desert.

Ondaatje’s latest novel shares the time and space setting with Timothy Findley’s *Famous Last Words*: a villa in Italy between Victory in Europe and the end of the war. As in Findley’s novel, *The English Patient* has several characters who are all maimed by the war in visible and less visible ways: a pre-war love affair mixed with international intrigue, post-war discoveries and confessions. Central is the fate of the English patient himself: he was rescued by the inhabitants of the desert, who handed him over to the British. He ended up in the villa, which was used as a field hospital until the staff and patients moved north, following the front. A young Canadian nurse insisted on staying behind with the badly burned patient. They are joined by an ‘uncle’ of hers, a thief in Toronto but spy, hero and victim in the war, and by a Sikh sapper, member of an elite bomb-disposal unit who is clearing the mines and booby-traps left by the retreating Germans. Except for the English patient, who cannot stop talking, the three characters are silent at first. Shut off from the rest of the world, they begin to talk, to share their past with each other; secrets are uncovered, wounds healed, until the sapper hears of a bomb that is too large to do anything about.

The language of *The English Patient* is the poetic and metaphoric language that readers have come to expect from Ondaatje: his images are always surprising, they juxtapose realms of experience that do not normally mix. But he is not just a poet and his success is not purely linguistic: some of his most vivid and sensual images are visual, as when Hana is pouring milk into her cup: ‘As she finished she moved the lip of the jug over Kip’s hand and continued pouring the milk over his brown hand and up his arm to his elbow and then stopped. He didn’t move it away’. Ondaatje should start making movies.

The structure of the book is cinematic: brief sketches give us glimpses of the characters’ present and past, a stroboscopic effect that is illustrated in
the book itself by the frequent references to lightning. The war hero and thief is forced to steal a roll of film from a woman who took his picture at a party for German officers. When he enters her room in a villa full of German officers, she is making love to a German officer in a completely dark room. Just before he manages to take the film a car beam lights up the room and the woman sees him but does not betray him.

Hana, the Canadian nurse, is not the central character: she seems to function more as a link between the three men than as an independent person. This may have something to do with her job: having been thrown into the reality of war, she was just getting used to having young men die in her arms, when she hears the news of her father’s death. In order to escape the reality of this most important death, the English patient has become her sole focus in life: as if her father has been left behind with burn wounds.

The three male characters resemble the protagonists of Ondaatje’s other novels: they have one great gift, a gift like Buddy Bolden’s in Coming Through Slaughter. David Caravaggio is a master-thief: he can get into and out of buildings nobody else would even be able to approach. As a spy he does not need disguises; he manages to get into the villa of the German officers because he does not wear a disguise: he is naked. When he is caught, his thumbs are cut off by a fascist police officer called Ranuccio Tommassoni. Neither the name of the officer, nor David’s last name is accidental: as part of sub-text about Italian renaissance painting, Tommassoni was the man whom the seventeenth century painter Caravaggio was accused of having murdered.

One of the discoveries about the English patient is that he is not English; before the war he was a desert explorer who fell in love with the wife of a British colleague, in the war he works for the Germans. He has the gift of words and places: at the villa, he cannot stop talking. Whereas Caravaggio refuses to speak after his capture by the fascists, the English patient tells story after story, but he carefully avoids revealing his true identity until Caravaggio, a fellow-spy, gives him morphine. The English patient is a desert poet: the pages about Southern Libya are among the most beautiful in the book and Ondaatje uses his sources (the archives of the London Royal Geographical Society) in the masterful and sensual way we recognize from In the Skin of a Lion and Running in the Family. We learn the real story of the English patient in little doses, and gaps remain in the narrative. In a way the patient is doing the same thing as Hana, his nurse, who reads to him from different books she finds in the villa’s library, among them an edition of Kipling’s Kim. Hana reads on, regardless of whether her patient is awake or asleep.

The last hero is the Sikh sapper: like Caravaggio, he is in love with Italian painting, but his passion is bombs, and in some ways half of this book could be called ‘There’s a Trick with a Bomb I am Learning to Do’. Kip is an outsider in Europe, but he is also a professional survivor. The
descriptions of his training in England and of his struggle with some particularly clever booby traps make the sapper another of Ondaatje's artist figures. His final breakdown, when the bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki are announced, is due to the realization that he is and remains a foreigner, even among his friends. When he blames the English patient for Nagasaki he does not realize that in reality he's not British, but he knows, and so does Caravaggio, that even that does not make a difference.

Ondaatje has managed to evoke an era and to describe a series of significant moments in the lives of characters who are emblems of dreams and perspectives. The result, *The English Patient*, deserves more than half a Booker prize.
The Year That Was

AUSTRALIA

After the publishing frenzy of the Bicentennial Year or three (it was really 1987 to 1989), 1991 was a conservative year in most respects. Few new reputations were made but a lot of consolidation went on: some of it had been going on for quite a while. It was a year of re-issues, Selecteds and Collecteds, and biography; it was not a year for short fiction or drama.

In criticism, only Bob Hodge and Vijay Mishra's Dark Side of the Dream: Australian Literature and the Postcolonial Mind (Allen & Unwin) exhibited contemporary critical modes. Not without some problems of its own making, Dark Side sets out to make more visible the Aboriginal presence in Australian literature; tendentiously pioeering in its rhetoric, it nevertheless does valuable service in undoing what it calls 'Aboriginalism' (the parallel is with Said's 'Orientalism') - though the coinage is new, the notion is not, as readers of Goldie (Fear and Temptation), Healy (Jack and Chris), Shoemaker, Gelder, Muecke will know. John Docker's The Nervous Nineties: Australian Cultural Life in the 1980s (Oxford) is familiar territory worked afresh, though also less attentive than it might be to other recent work; using Bakhtin, Docker finds the '90s to be a diverse period in theme, form, genre, sociology, culture. Familiar discourses are given some textual teeth in Stephen Alomes and Catherine Jones' Australian Nationalism: A Documentary History (A&R).

Following John Barnes's 1990 biography of Furphy, that cornerstone of the tradition was given a new slap of mortar by two excellent books. The long-awaited Annotated Such Is Life (Oxford) edited by Frances Devlin-Glass, Robin Eaden, G.W. Turner, and Lois Hoffmann was greeted with real enthusiasm by those who find the novel difficult and those who love its difficulty. Julian Croft's The Life and Opinions of Tom Collins (UQP) is the best critical writing yet on Furphy.

It was the year of the biography. David Marr's Patrick White (Random) scooped the prizes and sold extraordinarily well - after a British reviewer suggested that it wouldn't really have a market here. Although most reviewers reviewed White rather than While, they greeted it very warmly. Massively documented from an amazing array of personal, epistolary and published sources, it is a lively read and a fascinating account of White's life, career, milieu, friendships, and his sustaining relationship with his partner Manoly Lascaris. Julie Lewis's Olga Masters (UQP) makes only a small attempt to link the life and the work; Nancy Phelan manages to evoke both in The Romantic Lives of Louise Mack (UQP).

Two biographies of Ada Cambridge (Margaret Bradstock and Louise Wakeling, Rattling the Orthodoxies, Penguin; and Audrey Tate, Ada Cambridge, Melbourne UP) were accompanied by a re-issue of Sisters (1904), and Michael Griffith attempted the difficult task of rolling out with tact the life of Francis Webb in God's Fool (A&R). Griffith combined with James McGlade to edit Cap and Bells, a complete Webb for the first time: what is needed now is a good Selected Webb with the annotation his difficult work deserves (and requires). Bruce Bennett's Spirit in Exile (OUP) is a critical biography of Peter Porter in which the closeness of the life and work become part of Bennett's method as well as his theme - biographical information is often taken from the poetry - but it's a candid account of a fine poet and an interesting life. Several other
biographies are on the way: curious in an age that has turned a disdainful back on the singular subject and author-centred studies.

Old-fashioned and cranky in the best sense was Dorothy Green whose death in 1991 deprived us of one of the most articulate voices of our conscience; her essays, *Writer Reader Critic* (Primavera) leave us something of real value. Her former colleagues, Bob Brissenden and Manning Clarke outlived her by only a few months.

It was a pretty quiet year for theatre publishing. Jimmie Chi’s *Bran Nue Dae* (Currency and Magabala) was a ground-breaker. The first Aboriginal musical, with music by Chi’s band, Kuckles, is an exhilarating theatrical experience that toured Australia in 1991. It’s a witty topical narrative of dispossession, mistaken identity, hypocrisy, and reconciliation: polemical entertainment of a distinctive kind. The text is a generous one with about seventy-five photos, words and music of all the songs, glossary, and an Introduction by Peter Bibby. Stephen Sewell’s *Sisters* (Currency/Playbox) is an emotional play about a reunion between two sisters who’ve been apart for sixteen years (it’s not one of his best); Janis Balodis’s *Wet and Dry* (Currency) was premiered in 1986 and had a less enthusiastic reception than either *Too Young for Ghosts* or *No Going Back* (1992).

The major piece of theatre-publishing was Currency’s massive, lavish *Entertaining Australia*, the reference book that also looks good on your coffee table. Massively researched by just about every theatre researcher in Australia, lavishly illustrated and documented, it’s a beautiful, readable and reliable documentary history of the entertainment arts in Australia.

Veronica Brady’s *Playing Catholic* (Currency) is a study of four plays about the ubiquitous 1970s theme of Catholic boyhoods; where there seems to be apologia rather than rigorous attention to form, it stands out because Brady is normally much sharper than this. And the plays about Catholic boyhoods? I guess you really just had to be there. Peter Fitzpatrick’s *Stephen Sewell: Playwright as Revolutionary* (Currency) is a major study of the most demanding of the important contemporary playwrights. Unlike some of his predecessors in this series (formerly Methuen Australian Drama), he takes up the theatrical and textual issues, but there’s more about playwrighting than the revolution.

There was some energetic movement at the periodical station in 1991. There were Special Issues of a number of journals. Both *Australian Studies* (5) and *Australian Literary Studies* (15.2) focussed on Europe and Australia, with the ALS number being especially strong. Edited by Giovanna Capone, Bruce Clunies Ross, and Werner Senn, it contains major essays by, among others, Martin Leer, Horst Pressnitz, Hena Maes-Jelinek, and Dieter Riemenschneider. *Southerly’s Memory* issue (51.3) also appeared as an A&R book; edited by Ivor Indyk and Elizabeth Webby and splendidly produced, but a few items seemed to gesture only a little factitiously towards the topic. There are fine items by Archie Weller, Gwen Harwood, Jackie Huggins, and Fay Zwicky. *Australian Cultural History* 10’s topic was ‘Travellers, Journeys, Tourists’ and had some interestingly varied things to offer from a range of inter- and multi-disciplinary perspectives including splendid essays by David Goodman, Sue Rowley, and Anne McGrath. *Hecate* (17.1) gathered most of the papers from the highly successful ‘Women/Australia/Theory’ Conference in a large Special Issue of that name: Jill Roe on Miles Franklin, Joan Newman on Mollie Skinner, Kay Schaffer on Eliza Fraser, Bronwen Levy on Mainstreaming are among the most interesting. David Carter edited selected essays from an HRC Conference on periodicals and periodical culture, *Outside the Book* (Local Consumption). A couple of new journals stepped into the increasingly expensive waters of periodical distribution – *Aurealis* (Melbourne), a new sci-fi magazine, *Papers* (Perth) devoting itself to children’s literature, *Mean Streets* (Bondi), a magazine for crime and mystery buffs, and a quarterly review from the National Library, *Voices*.

The major periodical event, *Meanjin*’s celebration of its half-century as Australia’s major cultural magazine, was marked by a generous, periodised selection, edited by
Jenny Lee, Philip Mead, and Gerald Murnane, *The Temperament of Generations* (Meanjin/Melbourne UP): it is an anthology as cultural history and a fine one at that.

Peter Carey’s *The Tax Inspector* (UQP) and Tim Winton’s *Cloudstreet* (McPhee Gribble) look like the biggest fiction events of the year. A shorter novel than the Booker-winning *Oscar and Lucinda*, *The Tax Inspector* disappointed some reviewers who wanted another blockbuster but it’s got bits of Carey at his vintage best in a tighter tale of contemporary fiscal and familial moralities in a Sydney car yard. *Cloudstreet* is also classic Winton, only more so: a saga of two odd families who share a ramshackle, slightly gothic old house; a Wintonesque innocent narrator; physical and moral disorder and a resolution under quite powerful, if potentially sentimental, forces of love and acceptance.

Three other novels evoked more puzzled and contradictory responses, especially for their problematic representation of gender. Brian Castro’s long-awaited *Double-Wolf* (Allen & Unwin) reworks a notorious case of Freud’s in a tricksome re-signing of textuality and sexuality. David Foster’s *Mates of Mars* (Penguin) is an unapologetic book about male aggression and, with Foster’s typically challenging combination of seriousness and satire, metaphor, arcana and naturalism, it debunks male posturing while celebrating some kind of primal male instinct; Rod Jones’s *Prince of Lilies* (McPhee Gribble), whose *Julia Paradise* also troubled critics in 1986, is a complex mythopoeic tale of psychic and intellectual mentorship.

At the lighter end of the reading scale, Peter Corris gave us one of his very best with *Wet Graves* (Bantam), a Cliff Hardy mystery centred on (or rather under) the Sydney Harbour Bridge and the troubled history of its construction.

The most interesting new novelist in 1991 was Gillian Mears, whose *The Mint Lawn* (Allen & Unwin) took out the Vogel Prize; fast developing a reputation as a stylish short-fiction writer with a quirky imagination that has won her several prizes already, Mears is worth looking out for. *The Mint Lawn* is a slow, crackling, decadent tale of memory and the present (‘everything reminds Clementine of everything these days’) in a country town.

The new novel by Rodney Hall, now Chair of the Australia Council, is the first in the trilogy of which the third was *Captivity Captive* (1988). *The Second Bridegroom* (McPhee Gribble) is set in the 1830s, a meticulous fable of early Euro-Australian history, it follows a transported Manx forger, Ash, on his escape into the Australian bush that comes to represent savagery and the unknown other of Europe’s ordered society. He is supported and inducted into the wilderness by mysterious ‘guardians’. The tale of indigenisation is not new, but this is a powerful version of it: it is a consciously major novel.

But the most exciting fiction of 1991 was Mudrooroo’s *Master of the Ghost Dreaming* (A&R-Collins). It’s about contact, too, but from ‘the other side’. A magic-realist dealing with history, sexuality, religious beliefs of many origins (Cockney missionary, Aboriginal shaman, Ashanti); its displacements are spiritual, physical, moral and form-generic.

Few new poetic reputations were made in 1991, but an extraordinary number were consolidated or celebrated. Two ‘new’ poets, better known to readers of *Kunapipi* as excellent critics, produced superb volumes. Julian Croft’s *Confessions of a Corinthian* (A&R) confirms that a slow-building career has been worth the wait; Croft really does have the verbal control, wit, and poetic range to bring together his interests in memory, place, writing and painting, and a pressing emotional life. Syd Harrex’s *Inside Out* (Wakefield) is also poised, personal, and potent.

Angus & Robertson issued Selected Editions of David Malouf, Geoff Page, Peter Goldsworthy (*This Goes With That*), and Collected Editions of Rosemary Dobson and Les Murray (who are each, fortunately, still writing); UQP issued Selecteds of Robert Adamson and Bruce Beaver (with some welcome New Poems as well); Fremantle Arts
Centre Press contributed a Selected Dorothy Hewett. They’re all fine poets and fine selections. What more can one say? It is worth being reminded that Hewett and Malouf, who have deservedly-high reputations in other genres, have always been among our best poets; it’s certainly worth having a new selection of Bruce Beaver, whose *Letters to Live Poets* is, in my view, the best post-war volume of Australian poetry.

A.D. Hope’s *Orpheus* (A&R), published in his eighty-fourth year, is again about poetry and poetics, about sexuality and creativity, sensitive to form(ality) but with that person­ability that he only seems to suppress. The title poem, ‘The Song of Songs’ and ‘The Tongues’ will all take their place in a future Selected Hope. Though these are not all recent poems, they are gathered in a volume for the first time.

Vincent Buckley’s *Last Poems* (McPhee Gribble) was the most regretted title of the year: Buckley’s death in 1988 ended a long poetic career that kept getting better. *Last Poems* has an emotional finesse and what, in one of these poems, he calls ‘carnal clarity’.

ALAN LAWSON

**CANADA**

Rohinton Mistry’s *Such a Long Journey* (McClelland and Stewart; from now on M&S) has won the Governor General’s Award for Fiction in English, 1991, the Smithbooks/Books in Canada First Novel Award, and the Commonwealth Writers’ Prize for Fiction, 1992. Crammed with idiosyncratic characters and fascinating detail, this novel has as much in common with Dickens as with Rushdie. Through his loyalty to a friend, Gustad Noble, a Parsi bank clerk, is drawn into a plot set in motion by Indira Gandhi during the 1971 war with Pakistan. His situation comes to symbolize how the pressures of modernization, urban decay and pollution, mounting political corruption and war are closing in on modern India and on the possibility for anyone, however moral (or Noble), to lead a good life.

The title of Margaret Atwood’s *Wilderness Tips* (M&S) may make readers think of the bush in *Surfacing*, but the wilderness in these witty and wicked stories is that of the postmodern city, or perhaps that of the 1980s yuppie heart. Robertson Davies’ *Murther and Walking Spirits* (M&S) is the account of a journalist accidentally murdered by his wife’s lover when he walks in on them in bed together. Instead of having his past life flash before him, he is treated to a film of his family’s past, intermixed with clips of his anxious and increasingly dishevelled rival. The result, although a comic tour de force, is too quirky and fragmented to have the impact or sustained interest of some of his other novels. Katherine Govier’s *Hearts of Flame* (Viking Penguin) about a rock group and Daniel Richter’s *Kicking Tomorrow* (M&S) are both readable accounts of the aftermath of the 1960s that, perhaps with the ‘boomer’ reader in mind, swerve towards the popular. Rita Donavan’s *Daisy Circus* (Cormorant) perhaps swerves a little too far in the opposite direction, since both e.e. cummings and Samuel de Champlain are resurrected in a story about a brother and sister. Nonetheless, Donavan is a talent to watch. Alberto Manguel’s *News from a Foreign Country Came* (Random House) is beautifully written, but lost its force for me once I guessed the ending. Similarly, Mark Frutkin’s *Invading Tibet* manages to convey a powerful mood through poetic language, but lacks involving characters or plot. Norman Levine’s *Something Happened Here* (Penguin) is his first new collection in 12 years, an occasion of rejoicing for those who admire his austere, minimalist pieces. (I am one of them, although a friend commented that she would have called the book *Nothing Happened Here.*) Somehow he manages without beautiful language or plot, nor can his characters be described as colourful. Some powerful new
voices are Rachna Mara’s in *Of Customs and Excise* (Second Story), interconnected short stories set partly in India and partly in Canada; Native writer Lee Maracle’s in *Sojourner’s Truth and Other Stories* (Press Gang) and Hugh Brody’s in *Means of Escape* (Douglas and McIntyre). Other readable collections include Carol Malory’s *The Edge of the World* (Mercury), M.A.C Farrant’s *Sick Pigeon* (Thistledown), Helen Fogwill Porter’s *A Long and Lonely Ride* (Breakwater), Rosemary Nixon’s *Mostly Country* (NeWest) and Patricia Stone’s *Close Calls* (Cormorant). Herb Curtis’ *The Last Tasmanian* (Goose Lane) provides a gentle, humorous and nostalgic look at the landscape of Brennan’s Siding and the adolescent heroes, Shadrack and Dryfly. Marlene Nourbese Philip’s *Looking for Livingstone: An Odyssey of Silence* (Mercury) explores interesting generic territory, fusing the styles of French feminist theoretical writing, postmodern science fiction, travel writing, and poetry; perhaps intentionally, the quest for Livingstone itself lacks interest, which unfortunately makes the book somewhat static. Michael Kenyon’s *Kleinburg* (Olican) experiments with narrative and point of view.

Some well-known poets have added to their *oeuvre* in 1991. Margaret Avison, twice winner of the Governor General’s Award for Poetry has published *Selected Poems* (Oxford UP), which includes 10 previously unpublished poems, most new. Earle Birney’s *Last Makings* (M&S) appeared with an introduction by Al Purdy. Don Coles’s *Little Bird: Last Letter to My Father* (1897-1986) (Véhicule) is a poem of 296 quatrains, an elegiac monologue. A corrected reissue of Louis Dudek’s *Europe* (1954) is out from Porcupine’s Quill. Daphne Marlatt’s *Salvage* (Red Deer College Press) is precisely that, a salvaging of her earlier work from her current perspective. Patricia Young manages again in *Those Were the Mermaid Days* (Ragweed) to make ordinary life live passionately. Some of the collections nominated for the 1992 Governor General’s Award for Poetry were published in 1991: Laura Lush’s *Hometown* (Véhicule), Steve McCaffery’s *Theory of Sediment* (Talonbooks) and Kathleen McCracken’s *Blue Light, Bay and College* (Penumbra).

*Pale as Real Ladies: Poems for Pauline Johnson*, Joan Crate’s collection from Brick about the well-known Native poet, is prefaced, revealingly, with the words ‘I re-invent you. It is not your words I want ... it is the sound of your voice’, which the subsequent poems, written in the first person, proceed to construct. Marie Anneharte Baker’s *Being on the Moon* (Polestar) has a response: ‘Wannabees take a lot of time to joke. We buffalo all their attempts to be our nichimooses. Maybe in my last days ... I will be taken for an old white lady on a vacation, having proven my blood by climbing to Macchu Piccu for the view.’ Jeanette Armstrong’s *Breath Tracks* (Williams-Wallace/Thetys) moves easily from lyricism to activist anger, from a personal voice to the distinctive, stubborn, compelling voices of the Native people she writes of. *Whylah Falls* (Polestar) by George Elliott Clarke is set in a mythic Black Nova Scotian community filled with philandering and exuberance. Ahdri Zhina Mandiela’s *Dark Diaspora ... in Dub* (Sister Vision) uses essays, script, and photographs to make this oral form accessible to the print-oriented. Kim Morissey’s *For Men Who Dream of Lolita* (Coteau), written from Lolita’s point of view, deals compellingly not only with the loaded topic of child abuse, but also with the issue of artistic morality. Two anthologies collect poems from past years. *The New Long Poem Anthology*, edited by Sharon Thesen, includes 16 poems, each accompanied by a discussion with the author, and bio-bibliographical information. It includes poems by Robin Blaser, George Bowering, Dionne Brand, Christopher Dewdney, Louis Dudek, Diana Hartog, Roy Kiyooka, Robert Kroetsch, Daphne Marlatt, David McFadden, Barry McKinnon, bpNichol, Michael Ondaatje, Lola Lemire Tostevin, Fred Wah and Phyllis Webb. Rhea Tregoev edits *Sudden Miracles: Eight Women Poets* (Second Story) (Susan Glickman, Elisabeth Harvor, Roo Borson, Anne Michaels, Bronwen Wallace, Erin Mouré, Claire Harris, Paulette Giles). New voices appear in George Elliott Clarke’s collection, *Fire on the Water: An Anthology of Black Nova Scotia Writing* (Pottersfield), Agnes Grant’s
Our Bit of Truth: An Anthology of Canadian Native Literature (Pemmican), Bennett Lee and Jim Wong-Chu’s Many-Mouthed Birds: Contemporary Writing by Chinese Canadians (Douglas and McIntyre) and Makeda Silvera’s Piece of My Heart: A Lesbian of Colour Anthology (Sister Vision).

Plays published this year include Wendy Lill’s Sisters (Talonbooks), written from the perspective of nuns running a Native residential school, Robin Fulford’s Steel Kiss (Blizzard) about gay-bashing, and Sally Clark’s The Trial of Judith K. (Playwrights’ Coop), an adaptation of Kafka with a woman banker as the central character. Native playwright Drew Hayden Taylor cheerfully admits that he intended to write a play about Native people that has no redeeming political value: The Bootlegger Blues (Fifth House) is the funny result. Monique Mojica’s Princess Pocahontas and the Blue Spots (Women’s Press), manages to be both funny and political, as she deconstructs the stereotype of the Indian princess in 13 ‘transformations’ or scenes set in different periods. David Fennario’s Joe Beef (Talonbooks), is based on a real character; the play gives the history of Pointe Saint Charles from a working class perspective. Again, some plays nominated for the 1992 Governor General’s Award for Drama (English) were published in 1991: Daniel Brooks’ and Guillermo Verdecchia’s The Noam Chomsky Lectures (Coach House), Dave Carley’s Writing with Our Feet (Blizzard) and John Mighton’s Possible Worlds and A Short History of Night (Playwrights Canada) – Mighton won the award in this category.

Some interesting works of general criticism have appeared this year, among them Canadian Canons: Essays in Literary Value, edited by Robert Lecker (U of Toronto P), Margin/Alias: Language and Colonization in Canadian and Québécois Fiction by Sylvia Söderlind (U of Toronto P), On the Edge of Genre: The Contemporary Canadian Long Poem by Smaro Kamboureli (U of Toronto P), Contrasts: Comparative Essays on Italian-Canadian Writing, edited by Joseph Pivato (Guernica) and Splitting Images: Contemporary Canadian Ironies by Linda Hutcheon (Oxford UP). Hartmut Lutz has put out a book of interviews that provides some much-needed background information on newly-flourishing Native writers: Contemporary Challenges: Conversations with Canadian Native Authors (Fifth House).

MARGERY FEE

PAKISTAN

As of first indication, there is nothing very naughty about these Nineties. The writers have been working in relative freedom of late, producing with poker-faced concentration such works as will appear ‘relevant’ and, certainly, hold attention for some time. One would be harder put to say if the quantity is larger than last year’s, the work finer, the spirit brighter – or, indeed, if it is any the worse for not being all that.

The new decade commenced with a sizeable harvest of English work, and the largest sheafs consisted of poetry. A number of first books, selections, and anthologies made the lists. Saad Ashraf’s Fifty Autumn Leaves (Leo Books, Islamabad) and Shadab Zeest Ali Khan’s Swan-song (Privately published, Peshawar) are in the romantic vein and published without much editorial help. The heftier volumes, all first books again, were by Shahryar Rashed, G.F. Riaz, and M. Athar Tahir. Rashed’s Hybrid (Almaab Printers, Lahore) contains the poems of a poet who explicitly acknowledges the symbiotic character of the creative process, as its sources are both in Pakistani and Western traditions. The book has a number of poems of interest. M. Athar Tahir’s Just Beyond the Physical (Poems) (Sang-e-Meel, Lahore) contains thirty-seven poems on various personal, social,
and spiritual/historical themes, though the title stresses the 'touch' of the Beyond. Accomplishment varies from poem to poem; the most successful ones being 'In the Plantation', 'Border Lines', 'Afternoon', and 'Words'. Shade in Passing and Other Poems (Sang-e-Meel, Lahore) by C.F. Riaz consists of seven sections of nine poems each on a variety of topics approached by someone acquainted with loneliness, loss, and humane concerns. The writing is variable and only a small portion of the book is worthwhile. Among the poems achieved with greater control are 'Cantius Torresi' (which I should not want anyone to miss), 'The Cry', 'Shade in Passing', and 'Trophies'. Tariq Latif's first book, Skimming the Soul (Littlewood Arc, Todmorden, Lancashire), is also his first poetry collection but quite different in its choice of imagery as well as treatment. The most obvious reason for this is that Latif, who was born in a village outside Lahore, migrated to England as a child and grew up there. As such, his needs and concerns, as well as the technique, have evolved under a different set of circumstances. He writes of England and Pakistan, himself and his family, and his loves and larger social concerns. 'Igloos and Hammocks', 'Raspberries', 'My Choice at 13+', 'November', 'An Asylum Made of Fog', 'Snow', and 'The Outsiders', apart from 'Skimming the Soul', are poems to read, not to skim through.

Zulfiqar Ghose brought out his Selected Poems (Oxford University Press, Karachi), chosen from his previous four collections and an earlier New and Selected Poems. Alamgir Hashmi published work in Contemporary Review (London), The Bombay Literary Review, Sappriphage (France), Pen International (London), Span (Australia), The Toronto South Asian Review (Canada), and The Epistolar Form and the Letter as Artifact, edited by Jim Villani et al. (USA).

In fiction, a welcome new feature is stories for children and young people: e.g., Kamal K. Jabbar's Defunct (MNJ Communications, Karachi) and Parveen Talpur's Mystery of the Three-Headed Bull (Ferozsons, Lahore). Farhana Sheikh, who was born in Lahore and has been a long-time resident of London, has also written a first novel — about the Pakistani youth in England and the challenge of growing up in a society with culture walls. The Red Box (The Women's Press, London) explores a limited socio-psychological area but will interest a diverse audience keen to be acquainted with 'mixed' societies. Its observations of Pakistan are also stimulating, and not altogether fictional. Bapsi Sidhwa, Aamer Hussein, and Zulfiqar Ghose published short stories in magazines and anthologies. The U.S. edition of Bapsi Sidhwa's Ice-Candy-Man (1988) was published in Minnesota with a rather sensational title, Cracking India (Milkweed Editions, Minneapolis). Tariq Rahman brought out his second collection of short stories, Work and Other Short Stories (Sang-e-Meel, Lahore), continuing with his social and political concerns in an easy-going style, which may win a wide readership if not critical approval. 'Hore', 'Bingo', 'The Dance of the Beards', 'Moustache', and 'Rain' are all fairly representative of Rahman's storytelling and themes; and, like African pulp, have the potential to become popular. The same may be said of M. Athar Tahir's short stories in connection with the South Asian readership.

Among translations into English may be mentioned The Tale of the Old Fisherman: Contemporary Urdu Short Stories (Three Continents Press, Washington, DC) and The Colour of Nothingness: Modern Urdu Short Stories (Penguin, New Delhi), both edited by Muhammad Umar Memon; In the Last Days of Autumn: Selection of Poems of Amjad Islam Amjad, selected by Baidar Bakht and Leslie Lavigne (Sang-e-Meel, Lahore); Kishwar Naheed's The Scream of an Illegitimate Voice, translated from Urdu by Baidar Bakht, Leslie Lavigne, and Derek M. Cohen (Sang-e-Meel, Lahore); and Shahabuddin Rahmatullah's translation of his own ghazals, Angelic Whispers (Vantage Press, New York).

In non-fiction, also, the four-volume set for children, Doostan: A Book for My Children (Hamdard Foundation, Karachi) by Hakim Mohammad Said, is a type of publication to increase in the future. The biographies include Shaista Ikramullah's Huseyn Shaheed
Suhrawardy (Oxford University Press, Karachi) and Syed Shabbir Hussain’s Al-Mashriqi: The Disowned Genius (Jang Publishers, Lahore). Popular columnists’ writings have been collected in The Night Was Not Loveless (Rohtas Books, Lahore) by late Muhammad Iqrees, and Private View (Sang-e-Meel, Lahore) by Khalid Hasan. More general books in this category are: Imran Khan’s Indus Journey: A Personal View of Pakistan (Chatto and Windus, London), Waqas Ahmad Khwaja’s Writers and Landscapes (Sang-e-Meel, Lahore), and Sher Ali Pataudi’s Ramblings of a Tiger (Syed Mobin Mahmud & Co., Lahore).

Serious criticism and scholarship about Pakistani English and Pakistani literature in English are regularly published in Pakistani as well as foreign magazines and journals. Short studies published during the period mostly dealt with the following writers: Tariq Ali, Zulfiqar Ghose, Alamgir Hashmi, Hanif Kureishi, Taufiq Rafat, M. Athar Tahir, and Adam Zameenzad.

The only book-length study published in the field was A History of Pakistani Literature in English (Vanguard, Lahore) by Tariq Rahman, and was no answer to the need for a history of or a critical guide to this literature. Evidently laboriously put together, it still fails in certain crucial aspects: in the matters of accuracy and documentation, in plan and method, in interpretation and evaluation, in its style – in short, in historiography.

The articles in the journals, however, have been pertinent and sound; notably Pakistani English: Some Phonological and Phonetic Features’ by Tariq Rahman, World Englishes (10:1); ‘The Use of Words in Pakistani English’ by Tariq Rahman, English Today (21); ‘Three Contemporary Poets: A Study of Their Use of Language’ by Shaista Sonnu, Sirajuddin, Explorations (14:1); ‘Ahmed Ali and the Transition to a Postcolonial Mode in the Pakistani Novel in English’, Journal of Modern Literature (17:1), and ‘Pakistani Literature in English: Past, Present, and Future’, South Asia Bulletin (10:2), both by Alamgir Hashmi.

No, English is not always frowned upon in Pakistan. M. Athar Tahir won a National Book Council award for his Qadir Yar: A Critical Introduction (1988). The late Daud Kamal and Bapsi Sidhwa won the Presidential awards for writing (poetry and fiction, respectively); while the late Professor Urmila Sirajuddin won a Presidential decoration for her services in the area of English literary education.

ALAMGIR HASHMI

The Year That Was for South Africa, India, Singapore, and the Caribbean will appear in the next issue.
NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

IAN ADAM edited ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature from 1980 to 1990, and was co-editor, with Helen Tiffin, of Past the Last Post: Theorising Post-Colonialism and Post-Modernism (1991). He is the author of three volumes of poetry and author or editor of four other books. He teaches post-colonial literature at the University of Calgary, where he is Head of the English Department.

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MARK McWATT was born in Guyana. He read English at the universities of Toronto and Leeds and now teaches in the English Department of the Barbados campus of the University of the West Indies. Dangaroo Press published his first collection of poems, *Interiors*, and will publish his next collection, *The Language of Eldorado*, in 1993.

MERVYN MORRIS was born in Jamaica. He is now a Reader in West Indian literature at the Jamaican campus of the University of the West Indies. He has edited several West Indian anthologies and published four collections of poetry. The poems in this issue of *Kunapipi* are from his collection *On Holy Week* which has recently been published by Dangaroo Press. In 1992 Mervyn Morris was a United Kingdom Arts Council Writer in Residence.

EVELYN O'CALLAGHAN was born in Jamaica and now teaches at the University of the West Indies in Barbados.

OLIVE SENIOR is from Jamaica. Her first volume of stories, *Summer Lightning*, won the Commonwealth Writers' Prize. She has since published another volume, *The Snake Woman*.

CHRIS TIFFIN teaches at the University of Queensland, Australia.

MARINA WARNER is a writer, critic, and historian. She has won numerous prizes for her work and is today one of Britain's most distinguished novelists. *Indigo* was published in 1992, and a collection of her short stories has just been published.
KUNAPIPI
International Arts Magazine

This issue of KUNAPIPI, guest edited by Victor Chang, contains highlights of the Commonwealth conference held in Jamaica in August, 1992. Given the venue it is natural that writers and writing from the Caribbean should be featured. These include Derek Walcott, Jamaica Kinkaid, Caryl Phillips, Claire Harris, David Dabydeen, Mark McWatt, Earl McKenzie, Vincent O. Cooper. However, as usual, KUNAPIPI's span is wide and the issue also includes poets and writers from Australia, Canada, New Zealand, Africa and the UK as well as articles on Michael Ondaatje, Ama Ata Aidoo, Bharati Mukherjee, Janet Frame plus general articles on post-colonial discourse and the voyaging of the good ship 'Commonwealth'. David Dabydeen interviews Marina Warner and the volume concludes with The Year That Was, a general summary of the main literary events and publications from the Commonwealth countries.

COVER
Peter Minshall. The Merry Monarch (He Who Laughs Last), the sardonic king of Carnival is Colour (1987)