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6. To construct and maintain boundary fences.

If the Minister is satisfied that an Indian, who has deserted his spouse or family without sufficient cause,

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

The editor invites creative and scholarly contributions. The editorial board does not necessarily endorse any political views expressed by its contributors. Manuscripts should be double-spaced with notes gathered at the end, and should conform to the Harvard (author-date) system. Wherever possible the submission should be on disc (soft-ware preferably Microsoft Word) and should be accompanied by a hard copy. Please include a short biography, address and email contact if available.

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EACLALS

European Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies


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

Editorial, *Anne Collett*  
Letter from the President of EACLALS

### ARTICLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cynthia Sugars</td>
<td>“There’s No Place Like Home”: The Unhomely Paradox of André Alexis’ <em>Childhood</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brendon Nicholls</td>
<td>‘Clitoridectomy and Gikuyu Nationalism in Ngugi waThiong’o’s <em>The River Between</em>’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lindsey Moore</td>
<td>‘The Veil of Nationalism: Frantz Fanon’s “Algeria Unveiled” (1959) and Gillo Pontecorvo’s <em>The Battle of Algiers</em> (1966)’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russell McDougall</td>
<td>“The Unresolved Constitution”: Birth-Myths and Rituals of Modern Guyana: Wilson Harris’ <em>The Sleepers of Roraima</em> and Michael Gilkes <em>Couvade</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sukeshi Kamra</td>
<td>‘Ruptured Histories: Literature on Partition (India, 1947)’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stephen Cowden</td>
<td>‘Colonialism, Nationalism, Modernism: Rethinking Furphy’s <em>Such Is Life</em>’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mohammad A. Quayum</td>
<td>‘Malaysian Literature in English: An Evolving Tradition’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### ESSAYS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kay Williamson and Charles Lock</td>
<td>‘Richard Freemann’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anne Collett</td>
<td>‘Nadia Myre: A History of Unequal Halves’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R.B.</td>
<td>‘Blue-Eyed and Brown-Skinned: Uncovering a Hidden Past’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### FICTION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Richard Freemann</td>
<td>‘The Poor Man and His Vernacular Speaking Goat’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jacqueline Lo</td>
<td>‘Sarung Slippages and Hybrid Manoeuvres’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### POETRY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gerry Turcotte</td>
<td>‘Border Crossing’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### INTERVIEWS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tomson Highway in Interview with Mark Shackleton and Hartmut Lutz</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David Milroy in Interview with Ernie Blackmore</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>196</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>159</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>198</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
EDITORIAL

A general issue is an exciting thing because the coming together of its individual parts is so often productive of something unexpected. I am reminded of Jamaica Kincaid’s comment on gardening cum writing in her essay, ‘Flowers of Evil’:

As I started to write this (at the very beginning) I was sitting at a window that looked out over my own garden ... and my eye began in the deep-shade area, where I had planted some astilbe and hosta and Ranunculus repens, and I thought how beautifully the leaves of the astilbe went with the leaves of the ranunculus, and I took pleasure in that because in putting things together (plants) you never really know how it will all work until they do something, like bloom.... Just now the leaves in the shade bed are all complementary (but not in a predictable way — in a way I had not expected, a thrilling way). And I thought how I had crossed a line.... My feet (so to speak) are in two worlds.... (159)

Like the plants in Kincaid’s garden, editorial excitement lies in the unpredictability of the shape, light, colour and texture of ideas that offer something more than themselves when they are brought into contact with each other in a single volume (or garden). The design, or complementarity, is only apparent after the fact; and it is apposite that Kincaid should move from an observation about the pleasure of unpredictable complementarity to a reflection on border crossing — ‘And I thought how I had crossed a line...’. So many of the contributions to this issue address, struggle with, reflect upon the nature of the spaces we inhabit — the lines we draw around us, the demarcation of boundaries that are breached or bridged by discovery of unpredictable association and sympathy with ‘the other side’ — the discovery of an unexpected complementarity. So much writing is about making the strange familiar and the familiar strange — crossing the borders, negotiating shifting spaces. In her essay on André Alexis’ Childhood, Cynthia Sugars writes of ‘a generative space from which creative self expression might emerge’ and Alexis himself speaks of ‘the necessity of alienation to creativity’. It would seem that much creativity is generated from the liminal space — the paradoxical condition — of being an inside outsider. Such is Kincaid’s position in the pages of The New Yorker, one that she uses to maximum advantage, and, like Kincaid, I must admit to a design that is both accidental and deliberate in making use of her observations to remind readers that the next special issue is dedicated to Caribbean Cultures.

Anne Collett

CYNTHIA SUGARS

‘There’s No Place Like Home’: The Unhomely Paradox of André Alexis’s Childhood

[How to belong — not only in the legal and civic sense of carrying a Canadian passport, but also in another sense of feeling at ‘home’ and at ease. It is only in belonging that we will eventually become Canadian. (Philip 16)]

[I]f you are Canadian, home is a place that is not home to you — it is even less your home than the imperial centre you used to dream about.... Try to speak the words of your home and you will discover ... that you do not know them. (Lee 46–47)

Salman Rushdie’s little guidebook to The Wizard of Oz contains some compelling observations about diasporic experience. Dorothy’s wistful longing for ‘somewhere over the rainbow’ testifies to ‘the human dream of leaving, a dream at least as powerful as its countervailing dream of roots’ (23). The Wizard of Oz, Rushdie attests, exemplifies ‘a great tension between these two dreams’, but ultimately it ‘is unarguably a film about the joys of going away’. What the film — and the song — really attest to, however, is that, despite the power of the ruby slippers, there is, ultimately, ‘no place like home’ (57). In other words, the place we call home, in the final analysis, cannot offer the sought-for psychic comfort of familiarity and ‘homeliness’.

The engagement with questions of home and homeland has formed a central theme in postcolonial writings, especially those written from within a context of diaspora or exile, which in a sense is why Rushdie playfully attests that Over the Rainbow ought to be ‘the anthem of all the world’s migrants’ (23). This is certainly true of what is being termed the new ‘international’ literatures in English, which Bruce King identifies as ‘a literature of cosmopolitans ... rather than of ethnic immigrants with separatist cultures that are in conflict with their new homes’ (19).1 Certainly writers such as Rushdie, Ishiguro, Ondaatje, and others have been overtly identified in this way. However, if it is the case that the ‘cosmopolitan’ writer has no singular sense of ‘home’, or seeks a home only to find that it is not
quite 'like home' should be, the case of many diasporic contexts and writings complicates things substantially. While Victor Ramraj has argued that many diasporic writings are not expressing a means of re-establishing home, he does highlight the ways they articulate a combined attachment to the 'centrifugal homeland' as well as a 'yearning for a sense of belonging to the current place of abode' (216). As a result, many of these accounts apply a non-paradoxical vision of resistance and reconciliation to the circumstance of displacement from home. As Smaro Kamboureli phrases it, diasporic characters 'inhabit a space where they are both displaced and at home in some way or another. Significantly, this ambivalent condition is not presented as paradoxical' (17).

While the expatriate and immigrant experience is one that invites urgent meditations on issues of home — and in some cases, as in M.G. Vassanji's *No New Land*, the ways in which 'Canada-as-home' has become a site of social and psychic resistance (New 205) — it is also true that related dialogues occur on an intra-national (and intra-psychic) level in the location of the postcolonial state. As Arun Mukherjee notes, 'alienation from a national entity called “Canada”' is a common feature of Canadian racial minority and Aboriginal writings (70). This ambiguity of national emplacement is a key feature of those ‘settler-invader’ societies in which the divide between us and them, self and other, is never too easily discernible — or dismissable. Indeed, Rushdie’s phrasing rings very closely with the accounts of Canada’s status as a conflicted and ambivalent settler-invader colony, which in itself is not surprising, for the descriptions of the psychic experiences of diaspora echo those formulations of the transitional condition of settler-invader societies (compare Slemon, Brydon, and Lawson with, for example, Clifford, Kamboureli, and Hall). Canada, in many of these writings, is figured as a kind of 'unhomely state', or, to use Julia Kristeva’s phrasing, a 'paradoxical community' (195), a term which signifies the difficulty we have of living as an other and with others' (103), while at the same time underscoring 'the limits of nation-states and of the national political conscience that characterises them' (103). The paradoxical community thus highlights any number of possible configurations of unsettlement or uncanniness.

If the conflation of the paradoxical and the non-paradoxical appears confusing, it is because both terms have been used (sometimes interchangeably) in postcolonial and psychoanalytic discourse to highlight the inherent ambivalences and provisionalities of perceptual identity formations. If a paradox refers to a statement that is at once contradictory and true, the emphasis of the figure nonetheless remains on the contradiction, for it is this element which constitutes the figure's rhetorical effect. For incommensurate terms or perceptions to be non-paradoxical is to highlight the absence of contradiction as a point worthy of remark in itself. For Homi Bhabha, the notion of unhomely lives and/or texts suggests the centrality to postcolonial theory of a condition which is simultaneously paradoxical and non-paradoxical: living at the intersection of seemingly
incommensurate narratives of identity and belonging in a way which is not self­
contradictory. The subjectivity which is grounded in this intersection is always
provisional and partly indeterminate, but decidedly not aporetic. Emphasis on
‘unhomeliness’ is not about alienation — the strange as the familiar — but is an
index of the extent to which the familiar is itself something which is always
achieved out of a synthesis of the various contingencies which might in another
framework have amounted to a sense of home. The non-paradoxical emphasises
the synthesis rather than the disparity that is inherent in the idea of a paradox as
a conjunction of seemingly dissimilar terms.

For the purposes of this discussion, I am interested in the notion of psychic/
social domestic space as a site of ‘uncanny strangeness’, which Kristeva, following
Freud, formulates as ‘an immanence of the strange within the familiar’ (183). It
is the semantic ambiguity of the phrase, ‘there’s no place like home’, which
lends itself to treatment in much Canadian fiction, an inherent paradox which is
perhaps a legacy of the nation’s settler-invader-immigrant heritage which doesn’t
allow for easily reducible dichotomies between us-and-them, here-and-there. In
this paper, I will focus on a particular postcolonial engagement with this
phenomenon as it finds expression in André Alexis’s 1998 novel Childhoo, a
text whose main character is neither of settler-invader ancestry nor a recent
immigrant, but rather a second-generation Trinidadian Canadian for whom the
idea of home has become an absurdity. Indeed, the novel is remarkable for its
narrator’s curious quest for ‘no place like home’.

* * * * *

Childhood created something of a national and international stir when it
first appeared in 1998. Although Alexis was a little-known writer at the time (he
had previously published a collection of short stories in 1994 entitled Despair
and Other Stories of Ottawa and was a frequent contributor to the Globe and
Mail and This Magazine), he swiftly gained public acclaim. Not only had the
international rights been sold before the book was published, but in Canada the
book won the Chapters/Books in Canada First Novel Award, tied with Alice
Munro’s For the Love of a Good Woman for the Ontario Trillium Award, and
was nominated for the prestigious Giller Prize. Without doubt, as Leslie Sanders
notes, the novel is ‘[t]he most celebrated work of fiction yet by an African
Canadian’ (171). And yet, Childhood has provoked a remarkably mixed response
from a number of Canadian critics who fault the book for its failure to adequately
address issues of race relations and black identity in a Canadian context (Hudson;
Sanders; Walcott). While Judith Misrahi-Barak, conceptualising literary ‘post­
coloniality’ in reductively mimetic terms, argues that ‘Post-coloniality is hardly
an issue’ in Childhood (91), others have engaged with the undeniably postcolonial
subtext which they believe the novel unsuccessfully seeks to repress. Of particular
interest is the debate about ‘national belonging’ sparked by the book (Walcott
1999 62). If Childhood on one level articulates a (Caribbean) diasporic nostalgia
for an absent home, it is also seen to express a conformist desire to belong to the
Canadian national status quo. In this sense, it has been accused of ‘suggest[ing] a
profound sense of ambivalence about the place and space of “race” in the
present-day nation’ (Sanders 173).

The mixed response to *Childhood* tells us something important about the
text’s ambivalent emplacement in the Canadian cultural context. If references to
the characters’ Trinidadian origins are relegated to footnotes in a tale more
focussed on a deracialised account of abandonment and belonging in Canada,
the work might also be seen to evoke the definitive non/paradox of the Canadian
locale expressed by innumerable postmodern and postcolonial theorists on
Canada. As Alexis himself states, Canada is less a ‘physical reality than [an]
imagined possibility’ (1995 20). For the (undoubtedly marginalised) black writer
within (the already marginalised) Canada, the ambiguity of emplacement requires
even greater imaginative will, which might suggest that rather than presenting a
scene of complicit belonging to the national mainstream, the novel disallows
any sense in which the condition of belonging is either an easily accomplished
or superficially desirable state.

*Childhood* thus delineates a resonant ‘in-betweenness’, for, like Kamboureli’s
observation about the films of Wim Wenders, it traces ‘the possibilities of diaspora
in a [work] that does not declare itself to be about ethnicity’ (8). As Donna
Bailey Nurse observes, ‘Alexis is something of a rare bird: a black author who
attempts to tackle issues like displacement and unbelonging without placing the
major emphasis upon racism or race’ (10). Alexis’s exploration of diasporic/
non-diasporic transitional space allows him to reinflect the condition of diaspora
outside of the strict terminology of cultural/national identity and the estrangement
of exile (and the nostalgia that accompanies it). With Bhabha, he ‘captures
something of the estranging sense of the relocation of the home’ (Bhabha 9), but
not by delineating an experience of migration and dis/continuity. Instead, Alexis
identifies this ‘unhomeliness’ of home as an existential condition located in one
character’s experience of the disjunctive present of Canadian domestic space.
Yet, indirectly, through his protagonist Thomas MacMillan’s meditations on
home — and his sense of disconnection with his Trinidadian heritage — Alexis
reveals the ways the ‘recesses of the domestic space become sites for history’s
most intricate invasions’ (Bhabha 9), as well as the ways the social invades the
psychic, and vice versa.

Alexis takes the notion of home as an unsettling or *unheimlich* place and
turns it into the desired goal of his narrator, for Thomas, as he repeatedly attests,
seeks a home that is ‘no place like home’ — or, to reformulate Bhabha’s notion
of national space, a home that is ‘less than one’ (97). Here, the concept of ‘home’
is explored as a seemingly paradoxical space which cannot be easily reconciled
— a paradox, to use the words of object-relations psychoanalyst D.W. Winnicott,
‘to be accepted and tolerated and respected’, but not resolved (1991a xii). In
other words, what Thomas articulates is the experience of home as a clearly non-
paradoxical space, a space which offers a potential for agency in the form of imaginative and cultural expression. In effect, what he must come to learn in the course of writing his memoir is that the 'home' he seeks exists in the very unhomeliness he feels around him. This constitutes a double movement between resistance and reconciliation, for the narrator neither mourns for a land left behind (he is born in Canada), nor does he seek a sense of coherent belonging (he avoids making attachments), but instead, like Dorothy, he fantasises about a non-paradoxical space whose allure resides in its very irresolvability. In this case, home exists as a place in which he can securely belong and not belong, a place which he is resistant and reconciled to at one and the same time. For the narrator, the 'unhomely' experience of 'home' is to him what is most familiar — hence he seeks a 'home' which will be recognisable by the subjective dislocation it evokes in him.

This experience of a home that is not a home corresponds very closely with Winnicott's conception of transitional spaces, which he defines as 'the intermediate area between the subjective and that which is objectively perceived' (1991d 3). The transitional space functions as a 'third' area of experience (neither inner psychic reality nor external reality), a conceptual realm betweenillusion and reality, inside and outside (2). As a 'potential space' which coincides not only with a child's play activity but also an adult's imaginative and cultural experience, it enables the non-paradoxical acceptance of contradiction. In other words, it allows the retention of an ontological paradox, 'between me-extensions and the not-me' (1991b 100).

What this experience offers to the narrator is a potential very similar to that afforded many postcolonial writers — a generative space from which creative self-expression might emerge. This space lies somewhere between the inner life of psychic apperception and the pragmatic necessities of external reality, a hypothetical area between the two of these where, Winnicott insists, most living experiencing occurs (and out of which cultural expression emerges). However, it is also true that this 'potential space varies greatly from individual to individual' (1991c 110), and from one socio-experiential context to another, since 'it depends for its existence on living experiences, not on inherited tendencies' (108). Which is to say that the postcolonial cannot be swept away in the guise of a universal agonistic condition. As Alexis observed in an interview with Branko Gorjup when asserting the necessity of 'alienation' to creativity: 'I couldn't write as I write now had I stayed in Trinidad' (1998 12). Hence it is significant that by the end of his narrative Thomas takes us to the point where he is finally able to assuage — but not resolve — his identificatory anguish by setting down (one version of) his personal memoir: 'I will have thousands of childhoods before time is done. But this one has its own necessity' (264).

* * * * *
Thomas Macmillan’s displacement from a clear sense of home emerges from the vagaries of his unconventional upbringing. Having been abandoned by his mother at birth, and hence doubly displaced from home (see note 3), he has been left with his grandmother who, against her own inclinations, is left to raise the child in Petrolia, Ontario. This experience leaves Thomas grappling with an originary discontinuity or aporia at the core of his history, a gap in identity with which he struggles to come to terms throughout his life. Abandoned by his mother, who was in turn, apparently, abandoned by Thomas’s father, he becomes a kind of paradigmatic existential *étranger,* who because of his alienation from his diasporic ancestry, is unable to forge any clear sense of even alienated homelessness. How, after all, can you define yourself in terms of diasporic dis/continuity if you do not know what you are displaced from?

His grandmother offers little illumination, for ‘You couldn’t always tell where you stood with her’ (5). From the outset, Thomas’s memories of her are mixed. On the one hand, it may be that she loves him; on the other, she regards him with hostility: ‘She could have drowned me, poisoned me, left me in traffic, or fed me to wild dogs — all of which she threatened to do. Instead, in her own way, she sheltered me. (There is even, at the edge of memory, a memory of sleep in her arms; her sour smell, her dry white hair ...)’ (11). That her ‘sheltering’ evokes a memory of a ‘sour smell’ testifies to the double-edged experience of warmth that becomes the vector of familiarity for Thomas from early on — to feel comforted is also to be enveloped in sour resentment. As he admits of his grandmother’s response to him, ‘The less she saw of me, the more tolerable I was’ (12).

Nor does his grandmother offer him the solace of origins in the form of a cultural tradition, as is evident in her rejection of her own Trinidadian background. His grandmother, he tells us, had ‘swept Trinidad from her life’ (139), and has done this ‘so thoroughly that I could not have guessed her origins were anything but Canadian’ (29). Instead, Edna Macmillan has created an alternative home in the ‘Dickens Society of Lambton County’. Enthralled with the works of Dickens and Archibald Lampman, Edna fashions her home as a kind of nineteenth-century salon, and yet, beneath the surface, Thomas glimpses artful traces of her repressed roots: ‘the flag of Trinidad is the same red, white, and black as my grandmother’s dresses’ (29). Whether this is merely wishful confabulation on Thomas’s part is uncertain, though it is noteworthy that he remarks on the Trinidadian origins of his mother’s partner, Henry Wing, some years later. Although Henry, too, has surrounded himself with Victorian trappings, his home offers Thomas the tastes of Trinidad through the meals that are prepared by Henry’s house-keeper, Mrs. Williams. Once again, Thomas responds to these ancestral origins — which both are his and are not his — ambivalently. When Mrs. Williams serves him a meal of okra and rice, he finds the green vegetable ‘repulsive’ (138). And yet, although Mrs. Williams’ Caribbean cooking is
‘inexplicably foreign’, he takes ‘to plantain and roti, dasheen and doubles as if [he] were born to them’ (139).

Eventually, it is Mrs. Williams who comes to fill the role that might have been played by Thomas’s mother or grandmother, for she takes it upon herself to tell him the stories and legends of her own childhood. Lamenting the fate of what she terms this ‘“unfortunate” child’, she ‘took up my education, teaching me old and peculiar songs like “Caroline” and “Gold Bond soap to wash your punkalunks”’ (155). Thomas’s intimacy with Mrs. Williams makes his betrayal of her, at the behest of his mother, all the more surprising, and testifies to his own discomfort with a too-homely maternal role model. By accusing Mrs. Williams of theft and thereby ‘abandon[ing]’ her (159), Thomas restages a scene of primary repression and re-enacts a symbolic displacing of the mother. In the process, he contributes to the ambiguous nature of his new household (what was once familiar becomes repressed). Although, with Mrs. Williams ‘out of the picture’, he admits that ‘Henry, my mother, and I, did grow closer’ (160), this closeness provokes Thomas’s subsequent rejection of a home that has become too (superficially) homely and content.

The memoir Thomas writes is an attempt to come to terms with this mixed legacy following the death of his mother — an attempt to revisit the unheimlich traces she has left in his life history. His quest for his lost and ambivalently figured mother is more comfortably displaced onto images of home, for in his memoir he traces his life via the places he has lived. In part because of his lack of clear origins, Thomas is obsessed with place — not with landscape, but with domestic social and psychic space. Because the home he grows up in is unwelcoming, Thomas becomes fascinated with the idea of homes (and mothers) that are not his own. As he says towards the beginning of his narrative, ‘I was obsessed with other people’s houses’ (13). It is for this reason that we are given a far more detailed rendering of the neighbouring homes than of his own, which remains something of an all-too-present absence in Thomas’s tale of non-originary origins.

Significantly, Thomas is most enthralled with the Berwicks’ house which borders his own at the back: ‘Though other houses were more inviting, the Berwicks’ was where I would have chosen to live’ (13). The choice of this particular house is odd because it is the Berwicks’ home that functions as something of an empty signifier in the novel: ‘It smelled clean. It was ethereal in its cleanliness. ... The kitchen was spotless ... no signs of violence. The furniture, what little there was, was all straight lines’ (13). That the spartan aspect of the place is largely related to Sandy Berwick’s asthma is irrelevant to Thomas — what he likes about the place is its uninviting blankness, its resonant potential as a void.

Thomas’s quest for the unhomeliness of home is closely linked to the unheimlich character of his mother, who exists as a familiar but estranged presence
in his life. In a sense, the non-homes he seeks function as a kind of objective correlative to her characteristic ineffability. Not only is he unable to glean any reliable information about her — people’s stories of Katarina are always changing — but when he eventually does get to know her, he realises that she is inherently unfathomable: ‘my mother [is] constant in the most mercurial of instincts’ (216). His relationship with his mother is described as ‘a loving relationship with chaos’ (222). This is magnified by the fact that he can never quite accept the fact that she is, indeed, his mother; as a result he often contorts his phrases so that he does not have to use this term when addressing her (120–21). Initially, Thomas has trouble accepting the non-paradoxical character of his mother’s identity — namely the identity of his mother as his mother.8 Although he admits that ‘mothers are both/and — both frightening and loving’, he continues to separate her into distinct selves: ‘I think of her kinder self as Mother, and it is disconcerting to have less vivid memories of my mother as Mother than I do of my mother as Katarina’ (219).

The more Thomas is obsessed with getting the facts straight about his mother’s identity and the places she has lived, the more he exhibits an adamant refusal to accept the contingency of change. As he questions the woman next door, Lillian Schwartz, about his mother’s early years, he especially wants to know whether ‘my mother’s Petrolia was like the one I inhabited’, to which she responds with the paradoxical cliché, ‘Plus ça change...’ (38). Although he states that this was ‘an idea I wouldn’t understand for decades, if I understand it at all’, it will become clear that Thomas understands the concept of home only in these terms. The more he tries to get a fixed sense of his background, in which ancestry is transposed onto place, the more he finds it evading him — and the more it seems to be most peculiarly his.

It is only upon his grandmother’s death that Thomas begins to get an inkling of his unusual relationship with this home that he must now leave behind. Looking at his house from a bedroom in the house next door, he comments, ‘The house looked almost foreign to me’ (69). When he ventures back into the house to retrieve some of his things, he comes to recognise the place for the first time: ‘on this second venture into what had been my home, I felt something of the bond I had with what was, after all, the only house I’d ever truly known’ (69). Although his grandmother had assured him that this was not his true home, and that he ‘would be taken to [his] “rightful home”’ in due course when his mother finally retrieved him, Thomas realises that this is the only ‘home’ he really has, and what marks this feeling of homelessness is the very ambivalence it evokes in him: ‘I longed for this: a house that was not mine and not quite not-mine’ (70). The echo of Winnicott’s terms here is itself uncanny, for ultimately Thomas seeks the reassurance of a transitional space which is compelling for its irresolvable connection to both inner and external reality (1991d 14). While this may appear a sign of Thomas’s alienation from a clear sense of emplacement and identity, it is also true that this configuration more adequately describes the experience of
the rootlessness of home. As Bhabha says, 'To be unhomed is not to be homeless' (9), which is perhaps one of the key implications of the novel’s exploration of this subject as a metaphor for a postcolonial defamiliarisation with place. It is worth noting, therefore, that Thomas echoes this phrase towards the end of his narrative when he describes his eventual acceptance of home upon returning to Petrolia for his mother’s funeral. During this last visit to the town, Thomas feels a clear sense of ‘belonging’ in this place ‘that was neither mine nor, as yet, not-mine’ (248). ‘I have rarely felt so stable’, he asserts at this moment.

The death of his grandmother marks the termination of the first stage of Thomas’s narrative. When his mother arrives to take him to his ‘rightful home’, Thomas discovers that she herself is homeless. Significantly, their first exchange (this is the first time either of them has spoken) revolves around a quest for home. When Katarina hurriedly tells Thomas, ‘We have to go’, he fills in the missing word himself: ‘Home?’ (72). To which she vaguely replies, ‘Somewhere’ (72), thus confirming the very instability of the signifier in his mind. Struck by how easily his mother once again ‘quit[s] her childhood home’ (73), as he is to do some years later when he sells his grandmother’s house, Thomas is about to experience a literal experience of homelessness, for the home that is not clear anywhere soon becomes a series of hastily pitched camps along the highways in southern Ontario. His final thought upon leaving Petrolia is that he is quitting a ‘community to which, despite myself, I almost belonged’ (75).

Thomas’s ambivalent sense of his emplacement in the world is illustrated in the dichotomy he sets up between the positions of Heraclitus and Parmenides when he is speculating on the implications of home. For Heraclitus, he notes, ‘all is in flux’; there is ‘no permanence except the permanence of change and becoming’ (81). Significantly, Thomas chooses to apply this observation to a definition of home. What Heraclitus teaches, he insists, is that ‘home won’t persist’: ‘Once you go away, you can never return’ (81). However, to push the Heraclitean principle to its limits is to realise that stability is an impossibility: ‘even as you sit within it, home changes ... no stasis can keep home home’ (82). For Parmenides, it is change that is impossible; all alteration is an illusion. In which case, ‘The only thing that persists is home’ (82). Ultimately, the Parmenidean principle, much as a tormented character such as Thomas might long for its validity, is the more distressing, for it renders the potential of perception (and agency) static and null. That Thomas acknowledges this fact is an indication of the nature of his quest, for the ideal conception of home might be one that combines the haunting persistence of an idea of home with the Heraclitean inevitability of change. Which might also be to suggest that the most welcoming conceptualisation of home is one which both is and is not ‘home’ at any given time. Plus ça change....

The shifting nature of his grandmother’s house in space and time is ‘brought home’ to Thomas later on upon sharing memories of the place with his mother. The house, which had long been something of a semiotic minefield to Thomas,
is suddenly ‘familiarised’ by Katarina’s account of her memory of ‘what had been home’: ‘Did I realise the small hole beside my bedroom door was one she’d made with a pencil? And then: a name carved in the baseboard, a broken door, a cracked pot handle, a stain on the kitchen wall ... all her doing. If I’d only known where to look, I’d have seen her marks everywhere’ (110). Realising that the signs of his mother — like the purloined letter — were there to be discovered all along, the house is in a sense secondarily defamiliarised for Thomas all over again: ‘The house I’d lived in was different now that I knew the secret signs of Katarina’s presence’ (120). The stability of the place, with its inherited marks and scratches, has been temporally upset by Katarina’s ‘presencing’ of moments of agential expression into the scene, thus rendering the place both familiar and foreign to Thomas, who (in actual space/time) remembers the same physical location, but who (in mental space/time) envisions it as a place in which his mother was woefully absent.

This conflation of space and time parallels the confusion between inside and outside, private and public, of which Bhabha (10) and Winnicott speak — a perception from the perspective of an ‘insider’s outsideness’ (Bhabha 14). That Thomas has ‘as much trouble knowing where I am in Place as I do in Time’ is evidence of the shifting nature of his perception of his emplacement, and echoes the functioning of the transitional space as a ‘continuity-contiguity moment’ (Winnicott 1991b 103). If place is a function of time, as this notion of ‘homeliness’ necessarily is, then the subject’s self-location is constantly undergoing revision, a phenomenon which is only exacerbated by Thomas’s peripatetic childhood. His vision of Ontario, for example, is de-territorialised in his accounts of his travels through the province with his mother and her then boyfriend, Mr. Mataf. In order to subvert conventional notions about this familiar ‘home’ territory (and thereby make it more amenable to his experience of the event), Thomas combines space and time via a mode of non-simulacral cartography: Ontario can be charted according to the changing emotions of those who pass through it in time (112–16) and it can be spatially figured, through a kind of cartographic absurdity, as ‘a fish with its head cut off’ (83).

It is in Thomas’s perception of Ottawa, however, that this non-paradoxical conceptualisation of shifting self-location is most clearly established. The conflation of self and other which marks the experience of transitional space is clearly enunciated when Thomas notes how the city has changed upon his discovery of it. When he first encounters the city it is ‘Ottawa-as-Ottawa’; now it has become ‘Ottawa-as-Thomas’ (199). As soon as Thomas leaves the confines of his mother’s and Henry’s house, he discovers that he is ‘unable to do without “belonging”, but I had discovered a “somewhere else” more hospitable than their “there”’ (198). If his mother was always out of place in Ottawa, ‘without ever feeling at home’ (198), it is because she was ‘looking for a place that felt other than temporary’ (198). Likewise, Henry made of Ottawa a ‘somewhere
else’, an echo of a Victorian colonial inheritance, ‘one in which Lampman and Scott might have taken tea’ (199).\textsuperscript{10} For Thomas, Ottawa is a vista of unresolved locations and memories. Because he expects nothing from it — or should I say, because he expects it not to be home — it functions as a scene of seemingly incommensurate possibilities: ‘It has been everything to me since: my ocean, my desert, my plain’ (199).

The experience that provokes Thomas’s intense self-identification with the city is an unusual one and reveals a great deal about his sense of belonging in time/place. The day that he and his friend, Lucie, set out into the city begins positively: it is warm, the sky is blue, they wander alongside the canal. When they enter the Market area, however, the homely atmosphere quickly gives way to the unhomeliness of the place, for each pleasant detail is subverted by a something ‘strange’:

At the Market, there were so many people, it was like drifting on a tide. The place smelt of fish, of cheese, of apples and cucumbers, tomatoes and green peppers, and, by the cages, of chicken shit.

It was on this day that I saw a man take a chicken from its cage of wooden slats and wring its neck. … It was also on this day that I saw a German shepherd pounce on a rat that had run out from the back of a shop. … I took a stick and chased the dog away, but when I went back to see if the rat were alive, the poor thing bit me and scuttled away, finding protection under a wooden pallet. …

I know it’s odd that moments like these should have drawn me to the city…. (200)

This apparent paradox also occurs in Thomas’s dreams of the city. The familiar and comforting landscape of Ottawa — the Parliament buildings, the war memorial, the canal — becomes the scene of ‘knife-wielding lunatic[s]’ (125) and forbidding angels (126) in his dreams. As Thomas acknowledges, ‘there are two strands of the city in my imagination. There’s the city I walk in. … Then there’s the city I negotiate in dreams and daydreams. They aren’t entirely distinct, of course. Ottawa feeds the city of my dreams, and the city of my dreams is a dimension of the city itself’ (126).

That Thomas’s initial obsession with Ottawa is associated both with comfort — ‘I threw myself into the arms of the city’ (199) — and distortion/alienation — through its scenes of death — is significant of the way he comes to determine his ‘homes’ in terms of the very unsettlement they evoke in him. As a result of his foray into the Market, he is made ‘conscious of not being myself in a place that included me’ (202). This experience, in which he is neither himself nor not himself (neither me nor not-me), becomes an exhilarating one for him since it enables him to be ‘blessedly, unselfconscious, and that was how I came to recognise home’ (202). Not only does the city function as ‘a crucial messenger in the dialogue between my mind and my body’ (127), but Thomas’s identification with the place assumes even more profound proportions: ‘I sometimes think I am its embodiment’ (129).
That the actual city and the fantasised one co-exist in his mind reveals the ways the city of Ottawa — the home outside of home — functions as another transitional experience for Thomas. As both Winnicott and Kristeva attest, uncanniness, ‘occurs when the boundaries between imagination and reality are erased’ (Kristeva 188), partaking ‘simultaneously of reality and illusion’ (Rudnytsky xii). It is significant, therefore, that it is through Ottawa that Thomas discovers his bearings away from his other home, that of his mother and Henry. What he discovers is that ‘the outside world mattered more to me than mother, father, home and hearth’ (202), which is revealing because home for him has never been associated with these things. However, it is also true that up to this point of rupture, Thomas has responded to Henry’s house as his home, one which he finds ‘both comforting and disturbing’ (172). Henry’s house, in many ways, exists as a kind of in-between location for Thomas — a ‘half-way’ house which disrupts clear-cut evaluative identity markers. Henry’s friends are neither clearly men nor women; science and literature, fact and fiction, become merged in Henry’s alchemical pursuits; truth and falsehood, good and bad, are subverted by Henry’s apparent leniency towards Thomas’s thefts and lies (which reaches its zenith when Thomas accuses Henry of putting him up to the thefts). Henry’s house, especially his library, is in a state of apparent chaos under which resides an inherent order (234). Finally, Henry’s status/identity as Thomas’s missing progenitor remains unclear by the end of the novel. In Thomas’s interminable quest for origins, he discovers a man who is not quite his father nor not quite not his father, which in the end is the only father that is meaningful to him: ‘I am, I think, Henry’s son, whoever fathered me’ (247).

Ironically, it is when the relations between Henry and Katarina begin too closely to resemble that of a family that Thomas seeks a retreat for a more comfortably ambiguous ‘home’ outside in the city. As long as Henry’s status remains tenuous — as long as Thomas remains unfathered — the unhomely character of Thomas’s home environment exists as a reassuring factor for him (176). When his ‘parents’ relations cease to be ambiguous, Thomas can no longer ‘live in hope of family’ (176), in a perpetual and tantalising state of shifting and ambivalent imaginary desire. Once this desire appears close to fulfilment, Thomas takes action and quickly subverts it by sowing seeds of dissent between them, effectively unhousing his home.

The final section of the novel is aptly entitled ‘Housecleaning’, for the closing of the book culminates in Thomas’s taking up his pen to write his personal memoir of ambivalence.

Having inherited Henry’s house, another home that is both his and not his, Thomas asserts his reassuring discomfort with a place in which he does not quite belong:

How strange it is that certain rooms, the ones I don’t often visit, should become untidy.
I mean, you'd think it was my presence that brought untidiness, and, it's true, the rooms I visit often are more conspicuously untidy.

Yet even unfrequented rooms, like those in the basement and those on the third floor, need constant looking into. (263)

It is the act of housecleaning, through writing, that propels Thomas's acceptance of his unhomely condition — a condition at once diasporic and not-quite not diasporic. The non-experience of home ultimately offers Thomas a potential that has been invoked by many postcolonial writers/subjects — a generative space which fosters the expression of creativity and agency. Indeed, Thomas's memoir evokes not only those writings which treat of diasporic and immigrant experience, nor only those which treat of settler-invader alienation, but perhaps enacts a non-paradoxical combination of both these postcolonial contexts in which the unhomely functions as both an internal and external (psychic and social) alien space or condition. As Bhabha argues, if 'the “unhomely” is a paradigmatic colonial and post-colonial condition, it has a resonance that can be heard distinctly, if erratically, in fictions that negotiate the powers of cultural difference in a range of transhistorical sites' (9).

To conclude, it might be helpful to refer back to the apparently contradictory epigraphs that introduced this essay. If belonging might lead one to become comfortably Canadian, as Marlene Nourbese Philip proposes, to be Canadian is also to feel, with Dennis Lee, that one does not, in any comfortable sense of the term, belong.11 Or is the celebration of such ambivalence the privilege of those whose ‘belonging’ is never, ultimately, called into question — at least not within the nation itself? This contrast in perspectives highlights the problematic ambiguity of Canada's status as a postcolonial nation, a dilemma that was addressed at a conference at the University of Manitoba in September 2000 devoted to the question, 'Is Canada postcolonial?' The question not only demands a clarification of one's definition of the term, but also an acknowledgement that postcoloniality is differently experienced in the multivalent context of any number of national belongings. As Charles Taylor expresses it, there are different 'ways of belonging' within the national whole (183), and, therefore, different ways of 'being' postcolonial as well. In this sense, the text for which postcoloniality was deemed to be 'hardly an issue' (Misrahi-Barak 91) might be seen instead as the crystallisation of a central postcolonial (and diasporic) dilemma, in which home is at once an 'apparent fixity yet also subject to a dangerous fluidity' (Philip 11).

To suggest that 'In Childhood ... belonging is achieved only by the repression of longing' (Sanders 185) is to over-simplify a crucial aspect of the central character's obsession with the ambivalence of emplacement, whereby belonging, in any real sense, is only achieved by an insistence on longing. In this way, 'the desire to belong', to echo the title of Rinaldo Walcott's analysis of Childhood,
must be understood in terms of the psychoanalytic notion of desire: while belonging is continually deferred, it is a deferral that is itself a form of satisfaction — what a Lacanian might identify as the ‘desire to desire’, or, in this case, the longing to (never quite) belong.

In Thomas’s account, homelessness comes to describe both an existential and postcolonial condition — a condition, says Rey Chow, which is not teleological but ‘of which “permanence” itself is an ongoing fabrication’ (15). Thus does Heraclitus trump Parmenides. In the end, it is important that Thomas realise the full implications of the non-paradox of his not-quite-one inheritance: ‘After all, I come from somewhere’ (265). While transitional phenomena offer a non-paradoxical space in which me/not-me are not clearly distinguishable, they are also, according to Winnicott, ‘the place where we live’ (104), which might be to say, with Rushdie (and with Dorothy), that there is, finally, no place like home.

NOTES

1 The risk of ‘universalising’ these literary contexts beyond recognition is a legitimate fear of those theorists interested in sites of the postcolonial. Bhabha qualifies this version of world literature through his suggestion that ‘[t]he centre of such a study would neither be the “sovereignty” of national cultures, nor the universalism of human culture’, but a focus on historical displacements and contingencies (12). In Literary Pluralities, Christl Verduyn, quoting Joseph Pivato, notes the ways Canadian ethnic writing, specifically, has ‘internationalised’ Canadian literature, ‘taking Canadian writing into a truly international context of comparative study and exchange’ (15).

2 James Clifford suggests that it may be the diasporic experience which most clearly reconceptualises notions of identity, for it reveals ‘unresolved historical dialogues between continuity and disruption, essence and positionality’ (108). Likewise, Alan Lawson has suggested that the settler-invader context provides the most evocative context for disruptions of too easily dichotomous structures of identity and colonisation. It is in the ‘settler colonies’, he states, ‘where the processes of colonial power as negotiation, as transactions of power, are most visible’ (22).

3 ‘Non-paradoxical’ is therefore not the same as ‘not paradoxical’, for it retains the premise of the paradox at its centre. With this in mind, Sigmund Freud’s conception of the unheimlich might be considered a famous non-paradox, for it contains both the notion of the familiar (the homely) and the unfamiliar (the unhomely) at one and the same time: ‘the word ‘heimlich’ is not unambiguous, but belongs to two sets of ideas ... on the one hand it means what is familiar and agreeable, and on the other, what is concealed and kept out of sight’ (345). One sense of the unheimlich is the way the familiar becomes unfamiliar (through the act of repression) by the very fact that it is too familiar (and hence had necessarily to be repressed); glimpses of this repressed content create the feeling of the uncanny or unheimlich. If images of home, as Freud later attests, are associated with the mother’s genitals (368), this might be to suggest that home is, in the first instance, always both familiar and unfamiliar, and secondly, that one can never go home again—both of which evoke the multiple meanings of ‘there’s no place like home’.

4 There is a wealth of critical material on Canadian identity and culture which addresses this aspect of Canadian in-betweeness, from such early anti-colonialist pieces as Northrop Frye’s 1971 Preface to The Bush Garden, his 1965 ‘Conclusion’ to the
'There's No Place Like Home'

Literary History of Canada, and Dennis Lee’s 1973 ‘Cadence, Country, Silence’; to those postmodern configurations of the Canadian psyche offered by Robert Kroetsch and Linda Hutcheon; to many postcolonial accounts of Canada as a settler-invader culture, such as those provided by Diana Brydon, Alan Lawson, and Stephen Slemon. Walcott, writing on Alexis, notes the ‘in-between’ character of black Canadian space specifically. ‘To be black and “at home” in Canada’, he writes, ‘is both to belong and not belong’ (1997 136).

In his 1995 article for This Magazine, ‘Borrowed Blackness’, Alexis notes how he was once told ‘that in order to discover my “Black self” I should move to the United States. ... black Canadians were not Black enough’. ‘Canada is often invisible in American writing’, Alexis continues, ‘black Canada even more so’ (17). Alexis’s account of the gap between black Canadianness and African-American-ness has been criticised by Walcott and Hudson for failing to take into account the commonalities of experience among black diasporans. While this critique is valid, it seems to me that critics have nonetheless too readily applied Alexis’s comments in ‘Borrowed Blackness’ to produce over-simplified readings of Childhood, a text which has itself suffered from being deemed ‘not Black enough’. As a writer ‘preoccupied with the idea of making this country his own’ (Nurse 1), Alexis’s vision of national belonging is far from easy. For Alexis’s comments on this aspect of the reception of Childhood, see Michael Redhill’s ‘An Interview with André Alexis’.

This configuration, when stated in very general terms, applies not only to writings which treat of diasporic and immigrant experience, but also plays a role in the experience of psychological colonialism or internalised foreignness — what Kristeva expresses as the experience of being ‘strangers to ourselves’ — where ‘home’ is not only considered inferior to the imperial centre, but where every home is also at once an alien psychic space or condition. However, if the metaphor of homelessness, as Kristeva uses it, comes to describe an existential condition, the postcolonial critic must take care not to erase the social and political particularities of any given psychic state. The social and the psychic are coterminous and mutually invasive.

See Stuart Hall’s ‘Cultural Identity and Diaspora’ for an account of the ways cultural identity is framed by the two simultaneous vectors of continuity and rupture (395).

One could also reformulate this as a resistance to recognise her as a distinct and unidealised individual — what in object relations terms is known as depressive experience. That Thomas longs for the unresolved transitional space of a non/home might signal his inability to resolve the confusions surrounding his own experience of his mother at the same time as it might represent a longing preservation of the only experience of ‘mothering’ he has known.

See Graham Huggan’s ‘Decolonising the Map’ for his account of how ‘the provisional connections of cartography suggest an ongoing perceptual transformation which in turn stresses the transitional nature of post-colonial discourse’ (131). In a sense, Thomas’s many ‘emotional’ maps push this subversive potential of cartography to its limits.

For non-Canadian readers, it might be helpful to clarify that Lampman and Scott are references to two nineteenth-century Canadian poets, Archibald Lampman and Duncan Campbell Scott.

Perhaps, to invoke Philip’s notion of ‘be/longing’ (22), this is because the settler-invader can never claim a sense of having been here long enough.

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Richard Freemann

Biographical Introduction by Kay Williamson

The Nigerian writer and story-teller Richard Ayeberemo Deribi Freemann died at Port Harcourt on 3rd August, 2002. According to his official records, he was born on 24th May, 1944 in what is now Bayelsa State, Eastern Nigeria, in the village of Ikebiri, formerly within the Southern Ijaw Local Government Area, now in the Apoi/Olodiama Local Government Area. Richard Freemann received his primary education in Ossiama from 1953 to 1957, and his secondary education, from 1957 to 1960, in Bomadi. In the early 1960s he moved to the Nigerian capital, Ibadan, where I was working on the Izon language. The Izon language is spoken in the Niger Delta of Nigeria, with many dialectical variations, and is rich in imaginative stories and expressions.

The first thing I heard about Richard Freemann was that a wonderful story-teller had come to town. As an Izon speaker, he was soon introduced to me. He was looking for a job and thought of joining the army. This was just before my parents came from England to visit me; the very night they arrived he came to my flat clutching a live chicken, which he presented to my mother. She rose to the occasion, accepted the chicken and then sat down with Richard who told her all his troubles. The next day my mother suggested that he needed a skill and paid for him to take a course in typing.

One day, watching me teaching a rather slow undergraduate how to write and tone-mark Izon, Richard Freemann asked if I would teach him too. I agreed, not expecting much, and to my surprise he immediately got the idea and quickly became a very accurate transcriber of his own Olodiama dialect of Izon. With both typing skills and the ability to write Izon, he was qualified for appointment as a transcriber of a Nigerian language at the Institute of African Studies at the University of Ibadan.

He was employed at the University of Ibadan from 1965 to 1977, and in that time advanced his education on numerous fronts. In 1971 he took a course in fishery studies, offered by the Ministry of Agriculture and Natural Resources; in
1973 he received an Instructor’s Certificate (with Distinction) after a course at Port Harcourt in the writing of local (Rivers State) languages. He was awarded a certificate in Fine Art and Design in 1974, from Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, and in 1975 he took a course at the Kainji Lake Research Project, New Bussa, in the scientific drawing of fish. When the University of Port Harcourt was founded in 1977, Richard Freemann was able to return permanently to Rivers State: he was appointed to the Faculty of Humanities as a Language Field Assistant, and later moved to the Faculty of Education where he was promoted to the post of Higher Cultural Officer in the Department of Curriculum Studies and Educational Technology.

He was three times married, and left ten children.

Celebrated even in his youth as a storyteller, Richard Freemann applied his skills to the composition of written stories and poems, in both Izon and English. In 1972 the Institute of African Studies at Ibadan published his book, Okoyai aumgbomo: Seeds of Poetry, consisting of poems created in both languages on facing pages. Some stories were accepted for publication in the Literary Review (New York) and African Arts/Arts d’Afrique. He also published a school reader in Izon commissioned by the Rivers Readers Project, with Teacher’s Notes in English, and a translation of a story from the Bible. His studies on fish and fishing methods in the Niger Delta are unpublished: a major work on this topic remains uncompleted.

Richard Freemann was someone for whom the boundary between the physical everyday world and the spiritual world was very thin. He dreamed dreams and he saw visions, and he would talk about them with sympathetic listeners. He was to a great degree an interpreter of one culture to another. He told and wrote stories about the interaction of the different worlds he experienced: I could often not tell when he moved from fact to fiction. As a Christian in a still largely traditional society, he moved through a great variety of churches, and it was as a Quaker that he endured the depredations of AIDS. A Service of Songs was held in Richard Freemann’s memory at the University of Port Harcourt on 31 October 2003. He is buried in Ikebiri.

Critical Introduction by Charles Lock

I met Richard Freemann once, far too briefly, on a visit to the University of Port Harcourt in April 2002. A UNESCO lecture on ‘Amos Tutuola and Ken Saro-Wiwa: A Heritage of Rotten English’ had been delivered to a distinguished but unconvinced audience (now published in Kiabàrà: Journal of Humanities [Port Harcourt], 8.1, 2002, pp. 1–10). I was dismayed to note that in the fiftieth anniversary of the publication of The Palm-Wine Drinkard, Amos Tutuola is still an anomaly, an embarrassment; recognition of Tutuola’s stature remains withheld in his homeland; only outside of Africa is he regarded as an initiating presence in African (and post-colonial) writing in English. One of the very few listeners who assented to my argument was Richard Freemann, the language of whose
stories can certainly be placed within the heritage that I had outlined, from Amos Tutuola to Ken Saro-Wiwa’s *Sozaboy: A Novel in Rotten English* (Saros, Port Harcourt 1985). Indeed, this point had been made as long ago as 1968 — long before Saro-Wiwa had coined the term ‘Rotten English’ — in an unsigned prefatory note (56–57) to Richard Freemann’s story ‘Udouye the King of Beauty’, published in *African Arts/Arts d’Afrique* (II.1 1968),

the idioms and syntax of the mother tongue impose on English an odd yet curiously refreshing and piquant flavour. This is not bad English but a different English.... The work of the well known writer Amos Tutuola has been the focus of great debate on this point, some critics praising the unusual quality of language, others deploring the inaccuracies of his English judged by standard norms of the language. For all the fierce argument, *The Palm Wine Drunkard* [sic] remains justly appreciated and Mr. Freemann’s work has something in common with Tutuola’s, at least in its freshness and originality.

Tutuola’s reputation cannot be said to have risen since 1968, and there has been a surprising lack of sustained interest in irregular forms of English to be found in what was then known as Commonwealth literature, and which has since been re-appropriated under the name of post-colonial literature. The unsigned preface to Freemann’s story of 1968 concludes that ‘For many scholars, the adaptations writers are bringing to English as they absorb its forms into their own traditional usage is a fascinating subject....’ (57). However, the premise that language must not be prescriptively judged, and therefore that ‘anything goes’, has unfortunately stifled curiosity in what ought to be one of the richest seams of inquiry in post-colonial studies. Despite much interest in New Englishes and Global English as linguistic phenomena, there has been insufficient attention paid to the literary consequences of their deployment in texts. This might in part explain the neglect of Freemann’s work after some promising symptoms of interest in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

The general assumption is that such irregular forms of English can be ascribed merely to deficiency, to a lack of education: in the case of Tutuola, it appears that he could not write ‘correct’ English — that his novels fairly indicate his command of English syntax — and that he was even ashamed of the ‘mistakes’ that his remarkably tolerant and enlightened publisher (Faber) had allowed to stand. Of the extant typescripts of Richard Freemann’s stories, Professor Kay Williamson has informed me that ‘What I normally did, for anything which he showed me, was to correct purely grammatical things like verb tenses as well as obvious spelling errors, but leave his phraseology untouched.’ Such a practice raises a number of questions, though I hasten to add that my own procedure, in editing the story presented here, is hardly more rigorous. I have ‘corrected’ only the sort of ‘oddity’ that appears to be a typing error — one that would have no justification whether phonetic or idiomatic, or is obviously produced by the striking of an adjacent key. Of course, to judge the difference between a graphic ‘error’ and a typographic ‘error’ remains open to the charge of subjectivity. As editorial theory
Richard Freemann moves beyond the once-axiomatic distinction between ‘substantives’ and ‘accidentals’ so texts such as those of Richard Freemann become particularly problematic.

If the ‘speaker’ is to be represented in writing as having an irregular accent, that voice will be notated by irregular spelling: this is a common device in Burns and Scott, Hardy and Mark Twain, and it is marked and precipitated by a distance from the metropolis, a sense of regional or national distinctiveness. By the same token, however, a writer who is an ‘irregular speaker’ may well be entirely happy with regular spelling. The Scottish novelist Alasdair Gray refuses to spell ‘night’ in the conventional Scots way as ‘nicht’. That, Gray says, is for him the German negative, and not a word in his language at all. When Gray reads the word ‘night’ he hears a sound that does not rhyme with ‘site’, a sound that is quite accurately represented by the regular spelling of ‘n-i-g-h-t’. By what right (voiced to rhyme with ‘n-i-g-h-t’, not with bite) should the English decree that ‘night’ is to be heard as ‘nite’? One suspects, by the same token, that when a Nigerian reads (or writes) ‘ask’ he hears ‘aks’: certainly I’ve known speakers of Nigerian English who do not write ‘aks’ or ‘ax’ instead of ‘ask’, not even as a literary device. It is the remarkable disparity between orthography and phonetic value in English that has made English ‘speakable’ in such diverse ways, without threatening a degree of orthographical modification that would lead to a proliferation of distinct and separate languages.

In considering Richard Freemann’s practice as a writer of stories, we should recall that the relationship between Professor Williamson and Richard Freemann had been founded on instruction in transcription. She taught him to write Izon, the Central Ijo or Ijaw (anglicised spelling) language. It has been recorded in an unsystematic way since the sixteenth century, and has had a regular orthography since c.1860, in which the five vowel letters of the Roman alphabet are supplemented with four vowels marked with subscript points (‘subdots’) to represent the nine different oral vowel sounds. Few works, however, have been published in this script, and very few people can write it accurately. Moreover, it is a tonal language, and although it is usually written without tone-marks, this creates ambiguity at many points. Modern scholarly writing in Izon makes increasing use of tone-marks to remove this ambiguity. As a transcriber, Freemann’s value lay in his competence to listen to a tape-recording and represent the sounds by means of the regular orthography supplemented by tone-marks.

Those who write in English today assume a somewhat arbitrary relation between orthographies and phonetics; they use irregular orthography either — like George Bernard Shaw — in order to promote spelling reform (a metropolitan conceit that would have disastrous consequences for the ‘unity’ of the English-speaking and English-writing world), or to draw attention to an idiosyncratic way of speaking. To speak only of languages using the Roman alphabet, English is today by far the most tolerant of orthographic deviance in literary representation.
Ken Saro-Wiwa’s ‘Rotten English’ would not be possible without such tolerance. If there is no such concept as ‘Rotten Spanish’ or ‘Rotten French’ or ‘Rotten German’ in those literatures this may have less to do with the imperial and colonising histories of these languages than with their respective degrees of concord between spelling and voicing.

Freemann knew not only English and Izon but also a certain amount of Latin terminology concerning fish. Latin, as a ‘dead’ language, has no standard pronunciation (as Erasmus was already shocked to find on his visit to Cambridge c.1500) and is largely muted within writing: even educated English speakers now say ‘i-ee’ instead of ‘id est’ and almost all say ‘ee-gee’, having forgotten that e.g. stands for ‘exempli gratia’. (However, I have yet to hear anyone in Europe say ee-tee-see for etc.). Listen (as best one can) to this:

Therefore, one day, he prepared the hook with rod. He dug out some earth-warms ['corrected' from 'warms'] and went down to the extreme western part of the beach, trying to hide himself from people seeing him. He stood on the bank and baited the hook and as soon as he threw the hook into the water, a big grunt (type of fish) *Pomadasys* sp. ‘egeleu.’ in Izon was caught. (‘The Poor Man and the King’, ms. p. 1)

How, indeed, does one hear ‘*Pomadasys* sp’? Rather less confidently and fluently, I suspect, than does our piscatorially learned author. So much for reading and hearing; as for our understanding, European readers are likely to be humbled that a Latin gloss so generously supplied may be of little more referential or explicatory value than ‘egeleu., or even ‘grunt’.

Freemann’s writing bears in its very consistency the signature of a transcriber, of one for whom the boundaries between spelling and hearing can be of fascinating variability. Thematically, his stories are much concerned with water and the creatures that live therein, both fish and dolphins, and thereon, those whose business is fishing. From traditional legends are derived diverse ‘water wives’ and water personages: ‘As previously said in some of my stories, the Ijo (Ijaws) believe that there is another set of people living in the water. This set of people can appear and disappear and many a time move with the land dwellers, the Ijo (Ijaws).’ So begins ‘The Boy Was His Saviour’. The story published here, ‘The Poor Man and His Vernacular Speaking Goat’, may be taken as exemplary of Freemann’s method, of the accomplished naïveté of his manner, and of his ability to confuse us (as Professor Williamson notes) as to what is fact and what fiction. Or rather, to challenge our judgement of what belongs to a serious discourse of explanation and plausibility, and what is fabular. Tricksters and acts of metamorphosis are certainly represented in these stories: but these stories are themselves out to trick us, and the first task of any trickster is to appear simple, perhaps a trifle dull, at any rate inconsequential. Connoisseurs of rotten English, of Alice-mannered explanations, of Ovidian shape-shiftings, of Rabelaisian disproportions, and of crafty telling, will, it is hoped, see (and hear) something else.
Orfirima, ‘Shark Masquerade’, by Richard Freemann
Sketch: Courtesy of Kay Williamson
Tide of the river!
Where does my wife go?
To the bright-night river?
Among the mermaids?
Where I saw her merry.
I know, there her home is.
My darling, come back!

Photo: Courtesy of Kay Williamson
The Poor Man and His Vernacular Speaking Goat

RICHARD AYEBEREMO DERIBI FREEMANN

The poor man had a wife. These two creatures were the poorest in the town. They under gone great task with struggle before they could cover their private worlds. They built their little hut with palm leaves and other leaves from the plants. Since God created man and woman, and the golden seed plus the golden garden, the poor man started to plant his golden seed. Due to the fertility of the soil, the woman was conceived and gave birth to a female child without helper, just like goat that delieveres without approaching midwife. Because of the poverty that made them to stand on the boundary of living and nonliving, people looked them to be like the dirts on the ground.

In some days, they went to the bush to picked palm nuts under the palm trees and cracked them to prepare food to eat. Some days they went out for begging to feed them selves. When the wife could not go out, the husband would go for begging or picking for feeding. If they saw that the breathing of the fresh air of their private worlds was due, they went to the dust bean to pick some rags to cover them as loin cloth for the period. If they picked two pence or three pence unexpectedly, that day would be December 25th to them, from there you would hear dancing and singing.

The poverty that made them to become useless, made the town’s people not to count them among the town’s population. Because they were poor all their sisters and brothers did not pay heed to them. ‘My good readers, it is clear to everybody that the four comers of this gloab receive the rich people and leave the poor, blessed are the poor, for their’s is the kingdom of heaven!’

Let us bury these words in our heads:

Take the life as you see it and pray God, because He is the creator. Do not proud of the chair that you are sitting on, if you desend from it to sit down on the ground, you will be ashamed because God is the maker of that very chair. Do not proud of this world because the world is empty. Pinch the ground with your finger-nails when you walk else you will be tumbled and fall, because the ground is slippery. When you move out, look your back before move on or else you miss road, because there are uncountable roads in the world. Do not be proud of your white colour because the colour is as changeable as the clouds. Do not build your castle very high or else the storm will destroy it because the tempest is great and fierce.

The rich man’s life is shorter than the poor man’s life, that is, he is the victim to the world. Receive the poor man as you receive the rich man or else
you will regret because you do not know of what will happen tomorrow. I think you have agreed with me for the above wise sayings. The story is started again. These happy poor husband and wife were always praying God, ‘fear God’ they said, for God knew how He situated them. In the whole of the town, only one man loved them. Sometimes this man gave them food by helping them. This man did not take him as a poor man but took him as his best friend.

In one fine morning this poor man went out for picking. This man went to a certain big dust-bin and picked three shillings. He came to his house with singing and dancing. When he reached home, they were overcome with joyfulness. He wanted to go to market with the three shillings so he said to his wife: ‘My wife, I want to go to market. If I go, I will buy a shilling worth of rice, a goat costing one shilling, three-pence worth of tomatoes, three-pence worth of pepper, three-pence worth of cooking oil and three-pence worth of salt’. After a short pause he continued: ‘You will be the cook, today, I will call my friend to come and eat better food in my house. My wife, I think today is Christmas?’

The wife said: ‘My husband, today is not Christmas day. We are in April, and there is still time, after eight months before Christmas’. The husband said: ‘When I go to the market and buy the goat, I will kill it here and all will be cooked because my friend will come and eat.’ ‘My wife, if it turns to Christmas to us, will it be bad’, he asked with happiness and confidence. The wife said: ‘You can make any day as your Christmas day, nothing is so bad, go to the market and buy the goat’. He then said: ‘So my wife, let me go to the market and buy the goat, bye-bye’.

Immediately he left the house, he started to proclaim: ‘I want to buy a shilling goat, all the goat sellers, bring your goats, I need a goat costing one shilling. Today is Christmas day, so I am going to market to buy a goat, if I can see any goat here to buy I would have been more grateful.’ When the town’s people heard his announcement, they started to laugh at him and said: ‘Poverty has spoiled his head, he is mad, this type of poverty is bad, who will sell him a goat at the rate of a shilling, he is thinking that we are as poor as he is, don’t mind him’. ‘My friend,’ they said, ‘close your mouth, when you reach the market, you can then announce it with your foolishness. We never heard of a person selling a goat for only a shilling, go to the market and buy your shilling goat. This type of poverty is bad, you do not know what you are doing.’ Inspite of all these mockery from his town’s people, he went to the market to buy his goat.

When he reached the market, he saw a goat seller fastening his goats with ropes to a stick. The poor man asked him of the prices: ‘My friend goat seller, what is each one of your goats costs?’ ‘The cost of each of my goats are: the smallest one is two pounds, the biggest one is five pounds and the average ones are four pounds each’ said the goat seller.

The poor man said: ‘My friend, your goats are too costly, as are saying, when you finish selling them, how much will be the profit? Are you seeking to become
the richest man in this world in one day? Don’t you know that little by little makes a mighty sea? Do you think that the rich people become rich in one day?’ ‘They picked little by little before they become rich,’ he concluded. To this the goat seller replied: ‘Do you know what you are talking of? Do you mean to say that I should sell you a goat at the rate of a shilling? I don’t think that you are normal. go away from my sight, do not spoil my market’.

The poor man said: ‘I don’t come to spoil your market. when you finish selling them, you will become a millionaire. Do not be afraid, I will go away, bye-bye’. The poor man went away from the place and started to announce his shilling goat and said: ‘Today is my Christmas day, so I want to buy a goat at a shilling, all the goat sellers in this market should listen to me’. By then people were laughing at him and said: ‘Where does this man come from, we never saw such type of person before’. Some people said that he was a mad man. Others said that the man was not mad but a fool. They said: ‘who will sell him a goat at a shilling’. His announcement caused a great laughter.

As he was doing so many people were parking their cargoes because the night was at hand. At last, he saw a certain goat seller. When he reached the place, the man asked him and said: ‘What are you looking for? Don’t you see that the people are going to their respective houses because of the approaching of the night?’ The poor man said: ‘I came to this market since the morning to buy a goat which can cost only a shilling, but I have not seen any’. The goat seller looked at him and laughed, then said: ‘You are the poorest man among the poor people in your town. You want to make your own Christmas with the three shillings which you found from the dust-bin, hence you want to buy the shilling goat’. After a short pause he said again: ‘Your wife is hungry in the house, so I will give you to buy’. Due to that reason, the goat seller sold him a goat at the rate of one shilling. The poor man gladly bought the goat and the other things he thought to buy, then went home.

When he reached home, the wife and the daughter were happy because they want to eat goat. My good brethren, listen to these words with me and be of good courage. What God has planted for you, you will harvest it with gladness, so praise God. Endurance is bitterness, but it is the way success. He who dived into the water doesn’t know how the atmosphere is, that is how our lives are.

The husband said: ‘I said that you would be the cook, so the time is up to you now. You will cook the rice at first before I will kill the goat for you to make the stew’. ‘Business is Business.’ said he. ‘Oh!, today, my friend will come and eat good food in my house, what sort of poverty, today will be a tough day for us. My daughter, today you too will eat rice and stewed meat.’ ‘Do you understand?’ he asked. ‘Yes papa,’ answered the daughter. Meanwhile, the wife washed the rice and started to cook it. When she had finished cooking the rice, the husband said: ‘This is the high time for my killing the goat’. My good friends, wonders shall never end.
Immediately he said how he would kill the goat, the goat started to speak vernacular. The goat said: ‘My man, what are you saying? Do you want to kill me? it may be another goat, not my very self’. The goat further said: ‘I am hungry, so put my rice for me to eat. Do you think that I don’t eat food?’ After a short time, the goat continued: ‘You are saying that you will kill me, since you brought me from the market, you never give me food to eat. Are you planning to kill your head? Divide the rice quickly and give me my share to eat. Am I the cause of your poverty? You have no sense because you are poor! You speak any how, you said you want to kill me, not my very self! You said that you were looking for a shilling goat, now do what you want with your foolishness.’

When the goat was saying that, the poor man whispered to his wife and said: ‘This will kill us, what are we going to do? Shall we escape away from the house?’ To this the wife, having being overcome with fear said: ‘This matter is greater than what tongue can tell. It is better we escape from the house for the goat, if not so the goat will kill us’. When they were saying that, the goat cut in and said: ‘My people, what are you saying? I said that I am hungry, I come to make this Christmas with you with joyfulness. I don’t come to kill you, you should not fear me, I come to make you glad, give the rice to me to eat.’

When the goat stopped speaking, the poor man ran out from the bedroom and asked: ‘Sir, what do you say?’ The goat replied: ‘Are you deaf?’ The poor man said: ‘I am not deaf, I don’t understand what you said hence I am asking you, Sir’. Then the goat said: ‘I said that I am hungry! Bring the rice for me to eat quickly!’ The poor man answered him with a shaking voice and said: ‘Yes, Sir, I am going’.

When the poor man ran to the kitchen, the wife was putting the rice. He said: ‘Go away from the place, I do not want trouble’. The poor man put the rice and ran to the goat and said: ‘Sir, I have brought the rice’. The goat said: don’t you drink water when you eat? The poor man said: ‘Oh! very sorry, I will bring water sir’. The poor man ran back to bring water for the goat. When the goat was eating the rice, the poor man asked for permission and said: ‘Master, may I go to answer the nature call?’ The goat said: am I greater than you, why are you calling me master? ‘Go away from the place, I am eating, don’t trouble me.’

The poor man ran to his friend to tell him and said: ‘The goat which I bought wants to kill me in the house’. The friend asked him and said: what is the matter? The poor man said: ‘The goat knows how to speak vernacular more than I can do’. The friend said: ‘I never heard such thing before, I too will go and see the goat, I am very happy to hear this story’. The two friends went to the house. Immediately they reached the house, the goat said: ‘You have called him come, my master’s friend, welcome’. Have you come? Is your wife and your children well? ‘Your frien is afraid of me.’ ‘I come for peace but not for fight.’ The goat started to speak with his master’s frien.

The friend said: ‘My friend, you will be rich soon.’ The poor man asked his friend and said: how shall I do before I will be rich? He said: ‘If people hear that
you have vernacular speaking goat, they will come to look. If they come, they pay money before looking, all the money that they will pay will be your’s. I will take bell and go for announcing’. The poor man’s friend really took bell and went out to announce. When he was announcing, the people started to come to look the goat. The wife was with the goat and the husband became the gate man. These husband and wife started to demand money, some people one pound, some people ten shillings and the lowest was one shilling. These people became rich in that day.

When the spectators went to the house, the goat started to make conversation with them, sing, dancing, putting parables, riddles, telling stories and other jocks. Due to these wonders that the goat was performing, the people were rushing in and out every day and night to see. After three months, the man built up stair plus a mighty shop and started selling. Within a blink of eye, the man became one of the richest men in the town. He helped those who were in need of his help with his kindness, even his poverty period he made no enmity with anybody. All those who were driving him from their houses like a dog started to call him Sir, Sir or Master, Master.

He built up a mighty upstairs for his friend, and he too became a rich man. Due to the fame of the goat that was spreading the whole area, lookers were coming from the neighbouring towns and from other towns respectively every day and night. The man took care of the goat more than human creature. He would like the goat to eat the best food in the house. He would like to say good morning to the goat before saluting any other person every morning. He sewed costly dressing for the goat. He did not allow anything to touch the goat because his whole life was on the goat. He made very good sleeping room with fine well dressed bed for the goat.

If they need any play in the town, it was the goat that they always invite and paid heavy amount, mostly Christmas. There was an old woman in his compound whom he loved. He was feeding and clothing her, because of that she too was constanting his house. As have been told, during his poverty season they did not include his name in the town’s population. By then he never knew that an old woman of that nature was in his compound. My dear readers, let the world to keep great enmity with you for God to receive you.

Poverty gives birth to foolishness and madness.
He who doesn’t have any child is not counted among the family.
He who is without money is not among the town’s people.
He who is not important is not known by the world — all is vanity!

One day the goat called his attention and said: ‘My master, lend me your ears and listen to what I am going to tell you. Tell your daughter and your wife even your very self that nobody should show me mirror’. ‘If I see my face in the mirror, I cannot speak vernacular but I will be just like an ordinary goat, therefore, listen to what I am telling you and no accordingly.’
The man said: ‘I have heard what you have told me, don’t be afraid, nothing of that sort will happen to you’. To this he replied: ‘If supposing such a thing happens, will it be bad on my side or on your side?’ He continued: ‘We are not in the court to judge case, just take proper care of me, that’s all. If anything of that nature occurs due to your foolishness, I will not be worried. What is my lookout? If you are sensible, take care of me’. The man said: ‘Yes, I have heard you’.

In their area, there was a custom. It was that a king, in the first month of every year, should invite all the other kings plus some plays to perform before them to see the capability of the king in his kingdom. This was done by all kings — one after the other, just in a rotational way. In that very month of the year, it was their king’s turn to do it. After three weeks of their conversation, the king’s messenger brought a letter to him. the letter was read thus:

His Majesty

My dear servant,

The custom that the kings follow has come to me this month, so I will invite you when they come. Come with your goat and play to their satisfaction, don’t make me to be ashamed before them.

If you play to their satisfaction, I will give you thirty thousand pounds, but if you make me to be ashamed, I will kill you. I prefer your goat’s play to others hence I am inviting you, so play well for me to obtain the greatest title, therefore you make a limit preparation with your goat and appear before the congregation.

Thanks. I am,
Yours faithfully,
Crown-Head.

After the reading of the letter, he went and told his friend how the King wrote him a letter. His friend said: ‘It is not so bad, you will receive much money, I think the goat will play his best’.

When the arranged date was accomplished, his friend too should accompany him but his ten-years old daughter died in that night without sickness, so he failed to go. The man prepared and went to the place with the goat. The field was fully populated, the inhabitants and people from the neighbouring towns. In no time at all the King’s news reader brought out the agreement that the man made with the king and read it: ‘I, the goat owner agreed with the king that if my goat doesn’t play and speak vernacular, I am bound to be hanged, but if the goat does well, the king is bound to give me thirty thousand pounds’.

The king asked the man and said: ‘Do you agree with me still?’ The man answered and said: ‘Oh! my king, what I have said is what I have said, I can’t break my promise, my goat will play interestingly’. Immediately after the conclusion of the man’s speech, the spectators cheered up three times: ‘Hip! hip! hipp! hurrah!, hip! hip! hip! hurrah!, hip! hip! hip! hurrah!’. They continued: ‘What are we expecting? We are expecting the play, hip! hip! hip! hurrah’. After the cheering up of the spectators, there was a great silence. Everybody was waiting on the man and the goat.
Presently the man started to address the congregation with speech, he said: ‘Oh! kings, dear ladies and gentlemen, this our first day to play for the world to see’. He continued: ‘Open your eyes to see wonders and open your ears to hear something’. He then started commanding: ‘Oh! come, the four holy angels in the four corners of the globe. Oh! lord abide with me, Oh my father and my mother, come out from your graves to play with me for these people to see. Oh! Mushaasha come to me. Oh! Okilolo come to do your work. Oh! Kunkunfiyewei, this is your time for work’.

When he had finished all these words, he looked at the goat. He said: ‘My goat, I have finished my part and the time is up to you now’. The goat shouted and said: ‘Baaa baaa baaa’. The man said: ‘Speak vernacular’. The [goat] repeated the same thing. Again the man started to pour more few words, he said: ‘Oh! Ingbeduba, orudekimidei, endurance is the key to success, this is your business time’. He made an attempt with all his efforts but the goat did not speak, all his commanding did not serve any good purpose for him.

The soldiers were in readiness for killing him because of the written document — [between] himself and the king. Some of the spectators have already shed tears because of the unfortunate death which would inevitably follow. The man became a victim to the king. The killers were in great joy to shed the innocent blood of the man. When the lookers on saw that the man’s minutes were numbered, there was a great sorrowful murmuring and it caused a great noise.

After a short period, his friend who was dressed in black sitting in his house morning because of his daughter’s death ran to the field with some leaves and said: ‘Oh! king, never you kill him yet, I have something to say, so allow me. I will make the goat to speak, if he doesn’t speak, kill me and leave that man’. At this stage the king said: ‘The eyes will see you and the ears will hear you, so say on’. Then the friend said: ‘Last night I dreampt that this man and his goat went for a play but the goat was unable to speak, so it was myself who treated him with some leaves similar with these ones. So the goat started to speak and played various types of plays to the satisfaction of the onlookers. This one too is the same as the one which happened in my dream land, and so I want to treat him.’

When this man was saying this thing before that mighty group of human creatures, there was a great silence. All the eyes and ears were set upon him. The man squeezed the leaves and put the liquid into the goat’s eyes and mouth. Shortly after the treatment, the goat started to entertain the congregation:

Wélcó — me, oh! — gentle ménñnn,
Wélcó — me, oh! — lá- di — es,
Ah! áh! inashúnñnn, we óften sáy — ,
Wé are here — to entertain you — ,
Wé wish you — all góod evening — .
Hip! hip! hip! hurrah, hip! hip! hurrah, hip! hip! hurrah!!.
‘My master and myself,’ said the goat, ‘would become useless before this
congregation hence I went to his friend in the dream land to show him and make him know all that would happen.' He continued: 'Now you should listen to what I am going to say, all men and women, young and old, great or small, rich or poor. One day I called my master and advised him how he would take proper care of me. I knew what would happen in future but he did not take to my advice. The old woman who is in his house showed me mirror, when we were preparing to come. You should look for the old woman and kill her, she is in this field'.

They immediately found her out and killed her. After killing the woman the goat played greatly to the satisfaction of everybody. After the play, really the money was given to him. The story has been ended.
BRENNDON NICHOLLS

Clitoridectomy and Gikuyu Nationalism in Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s *The River Between*

This essay examines the production of the sign ‘woman’ in Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s early novel *The River Between*.¹ The analysis of signs and of signifying systems in the novel is only viable if one examines the movements of history that have facilitated and necessitated the production of signs. Equally, it is important to examine the subject-formation of the historical person, (James) Ngugi, who acts as an agent of particular discursive practices, motivated by specific ideological interests. *The River Between* provides insight into a pivotal moment in Kenyan history — that of the Kenyan circumcision debate.² This historical moment is interesting for three reasons. Firstly, it highlights the contest between conflicting power bases (traditionalism, education, Christian revivalism, Gikuyu nationalism) in colonial Kenya. Secondly, the debate is particularly revealing of the Gikuyu woman’s production as a subject under conflicting discourses and her marginalisation from political debate (since she becomes the site of contest in the debate). Thirdly, Ngugi’s re-presentation of the debate in *The River Between* points to his own ideological unease in relation to the discourses that inform his novel.

The circumcision debate erupted in Kikuyuland in 1928 when several of the missions located there (most notably the Church of Scotland Mission) initiated a campaign against clitoridectomy and required their followers to renounce both the custom and their membership of the Kenya Central Association (KCA), a traditionalist party of which Jomo Kenyatta was the general-secretary. The Gikuyu community, under the leadership of the KCA, initiated a counter-campaign of protests, letters to the press and pro-circumcision politicking. The mission schools instructed pupils that circumcised students would not be admitted. In the short term, the debate cost the missions most of their adherents, although many later returned. More importantly, it provided the KCA with an issue around which Gikuyu solidarity could be fostered. The KCA also began to see the need for an independent school system and an African-controlled church, which would sanction both polygamy and clitoridectomy. Rosberg and Nottingham inform us that ‘the missions were increasingly regarded as the spiritual edge of the colonial sword. In particular, the dominant mission role in education was no longer regarded as sacrosanct. Out of the controversy there developed a drive to establish a comprehensive educational system independent of missionary control’ (125). The KCA set about establishing the Gikuyu Karing’a Education Association.
Clitoridectomy and Gikuyu Nationalism

(karing'a denotes 'nationalist' or 'full-blooded' [ie. non-hybrid]; Meyer 39) and the African Independent Pentecostal Church. The feeling regarding the issue of clitoridectomy ran so high that on 2 January 1930, one of the missionaries, Miss Hulda Stumpf, was reportedly attacked in her home and forcibly clitoridectomised (Rosberg and Nottingham 124). By 1931, more moderate voices within the church had prevailed and the air cleared.

Despite the Gikuyus' and the missionaries' representations to the contrary, the circumcision debate did not centre around clitoridectomy as a moral issue. The heat that the debate generated was largely due to the moral indeterminacy which inhered between the conflicting ideologies of the Gikuyu and the missionaries. The church's opposition to the ritual was relatively straightforward: its intent was to eliminate an operation that is painful, sometimes fatal and always irreversible (Rosberg and Nottingham 111–119; Sicherman 63–64) The circumcision procedure was not carried out in the sanitary conditions of a Western hospital and its function in terms of Gikuyu spirituality was anathema to the West's received notions of religious worship. As such, clitoridectomy was deemed a barbaric and heathen practice. The missionaries' representation of clitoridectomy was an interested one — their civilising mission consisted in the redemption of African subjects from the clutches of darkness but this mission was co-extensive with colonialism, because both involved the eradication of the Gikuyu's history, social organisation and sense of identity. Clitoridectomy produced a crisis for the missionaries because the liberal-humanist discourse that informed their activity meant that they could only recognise the Gikuyu subject's common humanity so long as that humanity was constituted in the image of the West.

The Gikuyu's argument was more complex — at least, from an outsider's point of view. Jomo Kenyatta's account of clitoridectomy, which Ngugi follows in *The River Between*, is the clearest exposition of the ritual and its importance in Gikuyu culture. In *Facing Mount Kenya*, Kenyatta describes circumcision as 'a deciding factor in giving a boy or a girl the status of manhood or womanhood in the Gikuyu community' (133). He continues: 'No proper Gikuyu would dream of marrying a girl who has not been circumcised, and vice versa. It is taboo for a Gikuyu man or woman to have sexual relations with someone who has not undergone this operation' (132). Furthermore, those 'detribalised' Gikuyu who did wish to settle down with an uncircumcised partner would not have enjoyed the blessing of their family and would have faced exclusion from the homestead, disinheritance and, therefore, landlessness. Kenyatta continues:

It is important to note that the moral code of the tribe is bound up with this custom and that it symbolises the unification of the whole tribal organisation.... The irua (ceremony) marks the commencement of participation in various governing groups in the tribal administration, because the real age-groups begin from the day of the physical operation. The history and legends of the people are explained and remembered according to the names given to various age-groups at the time of the initiation ceremony. (134)
More importantly, the parents of the initiates became members of the governing council of elders (kiama) subsequent to the initiation of their first child. The ceremony was thus central to the social organisation and the organisation of power within the Gikuyu community. However, circumcision was also of crucial importance to the organisation of sexual difference and male privilege in the community:

Before initiation it is considered right and proper for boys to practice masturbation as a preparation for their future sexual activities. Sometimes two or more boys compete in this, to see which can show himself more active than the rest.... Masturbation among girls is considered wrong, and if a girl is seen touching that part of her body she is at once told that she is doing wrong. It may be said that this, among other reasons, is probably the motive of trimming the clitoris, to prevent girls from developing sexual feelings around that point. (Kenyatta 162)

Clitoridectomy was thus tantamount to an erasure of one aspect of female desire by a male-dominated culture. Allied with this negation was a series of cultural relations that the operation enacted and instituted. It not only dispossessed Gikuyu women of one site of bodily pleasure, but also dispossessed them of material possessions. Becoming a woman among the Gikuyu meant submitting to exclusion from the ownership and inheritance of land and from access to political decision-making. In short, clitoridectomy enacts the relations of male dominance and female submission that constitute a patriarchal social order. The Gikuyu woman’s body is instrumentalised in the establishment of male prerogatives. She is allocated an important ‘place’ within culture, in spite of the fact that she will never own that place. Her body founds the (male) right to property, the male prerogative in the homestead, male accession to power, the male-defined dialectic of desire. Her desire (which exceeds her reproductive functions) is effaced in order to naturalise her subjection in culture. Spivak is apposite here:

Male and female sexuality are asymmetrical. Male orgasmic pleasure ‘normally’ entails the male reproductive act — semination. Female orgasmic pleasure (it is not of course the ‘same’ pleasure, only called by the same name) does not entail any one element of the heterogenous female reproductive scenario: ovulation, fertilisation, conception, gestation, birthing. The clitoris escapes reproductive framing. In legally defining woman as an object of exchange, passage or possession in terms of reproduction, it is not only the womb that is literally ‘appropriated’; it is the clitoris as signifier of the sexed subject that is effaced. All historical and theoretical investigation into the definition of woman as legal object — in or out of marriage; or as politico-economic passageway for property and legitimacy would fall within the investigation of the varieties of the effacement of the clitoris. (1987, 151 [emphasis in original])

There was far more at stake in the circumcision debate than the Gikuyu woman’s right to determine whether or not to submit her body to clitoridectomy. In fact, her assenting or dissenting voice was never an issue. Rather, the central (but
In order to clarify this point, I shall make use of Louis Althusser's essay, 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses'. Althusser argues that the capitalist state reproduces itself in two ways. Firstly, it must reproduce the skills and materials required for production. Secondly, it must reproduce the labour force's submissive relationship to the organisational hierarchy of the state:

"To put this more scientifically, I shall say that the reproduction of labour power requires not only a reproduction of its skills, but also, at the same time, a reproduction of submission to the rules of the established order, i.e. a reproduction of submission to the ruling ideology for the workers, and a reproduction of the ability to manipulate the ruling ideology correctly for the agents of exploitation and repression, so that they, too, will provide for the domination of the ruling class 'in words'. In other words, the school (but also other State institutions like the church...) teaches 'know-how', but in forms which ensure *subjection to the ruling ideology* or the mastery of its 'practice'. (6-7 [emphasis in original])"

Althusser claims that the ruling ideology of the state is promulgated by Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs), which include the religious ISA (the system of different churches) and the educational ISA (the school system). ISAs such as these become 'not only the *stake*, but also the *site* of class struggle' (21 [emphasis in original]) in the proletariat's attempts to ward off the ruling class's exploitation and to seize control of the state. In pre-Independence Kenya, the Christian church's contribution to colonialism was to ensure a docile populace, who could look forward to the Kingdom of Heaven in the afterlife while enduring servitude on Earth. Equally, the school system functioned to produce an African élite, who would emerge as a buffer class between the settler's neo-aristocracy and the Kenyan peasantry. In other words, the Ideological State Apparatuses constituted by the school system and the missions enabled and perpetuated the exploitative social formations in colonial Kenya. In political terms, the circumcision debate marks a decisive juncture in the history of Gikuyu resistance to colonial rule.

The emergence of the independent schools and the African churches was tantamount to the emergence of powerful new ISAs in the Kenyan state, instituting a counter-colonial discourse. These ISAs, like the Gikuyu nationalism they fostered, had their ideological roots in Gikuyu traditionalism. The advent of *Mau Mau*, twenty years later, may be viewed as an attempt by the Gikuyu people (and others) to usurp the Repressive State Apparatuses (the army, the police, the homeguard, the courts) that enforced the last vestiges of colonial domination in Kenya.

While the debate may have had far-reaching consequences for the Gikuyu populace, the central figure in the debate — the Gikuyu woman — is conspicuously silent. This silence may be understood in terms of Althusser's remark that '[ideology] represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence' (36). In terms of this formulation, the Gikuyu
woman's identity as 'a woman' is produced by the ritual of circumcision and its attendant cultural implications — it was only by submitting to clitoridectomy that the Gikuyu woman could call herself 'a Gikuyu woman' (or, for that matter, 'a patriot'). Equally, it was only by refusing to be circumcised that the Kenyan Christian woman could call herself 'a Christian woman' (or, for that matter, 'a good colonial subject'). In Althusser's terms: 'all ideology hails or interpellates concrete individuals as concrete subjects' (47). Despite the hostility that developed on both sides, the result of the circumcision debate was the production of a regime of signs in which the Gikuyu patriarchy and the colonial patriarchy colluded to silence the Gikuyu woman. Evidence of this collusion may be found in the strikingly similar conclusions that Kenyatta and the missionaries drew from the events in 1931: that circumcision was a custom ingrained in Gikuyu culture, and that it was best left to die out by itself.

Although the Gikuyu traditionalist community was the only party to advocate clitoridectomy in the debate, the missionaries' Christian belief-system entailed the suppression of the clitoris by a more subtle mechanism — as an example, one might cite the myth of the Immaculate Conception (as Tobe Levin's essay on The River Between does) in which Mary's motherhood is co-extensive with a lack of participation in the act of coitus, which in turn constitutes an effacement of female desire: Mary is an icon of 'woman' defined exclusively as a mothering-function. In addition, Gayatri Spivak has provided an incisive critique of the ubiquitous symbolic clitoridectomy of women:

Psychological investigation in this area cannot only confine itself to the effect of clitoridectomy on women. It would also ask why and show how, since an at least symbolic clitoridectomy has always been the 'normal' accession to womanhood and the unacknowledged name of motherhood [Spivak refers here to Freud's assertion that women's psychosexual maturity rests upon a change from clitoral to vaginal orgasm], it might be necessary to plot out the entire geography of female sexuality in terms of the imagined possibility of the dismemberment of the phallus. The arena of research here is not merely remote and primitive societies.... The pre-comprehended suppression or effacement of the clitoris relates to every move to define woman as sex-object, or as means or agent of reproduction — with no recourse to a subject-function except in terms of those definitions or as 'imitators' of men. (1987 151)

The upshot of the collusion between colonial-Christian and traditionalist-nationalist ideologues in the circumcision debate was that both camps decided upon a shared referent (the peasant woman) and differed only as to whether she should be symbolically or physically clitoridectomised.

Ngugi's own subject-formation is an uneasy synthesis of the colonial and counter-colonial ideologies that competed for primacy in the circumcision debate. He was born into a family of aholi (tenant farmers) and, although his parents were located within the Gikuyu peasantry, they distrusted Gikuyu traditionalism. Their landlords were devout members of the Church of Scotland Mission. The
first three years of education Ngugi received were at a mission school (Kamaandura). He then transferred to the Maanguua Karing’a school, which was one of the independent schools, and underwent circumcision at the age of fifteen. He then attended Alliance High School, where he became ‘rather too serious a Christian’ (Sicherman 1990 4, quoting the Amoti interview). Shortly after writing _The River Between_ in 1961 (originally and revealingly titled _The Black Messiah_), Ngugi wrote an article for the Kenyan newspaper, _Sunday Nation_, with the propitiatory title of ‘Let Us Be Careful About What We Take From The Past’. The article argues ‘for selective retention of things from the past in keeping with “our progress to a higher and fuller humanity” [and] finds the Gikuyu “the worst offenders”, citing “brutal” female circumcision and bride price as customs that have “completely outlived” their purposes’ (Sicherman 1989 11).

It is perhaps not surprising that _The River Between_ reflects Ngugi’s ideological unease in relation to the Gikuyu woman. On one level, the text reinforces the production of women in terms of traditionalist ideology. For example, the free indirect discourse attributed to Chege reveals the social importance with which clitoridectomy is invested: ‘[circumcision] was a central rite in the Gikuyu way of life. Who had ever heard of a girl that was not circumcised? Who would ever pay cows and goats for such a girl?’ (37–38). The passage is ambiguous. Firstly, it is ironic that it is precisely Chege’s son (Waiyaki) who falls in love with an uncircumcised ‘girl’ (Nyambura). Yet Chege’s thoughts prove to be prophetic: events intrude upon the young lovers’ plans and prevent them from marrying according to either a Christian or a traditional custom. As prophecy, Chege’s assertions are validated; as irony, they are deflated. This should point us to Ngugi’s ambivalence in regard to both Gikuyu traditional and Western belief systems, which play out their confrontation in terms of the sign ‘woman’ (or ‘girl’) that can only be produced in exogamy. The exchange of women in Gikuyu culture (and implicitly in the novel) is an exchange that cements social and political relationships between men. Circumcision therefore provides a seal on the act of exogamy — it invests ‘the goods’ with value.7

In one of its less equivocal moments, _The River Between_ resorts to a free indirect discourse that unwittingly exposes circumcision as a cornerstone upon which the Gikuyu patriarchy is founded:

Circumcision was an important ritual to the tribe. It kept people together, bound the tribe. It was at the core of the social structure, and a something that gave meaning to a man’s life. End the custom and the spiritual basis of the tribe’s cohesion and integration would be no more. The cry was up. Gikuyu Karinga. Keep the tribe pure. Tutikwenda Irigu [we do not want uncircumcised girls]. It was a soul’s cry, a soul’s wish. (68 [my emphasis])

Beyond the sexist language in this passage and its construction of a masculine performative ‘we’ that articulates the destiny of women’s bodies in an unimpeachably spiritual register, _The River Between_ is a little simplistic in its
reduction of an entire tradition to one custom. However, the text’s emphasis on the ‘spiritual’ importance of circumcision also obscures its material importance in disciplining the Gikuyu subject:

The knife produced a thin sharp pain as it cut through the flesh. The surgeon had done his work. Blood trickled freely onto the ground, sinking into the soil. Henceforth a religious bond linked Waiyaki to the earth, as if his blood was an offering. Around him women were shouting and praising him. The son of Chege had proved himself. Such praises were only lavished on the brave. (45)

The blood that drops onto the earth during circumcision is supposed by the Gikuyu subject to naturalise his/her bond with the land. This representation obfuscates the fact that, unlike the empowering outcomes of the operation upon men, clitoridectomy functions to acculturate the Gikuyu subaltern woman and to appropriate her body in the service of oppressive social relations. The ritual re-enacts this silence because the subject (whether male or female) is expected not to cry out, nor to register pain (Kenyatta 1938, 146). The material basis of circumcision becomes manifest if one examines these silences in the text. If the ritual serves to naturalise the relationship between the subject and the land, it may be viewed as a legitimising enactment of Gikuyu proprietorship of the land. In a number of places, the text refers to a secret language of the Kenyan highlands; a language that the coloniser does not understand. The content of this secret language is not explicitly revealed to the reader, but it forms part of a coded reference to Gikuyu proprietorship of the land at one point in the narrative:

On sunny days the green leaves and the virgin gaiety of the flowers made your heart swell with expectation. At such times the women could be seen cultivating; no, not cultivating, but talking in a secret language with the crops and the soil. Women sang gay songs. (79)

The secret language of this passage is one which links the subaltern woman with the land and that which issues from it — the flowers have a ‘virgin gaiety’ (which might, in turn, imply the pristine agrarian society prior to the advent of colonialism) and likewise the women sing ‘gay’ songs. Equally, in the Kenya of the early 1930s, the secret language of the KCA’s involvement in the circumcision debate was that the preservation of the ritual formed part of its program for the reclamation of land alienated from the Gikuyu, and the reinstitution of a traditional social order which was beginning to lapse under the weight of colonial incursion.

The alignment of ‘women’ (or ‘mothers’, or ‘virgins’) with nature serves to legitimise a broader narrative that divests women of a controlling hand in the realms of culture and politics. This narrative is expressed in one of the Gikuyu myths that appears more than once in Ngugi’s work. Waiyaki asks why antelope do not flee from women. Chege replies:
'You do not know this! Long ago women used to rule this land and its men. They were harsh and men began to resent their hard hand. So when all the women were pregnant, men came together and overthrew them. Before this, women owned everything. The animal you saw was their goat. But because the women could not manage them, the goats ran away. They knew women to be weak. So why should they fear them?'

It was then Waïyaki understood why his mother owned nothing. (15)

This passage naturalises Gikuyu male privilege and prerogatives in Ngugi's text and in the traditional society from which the myth is drawn. The implication in the myth is that society is best ruled by those (men) who can best instil fear into (their) others. More importantly, the myth may be linked to the rite of circumcision in this way: if clitoridectomy (symbolic or real) is the pre-requisite of a patriarchal construction of woman in terms of a uterine social organisation — under which woman's excessive desire is effaced so that the womb may be appropriated for its reproductive potential — then the myth depicts the rise of the patriarchy by an appropriation of women's reproductive capacities. The myth comprises a symbolic effacement of the clitoris, and it undergirds a patriarchal Symbolic that is predicated on the effacement of female sexuality. The myth thus serves to legitimate the practice of clitoridectomy and its cultural effects. Further, it serves to counter the peasant woman's claim to political self-representation. In a sense, the circumcision debate and the myth that legitimises male power conspire to place the subaltern woman in a double-bind from which even Ngugi's hybrid female characters cannot escape. The circumcision debate meant that a woman's political choice was exercised through her physiological status (clitoridectomised or not) and the myth legitimising male power implies that it is precisely women's physiology which prevents them from exercising political power.

However, my reading of The River Between has not taken into account the contradictory status of the characters that are a synthesis or middle ground in the ideological divide between Western Christianity and Gikuyu traditionalism. These characters are hybrid and are therefore offered a revolutionary potential in the text. It is clear that the text privileges these characters: the title, The River Between, refers to the Honia river, which serves as an 'ideological between' — a negotiated position in the conflict between the Makuyu and Kameno ridges. Perhaps the most important of these hybrid figures is Muthoni. Her decision to be both Christian and circumcised is revolutionary in the context of the circumcision 'debate' and her justification of this decision provides Waïyaki with the first inklings of how he may assist in the liberation of the Gikuyu from colonial rule. Muthoni says, 'I want to be a woman. Father and Mother are circumcised. But why are they stopping me, why do they deny me this? How could I be outside the tribe when all the girls born with me at the same time have left me?' (44). Her position exposes the inconsistency of her father, Joshua's, prohibition of circumcision. However, although her position offers her a
revolutionary potential in the text, it does not offer her liberation from the strictures of the Gikuyu patriarchal order: ‘I want to be a woman made beautiful in the tribe: a husband for my bed; children to play around the hearth’ (44). Clearly, to be ‘made beautiful in the tribe’ is to acquire an ideologically-determined beauty which supports the patriarchal organisation of the Gikuyu. If clitoridectomy erases female desire in order to produce wives and mothers, then Muthoni’s words indicate that she will find her own fulfilment in the role that has been allocated to her. Muthoni’s hybrid status is further confirmed by her final words: ‘I am still a Christian, see, a Christian in the tribe. Look. I am a woman and will grow big and healthy in the tribe.... [Tell] Nyambura I see Jesus. And I am a woman, beautiful in the tribe...’ (53). Nevertheless, Muthoni’s death functions to negate the possibilities that the text affords her — she constitutes a failed attempt at an ideological synthesis of the Gikuyu traditionalist and Christian stances in relation to clitoridectomy. Significantly, the injuries she sustains during the operation can be cured neither by Gikuyu traditional remedies, nor by Western medicine (50). Incidentally, Muthoni’s death signals another negated possibility in the text. In Gikuyu, Muthoni means ‘a relative by marriage’, and the reader later discovers that a marriage between Waivaki and Nyambura is fated not to take place.

The second hybrid character is Waivaki. He is referred to as the ‘Black Messiah’, and there is some suggestion that Waivaki is the Jesus that Muthoni has seen on her deathbed (103). He is described in terms that evoke both Gikuyu traditionalist and Christian discourses:

[His] voice was like the voice of his father — no — it was like the voice of the great Gikuyus of old. Here again was a saviour, the one whose words touched the souls of the people. People listened and their hearts moved with the vibration of his voice. And he, like a shepherd speaking to his flock, avoided any words that might be insulting. (96)

Equally, Nyambura — Muthoni’s sister and Waivaki’s lover — is offered a revolutionary position. She is Christian and uncircumcised, and therefore outcast unclean according to the Kiama. She defies Joshua’s order not to love Waivaki (134) and when Waivaki comes to warn Joshua and his followers of the Kiama’s plans to harm them, Nyambura does the unthinkable by declaring her love for him:

Joshua was fierce. He hated the young man with a hatred which a man of God has towards Satan. There was another murmur in the room. Then silence reigned as Nyambura walked across towards Waivaki while all the eyes watched her. Waivaki and Joshua must have been struck by her grace and mature youthfulness. She held Waivaki’s hand and said what no other girl at that time would have dared to say, what she herself could not have done a few days before.

‘You are brave and I love you.’ (136)
Nyambura’s voice at this point becomes a powerful instrument for dissembling the hardened ideological positions which contribute to the crisis in the text. However, her voice is never permitted to exert any influence upon the action. Like Waiyaki, Nyambura becomes a sacrificial victim of the Kiama; the scapegoat onto whom all of the Gikuyu community’s guilt and hatred are transferred.

If hybrid characters such as Waiyaki, Nyambura and Muthoni are privileged in the text, one might wonder why their ostensibly revolutionary potential is negated: why do they fall foul of circumstance or of self-interested powermongers such as Kabonyi? Significantly, Kabonyi is the archetypal villain, and, rather than attempting to achieve a synthesis of the two ideological poles posited in the novel, he fluctuates between them, first as a Christian convert and later as the leader of the Kiama. The answer to my question has less to do with Ngugi’s contradictory formation under Christian and Gikuyu discourses than it has to do with his contradictory position within the emergent educated élite in post-independence Kenya.

These latter contradictions are outlined in Ian Glenn’s Goldmannian reading of Ngugi’s fiction. Glenn emphasises Ngugi’s class position within post-independence Kenya and he lists four features that characterise the emergent intellectual élite in newly independent states. Firstly, the intellectual élite plays a mediating role between the colonised’s traditional culture and Western culture. Secondly, it has an exaggerated sense of its own importance and representativeness in the shaping of the nation state and its ideology. The third notable feature of intellectual élites is that they are especially likely, by virtue of their training, outlook and position, to stress intellectual and abstract solutions to social and political problems.... The fourth feature of the intellectual élite is that a member is a member, paradoxically, by having his (sic) own views, opinions, conscience, judgement. He is likely to clash with traditional religious belief, marriage practices and value systems. This stress on individualism offers the temptation of a life of private consciousness, but in view of the élite’s sense of idealism and of its own importance, this temptation will be resisted or take particular forms. The two most important exceptions are the pursuit of a separate religious goal or destiny for the transcendent self, or the exaltation of the self in the most individualistic of relationships, that of romantic love, with its insistence on the signs of a unique and individual attraction. (62).

Waiyaki exhibits all of these features. He is initiated into Gikuyu customs by his father and by undergoing circumcision. He also receives an education at the Siriana mission school. He sees himself as a visionary who has been chosen to redeem the Gikuyu community from the conditions of its oppression, and the wistful solution Waiyaki offers to these conditions is that of education. Further, it is precisely Waiyaki’s ambition to enter into a companionate marriage with Nyambura that marks his position as a half-outsider in relation to the Makuyu and Kameno communities. If Waiyaki does share with Ngugi the features that
characterise the intellectual élite, one might expect the narrative to represent him in a considerably sympathetic light. Why then is Waiyaki abandoned to the discipline of the Kiama by the conclusion of the novel? Why is there a strong suggestion that his lover, Nyambura, will be circumcised or immolated? The unexpected turn of events at the conclusion of the novel may be explained by Ian Glenn’s remark:

Clearly the situation and dilemma of the heroes [of Ngugi’s novels] is structurally related to that of the élite whose alienation is, paradoxically, their source of power. How are we to understand the persistent failure and sacrifice of the hero? Is it a resurgence in African writing of the colonial novelist’s theme of the tragedy of the educated African, the man of two worlds? In some sense, yes. it seems to me that the novels reflect the strain of this mediating position, this double alienation, and exonerate the hero by suggesting that the task of modernising his primordial attachments or satisfying the various allegiances is impossible, that the contradictions cannot be lived out. At the same time, in death as sacrifice, the élite finds an ideal individualist gesture and intellectual act through which the opposites may be reconciled. (63)

Although the two central female characters in *The River Between* are not explicitly demarcated as intellectual figures, their mission school education and missionary father demarcate their class affinity with wealthy literate minority. It is clear that, like Waiyaki, these female characters respectively represent two poles of hybridity in the narrative: Muthoni is clitoridectomised and Christian, while Nyambura is uncircumcised and in love with a circumcised Gikuyu man. This construction offers each of the sisters a reconciliatory potential in the narrative, and yet this potential is negated by Muthoni’s death and Nyambura’s uncertain fate. I would suggest, in agreement with Glenn’s critical position, that *The River Between* plays out the possibilities and failures of a male intellectual consciousness attempting to be representative of an emergent nationalism.

Ngugi’s re-inscription of the myth of Waiyaki supports this latter contention. The ‘real’ or ‘historical’ Waiyaki entered into a treaty with Lord Lugard, then later initiated resistance against the British. He was captured and killed (allegedly by being buried upside down while still alive). Nationalist historians depict Waiyaki as an early Gikuyu martyr and a forerunner of nationalist resistance to colonial domination. Mbugua Njama’s pamphlet (in Sicherman 1990, 350–55), which Ngugi translated into English, is a representative example of this trend. However, Cora Ann Presley labels Waiyaki ‘an early collaborator’ (9). More importantly, she notes: ‘Kikuyu oral tradition maintains that Waiyaki was an ambitious young man from a poor lineage who believed he could become a man of status, wealth and authority by working with the Europeans’ (63). I would not like to argue for either the educated nationalist élite’s, or the illiterate peasantry’s, representations of Waiyaki. Rather, I would read the differences between the two versions as an allegory of the crisis of representativeness that confronts Ngugi
as an African intellectual, removed from his constituent class by an education which is as disabling in political terms as it is enabling in socio-economic terms.

Of course, the Waiyaki of *The River Between* is not the unqualified hero/martyr of nationalist accounts, but he is always partially inscribed by the Waiyaki of myth. This may be seen in the passage that relates to the Second Birth: ‘The women went on shouting but Waiyaki did not see them now. Their voices were a distant buzz like another he had heard in a dream when a swarm of bees came to attack him’ (1965 12). Two points are important here. Firstly, the dream of the bees is a proleptic moment in the narrative; it prefigures the immolation of Waiyaki and Nyambura and thus enhances the suggestion that Waiyaki is a prophet chosen by the Gikuyu gods to lead his people. Secondly, it also resonates with a moment of divine intervention in the myth of Waiyaki. Waiyaki has been captured and is being taken to the coast by British soldiers. A group of warriors is following them in order to free Waiyaki by force:

> It is very significant that there were many guards with him, and when they were travelling ... near Kabete a beehive, which no one had touched, fell from a tree, and the bees burst out and attacked the people who were guarding Waiyaki. The warriors wanted to fight; now they were being helped by the bees.

(Mbugua Njama, qtd in Sicherman 1990, 352)

There is an obvious difference in the function of the bees in the two stories. In the myth, they protect Waiyaki. In the novel, they attack him. Ngugi’s novel reinscribes the myth in order to act out the idealistic scenario of the individual sacrifice/martyrdom of the hero. It is a gesture which reconciles Ngugi’s position with that of the illiterate peasantry (as Ian Glenn suggests) and it accords with Ngugi’s Christian worldview at the time of writing — the sacrificial victim/messiah reunites the collective.

Given that Ngugi’s novel broadly follows Kenyata’s anthropological defence of circumcision in *Facing Mount Kenya*, there is a very revealing disparity between the two accounts of the Second Birth:

> His mother sat near the fireplace in her hut as if in labour. Waiyaki sat between her thighs. A thin cord taken from a slaughtered goat and tied to his mother represented the umbilical cord. A woman, old enough to be a midwife, came and cut the cord.

(Ngugi 12)

> [The] gut is cut in a long ribbon, and while the initiates stand in one group close together the ribbon encircles them, being tied so as to cover the navel of those on the outside of the circle. They stand in position for a few minutes; then the midwife comes along with a razor dipped in sheep’s blood and cuts the ribbon in two. This symbolises the cutting of the umbilical cord at birth. This is done to express the rebirth of the initiate. (Kenyatta 150)

Ngugi reinscribes the Second Birth in two ways. Firstly, it takes place before Waiyaki’s circumcision, rather than afterward (as in Kenyatta’s account).
Secondly, Ngugi’s account deals — revealingly — with an individual, rather than with a collective. Ngugi’s text is marked by an individualism (which, in turn, evidences a self-interested account of Gikuyu culture and resistance). Further, this account of the Second Birth defines Ngugi’s version of Kenyan history as a history of individuals, heroes, martyrs.

We have seen that Ngugi rewrites aspects of circumcision and Gikuyu myth in accordance with his position within the intellectual élite. Despite the discrepancies that the novel’s interested accounts of circumcision involve, there is also a sense in which *The River Between* leaves intact the gender disparities produced by circumcision and the nationalist ideologies that the Kenyan circumcision debate first enabled. The effacement of female desire is crucial to such nationalist ideologies, since their representations of women rely fundamentally upon the iconography of motherhood. In her analysis of *The River Between*, Tobe Levin locates the socio-cultural basis for clitoridectomy in a masculine fear of clitoral power. In an even-handed way, Levin highlights Ngugi’s ironic juxtaposition of traditional Gikuyu and Christian religious belief:

> Christianity’s failure is perhaps of far greater concern to the author than the obviously reactionary stance of the Kiamasa.... One needs little maturity to doubt the credibility of an organisation condemning clitoridectomy but espousing belief in a virgin birth. In fact, concerning sexual matters, the tribe appears to be infinitely more sophisticated than the Christians. For example, the clitoris is at least acknowledged by the former (being too powerful, it is removed), while the organ has been treated by western ideology as though it didn’t exist. (214)

Levin also draws on Marielouise Janssen-Jureit’s useful observation that clitoridectomy serves to produce docile wives. The ritual enables Gikuyu culture to appropriate the female desire that threatens to introduce social disorder. Equally, in the Kenya of 1929, the female body is appropriated for the production of manpower, which the ‘post-colonial’ state in embryo requires in order to be born. In terms of this dynamic, Gikuyu women’s bodies are the baby-factories that service culture. There are resonances of this appropriation in Ngugi’s subsequent novel, *A Grain of Wheat*. At the conclusion of this novel, Gikonyo envisages a pregnant Mumbi. In Gikuyu mythology, Mumbi is the mother of the Gikuyu community, and Mumbi’s (the character’s) pregnancy presages the birth of a new Kenya. Thus, Mumbi is situated on either side of the present — as part of a mythical past and an uncertain future — and is therefore excluded from history. She only achieves historical presence once she has been inseminated by her male counterpart.12

If we wish to interrogate Ngugi’s production of woman as a sign, we may trace many of his later heroines back to the production of women in the circumcision debate. Gikuyu nationalism took shape around the issue of clitoridectomy. At this juncture in Kenyan history, the Gikuyu woman’s body became a metaphor for the social composition of the state. To be uncircumcised
Clitoridectomy and Gikuyu Nationalism

was to uphold the Christian-colonialist establishment and to be clitoridectomised was to support the institution of an independent Kenya, purified of colonial influences and controlled and peopled by Africans. The role of Gikuyu women in the debate was productive inasmuch as they helped to initiate the resistance that would later topple the colonial order, but it was a role that has proved to be expensive in retrospect. Immediately after independence, Kenyatta’s first legislative act was to abolish the prohibition on clitoridectomy. Levin comments on the increasing prevalence of the operation in latter-day Kenya. She remarks that there has been:

an accelerating neglect of the rite accompanied by the spread of excision performed in hospitals on girls at increasingly younger ages, for whom the amputation is totally divorced from any kind of moral, ethical or even sex-educational dimension. The death of 14 young girls in 1983 led to the passage of an edict against the operations in Kenya. At the same time, law without the force of custom remains impotent.... (216)

Levin’s claims are supported by the statistics in one available study of clitoridectomy in Kenya, which claims that 4.74 million of the 7.9 million women in Kenya in 1985 had undergone clitoridectomy — a figure of roughly 60 percent (Kouba and Muasher 99).

If this trend has continued unchecked, then it would appear that the Kenyan patriarchy is producing docile women as effectively as it ever has. Furthermore, the only difference between the Kenya of today and the Kenya of the thirties would be that the patriarch now has Western medical technology at his disposal. I am not claiming that Ngugi shares complicity in these atrocities, but rather that his consistent and idealistic equation of the female character’s body with the body of the state contains problematic implications for Kenyan women, and does not afford them the emancipation it initially appears to promise.13

NOTES
1 This research was undertaken with the generous financial assistance of the Centre for Science Development and the University of Cape Town.
2 Although I am aware that ‘circumcision’ is a dangerous term to employ in the description of an amputation that differs substantially from the operation performed on men, I have retained the term in places. In my opinion, ‘clitoridectomy’ might be a far more disabling term in an analysis of this kind, since it might confuse a feminist discourse to the specifically corporeal (or ‘bodily’) effects of the operation. I therefore use ‘clitoridectomy’ to denote the physical operation, and I reserve ‘circumcision’ to imply the cultural effects attendant upon the rite.
3 In this context, Hickey’s argument (1995) that the missionaries at least raised objections to a gender-oppressive cultural practice is slightly myopic. The missionaries intervention at a politically sensitive time had the upshot of hardening ideological positions and harnessing clitoridectomy to Kenyan nationalism for many years beyond the initial circumcision debate. Hence, this intervention probably set back the anti-clitoridectomy cause by about fifty years.
The predominantly Gikuyu Mau Mau uprising took place between 1952 and 1957. Its association in the European mind with brutality and barbarism led to a disproportionate backlash against the Gikuyu and to extreme civilian hardship. Despite its military failures, Mau Mau precipitated Kenyan Independence in 1960. For an expanded account of Mau Mau see my ‘The Landscape of Insurgency: Mau Mau, Ngugi wa Thiong’o and Gender’ (forthcoming).

Patrick Williams’ description of the Gikuyu ‘female agency as ideologically trapped’ (1999 34) is pertinent here.

Not astonishingly, Waiyaki — the protagonist of The River Between — reaches a similar conclusion (Ngugi 141–42).

My argument is indebted to an article by Elizabeth Cowie, entitled ‘Woman as Sign’. Cowie contends that the sign ‘woman’ is socially constructed in terms of the relationships in which women are positioned by exogamy. On one level, the Gikuyu patriarchy’s intervention in the circumcision debate had the upshot of regulating the exchange of women. The KCA claimed, in a letter to the press, that the missionaries’ attempts to outlaw clitoridectomy were motivated by a desire to secure uncircumcised ‘girls’ as wives (see Arnold 121).

James Ogude has written of the novel, ‘The polity is constituted almost exclusively through a religious myth of origin and the whole issue of “tribal tradition” is collapsed into one single institution — circumcision, which is seen as a fulcrum of the community’ (16).

Although I have not chosen to quote or summarise Gayatri Spivak’s essay, ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’, my argument is indebted to her insights.

Glenn also notes a fifth feature which does not inform my analysis.

Lord Frederick John Dealtry Lugard was a former military man who ‘spent four decisive years in East Africa (1888–92)’ (Sicherman 1990 147–48) during which he established the first British East Africa Company station in Kikuyuland (with Waiyaka’s agreement) and urged the inclusion of Uganda into the British Empire. Lugard’s other achievements include bringing Nigeria under British Administration (1895–1902) and acting as the Nigerian Governor General (1912–1919). Lugard was the architect of the British policy of Indirect Rule in Nigeria. In a beautiful irony, Kenyatta’s anthropological studies under Malinowski in London (1936), which led to the publication of Facing Mount Kenya, were completed with the assistance of a scholarship from the International African Institute, chaired by Lugard (Arnold 28).

Referring to Ngugi’s earliest short story, ‘Mugumo’ Simon Gikandi states that reproduction ‘is justified by its capacity to give life to the new nation’ (2000, 44).

Regarding solutions for Gikuyu women, Levin notes that one activist (Awa Thiam) has gone so far as to suggest radical lesbianism for gender-oppressed African women (220).

WORKS CITED


The Veil of Nationalism: Frantz Fanon’s ‘Algeria Unveiled’ and Gillo Pontecorvo’s The Battle of Algiers

Women’s relationship to anti-colonial nationalism has been a problematic one, in that nationalist movements have tended to employ both women and feminist discourses strategically.¹ This phenomenon is far from limited to the Muslim or Arab worlds.² Nor is nationalism the only ideology to intersect uneasily with women’s interests in the region. However, work produced by feminist scholars grounded experientially in the region suggests that contestation between nationalisms and feminisms in North Africa and the Middle East has been extreme (see Hatem, Kandiyoti, Lasreg 1994 ch7, Moghadam and Moallem).

Here I revisit Fanon’s oft-discussed essay ‘L’Algérie se dévoile’, first published in his 1959 text L’An V de la révolution algérienne and translated as ‘Algeria Unveiled’ in A Dying Colonialism (Fanon 1959, 1980).³ My objective here is twofold. I first reassess the emancipatory import of Fanon’s essay and then use it to contextualise an analysis of Gillo Pontecorvo’s acclaimed film The Battle of Algiers (1966). I take up a point made by a rare dissenting voice about the film’s strong sense of inevitability culminating in ‘completeness’. It achieves the characteristic of a complete statement ... confirming itself as a concluded representation of history about which no further questions are to be asked, and presenting an episodic view of history quite alien to the possibility of understanding it [history] as an open horizon of possibilities and alternative realities. (Sainsbury 7)

This is a fair assessment of the politico-epistemological limits of Pontecorvo’s film. So if, as critics assume, The Battle of Algiers functions uncritically as Fanonian gloss (Shohat and Stam 251–52), does Fanon’s essay present a similarly overdetermined picture of the decolonising Algerian nation? My contention is that the film deflects the most useful complexities and ambiguities of Fanon’s discourse, particularly in relation to the subject of Algerian women. I support analyses which read Fanon’s text as attempting to locate revolutionary women’s participation within a double temporal frame, in which postcolonial implication exceeds anti-colonial effect. The dissemination of the signs of veiling and unveiling, in particular, has consequences beyond the field of the colonising other’s comprehension.⁴

Postcolonial scholarship returns, again and again, to Fanon’s ‘Algeria Unveiled’. This is partly a result of the ease with which the essay lends itself to
reading methods proposed by poststructuralist and psychoanalytic theories, particularly since Homi Bhabha’s re-reading of Fanon (1986). Feminist attention is held, however, by the glaring incommensurability between women’s anti-colonial militancy and their disenfranchisement in independent Algeria. In attempts to rationalise this disjunction, the essay has been challenged in terms of its factitiousness and lack of socio-historical contextualisation (Amrane 226–27, 247; Helie-Lucas; Lasreg 1994 125–29). Alternatively, both Fanon and the Algerian revolutionary authorities are viewed as silencing women (Fuss 36), and/or of endowing women with an agency which is merely designated, structural and auxiliary (McClintock 98; Mincs 162).

I maintain that, although ‘Algeria Unveiled’ is fissured by ambivalences and elisions which are undoubtedly problematic, it exceeds the ‘discursive constellations’ and combats the ‘ritualised silences’ which characterise women’s representation in the Algerian historical archive generally (Maougal 18; Hadj-Moussa 258–59) and in Pontecorvo’s film specifically. Fanon’s text can be located on a continuum with recent work by North African feminist intellectuals on women’s participation in early Islamic and anti-colonial movements (Ahmed; Djebar 1980, 1985, 1991; Lasreg 1994; Mermisi). This point is also made by critic Denise Sharpley-Whiting. I diverge from Sharpley-Whiting’s perspective, however, in applying a reading method to ‘Algeria Unveiled’ which foregrounds the play of signification and difference (cf. Sharpley-Whiting ‘Epilogue’; also Lasreg 1990 338–42). As Bhabha has portrayed him, Fanon is a ‘purveyor of the transgressive and transitional truth’, a commentator who realises that ‘the state of emergency is also always a state of emergence’ (1986 ix, xi, first emphasis mine). Given the dramatic erosion of women’s rights in independent Algeria, it is necessary to reassess the Fanonian relationship between national emergence and socio-cultural emergency.

French control of Algeria lasted from 1830 to 1962. The Algerian historical experience is particularised by the relentlessness and hypocrisy of assimilation under the banner of the French mission civilisatrice, the murderous and protracted war over independence, and the profound implications of both colonialism and independence for a contemporary Algeria in cultural and political crisis. Whereas postcolonial theorists since Fanon have seen Algeria as the exemplary site of colonial devastation and anti-colonial struggle, ‘les événements’ of 1954–62 have been ‘imperfectly repressed’ in French cultural memory (Rachid Boudjedra qtd in Dine 223). Pontecorvo’s film was not granted certification in France until five years after its release, despite its huge success at the 1966 Venice Film Festival (the French delegation exited in protest). Unsurprisingly, the most virulent condemnation of the film in France has come from les anciens combattants and pieds noirs (Dine 227).

Algerian nationalism was politically articulated prior to World War One and culminated in the encompassing and/or elimination of rival factions, notably Messali’s MNA (Mouvement Nationaliste Algérien), by the Front de Libération
Nationale (FLN) and its Armée de Libération Nationale (ALN). The release of
the FLN’s political charter on 1 November 1954 formally inaugurated a war of
independence based on principles which the FLN had proclaimed since 1946:
anti-colonialism and the reassertion of non-doctrinal Muslim culture (see Horne
95). After France’s official refusal, on 12 November, to compromise its stance
on ‘L’Algérie française’, the FLN confirmed its ideological commitment to
violence as counter-colonial tool. While these premises provided an ideological —
and emotive — base for solidarity in a society which was culturally ravaged
and linguistically and ethnically heterogeneous, the evasion of a coherent political
and social agenda was to have serious implications for independent Algeria
(Young 2001 278).

Fanon’s essay was written at the height of revolutionary fervour, when the
author worked for the FLN, largely as ideologue and international spokesperson
for the secular left of the party, a key vehicle being the revolutionary organ El
Moudjahid which he edited in Tunis. Pontecorvo’s film was made in the euphoria
of recent independence, five years after Fanon’s death. As products of their time
and exemplars of a leftist politico-theoretical context which they helped to shape,
both media dramatise the Algerian war of independence as a spontaneous,
unanimous and irrevocable upheaval across all social and political lines.

Pontecorvo’s film elides many contextual factors, including: the violent rise
to dominance of the FLN; the triangular conflict between pieds noirs, Algerian
nationalists and metropolitan France; evidence of sympathetic French
collaboration with the Algerian cause; and class-related factors of the struggle,
including the uprising of the rural population and the role of poor whites and the
small Europeanised Algerian bourgeoisie (by contrast, see Fanon 1959, 1961,
1964). In The Battle of Algiers, the individual is consistently ‘massified’ and the
resonances of the colonial system and anti-colonial uprising for specific groups
are lost. Scriptwriter, Franco Solinas, and director, Pontecorvo, describe the film
as ‘an analysis of two conflicting forces’, underpinned by a Marxist vision of
‘the ability of the mass, in special moments, to express certain qualities ... which
you generally don’t find in the individual’ (F. Solinas in P. Solinas 198; Pontecorvo
in P. Solinas 165).

Fanon’s essay operates conversely, in that a primarily existentialist ideology
is personified by the fidaïa (female weapon-carrier) at the center of the text.8 His
proposed agenda for a broader and more detailed study of Algerian women’s
participation in the War is evidence that his yoking of women to the nationalist
project in ‘Algeria Unveiled’ was a temporary textual strategy (‘AU’ 38 15n).
Fanon had the lived experience and the textual scope to discuss the Algerian
case more comprehensively, although political necessity meant that his views at
times merely echoed the FLN position.9 Nevertheless, Fanon’s ‘forked tongue’
(Sekyi-Otu 218), which resonates most clearly in A Dying Colonialism and The
Wretched of the Earth, testifies to Fanon’s somewhat ambivalent vision of FLN
policy and post-independence promise, particularly as these relate to Algerian women.
**Frantz Fanon’s ‘Algeria Unveiled’ (1959)**

Fanon’s works were written from a liminal position, from which he sought to reconcile loyalty to the insurgent Algerian population with the production of a more universally applicable revolutionary theory. As such, the colonial dialecticism of the Fanonian corpus is the product of a politics of production and reception split, or doubled, between Algeria and France. The desire to influence the apathetic French left, in particular, was one factor which contributed to Fanon’s fetishisation of ‘Algeria’, or his subordination of gendered, ethnic, class, regional and political differences to anti-colonial unity (Mowitt 173). This said, both FLN leaders and ex-fidayate have testified to an extraordinary level of solidarity amongst male and female revolutionaries (Yacef 35; Amrane; Amrane-Minne). Ultimately, it seems that both women’s role in the resistance and the ‘vexed question’ of Fanon’s cultural position (Mowitt 176) became more problematic after the event and in the context of new socio-political and economic variables.

Turning to the essay, then, the English title ‘Algeria Unveiled’ appears uncritically to repeat the epistemological violence of the French colonial regime upon the nation and women in particular, whereas the original French title ‘L’Algérie se dévoile’ insists upon subjective agency. Given criticisms that the female agency illustrated in Fanon’s work is at best conferred from above, this translative slippage seems relevant. Of course, whichever way one reads it, the title appears to unabashedly collapse women’s experience with that of the nation. Diana Fuss argues that Fanon’s essay does not surmount the dialectic wherein in the discourse of colonial imperialism and in the discourse of national resistance, the veiled Algerian woman stands in metonymically for the nation ... the woman’s body is the contested ideological battleground, overburdened and saturated with meaning. It is the woman who circulates as a fetish. (Fuss 27-28)

According to Fuss, Fanon’s women, as they masquerade in a manner which is suggested as a natural function of femaleness, represent the ‘inscrutable face of a nation’ (29). While I agree in part, I refute her suggestion that both women and the veils that they wear/remove have only metonymical and fetishistic functionality within the text and so fail to mobilise a specifically female political valency (Fuss 36). Fuss identifies but dismisses the empowering feature of women’s self-presentation in ‘Algeria Unveiled’; the fact that their gendered performances exceed identification with all available cultural role models, and so represent political intentionality and a gendered emancipation within and potentially beyond the nationalist agenda. I suggest, by contrast, an ironic reading of both French and English titles of Fanon’s essay, so that the implied movement towards transparency is undercut by a text in which ‘woman’ and ‘veil’ become increasingly complex or opaque terms controlled by women.

In a book dedicated to initiations of cultural catachresis and cognitive subversion by the colonised Algerians, Fanon’s essay foregrounds the *haïk*, the
white veil characteristic of the northern cities of Algeria, as a hybrid site which negotiates and transcends antagonistic discourses. In the course of the essay, the *haïk* is depicted in terms of: a refusal to tailor cultural practice to the demands of the colonists and a defense against colonial penetration (‘AU’ 24–25); the concealment of revolutionary weapons (‘AU’ 29); and the ability to transform oneself from Algerian to French woman (‘AU’ 31–38), or from man to woman and back again (‘AU’ 39–41). Fanon first posits veiling practice as reactive — to the colonialist offensive against the veil, the colonised opposes the cult of the veil [le culte du voile] (‘AU’ 25; ‘ASD’ 34) — but this is revealed to be merely a stage in the veil’s strategic relevance. By the time of writing, the veil has been ‘[r]emoved and reassumed again and again, ... manipulated, transformed into a technique of camouflage, into a means of struggle’ (‘AU’ 39). Because Fanon’s veil is multivalent, it is not only related to women’s reconstruction as urban guerillas. The religio-cultural associations of the *haïk* are overlaid by a performative politics of self-fashioning, a shift neatly encapsulated by the dual signification of the term *cult/le culte*. That which Fanon terms ‘the historic dynamism of the veil’ (‘AU’ 41) can therefore be extrapolated to an increase in the female body’s performative register. This is despite those moments when the text slips into an eurocentricism which too easily equates unveiling with ontological freedom (most notably, in the passage: ‘Her legs are bare, not confined by the veil, given back to themselves, and her hips are free’ [‘AU’ 36]. One detects a sexual gaze here and a eurocentric notion of ontological authenticity). In fact, during the course of Fanon’s text, the *fidai’a* ‘re-learns her body, re-establishes it in a totally revolutionary fashion’ with and without the veil (‘AU’ 37). As such, women unmoor their bodies from dichotomous constraints such as local tradition versus Western practice, private versus public and tradition versus militancy. New, instrumental meanings are generated for the veil which will later resonate in contexts such as the 1979 Islamic Revolution of Iran, another complex site of female participation (see Moallem; Tohidi).

Judith Butler has suggested that, in the process of reiterating gendered and ‘sexed’ norms,

gaps and fissures are opened up as the constitutive instabilities in such constructions [as gender or ‘sex’], as that which escapes or exceeds the norm, as that which cannot be wholly defined or fixed by the repetitive labor of that norm. This instability is the *deconstituting* possibility in the very process of repetition, the power that undoes the very effects by which [gender] is stabilised, the possibility to put the consolidation of the norms of [gendered practice] into a potentially productive crisis.

(Butler 10, emphasis in original)

The interplay between cultural production, subversion and recuperation upon which Butler’s work insists can be demonstrated in concrete historical and cultural locations. That which is often reductively referred to as ‘the Muslim veil’ provides a prime case study. In the second half of the twentieth century, a culturally
variable (and always individually manipulated) form of social practice has become a transnational ideological signifier (Islamist 

hijab

) which interacts, in complex ways, with history and (post)modernity, as well as with local practices and meanings (Ahmed and Donnan 14–15). Veiling practices represent an active engagement with the contexts in which women locate themselves (Kaya; Lasreg 1990). This polyvalency or multicitationality is posited by ‘Algeria Unveiled’, particularly as the essay favours veiling, rather than unveiling, as the reiterative principle.

As Yegenoglu remarks, ‘the veil had now become the embodiment of [Algerian women’s] will to act, their agency’ (64, emphasis in original). Yegenoglu applies Irigaray’s notion of feminine mimicry in order to suggest that women, by assuming diverse personae, ‘managed to stay elsewhere, indeed to create an “elsewhere”, an “outside” that displaced the colonial power’ (64). Algerian women become the agents of cultural mutation for which they were formerly the targets and, by doing so, they signify the promise of postcolonial culture. The essay ends with the hope of ‘new attitudes ... new modes of action ... new ways’ (‘AU’ 42) which will define gendered relations within the nation. ‘Woman’ and ‘nation’ are unveiled, then, as new terms in a postcolonial self-inscription. Despite various contradictions in the text regarding women’s involvement in the FLN and the militant use of the face veil, the text goes to some lengths to assert that Algerian women are responsible for disseminating the significance of the veil. FLN hesitations are described in the past tense, in disjunction with the irruption of the revolutionary woman into the agonistic scene in the present tense. ‘What we have here’, Fanon proclaims about the unveiled militant, ‘is an authentic birth in a pure state, without preliminary instruction’ (‘AU’ 28). In a characteristically Fanonian gesture, the Algerian woman emerges — as does postcolonial Algerian culture — from the crucible of political commitment and struggle.

In response to criticisms of the dubiousness of some of Fanon’s factual claims, then, I emphasise his empowering subtext. The 

fidayate

increasingly ‘penetrate’ not only the colonial cities but also the constitutive ‘flesh of the Revolution’, or Algerian public and discursive space (‘AU’ 32). Simultaneously, the system is transformed in which Algerian women have been sexual objects of conflict and exchange across the colonial divide. Fanon’s metaphorical use of the terms of sexual agency tentatively opens on to a symbolic in which the relationship between gender, sexuality and citizenship could be reworked. Such a reading inserts a productive margin between woman and nation, terms which are superficially conflated in the title of the essay.

Fanon’s repression of historical contradiction is significant, nevertheless. Speaking of the issue of women’s entry into militant action, he states defensively that ‘when Algeria has gained her independence, such questions will not be raised, for in the practice of the Revolution the people have understood that problems are resolved in the very movement that raises them’ (‘AU’ 25–26). The problem, given our advantage of historical perspective, is that women’s
political activity was redesignated by the post-independence regime as a strategic and temporary aberration from their traditional role and dismissed from the discursive realm. As ex-fidaia Baya Hocine testifies,

[From 1962] Algeria was constructed without us ... without anyone thinking of us.... For us, it was worse than before [the Revolution] because ... we had broken down all the barricades [but] in 1962, the barricades were put back in place again ... in a manner which excluded us. (cited in Amrane-Minne 146, my translation)

In a similarly reactionary manner, veiling has been recast as a cultural obligation, at least for urban women, which permits little signifying play.18

The mistaken optimism of Fanon’s vision is due to his reluctance (or inability) to engage with the complexities of Algerian culture, despite his helpful depiction of this culture as dynamic and contested. Scant attention is paid to the gendered organisation of Algerian cultural space which was not only the result of French intervention even if, as Fanon points out, colonialism led to its overdetermination (‘AU’ 16–17, 41). Despite his awareness that Islam contributes to the ‘cultural, hence national, originality’ of the country, he fails to contextualise the unveiled woman’s ‘subjectively organised fears’ as more than a reaction to the colonial gaze (‘AU’ 20, 30). The bias of the entire essay is latent in his claim that the ‘veil was worn because tradition demanded a rigid separation of the sexes, but also because the occupier was bent on unveiling Algeria’ (‘AU’ 41, emphasis in original). Fanon underestimates the influence of religio-cultural determinants and tenacious, local forms of patriarchy, despite his sociological incursion into ‘The Algerian Family’ in the same volume. By contrast, in works produced in the post-independence era, Algerian author Rachid Boudjedra and, in the broader context of the Maghreb, Driss Chraibi emphasise divisive social structures which intertwine with a profound psycho-cultural complex towards women. By comparison, Fanon’s warning about the ‘regressive’ tendencies of ‘authenticity’ and tradition (‘AU’ 41) lacks deconstructive impetus and appears only as a ‘slip’ positing a eurocentric, linear relation between tradition and modernity.19

Problematic gendered norms, as well as the insistence since the anti-colonial uprising upon defining Algeria in non-Western terms, have contributed to a contemporary situation in which the legitimate options for female self-presentation are limited once again. Historical revisionism and the reinvigoration of tradition have been exacerbated by the rise of Islamist movements such as FIS (Front Islamique de Salut) and its more extreme successors which are, in fact, structurally similar to the FLN upon which they declared a fatwa in 1992 (Gafaïti 72–73; Lasreg 2000). In contemporary Islamism, however, we see ‘the return in the form of a political claim of the “cultural” element repressed by modern political struggles for liberation’, in Algeria as in the broader Muslim world (Berger 1998 103).

One of the major stakes in the discursive manipulation which has characterised the whole post-war era has been ‘the symbolic valence of [women’s] participation
and the epistemological tear that legitimising their political agency would cause to the fabric of this particular society’ (Simra 827). As Djamila Amrane comments,

Although the fidayate were the militants featured most often in the press of the [revolutionary] era, their participation is completely effaced in writings on the Algerian war.... [But] an episode as decisive as the ‘Battle of Algiers’ cannot be recounted without remembering those women who participated on all levels, including that of leadership. (Amrane 114, my translation)

In the face of state-sanctioned historiography, and despite the recent public atmosphere of terror in Algeria, militant women’s histories circulate as memories, contributing greatly to women’s continued willingness to protest (Amrane-Minne 12-13).20 Despite his disavowal of culturally specific values and practices, it is to this legacy that Fanon made a vital contribution.

**Gillo Pontecorvo’s The Battle of Algiers**

Although on many levels the film reflects the Marxist affiliations of Pontecorvo and Solinas, again the relation between author(s) and text is not entirely unmediated. The film was made on the initiative of and in collaboration with the Algerian studio Casbah films, whose managing director Yacef Saadi plays himself as the leader of the FLN in Algiers. It has been suggested that Yacef extensively revised the script (Mellen), although Franco Solinas refutes the fact that the Algerians had any political input (F. Solinas in P. Solinas 194). Pontecorvo, by contrast, claims that Yacef wished to substitute the camera for the machine gun (Pontecorvo 269). Presented in the film credits as ‘la première grande production algérienne’, the Algeria presented in *The Battle of Algiers* could be described as overdetermined from within.21 Recontextualised as such, it seems that the obvious influence of Fanon’s writings is subordinated to the self-legitimation project of the post-independent FLN government (Young 2002). Sartre, rather than Fanon, is mentioned in the film, perhaps because of his less ambivalent cultural position.

Although *The Battle of Algiers* shows women in various roles as supporters and providers for militant men, the film focuses (as did the Algerian and French media) upon the *fidayate*, ‘fire carriers’ or sacred martyrs, who placed bombs. Women placed two-thirds of the bombs, but this was a mode of revolutionary activity which involved around 2.1% of militant women only (Benallègue 707).22 The filmic emphasis is easily accounted for in terms of spectacular effect, maximum existential impact and the elicitation of sympathy for a ‘humanised’ (because feminised) revolutionary violence. It is also facilitated by an historically limited and circular diegesis which dramatises the Algerian uprising by presenting it *in medias res*.23 This leads, however, to the erasure of historical factors such as prior female activism (cf. Benallègue 703) and of the resonances of the colonial system for Algerian women, a subject central to Fanon’s essay. It is particularly problematic that women are never shown as victims of torture, suggesting an inviolability which denies that arrested *fidayate* were
systematically tortured (Amrane 92) and that rape was employed as a colonial weapon (cf. ‘AU’ 23 and Fanon 1961 ‘Series A’; de Beauvoir and Halimi).

Moreover, in contrast to Fanon’s emphasis on the increasingly polysemic nature of (un)veiling, in the film women’s behaviour tends to be recuperated into a dominant pairing of traditional unveiling/strategic unveiling. Prostitutes and women indoors — those who hide revolutionaries fleeing the police, and relatives of FLN men — are unveiled; women walking, protesting or mourning in the streets are generally veiled. The narrative logic of the film suggests that, at least until the popular uprising of the final scenes, the public circulation of unveiled women is a strategy of the FLN, conceptualised within the demands and restrictions of a particular historical moment. Unveiling is temporarily politically useful, with the accompanying implication that women resume the veil in a traditional fashion once its performative power — both on and off the body — is exhausted. In only one instance in the film are veils deliberately put on as a revolutionary disguise and so represented in a way which controverts customary gendered practice — and in that case, it is men who wear them as disguise.24

In a scene which has become iconic, Algerian women remove their face veils, change into Western dress, cut off their hair and apply makeup (Figure 1). The syntagmatic positioning of the scene is important, as it follows an emotive montage in which Algerian bodies, bombed in the Casbah, are borne out of the debris in crucifixion poses.25 The bridge to the unveiling scene not only presents anti-colonial violence as a response to colonialist terrorism (Shohat and Stam
The Veil of Nationalism

254) but screens the causal link of an FLN decision. Although Yacef controls a furious crowd by promising to avenge the Algerian people, there is no evidence of planning or discussion by the FLN. Thus, the spectator is led to see an act of spontaneous patriotic reaction by the women. Underlining this link is an urgent drum-beat which affirms a connection between the women’s activity and the revolutionary cause and replaces the original dialogue with the dramatic effect of ‘a heartbeat, like a liturgy of war’ (Pontecorvo 267–68).

The spectator’s access to the subjective experience of the women, as they reconstruct their images, is limited. Most of our visual interaction is with their mirror images, a crossing of spectator/subject gases which would normally encourage empathy. Yet here the mirror is merely, as Shohat and Stam note, a revolutionary tool of transformation. I disagree with their contradictory claim, however, that ‘we become close to [these women], paradoxically, as they perform as Europeans’ (254). Rather, the viewer is placed in a paradoxical situation; we witness the women in a nominally intimate space but can only see the disguise of their bare faces. The overall impassivity of the faces and the lack of verbal exchange imply that the women are acting under orders to which they collectively subscribe. The upraised eyes of the woman at the end of the scene position a Western spectator, who confronts this woman’s unquestioning loyalty to the revolutionary cause (Figure 2). The spectator here engages with a social rather than a private consciousness. The masquerade of the Algerian as European is thus paralleled by a masking of the subjective by the communal revolutionary identity.
As in Fanon's essay, however, the ability of Algerian women to become interpretatively opaque stalls the cognitive machinery of colonialism. In an early scene, a veiled gun-bearer crosses the French barricades and one soldier is reprimanded by another for attempting to raise the woman's face-veil. ‘You should never touch their women’ is the received colonial wisdom. The subsequent passing of the blonde woman (modelled on the legendary guerilla Sohra Drif) at the checkpoints of the Casbah epitomises this manipulation of scopic and sexual regimes by the colonised. The moment of colonial mimicry is re-emphasised on camera at paratrooper headquarters where, again, the young soldiers are seduced/duped. The didactic commentary of Colonel Mathieu (a composite character based on, among others, General Massu) underpins the crossing of veiled and unveiled women in the coloniser’s line of vision, or the semantic moment of excess and incomprehension (Figure 3):

The FLN use proven revolutionary methods and their own original tactics. They are anonymous, unrecognisable among hundreds. They are everywhere ... Cameras [which] were hidden at the Casbah exits ... show the futility of certain methods....
The terrorists are somewhere in this crowd of Algerian men and women. Which ones are they? How can they be recognised? (translated film subtitles).

As the camera focuses upon the crossing of the unveiled blonde with a group of veiled women, ‘Algerian woman’ becomes the privileged exemplar of cultural and political impenetrability. The European masquerade causes a structurally similar anxiety to that provoked by veiled women: both are impenetrable and conceal something.

This subversion of the epistemological and scopic underpinnings of colonialism ensures the system’s downfall. Yet there are some ambiguities inherent in Pontecorvo’s presentation. Does the fidaia really ‘pass’ as French, or does the sexual desire of the male spectators lead them to deliberately misperceive in order to deracialise her? The circulation of Algerian women is always marked, in the film, by sexual politics. When veiled they ‘belong’ to Algerian men, but when unveiled they are available across the culture barrier. The film reflects a transcultural masculine blindness here, in which women must play ‘feminine’ to be (mis)recognised and thus empowered.

As Mary Anne Doane suggests, excessive femininity potentially foregrounds the fact that gender is a masquerade. ‘Hollow in itself, without substance, femininity can only be sustained by its accoutrements, decorative veils, and inessential gestures’ (34). When a woman actively transforms femininity into play, it is revealed as a mask which can be either worn or removed. I have suggested that, in both texts under discussion, Algerian women mobilise multiple forms of self-presentation. The proliferation of performative possibilities suggests an increase in the number of forms of female embodiment that are potentially viable in the public sphere. In the film, however, the idea lacks contextualisation and the blonde woman signifies only the blinding of the masculine gaze by its
own erotic content. She is not identified definitively as a temporarily aberrative female nor as a culturally specific postcolonial subject. I noted that Fanon’s essay slips momentarily to reveal a voyeuristic gaze focused upon the unveiled Algerian woman. *The Battle of Algiers* similarly resorts to a sexually inflected viewing position. This is ironic, given the fact that the film parodies the specular vulnerability of the French male authorities to Algerian women. When the women transform themselves into Europeans, the use of bird’s eye view and close-ups clearly indicates the ability of film to orchestrate, in Doane’s words, ‘a gaze, a limit, and its pleasurable transgression’ (20). As such, the film forces the spectator to breach the privacy of the changing room and to be complicit in a voyeuristic relation to these women.

However, the scene in which French soldiers watch footage of the scene at the barricades has more complex connotations. Here we have the introduction of a supplementary screen, which replays the moment of masquerade and visual duping. Upon seeing the scene again, the extra-diegetic spectator must self-consciously assess his/her specular relationship to the woman at the centre of the image. In recognising the sexually motivated nature of the gaze, we understand the strategic success of the masquerade, and, by making the spectator complicit with the ploys of the Algerian revolutionaries, the scene reinforces emotional identification with the Algerians.

Pontecorvo, in promoting a popular aesthetic over individual experiences and relationships, attempts — with partial success — to neutralise scopic relations of desire. This goes some way toward explaining why, despite the voyeurism encouraged in the unveiling scene, the women’s facial impassivity and economy
of movement have the effect of desexualising them. Certainly, the film does not present unveiled women as being in a more ‘authentic’ state, as does ‘Algeria Unveiled’. Rather, the captivation of the women by their mirrored images, as well as the stilted walks and the arch flirtation of the women at the barricades, all highlight the unveiled body as being in another state of masquerade. As Shohat argues, here we have ‘the Third World which masquerades as the West, not as an act of self-effacing mimicry but as a way of sabotaging the colonial regime of assimilation’ (74).

However, we have little access to women’s experience of their own bodily transformations or of their experiences as gendered subjects negotiating a complex bicultural field (cf. ‘AU’ 36–37). Where the film deploys identificatory mechanisms on behalf of the women, for example eyeline matches in the bomb-planting scenes, these insist primarily upon the humanity of the ‘terrorists’ (Shohat and Stam 251–53) and so, once again, privilege identification with the Algerians as a national group. The emancipatory aspect of dissimulation is mediated by this lack of access to female testimony, suggesting that the play of surfaces conceals a lack of depth. What is missing in the film is content which would exceed the binary of ‘the Algerian woman’–‘masquerading European’. If present, such a third term would correspond to Bhabha’s depiction of ‘a resistant trace, a stain of the subject, a sign of resistance’ which exceeds the doubling between an individual and his/her cultural persona (1994 49).

In sum, the film fails to problematise women’s revolutionary roles or to explore, in a particularly complex manner, ways in which gender is both sedimented by and transects the colonial context. The emphasis on women’s participation achieves little other than to underline the unanimity and integrity of insurgent Algeria. The closing scene, of a woman carrying an Algerian flag, renders the bond between ‘woman’ and ‘nation’ indissoluble and symbolically buries the chance of a specifically female emancipation within national liberation. Boudjedra’s The Repudiation (1969) and Moufida Tlatli’s film The Silences of the Palace (1994), by contrast, symbolise the postcolonial nation as an aborted foetus, thus suggesting that the independent Maghreb has been founded upon the silencing, abjection and death of Pontecorvo’s ‘mother of the nation’ and her daughters.

All communities establish themselves discursively via projection and exclusion — in other words, through a process of psycho-political boundary construction. The postcolonial nation is particularised by the need to dismantle already existing narratives of itself and its people. The two texts which I have addressed here constitute a counter-telling which involves both historical redress and the construction of a national identity. Partly under state pressure, Algerian cinema continued to be concerned with the construction of a unified ‘Nation-Image’ throughout the 1970s and ’80s (Hadj-Moussa), in marked contrast to much of its literature. Signs of cultural unification are useful in order both to mobilise a
The Veil of Nationalism

populace to urgent political action and to elicit external sympathy through a claim of moral integrity. However, as Britain’s entry into the war on Iraq demonstrates, national coherence rests on the repudiation and/or concealment of difference and opposition within the polis.

Nevertheless, the fetishistic myth of imagined community marks, even as it disavows, the places where absence, multiplicity and ambiguity may be retrieved. History is always a contested site, where official narratives clash with individual memories. While postcolonial Algeria illustrates a powerful and often deadly drive towards discursive monolithism, this context continues to generate resistance, most stridently articulated by intellectual voices in exile but also from within demotic interstices. In a more pessimistic light, the ideally communalised Algerian subject is revealed to be riven by linguistic, ethnic, religious and political violence. If Fanon ‘unveiled’ Algeria as a yet-to-be-inscribed state, then Assia Djebar has recently mourned it in terms of le blanc (whiteness or blankness): a funeral shroud, a page from which the life has been relentlessly bled (Djebar 1995). Despite the promise of Fanon’s and Pontecorvo’s decolonising visions, Algeria is again a nation which only tolerates one race, one religion, one language and one meaning of woman.

NOTES

1 For an almost comprehensive critical survey of material pertaining to the intersection of women’s movements with anti-colonial nationalisms, see Young 2001 ch. 25.

2 Nira Yuval-Davis is particularly attentive to the global nuances of this problem. See Yuval-Davis and Luts, and Phoenix and Yuval-Davis.

3 The 1980 English translation here is referenced parenthetically as ‘AU’ and the French text as ‘ASD’.

4 My reading thus extends Yegenoglu’s interpretation of the effects of un/veiling within the colonial sphere.

5 Amrane’s work is usually the authority cited for accusations of factual error although she presents a balanced view of Fanon’s work.

6 With regard to this latter criticism, it is remarkable how Western commentators remain blind to the fact that sexism is ubiquitous. The Independent of March 30th 2002 juxtaposes, without irony, the suicide bombing in Jerusalem by 16-year-old Palestinian schoolgirl Ayat Akhras, representing the al-Aqsa militia, and the announcement by Secretary of State for Defence Geoff Hoon that British women are banned from frontline military duties on the grounds of physical inferiority (Sengupta 1; Silver 4).

7 The film’s screening in St. Séverin, Paris, as late as 1981, prompted a firebombing of the theatre, thought to be initiated by ex-OAS members. The OAS (Organisation Secrète Armée) was a rightist military faction which wanted to retain total control of Algeria. Dine suggests, however, that France has undertaken a much deeper evaluation of its colonial past in the last two decades (228).

8 For example, Fanon represents the MNA as merely a collaborationist colonial tool (Fanon 1964 70). Macey warns that reissued El Moudjahid articles may have been ideologically ‘retouched’ and that the articles collected in Toward the African Revolution would have been subject to collective editing. Macey provides a more
balanced picture of the relationship between the FLN and the MNA (Macey 327, 334, 255–58).

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See Macey 397–400 on Fanon's decision to publish in Paris and the problems which this incurred.

Amrane comments, however, that in a work published twenty years later, Yacef played down this solidarity (113).

Gates Jr. discusses Fanon's characterisation as a 'European interloper' in post-independence Algerian commentary (468–69).

Macey, by contrast, emphasises the temporal shift from the ongoing sense of 'Algérie se dévoile' to the past achievement of 'Algeria Unveiled'. Macey also points out usefully that the title, A Dying Colonialism, occludes Fanon's titular paralleling of the Algerian with the French Revolution, his point being that 1954 was the dawn of a new historical era (Macey 402–403, 398).

Most critics disregard the times when Fanon speaks ironically from the perspective of the coloniser. Sekyi-Otu is the primary exponent of this polyphonic version of Fanon.

Fanon thus foregrounds that which Bhabha sees as crucial to postcolonial study: 'the negotiation of contradictory and antagonistic instances that open up hybrid sites and objectives of struggle' (Bhabha 1994 25, emphasis in original). The term haik should refer only to the large, white square of cloth which covers the hair and envelopes the body. The French distinction between 'le voile' (head and body cover) and 'la voilette' (face veil) better captures the binary notion of the form of dress than does the English 'veil', which also elides local and historical variation.

I am not suggesting that subjectivity is entirely a product of embodiment, but that bodily experience — overlaid with socio-economic factors such as class, wealth, education, access to technology and information and mobility — is one constitutive factor of subjectivity. In relation to this, I am disturbed by Yeôenoôlu’s argument that the veil can be understood as a kind of ‘second skin’ (119). Writers such as Mernissi and Djebar insist upon the fact that while veiling is often a choice, it can also be imposed and violently so.

This contradiction is particularly evident in the passage which states that women were ‘sent forth’ by the FLN, but ‘adopted an absolutely unbelievable offensive tactic’ (unveiling) (‘AU’ 29).

Veiling is not a legal obligation in Algeria but has been violently enforced by Islamist vigilantes, particularly since 1990.

A more extensive critique of cultural authenticity is found in ch. 4 of Les damnés de la terre, where Fanon argues against the discourses of Africanism, Arabism and pan-Islam, and for a specifically nationalist agenda.

See Amrane and Amrane-Minne for interviews with and testimonies of ex-moudjahidat and fidayate.

I am adapting Fanon’s claim (which reversed a Sartrean statement) that the colonial subject is always ‘overdetermined from without’ (Fanon 1986 116).

All figures pertaining to women’s participation are approximate, as many women did not register as militants.

The film commences in 1957, and then flashes back to the FLN political platform.
announced in 1954. Most of the action takes place in 1956. Towards the end, it returns to the events introduced at the start of the film (the capture of the last FLN leader, Ali La-Pointe), and concludes with the popular uprising of 1960, which finally led to the defeat of the colonial regime.

24 It is ironic, given the often misplaced stereotype of Muslim women as ‘cloistered’, that the FLN leaders dress as women because this enables them to move around the Casbah.

25 This incident, which left Algerians no recourse to legal structures of justice, was indeed the impetus for an upgrading of FLN terrorist activity in July 1956.

26 This character’s name is uncertain, at least in Piernico Solinas’ published filmscript, in which he refers to both the blonde and the brunette as Hassiba (cf. Solinas 1973c 67 and 153). To add to the confusion, he does not list a character named Hassiba in the credits.

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**FILMOGRAPHY**

Interview with Tomson Highway

The following is an edited extract from an interview with Tomson Highway which took place at the University of Helsinki, Finland on March 2, 2002. Highway had the previous day given a talk humorously entitled, 'The History of the World in 60 Minutes Flat', in which he focused primarily on mythology. Contrasting Greek, Christian and Cree mythological worldviews, he argued that to destroy mythology is to destroy ourselves. He also talked more generally about his work and explained how musical structures and counterpoint underpinned all his writing. Highway's talk, illustrated by excerpts on the grand piano from his plays/musicals, was the highlight of a two-day Canada Seminar entitled, 'First Nations: Symbolic Representations'. The interviewers are Mark Shackleton, who organised the seminar on behalf of the Nordic Association for Canadian Studies, and Hartmut Lutz, who gave the keynote speech at the seminar.

MS  I found fascinating what you said during the session that you gave yesterday — that there are three groups of Native peoples who have different degrees of awareness of Native mythology.

TH  ... depending on what part of Canada you are talking about.... In the most isolated areas of Canada, furthest north and west, where communities have managed to live intact with minimal disturbance from outside influences, other than television (which has done a tremendous amount of damage in the past twenty-five years), languages are being rebuilt or are intact, and as a result of languages remaining relatively intact mythology has remained more or less intact. So that's one group of people who at least have nominal contact with their mythology through such means.

Then there's the group of people that migrated at a certain point in their histories, principally in the 1950s and '60s. There was a social revolution of sorts that occurred in Canada where for a number of reasons — one of which was the acquisition of the vote for Native people in Canada — Native people were finally able to move away from reserves, and to live
as recognised human beings, so to speak, in so far as the status of being a human being is equated with the right to vote. These people moved to cities and other major urban centres across the country and in the process of two or three generations of living in large urban centres, (anything from Toronto to Kingston to Sicamous) lost their languages and with that lost their mythologies.

Then of course there was the third group of people. One of the reasons why groups of Native people migrated from reserves was for reasons of higher education and greater employment opportunity. In so far as this second and third generation of people went on to acquire higher education at universities and at university levels, these people, through sheer intellectual effort, managed to study mythology and literature and revived the mythology and literature in their own respective community. People started writing stories about their own communities in their own languages, and assisted in the revival of languages and, in so far as the revival of languages is assisted through such means, the revival of mythologies.

MS  Why are Trickster figures so important to you in your writing?

TH  I guess we all operate as human beings. What animates us as living entities is our contact — in partnership with material reality — like our fleshly existence, our molecular reality, our physical substance, our bodies. What permits that body to move is a creation magic that can only be attributed to some miraculous power that is beyond human comprehension, and that has been most frequently defined as being a divine form — ‘God’, for lack of a better word. And nobody has been truly successful in finding out what that animating force is. Neither theologians nor scientists — whether we are talking physicists, or molecular cellular biologists, or theologians — have been able to really get down to the root of the question as to what it is that makes us living human, living animate creatures. And neither has religion. So the closest that people have been able to come it seems to me is to an understanding that this motivating force is beyond human language, and that in order for the human mind, the human intelligence, the human consciousness to be able to get a grip on what that truth is, a new language has had to be invented to express those realities, and that language is mythology.

So mythological universes, mythological worlds have been created by the visionaries of our respective cultures to explain the various forces that govern our lives at its various levels — we’re talking physical, intellectual, psychological, spiritual, emotional. And at the centre of those mythological worlds or universes, exist certain characters, certain hero and anti-hero figures, and generally speaking most world mythologies — not always but to a very large extent — will have one central figure who plays the greatest
role in relaying messages between that divine force and humankind in the flesh, and that in the aboriginal perspective is the Trickster.

So who we are as a people and who we are as a culture I think can best be defined by pinning down to as great an extent as possible the nature and the substance and the content and the significance of this creature called the Trickster. And that’s why, I think, he fascinates me.

HL Many years ago you and, I think, Lenore Keeshig-Tobias and Dan Moses, founded the Committee to Re-establish the Trickster, and I don’t think there have been issues of their magazine for a decade or so. What has happened with the project and what was the motivating force behind it?

TH Well, the title said it all. Aboriginal mythology at that point in time, just like aboriginal languages, as with so many languages the world over, were in danger of extinction. And so the first generation of Native writers started writing about Native mythology, decided it was a necessity to make a concerted effort to revive this mythology, to revive this character, the Trickster. And that’s why it was called the ‘Committee to Reestablish the Trickster’. I don’t know what happened to it.

MS Do you find any reaction though, against focusing on the Trickster by fellow playwrights?

TH Yes. I think it is a necessary reaction. I think all movements have to have a negative reaction in order for them to continue moving forward. Yes, there has been some. Not much. There’s been disagreements as to the interpretation of the Trickster figure, but then there will always be, you know. There’s god knows how many in interpretations of the Christian God.

MS What kind of reactions are there against an overfocusing on the Trickster figure?

TH Basically it’s been said that Nanabush doesn’t drink, for instance. Some people have said that in the Native community. When in actual fact, from the other perspective he does need to drink in so far as we as Native people, you know, I as a Native person, drink alcohol. The Trickster, my Trickster, certainly drinks alcohol; my Trickster loves wine. But there are other people who are abstainers. So, of course, their Trickster wouldn’t drink. Anyway, things like that have been said.

There have been negative reactions to the violence associated with my Trickster, particularly in Dry Lips — you know, the rape scene in Dry Lips. But I think that that was my intention, to provoke argument, and to provoke discussion. In so far as that was my objective, I think I have been totally successful.
HL  We were talking the other evening, and I mentioned how when Dry Lips came out, there were some Native people who felt that the book was misogynist, and then reappraised The Rez Sisters and said, 'Yes, that's misogynist too'. Personally, I did not agree at all because I remember seeing The Rez Sisters in performance and I came out saying, 'Wow, those women are really strong!'. How do you react to criticisms like that? Does it affect you?

TH  No, I don’t think so. I think that criticism like that is good. I think that the more controversy a work kicks up the more visible it becomes. I think that if people don’t talk about it, don’t argue about it, then it’s that much more likely to be forgotten. So I’ve been very lucky in that sense, and it’s been a very small amount of political criticism, and nothing compared to the kind of criticism that other writers in other countries have faced, which is in some cases exile, banishment, imprisonment, and execution. Nothing like that.

HL  Talking about exile, you live part of the year in Europe, and you travel all over the world, speak many languages. You’re an international figure, and you live outside of Canada for lengthy periods. Would you see yourself as partly an expatriate writer?

TH  Well I live in France for six months of the year for a number of reasons. One of which is that I find the importance of the French language to the [Canadian] community of writers — no matter what background they are — is of the essence. Particularly for a Native Canadian writer, to be fluent in all three official languages — to speak the Native tongue, English and French — is of exceptional importance for a number of reasons, not least of which is the simple act of just holding the country together, because god knows we’ve come very close to the precipice of separation. The spectre of separation of course still faces us, square in the face, and it’s very, very much a potential possibility. Perhaps a little less so than five years ago, but certainly it’s still there, the divide. The cultural divide, the linguistic divide is there, and I think that it’s unnecessary. I think that it’s possible to bridge it, and if anybody can bridge it, it’s the Native people, and specifically the Native artist, and most specifically the Native writers, the artists who deal with language. And even more important than that ... if Québec were ever to leave Canada, violence and bloodshed would be one of the inevitable results. Specifically vis-à-vis the Native communities that happen to be located right on the border between Québec and such provinces as Ontario and New Brunswick. There are Native communities who straddle that border, and Native communities — Native reserves — that exist within the province of Québec, including Kahnawakhe. If separation were to ever
occur the real possibility exists that violence would occur and bloodshed would occur — people would be killed.

HL *Do you mean like the reaction over Oka?*

TH Well, the people would refuse to leave Canada, and a lot of Native communities would refuse to leave Canada — I can't talk about Oka — I think it's above and beyond that. Once bloodshed happens it just never stops ... reprisals generation after generation, just dreadful. And anything that can be done to avoid this situation is of the utmost importance for anybody who can possibly do it. And I think that for Native peoples themselves to become fluent enough in foreign languages is of the utmost importance. One of the reasons why I live in France part of the year is to perfect my French to the extent that I can. The other reason of course is that it's almost impossible for me to live in Toronto anymore because I get so many requests. Over the period of my residency in Toronto two years ago I used to get about 350 requests a year for speaking engagements, interview, playing the piano, concerts, benefits, night clubs, write book forewords, book jacket blurbs, and on, and on, and on — and from all over the world. It became impossible to try to accommodate even one-twentieth of those requests. People would come to my door in Toronto and ring my bell and say 'If you speak at my daughter's high school I'll give you $600'. I'd get accosted on street cars, in the subway, in public washrooms, in bars, at airports, on the airplanes flying across the country, at baggage collection points, and so on, and so on, and so forth. It just became impossible for me to work. So I just had to find a place away from that zoo for at least six months of the year in order to write in a place where nobody knew me. And that's France.

HL *Do the people in the village where you live in Franc know now who you are?*

TH No.... Or at least not as a general population.

HL *Does living outside of Canada change your perspective on North America, on Canada in particular?*

TH Oh yes, very much so. There is something like a village mentality that threatens to asphyxiate the imagination for certain people when living just in Canada. There are certain sectors of the community who believe that only Native actors have the right to play Native roles. There are other sectors of the community who don't, who believe that everybody should have a right to play their parts. There are certain sectors of the community who believe that only Native writers have the right to write from a Native perspective and other people who subscribe to the opposite view. And I happen to be of the school of thought that says that theatre and writing has
nothing to do with race. I believe in the freedom of the imagination, freedom of expression, to the greatest degree possible.

I find the act of writing to be so difficult, and the act of getting published and/or produced so difficult — they’re next to impossible — that I wouldn’t wish it on anybody else on the face of the earth. I need every ounce of my energy just to see my writing through, and to see my work through to being produced and/or published. I don’t have any time or energy left to go around telling people what they can or cannot write about, and how they can or cannot write about it. That’s none of my business. As far as Native actors playing Native roles is concerned, on the logistical level, in terms of getting work produced, the dictum that only Native actors have the right to play Native roles may be reasonable to a Native actor’s ears but, strictly speaking, in a very practical sense it’s death to a Native playwright’s career. Artistic directors and producers of consequence will not touch it, will not produce you. So your work languishes, you do not get produced and eventually your career just dries up, so you have to go to other forms of writing just to survive financially. So, you know, I just believe in working with people who are generous, people who are kind, people who are large of spirit, who are wonderful and laughter-loving, and those are my favourite kind of people, and that kind of thing has nothing to do with race.

HL You have to get out of it?

TH You just have to get out of it. Ghettoised thinking, that’s what that is. And ghettoised thinking can of course kill internally. Kill communities, kill the imagination, kill the will to write, and all those things. So getting out of that was, I think, at a certain point in time an absolute necessity for certain people, as it has been in the past for many other artists who’ve left their countries and worked elsewhere, sometimes permanently.

MS Joyce, for example.

TH Oh, yeah. To get beyond that village perspective, to achieve a universal, international, cosmopolitan perspective, because there comes a point when you just want to write about the human condition and not just about your own village.

MS Writers who happen to be women are tired of being characterised as ‘women writers’, and some writers, like Caryl Phillips, are not willing to be labelled ‘Black writers’ as opposed to just ‘writer’. Do you object to being called a ‘Native writer’ or ‘First Nations writer’, as opposed to a writer per se?

TH I don’t really care what I’m called. No, that doesn’t really matter to me, that’s the least of my concerns. There was a famous movie star who said that — I mean this is tongue in cheek, and I don’t really subscribe to her
opinion: 'I don’t really care what they say about me, as long as they talk about me'. Well, I don’t really care what they say I’m called, ultimately. An interviewer once asked me ‘How do you want to be remembered?’, and it’s like: ‘What do I fucking care?’ I’m not going to be here, it’s not my problem, I don’t really want to be remembered, to tell you the truth.

HL  You want to live....

TH  It would just be nice if I were forgotten as quickly as possible after my death, you know. I think there are certain people who still don’t understand that. There are people out there who actually write not because they want to become rich and famous and make lots of money or any of that stuff. It’s the will to have fun, first of all, to be a happy and fulfilled person, and what makes me a happy and fulfilled person is when I contribute to the well-being of the community around me, and the betterment of the community is the health of communities, is the healing of communities, and the people as individuals within the community, whether your community is your family, your extended family, your neighbourhood, your city, your province, your country, your planet. And that’s what I care about. I don’t care what I’m called.

HL  I think what you said, or what you developed, is in the best sense also a cosmopolitan view of human existence, and yet you come from a very specific region, a specific culture. You use the mythology from that culture and very often I thought, and I think people have said that too — I must have read it somewhere — that the tribal is the universal or the cosmopolitan. Do you find that in your roots?

TH  I think you have to start from somewhere. You have to start from the root of the tree in order for the tree to grow, and grow into the most fabulous branches in the universe possible. And I’ve had that unique experience in Japan, where I’ve managed to get a lot of work through some extremely generous and wonderful Japanese friends. Last year we did Dry Lips Oughta Move to Kapuskasing in the Japanese language with an entirely Japanese cast and design team, directorial team and so on and so forth — one of the most fabulous experiences of my life! They were kind enough and generous enough to fly me there to act as a consultant to the director and the design team on the script, on the elements of design, on the elements of music. The person I worked with most closely was the director and he kept wanting to make it his perspective. And his approach to me was too small. Because that wasn’t my perspective at all. My perspective was: a story takes place in a very specific community from a very specific cultural point of view; it ultimately is about the universe or the human condition. We’re all in the same boat vis-à-vis such enormous questions, universal questions, as the gender of God. I think, you know, we’ve all been fucked over by the
patriarchal system, and that there comes a time when it’s just got to stop or else no-one will survive. It’s a universal question. Once they started thinking in those terms, they started to turn it into a Japanese story, and by the end of it, it was just amazing. It was incredible. It was this tiny 250-seat theatre with a very small stage — a tiny stage that was twice the size of this room, but by the end of the play it was like the stage was the size of the universe, having gods battling up there in the sky — gigantic figures from Japanese mythology, these gods and goddesses fighting it out to the last. It was just a magnificent experience ... so it worked for the Japanese actors and the Japanese design team, and it worked for Japanese audiences because of that.

MS Where are you going from here? You have said at some time that you are producing a cycle of seven plays about the Rez. Is that project still going on?

TH Oh yes. It will probably take me a lifetime. It may very well be that a number of them will never be produced during my lifetime, but they are being written as we speak in one form or another. So, yes, the project is still very much on the go, and as to whether or not I’m around for the actual finishing of the project is not a major concern of mine. I think I have been extremely fortunate to have been given the opportunity to express the ideas that I have been able to express so far — for a Native Canadian, you know, for an Indian boy from one of the tiniest, most remote, most isolated, most inaccessible and most disadvantaged Indian reserves in the country. I don’t come from Toronto or Vancouver or Montreal or Winnipeg or anywhere near the centre in Canada. I come from one of the most isolated places on earth. It’s been fun, it’s been great, but there are days when I think that ... it’s not so much that it’s enough for me, so much as it is time for somebody else to take over. Sometimes it feels that it’s a relay race, you know. And every community has a responsibility of carrying the baton for a certain time and a certain distance, and I think I have carried the baton for a certain amount of time and a certain distance and I think it’s other people’s time to take over.

MS You’ve written, of course, both plays and a novel. I understand that you’re working on another novel.

TH I think I’m happiest when I’ve got several projects going on, simultaneously. I’ve never been really one to work exclusively on one thing at one time. It bores me. I’m happiest when I’m in the kitchen cooking for forty people. Like four pots going, and the oven going, the whole batch of whatever! That sense of chaotic creative activity! So I write novels, I write plays and I write music, because I can and because I had to.
One thing that links your plays and your fiction, and you mentioned this in the conference, is of course musical structure. Would you like to talk a bit about the musical structures in drama and in fiction. Are there parallels or is it very different?

Well, I was trained as a musician, as a classical musician. I remember my teenage years in Winnipeg, for instance, when I was at the age of 15, 16, 17, 18 going to high school. Well, in those days, music was not an elective, so whatever musical education you had, you had to get it outside, after school or before school and on weekends. And I remember — and God knows Winnipeg can be cold — while everybody would get to school at 9 o'clock and leave at 4 and go on to their respective whatever, I would get up at 6 and by 7 o'clock I'd be at my harmony teacher's. Monday morning would be counterpoint, and Thursday morning would be history and then Saturday afternoons would be piano, performing probably. I never really knew what I was doing at the time; I knew I just had to do that. I just had to learn how to write counterpoint. Part of it of course was that you had to work towards the diploma, this very arduous course. Then I went down to the university and I got very intensive training on all the forms of music. I was in a fabulous trio, in tours playing Mendelssohn and Mozart and Beethoven and Shostakovich. I remember, and all kinds of things. It was just fantastic.

Then, of course, we saw a lot of concerts and a lot of symphonies. We got to know the 7th symphony of Beethoven, 3rd Mahler, and so on and so forth. We studied the structure of these pieces, we learned how to write fugues, we learned how to write sonatas. We studied orchestration, we learned how to write for a symphony orchestra, all this stuff. And we studied German lieder and French chanson, meaning the songs of Gabriel Fauré and Claude Debussy and Maurice Ravel and Henri du Parc, and the German lieder composers. Brahms, Schubert, Schumann, Hugo Wolf. And you studied the structure of these songs. How they were written, the techniques of melodic construction. Italian bel canto, opera, the architecture of the ultimate architecture of melody, to my mind, melody making. When your whole youth has been infused with this information — by the time I was twenty-three I had this extraordinary education which stays with you — that's like the foundation of a house that you've built, and you never leave, it becomes a part of your life, a part of your wisdom as you approach old age.

And so to this day when people ask me who are your teachers, my teachers are Bach and Beethoven and Brahms and Mozart and Chopin and Rachmaninov and Prokofiev. So I use that knowledge — seeing as I couldn't become a professional musician, I was frustrated in that career choice, for a number of reasons, which don't really need an explanation at
Tomson Highway at the 'First Nations: Symbolic Representations' seminar, University of Helsinki, Finland, March 2002.
Photo: Courtesy of authors.
this point in time. The point being that I’d just become a musician in a different sense, in a different context. I’d become a musician using words as my music. So now I write plays and novels. And I think of plays now as sonatas for a solo instrument, like a piano or a cello, and I think of novels as symphonies, in terms of symphonic structure, and all the elements of phrasing, breathing, modulation, key. The key of D flat major expresses a certain psychological perspective, the key of C minor something else entirely, and so on and so forth. Counterpoint, harmony: all those things infuse my work because I just had this fantastic education as a mere kid.

MS  Are the characters in your plays like instruments in the orchestra?

TH  Oh, yeah, absolutely. I think of them as saxophone characters or flute characters....

MS  What about the novels? Would Champion represent a kind of instrument or would he be different? Or Father Lafleur?....?

TH  I think in those terms. I don’t think literally in those terms. I don’t set about making notes. Just the rhythm of my writing has been influenced by that kind of thinking, but I don’t actually put it down. It just works that way for me in an internal sense. It’s like when you’re making music, sitting at that piano. For high-level concert artists, singers, cellists, whatever, I think there comes a point in performance, in the process of performance, where it ceases to become an intellectual process ... it crosses a certain border on the sensual and subconscious level.

MS  What do you feel is the role of the artist in the community; and how much respect do you think the artist is given for what he or she does?

TH  I remember hearing a doctor say to an artist across the dinner table in front of about ten other people. ‘Hey, the grants must be good this year, eh?’ And the artist had no response. But I thought about that, because I just found it to be a very biting comment, an ignorant comment, and an insulting comment, ultimately. The answer the artist should have said across the table if he’d been as rude, and as unwise, he should have said ‘Not as good as yours’, because doctors live on grants from the Ministry of Health. Judges in the legal profession live on grants from the Ministry of Justice, and in our case from the Ministry of the Solicitor General as well. Teachers live on grants from the Ministry of Education, as do principals and other educational administrators, including university professors to a very large degree. The difference being that artists do their work way before the community or the individual gets sick. Doctors and lawyers do theirs when it’s way, way, way too late; and comparatively speaking the amount of grant money that the artist gets is nothing, peanuts, to the amount of grant money which the doctor or lawyer gets.
HL  So you see this as an investment in the future.

TH  Oh, absolutely. You know, the average prison inmate — and I don’t know what the prison populations in your respective countries are, but certainly I know what they are in my own country — a certain kind of individual packs the prison system of our country, as it does of every country the world over. But in my country I would venture to say that the average prison inmate gets a $30,000 Canada Council grant every year of his life. Sometimes for life for having committed unspeakable acts to other human beings and to their respective communities. The average artist is lucky if they see one $15,000 Canada Council grant in a lifetime, and look what they do vis-à-vis the individual and the health of the community. And that’s $30,000 that should be much more constructively put to use in schools, educational institutions, such as colleges and universities, hospitals and artistic and cultural institutions.
Nadia Myre: A History of Unequal Halves

When a Frenchman trades with them [the Indians], he takes into his services one of their Daughters, the one, presumably, who is most to his taste; he asks the Father for her; & under certain conditions, it is arranged; he promises to give the Father some blankets, a few shirts, a Musket, Powder & Shot, Tobacco & Tool; they come to an agreement at last, & the exchange is made. The Girl, who is familiar with the Country, undertakes, on her part, to serve the Frenchman in every way, to dress his pelts, to sell his Merchandise for a specified length of time; the bargain is faithfully carried out on both sides.

Montreal in September. It’s raining. An ancient elevator clanks its way to somewhere near the top of the building. I step out into a dark hallway and wait for Nadia. This is her studio. She takes me into a space shared with others and into the small space she calls her own. A canoe takes up much of that space. Suspended from the ceiling it is for me yet another strange encounter in a strange world. Half aluminium half birch-bark, Nadia comments on the strange affect the different materials produce — the distortion of proportion. [fig. 1] The wooden half is dominant. Crafted from traditional material (birch bark, cedar, ash, spruce root and gum), the knowledge and skill of centuries forms the stern, in effect ensuring the canoe travels on course in recognition of ‘where we have come from’. The gleaming aluminium of modernity forms the bow, from which position the paddler steers the canoe out of immediate danger. Tradition and modernity work together to direct and ensure safe passage. The piece is titled ‘History in Two Parts’. Seamed at the centre, the two halves create a whole whose viability is utterly dependent on the proof of that join. [fig. 2] The canoe is symbolic of Nadia Myre’s hybrid status and the history of relationship between aboriginal and settler nations in Canada: it is an artistic representation of the attempt to hold dissimilar halves in viable union. Each half is distinct and each half is beautiful. One half is modern and one half traditional; but the illusion of disproportion should not be forgotten for it too is symbolic. It represents two positions — one forced and one chosen — the ‘Indian’ half having been given disproportionate weight in a history of racial discrimination and attendant
suffering, and the other is a personal choice to give disproportionate weight to First Nations allegiance and the revaluation of tradition as an important determinant of future direction.

Born in Montreal, Quebec in 1974, Nadia Myre’s maternal family is from Algonkin (Kitigan Zibi Anishnabeg) territory. She studied at Camosun College (Victoria, BC), the Emily Carr Institute of Art and Design (Vancouver) and recently completed her Master of Fine Arts in sculpture at Concordia University, Montreal. Her work has been exhibited at the Woodland Cultural Centre (Brantford, Ontario), the Museum London (London, Ontario), the Lieutenant Governor's suite, Queen’s Park (Toronto, Ontario), Grunt Gallery (Vancouver, BC) and Oboro gallery in Montreal. She is the recipient of grants from the National Aboriginal Achievement Foundation, the Canada Council for the Arts, the Conseil des arts et des lettres du Québec, the Dumaurier Foundation, and is one of this years recipients of the prestigious Eiteljorg fellowship. Pages of ‘Indian Act’ (2000–2002) are on display in the permanent collection of the Canadian Museum of Civilization in Hull, Quebec.

‘Indian Act’ is comprised of 56 beaded, framed pages of the [Canadian] Indian Act [fig. 3] — the act that since the nineteenth century has legally defined ‘Indian’ status and all that such status entails, inclusive of land rights, political rights, educational rights, religious and cultural rights — may of which the Act denied. When, for example, First Nations’ religious and cultural practices like the Potlatch and Sundance were deemed unacceptable and uncivilised by the colonising power, the Indian Act was the instrument by which they were banned. The Act was also used to forcibly remove First Nations children from their families in order to educate them — an inhumanity that hastened the fragmentation and disintegration of indigenous communities, similar to the terrible impact of white assimilation policy on what has become known as ‘the stolen generation’ of indigenous people in Australia. A significant and provocative part of Myre’s larger work entitled, Cont(r)act, ‘Indian Act’ was a communal project that involved the beading over of the Act’s print text. White beads are sewn over White words, Red beads over White spaces. The White man’s words are replaced by the Red woman’s beads — partially obscuring, and indeed making non-sense of the legal document. [fig. 4] This act of beading is both creative and destructive; it takes possession of the Act whilst simultaneously mocking its status as a document of authority. Like graffiti, it is a public act of defiance and contempt that refuses the right of the Canadian ‘nation’ to command authority over a group of unwilling ‘citizens’, and as such it is also an a/Act of political solidarity. The red and white beads deliberately evoke the colours of racial definition and discrimination. Replacing the words that established and enforced inequality and injustice, the beads effectively act to defy legal authority and social judgement, for the Act, now ‘Red’ can no longer be ‘read’. [fig. 5]

‘Cont(r)act’ refers to the enforced relations of the euphemistically termed first ‘contact’ between First Nations and invaders, and is also a reference to the
various contracts negotiated in good faith that were often documented in the form of wampum belts. The Red man’s ‘bead on leather’ was equivalent to the legal documentation of the White man’s ‘word on paper’. The term *wampum* or *wampumpeag* comes from one of the Algonkin languages of New England (North America) and refers to beads carved from marine shells native to the coastal waters. The whelk and quahog shells were harvested, shaped and drilled into white and purple beads respectively by the coastal peoples; the beads were then either strung or woven into belts for ceremony and ritual purpose. Value attached to wampum by the indigenous peoples before European ‘contact’ appears to have been primarily cultural rather than economic. After ‘contact’, negotiation between First Nations and the settler-invaders increasingly centred upon the exchange value of wampum: it became legal tender — both in terms of bead-coin, but also being contractual in nature — the belts taking the form of a legal text such that the symbolic pattern of beads could be read or interpreted like a written document. These belts, many of which now reside in museums throughout North America, are the material evidence of negotiated relationship that speaks of First Nations generosity, political and social acumen, and a sophisticated understanding and use of contractual documentation. Each belt records, in symbolic and material form, the stipulated terms of exchange entered into between ‘brothers’ and ‘nations’. This is not a record, at least initially, of unequal power relations, but a record of diplomatic exchange entered into between civilisations.

Of the many belts that have gained prominence and political significance in recent years, the belt known as ‘Two-Row’ is perhaps the most clearly demonstrative of aboriginal understanding of the basis upon which they would accept the European peoples on their land. The belt apparently records one of the earliest treaties made between the North American and European nations. It is made up of two rows of purple (or black) wampum, separated by a width of sold white wampum — hence the colloquial name, ‘Two Row’. According to *Turtle* (The Native American Center For the Living Arts Quarterly Edition Newspaper) and translation by Huron Miller on the Mohawk Nation website, *Miketben*, The Two Row Wampum Belt [gus-when-ta] ‘symbolizes the agreement under which the Iroquois/Haudenosaunee welcomed the white peoples to their lands,’ thus:

We will NOT be like father and son, but like brothers. These TWO ROWS will symbolize vessels, travelling down the same river together. One will be for the Original People, their laws, their customs, and the other for the European people and their laws and customs. We will each travel the river together, but each in our own boat. And neither of us will try to steer the other’s vessel.

According to the treaty as documented on this site, ‘the Whiteman said’: ‘I understand, I confirm what YOU have said, that this will be everlasting as long as there is Mother Earth. WE have confirmed this and OUR generation to come shall never forget what WE have Agreed.’
Steadily driven west, corralled onto Native Reserves whose territorial expanse was gradually but irrepressibly and irretrievably diminished; impoverished, alienated and incarcerated by the economic, religious, legal and governmental attitudes and policies of powerful colonial and colonising peoples, there is little evidence of adherence to original contractual agreement between self-governing, self-constituted, independent nations. After more than three hundred years of 'bad faith', attempted restitution of indigenous rights and re-negotiation of equitable relationship between indigenous and settler nations has been initiated through the determined actions of First Nations peoples. The wampum belts of Nadia Myre's artistic project, Cont(r)act, are a significant contribution to this political and cultural work in progress. The project features two 'Two-Row' wampum belts. 'Monument to Two-Row, Revised' is a twenty-first century revision of 'Two-Row'. [fig. 6] Fabricated from pink and white glass beads and synthetic fibre, it is mounted on canvas and encased in an aluminium metal frame (reminiscent of the canoe). In the tradition of war monuments, it is monumental in size and, like those monuments, is a memorial to lives lost and, in this case, a trust betrayed. Like the names, traditionally etched into stone, of those who gave their lives in the White man's wars, each bead might be seen to be representative of the single unit of the individual life that is now woven into a belt of Red community. It might even be said that a belt of faith has become a belt of condolence. This belt insists upon remembrance of contractual agreement between nations — it has a presence that is very difficult to ignore — but in the nature of its shiny, sharp and beautiful solidity it is not only a belt of mourning but also a celebration of original treaty and speaks to the possibility of re-negotiation of equitable relations between nations and peoples. It is the original belt given twenty-first century form, thus it is a belt that connects original peoples to contemporary life. It remembers history whilst refusing consignment to the past.

The companion piece to 'Monument' is a sombre reminder of the suffering attendant on European 'settlement' of North America. [fig. 7] Fabricated from paint on canvas and imitation sinew, this belt is skeletal in appearance — its two rows reminiscent of the human spine. As such it might be read as the skeleton and the scarring that lies beneath the smooth pink surface flesh of 'Monument Revised'. The title of the belt, 'Portrait as a River, Divided', is reminder of the river down which the two nations of the original contract were to travel in peace — 'separately together'. The history of relations since that contract would suggest not only a confederacy of nations divided against each other — a river divided — but the creation and growth of a terrible internal division in the Canadian children of mixed descent like Nadia Myre. 'Portrait as a River, Divided' is as much a poignant self-portrait of division as it is a portrait of a divided national community. Yet Nadia Myre's work has a strength that refuses the comfort of nostalgia or self-pity. Its strength lies in the solidity and vibrancy of sculpture that creates links between past and present, tradition and modernity, individual and community. Although
the two halves of her inheritance might be unequal, she would fix them together such that the single canoe might travel whole and intact; but two such disparate materials join uneasily. The proof of seal lies in the quality of workmanship — the faith, the skill and the perseverance — of the joining.

Two men make a bargain whose seal of faith is born by the woman — she is the join but she was not asked nor did she consent to be that join ... and yet the bargain is described as 'faithfully carried out on both sides': is this the ire in Nadia Myre’s desire?²

NOTES
² Reference is made here to a painting in which Nadia Myre articulates the ire in desire, an image of which is unavailable for publication.
Figure 1. ‘History in Two Parts’,
Birch bark, cedar, ash, spruce root and gum, aluminium, 14' x 4' x 3', 2001

Figure 2. ‘History in Two Parts’, detail
Figure 4. ‘Indian Act’, detail of page 28

Figure 5. ‘Indian Act, detail of page 45
Figure 3. 'Indian Act' (all 56 pages),
Stroud cloth, Indian Act, beads, thread, wood frame 4' x 2" x 40' (1 page: 18" x 2" x 15") 2000-2002
Figure 6. 'Monument to Two-Row, Revised'
Wampum, imitation sinew, aluminium frame, 4' x 2" x 3.5', 2002

Figure 7. 'Portrait as a River, Divided'
Canvas, acrylic, oil, resin, imitation sinew, aluminium frame, 4' x 2" x 3.5', 2002
‘The Unresolved Constitution’:
Birth-Myths and Rituals of Modern
Guyana: Wilson Harris’s *The Sleepers of Roraima* and Michael Gilkes’ *Couvade*

couvade /kuˈvæd/ n. a practice in some societies by which, at the birth of a child, the father takes to bed and performs other acts natural rather to the mother. *(Macquarie Concise Dictionary, 3rd edn)*

Through the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a man taking to his bed during his female partner’s pregnancy, or otherwise restricting his diet and behaviour in a ritual manner, was regarded as a poor primitive ‘excuse for paternal indulgence’. This practice, known as ‘couvade’, appeared in Western colonialist discourse as merely another variation on the lazy and stupid savage’ (Swan 313). Modern explanations of couvade are many and various, deriving from feminist, psychological and anthropological discourses and their fusions. But couvade, as I attempt to untangle its relation to colonialism in this essay, is a strategy re-invented for the purposes of reconciliation in narratives of Manichean allegory.

I will be focusing on two texts, each from Guyana, and both named *Couvade*. The first is the opening story of Wilson Harris’s *The Sleepers of Roraima*, published in 1970. The introductory note to this story observes: ‘The purpose of couvade was to hand on the legacy of the tribe — courage and fasting — to every newborn child’ (13). Couvade in Harris’s story is the name given a small boy orphaned at birth. He knows nothing of his parents, and there is no record of his birth. This sets him apart from the dominant social reality. His grandfather explains to him the secret of his name. It means ‘sleeper of the tribe’ (15), and he bears that name because of his ancestry.

His parents had contracted a ‘sickness’ for which there was only one remedy, ‘the ancient remedy of couvade’ (17). It required them to undergo ‘a season of fasting and seclusion’ (17), but they transgressed against the law of their people and ate the forbidden food. That night their enemies attacked and they were never seen again. Their illness (as Harris conceives of it) is a dream of destruction.

Couvade, on the other hand, is a dream of survival. When the boy’s parents break the law of that dream they raise a question mark over the identity of their
descendents, as a dying people. Before they disappear they hide their newborn child in a cave outside their village, and it is there that his grandfather finds him, clinging precariously to life. Couvade, as Harris re-conceives it, is a product of an historical fear of annihilation, the indigenous fear of vanishing. In seeking to discover his identity, the boy must re-enter that dream which deprives him of it. He must sift through the images of his ancestry, and surrender all the masks of disinheritance that obscure his identity.

Along the way this dreaming, questing child undergoes a series of initiations. At the Place of the Toucan his grandfather sprinkles his head with dust, initiating him into ‘the secret of names’ (24). At the Place of the Fish, another initiation occurs, this time ‘into the motherhood of the tribe’ (27). But his mother metamorphoses into his enemy. Further on, he comes upon the guacharo bird (South American Oil Bird) asleep in a tree, which he is sure is his father. But this evolution from matriarchy to patriarchy also proves false. When finally Couvade senses the presence of both of his lost parents, he is standing on a shimmering bridge.

He thinks that his grandfather has brought him full circle to their old village. In fact, it is the village of their enemies. There are three bridges, a triad that suggests the progressive quest structure familiar from European romance and folktale, but each bridge turns out to be the same as the first, so that the quest narrative is restructured as an overlap. Has the child been dreaming all this time? Perhaps he has never left the cave.

For three years before his publication of The Sleepers of Roraima Harris had been working with the concept that would eventually provide the title for his study of the cross-cultural imagination — ‘the womb of space’ or ‘womb of origins’. Probably he derived that image from a Jungian notion of the collective unconscious — Man and His Symbols was published just before this — presenting the womb as the pre-eminent symbol of ‘that great source of psychic energy, the unconscious soul’ (Chetwynd 188). Harris worked intuitively with that image, and the ‘overlap’ that I have identified in the short story, ‘Couvade’ is one aspect of it. The womb of origins for Harris is a ‘dichotomy’ of masculine and feminine, animate and inanimate, death and life, positive and negative — an image, he says, of the seemingly endless repetition of an historical and philosophical misconception, ‘the illusory strength or sovereignty of matter’ (1967 50). It is this illusion, he argues, that chains us to a statuesque present and a false future (1967 36). However, the womb expresses for Harris the reverse bearing of that illusion, ‘upon an apparent substance of fulfilment on one hand, and an apparent sense of being punished or deprived on the other’ (1967 50). Literary proponents of the illusion write the dominant fiction of realism, which Harris believes is capable of changing nothing. Harris, by contrast, hankered after a fiction of implosion: a fiction of ‘subjective alteration’ which would simultaneously transcend and undermine the scientific pose of objectivity, ‘the purity and detachment' of conventional modes of spectatorship (1967 59). To illustrate the
implosive character, the implosive disorientation and freedom of the womb, Harris gives us Tiresias, whose punishment and reward revolves around male/female metamorphosis, and who was able to give Ulysses his only useful counsel in the underworld. ‘Tiresias is the embodiment of death as well as life, masculine as well as feminine’ (1967 49). Only through figures of such an androgyny, Harris believed, could the writer even begin to create a fiction that might correspond to the wholeness of community. ‘Genuine expression’, Harris says, is resident only ‘in a fluid body’ (1967 26).

The overlaps of ‘Couvade’ are metaphoric as well as narratological. Consider, for example, the pair of ‘American sunglasses’ that falls from the sky ‘in the wake of a passing aeroplane’ (18). The glasses are a mask of modernity, but they are also central to the historical dream of extinction experienced by the boy’s ancestors. The glasses are a mask of modernity, yet they also belong to the boy’s parents, who, in the paintings on the walls of his cave, appear in bird-masks. Thus the mask of modernity ‘overlaps’ in the ‘womb of origins’ with the ancestral image of the guacharo bird, or goat-sucker, whose face is a mask like sunglasses. Walter Roth quotes Depons’s South American Voyages of the early 1800s concerning the cavern of Guacharo, which lies in the mountainous Venezuelan province of Cumana: ‘From this cavern issues a river of considerable size, and in the interior is heard the doleful cry of the birds which the Indians attribute to the souls of the deceased, which according to them, must of necessity pass through this place in order to enter the other world’ (161). The cargo-cult image of falling sunglasses builds a bridge between earth and sky; and the metaphoric combination of bird (aeroplane) and bridge (eye-scales) elaborates the myth of the plumed serpent-god, Quetzlocoatal, the Mexican god of the winds and ‘giver of breath’ (Cotterell 188). Roth had noted how this Mexican creator-deity is linked both to the Aztec god, ‘Huracan’, and to the feathered serpent, Kukulan of the Mayan pantheon (170–71). Harris was fascinated by the nomenclatory ‘overlap’ of Huracan, Kukulan and the Carib ‘Yurokon’, for it seemed to hint at unity in the ethnic diversity of the Americas (1972 149). It was this mythological complex that provided him with the intuitive logic for the metaphoric overlaps of ‘Couvade’ — rainbow, feather, leaf, lizard, fish, star (Quetzlocoatal in his Morning Star guise), ‘an endless bridge spanning all the tribes, all the masks of ancestors’ (22) — all linked to the womb by the image of the hammock and the sleeper of the tribe.

The last bridge of the child Couvade’s quest, the Bridge of Names, is also the bridge of dawn, a birth-place where self and other embrace. There the dream of couvade unfolds into a riddle — the ‘birth of compassion’, the ‘birth of love’ (35). The answer to the riddle, the secret of the child’s name — that is, the secret of couvade — is endless caution: caution against breaking the law, against vanishing, against division and rigid polarities. Gradually the narrative arc of metaphor breaks down the distinction between mother and father, enemy and
friend, past and future times. This is the secret of couvade, as Harris writes it: that the ‘tricks and divisions’ that define the colonial order of things are ‘one and the same’ (24). It is the same conclusion that he reaches, in the same year, in ‘History, Fable and Myth’ and other non-fiction essays, where his exploration of Africanist and Amerindian and tradition is explicitly ‘away from apartheid and ghetto fixations’ and toward an ‘art of coexistence’, which is born of colonialism but houses within it ‘the strangest capacity for renewal’ (1970b 27).

The couvade narrative as Harris uses it is clearly an allegory of decolonisation; and its topography is necessarily the same as that of the colonial adventure. Recently, Charles Nicholl has shown how the language and symbolism of Raleigh’s The Discoverie of Guiana coded his quest for El Dorado as an allegory for the esoteric processes of alchemy, a chase after the chimera of the Philosopher’s Stone (319ff). The colonial quest after gold, then, was mapped ironically as an interior journey of purification in search of wholeness and renewal. It was a quest after the fifth element, which would be released from chaos only when the other four were finally broken down, and the corrupt and divided nature of matter redeemed. Harris’s interests in alchemy and in depth psychology, which had led Jung to an intensive exploration of the esoteric symbolism of alchemy, are well known. Palace of the Peacock (1960), his first novel, drew heavily upon the alchemical association of the peacock’s tail with the rainbow as a bridge between earthly and heavenly planes. The imagery that he gives to ‘Couvade’ — rainbow, feather, leaf, fish, and so on — derives from the same alchemical archive, and has the same ancestry as that of Raleigh’s Discoverie of Guiana. The children of colonialism, if they are to discover their true identity, must transform the penalty of the European quest after gold into the prize of the Grail, which is a symbol of reconciliation. Writing and reading, for Harris, are a process of transformation, like alchemy’s Great Work, and the child Couvade is a postcolonial figuration of the Philosopher’s Son, that mysterious child of alchemy who symbolises the birth of wisdom from the Hermetic Vessel (or uterus, as the alchemists conceived it) of the Great Work.

The publication of The Sleepers of Roraima in 1970 coincided with the declaration of Guyana as a ‘Co-operative Republic’ and the severing of all ties to the British monarchy. The transformation theme at that time, after the racial violence of the ’50s and ’60s, was politically and socially urgent. Dominated by Afro-Guyanese, the ruling People’s National Congress offered a socialist shield against the Indo-Guyanese economic ascendancy by organising the country into co-operatives. Police and military intimidation assisted this political regime of ethnic repression; and electoral fraud and media manipulation ensured its continuation (Colchester 33). In 1972, to further its agenda for cultural revolution, the government commissioned a young playwright, Michael Gilkes, to provide the nation’s gala entry in the first Caribbean Festival of Arts. Inspired by Harris, and entitled Couvade: A Dream-Play of Guyana, this is the second text that I
The Unresolved Constitution

wish to consider. It extends the quest motif of Harris’s re-invention of the Carib myth and ritual of couvade precisely into the contemporary social and political domain that I have just outlined.

The play’s full title derives from Harris’s ‘Couvade’, where the boy questor, not yet understanding the secret of his name and demoralised by the tricks of otherness, speaks as though ‘repeating the lines of a sad play, a dream-play of history’ (28). The play begins with the ritual incantation of a Black Carib shaman, calling forth ‘the dream of Couvade’ — which is explicitly a dream of power. A traditional image of couvade, the hammock is a permanent fixture of the set. A woman enters, her racial visage clearly suggestive of a mixed ancestry, Indo and Afro-Guyanese. She is visibly pregnant. Her partner, Lionel, has a hangover and is not enthused by her efforts to turn him out of his hammock. He wraps himself within it like a foetus in the womb, totally encased. He is an artist, and he has been up late, drinking and arguing about politics with his friends, and painting long into the night after their departure.

Lionel’s hangover is directly linked to political argument and is a symbolic reflection of the crisis in which Guyana found itself as a consequence of colonialism, unable to manage its independence, diseased by its past, corrupt and racially prejudiced. But his hangover is linked also to the creative effort that follows the drinking and argument. Quite literally, he sees through his hangover. In January 1970, the year that he published the story that inspired the play, Harris was invited by the newly formed National History and Arts Council to deliver the Edgar Mittelholzer Memorial Lectures. Almost certainly Gilkes would have attended these lectures. In any case, they were published a little later that year. The process of shamanism, Harris said, resembles a nervous breakdown. The shaman appears in the community at times of crisis, in a ‘creative attempt to see through or break through a hang-over of the past’, the diabolic burden of colonialism. The Caribbean artist, he implied, must be the shaman of the modernity, to see Guyana through to independence (1970b 22).

Arthur is a socialist, who disapproves of Lionel’s painting. He enthuses about the Folk, and Roots, but regards ancestry and myth as irrelevant bourgeois fantasies. His is a politics of race modelled upon Fanon’s Black Skin, White Mask. Lionel counters that argument with the Harrisian call for ‘the renascence of a new corpus of sensibility that might translate and accommodate African and other legacies within a new architecture of cultures’ (1970b 8).

Artist and politician appear each as an analogue of couvade, each labouring over his own cultural revolution: the artist is unable to complete his painting, and the new nation exists only as the empty rhetoric of the politician’s obsession with colour. In the heat of their argument, Lionel lunges to retrieve a book from Arthur, who swings it away from him and accidentally delivers a sharp blow to the stomach of Lionel’s pregnant partner, Pat. As she doubles up in pain, the possibility of miscarriage looms large. The figure of the Dreamer appears, the
exact image of Lionel, cross-legged in his hammock. The Dreamer's name is Couvade. 'He dreams us all', says the Shaman. 'When he awakes, we die' (32).

But Lionel’s dream is a nightmare, every night without change: the nightmare of birth continually denied. In it, he sees himself dreaming, but cannot wake up.

Lionel’s increasingly feverish devotion to his painting and his indifference to his pregnant partner chart his passage toward psychological breakdown. The climactic moment of the play arrives with a ritual masque, three dancers, individually attired in Arawak, West African and Southern Indian costume. The dance creates the impression of a circle continually breaking and re-making itself in the image of a mandala, a Jungian symbol of psychic order and the reconciliation of opposites and, — for the artist — of an opening of the door to spontaneous or intuitive experience. The Dreamer rises from the stage floor in a flood of light to symbolise the new self and the new society. It is Lionel. A gigantic replica of the canvas that we saw him painting at the beginning of the play, ‘The Robe of Ancestors’, descends from the ceiling behind him. He reverses into it, apparently dissolving into the world of his own spirit. The canvas falls like a robe to enfold him in a womb of space. But he emerges covered with blood. We hear a hideous cry of anguish and we witness the artist clawing at his face, self-mutilating, pulling thick paint in streaks down his cheeks so that he appears tiger-like. His birth, like that of Guyana, is a miscarriage and a travesty of violence. The first decade of the republic, beginning with a presidential proclamation of the birth of New Guyana Man, was characterised by extensive electoral fraud and political repression, and the socialist revolution led ultimately to economic ruin. The stage blackout on the tiger reveals the new nation as a community of strangers. When Pat finds Lionel curled up on the stage, she says — 'He was like a stranger. Someone we didn’t know at all' (56). The stripes on his face are black, red and white — the colour bands of racial division.

Gilkes must have known from reading Harris that there are three stages of alchemical symbolism (Gilkes 1975 7). The first is the nigredo stage, blackness symbolising the undiscovered or unknown territory. In the second, the albedo stage, whiteness represents the dawn of a new consciousness. And the third is the cauda pavonis stage, where the colours of the peacock or rainbow prophesy the variable possibilities of fulfillment. It is this third stage, according to Harris, that is fundamental to the Guyanas and the Caribbean: the stage of the ‘host native’, whereby an inner erosion of the character of conquest occurs and a threshold sensibility emerges (1970b 20). In Gilkes’s play, however, this is precisely what does not occur. The poor rainbow of black, red and white stripes that marks Lionel’s face at the climax of the third section of the play suggests a travesty of progress toward enlightenment; and the violent image of the tiger substitutes for the peacock as the symbol of a severely subscribed destiny.

It is clear that the racial division is a colonial legacy. Indeed, the image of the tiger recalls one of the most controversial events of Caribbean history —
Governor Edward Eyre’s swift and violent retribution for the 1865 Morant Bay Rebellion in Jamaica, which predates Guyana’s declaration of independence by a century. Frederick Harrison, a member of the Jamaica Committee that sought to bring Eyre to trial for murder, spoke then of ‘the tiger in our race’ (qtd in Dutton. 350). The tiger is an image of Englishness in the guise of its colonial Other.9

In the final section of the play, Lionel is recovering in hospital from his breakdown, his eyes thickly bandaged. Art, he has decided, is an illusion. But this is the view of an artist whose muse is annihilated, and a reflection of worn-out sensibilities — which is why Lionel, as he utters these diseased platitudes, appears as a prisoner in his hospital bed, with a mosquito net hanging white and ominous over and around him rather than the Robe of Ancestors. He has a bad case of anaemia; and the white mosquito net around his bed is the sign of a collapse of space, and the blood infection of his muse. This section of the play is ironically entitled ‘The Child of the Vessel’.10 Clearly there will be no birth of wisdom in Lionel’s hospital bed and his Great Work, like the chimera of El Dorado, remains an empty dream of the past. Guyana’s birth wish, the dream of a golden age, is blighted. The general elections are a week away, and the society is trapped in a net of violence.

In the final scene, the lighting holds each of the characters in their own contained and static space, so that they speak from isolation.11 Lionel, with the bandages removed from his eyes, is caught within an inverted cone of light inside the mosquito net. He squats on his bed in the foetal position of the Dreamer, condemned to the freeze-frame of a fake birth.

After the blackout, the stage gradually brightens to reveal a baby’s crib. Is there a baby in the crib? Has Pat given birth to her child. The symbolism is so overdetermined that it is hard to tell. The Ashanti Priest turns toward the crib. ‘Sleep. Couvade’, he says, ‘and dream our dream’ (65). The Black Carib Shaman ends with the same words. However, the stage directions do not in fact confirm the presence of a child, and the imagery of Lionel’s bloody miscarriage as an artist must cause us to doubt the survival of Pat’s baby also. The play is left unresolved because the constitution of Guyana was itself, at the time of its composition, profoundly unresolved.

Underpinning Gilkes’s play is Harris’s sense of history, fed by a birth wish and authenticated by a post-colonial redefinition of the Carib ritual of couvade. There is an ethical dimension to the operation that Harris performs on ritual, releasing its traditional social meanings and energies into new and inventive contexts where questions of social control and social value are re-negotiated. Harris was seeking a gateway to a new anthropology, and with it a new model of character for a new conception of the arts. He was fascinated by the formal kinship of the gaps and holes in Henry Moore’s sculptures with those of ancient Amerindian sculpture (1981). He applied that same sense of space to the body of history, in order to visualise through them what he called ‘the psychological
womb', where a new relation might gestate between self and other, past and present (1981 45–46).

But here is a problem. There is a residual sense in Gilkes's play and, to a lesser extent, in Harris's story of Couvade, that women exist only to give birth, even as the potency of reproduction is given over to metaphoric processes that do not require women particularly. The possibility of reading this as a masculinist appropriation is completely obvious. We need to remember that the rituals of couvade occur within contexts of reproductive technology that are culture-specific; and we need to be wary of the ideology that reproduction is exclusively female, since that is what underpins Western anthropology's long history of misreading couvade. Yet, the masculinist tendency seems confirmed by Harris's regarding of the holes in the body of history as a psychologised imagery of potency that requires penetration if it is not simply to implode. (The metaphoric overlaps to which I alluded earlier are, in this sense, a consequence of Harris's deliberately 'exploded womb' of origins — the cave of couvade pulled out into landscape.)

The lack of resolution in Gilkes's play serves a political symbolism that is problematic precisely because it forecloses interest in the outcome of the female character's pregnancy, whether or not there is a child in the cradle, and whether it is alive or dead. Harris and Gilkes have adapted the birth rituals and myths of Guyana to a post-colonial vision that imagines a new constitution of social relations, with the capacity to break the cycle of racial antagonism and violence and shift the shape of the colonial legacy. But that same constitution positions women predominantly as childbearing, it fetishises if not pathologises pregnancy and, in Gilkes's case at least, it allows race and ethnicity to obscure a meaningful role for gender in the processes of reconciliation.

Gender and sexuality in Harris's writing constitute an enormously complex and much larger topic than the scope of this paper will allow. But as it would be negligent entirely to evade these in the present discussion, I cannot avoid two final considerations, which are in fact the two most divisive considerations of Harris's writing among post-colonial scholars. First, there is the deliberately contradictory social biology of Harris's symbolic universe where intercourse is so inherently paradoxical that assault is difficult to disentangle from embrace. This myth-and-psychology derived attitude, separating sex from the materiality of the body, arguably produces a very de-natured and (in a Foucauldian sense) de-regulated idea of sexual power. Second, cross-culturalism is suspect with many post-colonial theorists, contaminated by a Jungian universalism that undermines its attempt to address the marginality of displaced and divided peoples. Gayatri Spivak, for example, regards cross-culturalism as the new Orientalism (qtd Lawrence, 12). Yet others maintain that the only way for a culture to be progressive and dynamic is through bastardisation.12 In fact, as Margaret Kumar suggests, post-colonial theory and cross-culturalism function as collaborative 'markers' of the discourse of cultural hybridity (Kumar 82–92). It is important also to
differentiate cross-culturalism from multi-culturalism, the latter being a kind of reactive pluralism, in Harris's view, that limits the possibilities for change. As Mette Jørgensen says, 'To Harris multiculturalism is a perverse cross-culturalism in its insistence on cultural separation or purity of cultures' (online). It is the separation of cultures, in his view, that blocks productive dialogue.

Both aspects, the social biology and the cross-culturalism of Harris's symbolic universe, derive from the Jungian imaging of the womb. As I have suggested, Harris draws deeply upon Jung's rebuttal of Freud's Oedipus/Electra model of sons yearning after their mothers and daughters yearning after their fathers, preferring the spiritual rather than the sexual explanation: a desire for 'rebirth or transformation of consciousness' (online). The fertile womb attaches to Jung's archetype of the Great Mother, a personification of the feminine principle in its most nourishing aspect that is linked by a unity of opposites to the devouring grave. This is the positive image of the unconscious, but is also a paradoxical image in itself, simultaneously signifying both fullness and emptiness. For Harris, the future centres very precisely on this image of the 'paradoxical womb', without which there can be no birth wish to balance the death wish of colonialism. Thus, while acknowledging the social value of modern technologies of birth control, he seeks a complimentary sacramental vision that recognises the drive toward extinction as one aspect of the price that has been paid for this 'dislodged fertility'.

The agency that he ascribes to the womb derives from a double apprehension of woman in the arts, as having both a 'hidden status' and capacity in pre-Columbian myth and a 'debased faculty' in modern fiction (1983 46–47). The quality of that agency is the 'universal host capacity to sustain contrasts' (1981 47) — a conception of cross-culturalism as the way to reconciliation that is grounded in Jungian psychology and alchemy, where the ideal state is a coincidence of opposites, not excluding masculine and feminine elements.

A great deal of attention has been focused on Harris's re-working of the cannibal trope of colonialist discourse through the technology and metaphoric gateway of the Carib bone-flute. This needs referencing to his writing of couvade, however, which more immediately illustrates the postcolonial impetus of his placing of birth myth and ritual into history. The trajectory of that placement, through Gilkes' 'Dream-Play of Guyana', took Harris's quest explicitly into the contemporary social and political sphere and focused cross-culturalism as the key to national destiny.

NOTES

1 Harris's explorations of synchronicity began with his first novel and have evolved into great complexity over many years of writing. In essence, he believes that the capacity for change relies upon our recognition of an 'inner objectivity' of events and actions, one of the key premises of which is the 'overlap' of seemingly unlike categories and images — 'comedy of coincidence'. See, for instance, 'Comedy and Modern Allegory', 3.
The first appearance in Harris’s writings of this term is in Tradition, The Writer and Society, 50. Further references are given in the text.

Michael Gilkes’s Couvade: A Dream-Play of Guyana, first published in 1974 (Longman), was reprinted in 1990 by Dangaroo Press with an Introduction by Harris praising it as ‘one of the most significant plays to have come out of the twentieth century Caribbean’ (n.p.). Further references are to this latter edition and are given in the text.

The Black Caribs provide one of few instances where anthropologists and cultural theorists have examined the rituals of couvade as a reproductive technology within a culture-specific context. Janet Chernela comments on the couvade of the Garifuna (Black Caribs of Honduras): ‘The care taken by the husband is not imitation of wife’s childbirth, it is imitation or enactment of infancy. Father becomes son. The Garifuna couvade is a reversal not of gender but of generation. Moreover, a male does not become a man until he has a child. In this sense, the birth of the child is identical with the birth of the man. Through the couvade, therefore, a man experiences his own birth as a full male’ (65).

Lionel emerges from the hammock wearing sunglasses. In Harris’s ‘Couvade’, as I have already indicated, sunglasses serve as mask to overlap ancestry and modernity. This is the intertext for considering Lionel’s sunglasses as linking him potentially to the souls of his ancestors, and identifying him therefore both as a possible conduit to Guyana’s dreaming (like the Shaman of the previous scene) and an agent of its future.

Arthur’s likening of the mutual suspicion of Africans and Indians to the itching of an amputated limb supplies an ironic reference to Harris’s play upon the idea of the phantom limb in his writing about limbo dancing. Human spiders he calls those dancers, who manoeuvre their bodies spread-eagled under the ever-lowering bar of the Middle Passage to break and re-make themselves symbolically in the image of the New World (‘reassem bly of dismembered man or god’ [Harris 1970b 8]).

In 1970, the three largest ethnic groups within Guyana were: Indo-Guyanese, 52%; Afro-Guyanese, 42%; Amerindian, 4%. Based on information from Statistisches Bundesamt (Landerbericht Guyana), 19.

Tigers, of which there are many in Guyana’s indigenous folklore, were often associated with the trumpeter bird, whose sighting traditionally warns of the approach of strangers. There is no evidence of any real tigers in the jungles of Guyana (Roth 367, 275).

See Sujit Mukherjeec: ‘Particularly when we recall the nature and range of human qualities attributed to the tiger by Anglo-Indian writers of fact as well as of fiction — memory, cunning, vengefulness, to mention only three — we shall realise that the tiger represented some enduring spirit of India that the British felt that they had failed to subjugate’ (12).

Readers of Harris will recognise the allusion to the Bush Baby spectre arising from the Carib cooking pot, an image of reconciliation and resurrection that corresponds to Jung’s ‘immortal or archetypal child of dreams’ (1970b 20).

This fragmented stage image recalls Kenneth Ramchand’s discussion (quoted by Harris in ‘The Unresolved Constitution’, 43) of how ‘the relative unawareness of the characters’ in West Indian writing provides an ‘expressive dislocated image’ which plunges the reader (or audience) into ‘the very debated substance of the work’.


See for instance Russell McDougall, ‘Walter Roth, Wilson Harris and a Caribbean/Post-Colonial Theory of Modernism’.

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SUKESHI KAMRA

Ruptured Histories: Literature on the Partition (India, 1947)

In 1994, the editors of the *Indian Review of Books* lamented: 'it would seem that the great writing that a cataclysmic event like the Partition should have produced is yet to come in full measure, and offer the catharsis that only literature perhaps can' (1). In the same year, Alok Bhalla, the editor of one of the first English-language collections of Partition literature reportedly stated in an interview: 'there is not just a lack of great literature, there is, more seriously, a lack of history' (qtd. in Ravikant 160). This lament has taken on the force of tradition with Professor Jaidev commenting, in 1996, that Partition literature 'is not a gallery of well-wrought urns' (2) and Ian Talbot, in 1997, stating that the 'stereotypes and stylised emotional responses' typical of 'lesser novelists' is 'pervasive in much of the literature of partition, whether it has been produced by contemporaries or those distanced from the actual events' (105–106). As recently as 2001, an otherwise valuable collection of fiction and critical analysis of Partition, *Translating Partition*, opens with: 'The best of the literature that emerged in the wake of Partition' (Ravikant and Saint xi), reminding us that there is much literary production that is ignored because it has been found aesthetically wanting.

Although I am not sure what exactly constitutes 'great' literature nor am I sure that there would be cross-cultural (within India) agreement about it, I suspect the disappointment voiced by many in the academic community, and the scant discussion of such literature, has something to do with the faithful observance of the literal we find in this literature as much as with the seemingly stereotypical treatment of Partition experience — close to identical plots, characters, descriptions of violence, attempts at rationalising, slippages even (in general privileging one religious community over another).

Such a dismissal, regrettable for its own sake, is also regrettable because Partition literature has the potential to act as an intervention in Indian historiography — by forcing attention to Indian social practice, which continues to be rendered uncomfortable by what Partition, the darker side of Independence, made visible. In other words, such a dismissal prevents us from extending consideration to such literature for what it is — a response to a dominant historiography that has made Partition the 'other' of Independence, as Ravikant states: 'The nation has grown up, ritually counting and celebrating birthdays ... while systematically consigning the Partition to oblivion' (160). To take the point further, as he does in the article, the remembering of 'Independence' appears to
have required a forgetting of ‘Partition’. It is not accidental. We have, that is, inherited and are perpetuating a cathected history. Partition, the event and experience, is thus ‘remembered’ only in and through the remembering of an event (happier) associated with it, Independence.

Considering whether and how Partition literature has engaged with, resisted or challenged dominant historiography since 1947 requires an interrogation of the surface of such literature, an interrogation that is invited if we notice the regular appearance of structural and narrative choices signifying an intention on the part of writers to challenge attempts to surround their experience with the contours of uniformity (for instance, their deliberate and strategic choice of fictional autobiography, that stresses the subjectivity of experience). A few others have also drawn attention to the inadequacy of response to Partition literature. Ravikant and Saint, for instance, suggest the need to notice destabilising literary tropes when they comment that literary critics have ignored ‘the use of irony and parody as modes of undermining stereotypes in literary discourse’ (xxv). In ‘Partition Narratives: Some Observations’, Arjun Mahey treats a few short stories on Partition in terms of ‘structural focus’ and ‘epiphany’, the first of which, he claims, is universal to the literature (143) and the second, given his identification of it with ‘the event itself’ must be equally universal (‘All Partition stories have such an epiphany’ [144]).

It is in the interest of opening up enquiry into Partition literature as a literature of response that I direct attention to an apparently invisible, because naturalised, dimension of literary text, the spatial. As Henri LeFebvre has pointed out, this is a dimension that is not so much a naturally occurring phenomenon as it is produced by social relations, that it in turn reproduces, maintains, transforms as well as mediates. Literary text is permeated with spatial representation of social forms, practices and ideas — as Lefebvre himself points out and as Mikhail Bakhtin has addressed in his discussion of the ‘chronotope’ in the novel — and can be considered to produce views of the complex, contestatory social, political, cultural, economic matrix of a given society — its social order, so to speak. By reading Partition literature not only in terms of ‘things in space’ (Lefebvre 37), that trains attention on characters and plot — that, in turn, apparently leads to disappointment in the instance of Partition literature — but also in terms of its ‘actual production of space’ (Lefebvre 37), perhaps we will arrive at a different sense of the attempt on the part of survivors to articulate the crisis that permeates their writing.

As might be expected, this generally naturalised dimension (assuming that the geo-social ‘context’ in a text is merely that — inert and functioning as the delimiter of geographical and temporal limits for the drama in the text) is not an overt concern in all Partition literature. Yet it certainly is in some Partition literature, in which it rivals event for its ability to ‘speak’ the crisis. Such an active and self-conscious production of space in literary responses to a catastrophic experience is not in itself surprising; a collective crisis such as Partition tends to
make social order more visible than it otherwise is, especially if it, or a critical part of it, is ‘blamed’ for the catastrophe.\(^6\)

An article afford only a very limited scope for a discussion of a multitude of texts (especially if the texts are not well known and require summarising, as is the case with much Partition literature), and here I restrict discussion to some short stories that appear overtly concerned with thematising social order itself.\(^7\) The stories I consider have, in the main, been translated into English, were written between the 1970s and 1990s, and have been written by individuals geographically, socially and culturally dislocated as a result of the partition in the Punjab.\(^8\)

In a number of short stories, the historical moment — which is always remembered as Partition, not Independence or the end of ‘the Raj’ — is thematised as a seismic, catastrophic shift of the ground beneath one’s feet. In this, the constructed historical moment of the texts — moving from an indefinite period before Partition, to Partition and to an equally indeterminate period post-Partition — borrows from the rhetoric that prevailed in 1947, at least if speeches made by leaders and the media are any indication. In an attempt to reassure the population, particularly that of Punjab and Bengal, leaders and the media described the shaky historical moment as a temporary confusion in an otherwise secured, established trajectory of history.\(^9\) Far from miming this rhetoric, such literature turns it on its head, so to speak, by emphasising the liminal as a violent and catastrophic break and altering the causal chain so as to locate Partition as an originary moment, with the force of ‘dating’ history backwards and forwards. (In the dominant culture ‘Independence’ remains the event with this same significatory power, but in not quite as absolute a manner as Partition for survivors). Hence time and history turn into a ‘pre’ and a ‘post’, with many of the usual implications of such a construction of individual and collective identity. Narratives ‘chart’ the historical moment by performing ‘the shift’ with Partition at its centre.

Texts I have chosen to discuss (and many more) fracture the history they problematise in different places. Some trace a trajectory that originates in a seemingly indeterminate pre-Partition and concludes with Partition. Others trace a trajectory that takes post-Partition as its starting point and ends with a return of Partition. Yet others confine consideration to the liminal phase of Partition itself. Given the different locations of fracture, we encounter an emphasis on different facets of what was a shared experience of social, cultural, geographical, political and psychological dislocation.

Texts in which the narrativising of Partition ends in the liminal space itself, suggesting the prevalence of an eschatological imagination, a memorialising of a (privileged) social order appears to be an imperative. Not surprisingly, there are a number of such stories and they have contributed to a culture of nostalgia.
In this too, the cultural imagination borrows from a very specific and entrenched notion of community, quite the opposite of the one advanced by the Nehruvian Congress (modern nation state). Pre-Partition social economy is read into some indefinite, but not quite ‘mythic’ past, for it contains disruptive and violent historical interventions in the form of invasions that led to the mixed cultural and religious reality to which all texts allude by virtue of the very reference to its multi-religious nature. It is hence not imagined as lying outside of material relations. This suggests, theoretically at least, that the textualising of the social order in literary form is not driven by a desire to idealise a uniform harmony, but to give expression to existing states of amalgamation and tensions. Partha Chatterjee has described this pre-Partition formation, the Hindustani term for which is ‘mohalla’, as a ‘fuzzy’ one. The term, he suggests, describes a community that does not ‘claim to represent or exhaust all the layers of selfhood of its members’, and that ‘though definable with precision for all practical purposes of social interaction’, does not ‘require its members to ask how many of them there were in the world’ (223). In a similar vein, Assaad Azzi comments:

it is unlikely that individuals in these societies represented themselves as members of coherent and unified cultural entities; rather, they probably saw themselves as belonging to one locale in a constellation of locales (villages, towns, regions) which were self-governing but which had informal networks of trade, exchange, and social relationships which made boundaries between them fuzzy at best. (122)

I would add to these attempts at articulating pre or non-enumerative notions of identity two further comments: typically the mohalla existed more as practice (than idea) and tended to function as the smallest unit of identity, a view expressed also by Prakash Tandon who comments that the best description of the mohalla is

as a multi-unit society, in which each caste had its functional place without oppression by a high caste. The different castes were united into biradaris, literally meaning brotherhoods.... These biradaris were loose and undefined, but in time of need they formed themselves into close-knit groups. They gave you certain rights and expected some duties. (46)

As the description provided by Tandon suggests, the practice was primarily social and most clearly expressed in ritualised and formalised rights and duties. Finally, Karl Marx’s description of pre-capitalist societies is helpful. It suggests the foundational logic of many such societies is custom itself and points to the multivalent and multilinear forms of exchange typical, indeed, of the mohalla.

Read as practice, the mohalla was indeed complex — maintaining distinctions of biradiri, observing collective ritualised practice of cultural and religious hybridity, managing the seemingly infinite gradations of sameness and difference without imploding along religious, caste, gender, and economic class lines, to name only a few of its functions. However, in much Partition literature, community as practice is reductively and obsessively concerned with making one point only
— communal co-existence. Consider Ashfaq Ahmad’s ‘The Shepherd’, a first-person account of an individual’s rite of passage into adulthood, in which Partition figures prominently. The fictional autobiography begins with an image, of childhood, by which its writer is able to lay a claim on behalf of his inherited community to its (what I can only call) rhizomic structure — he is woken rudely in the middle of the night by his (Hindu) teacher and forced to work at translating (presumably) Punjabi into Persian, an apparently typical occurrence. This initial scene of the community’s past casually locates several givens, all problematised and destroyed by Partition (in the text and historically): the Muslim speaker has a Hindu teacher; he is living in the latter’s house — in itself a claim of the affiliative, extended familial network of the community across religious lines; his teacher is fluent in Persian despite being Hindu; and finally, the scene points to the level of trust and association amongst individuals with different religious affiliations — the narrator does not differentiate between his biological family and this family in which his belonging is affiliative. As the narrator describes it, then, his psycho-social, cultural life was lived somewhere between the home of his (biological) Muslim family and the home of his Hindu teacher. The image is perpetuated in the narrator’s reaching into the even more remote past of the community, to the time of his teacher’s youth — spent also in the same community — by way of a conversation in which his teacher informs him that he himself, a shepherd, was able to acquire an education because of his (Muslim) ‘master’ who taught him because he ‘was fond of teaching’ (20). What he is taught, Hindu and Persian texts, emphasises a tradition of inter-cultural learning.

This verbal reconstruction of pre-Partition community is clearly a pre-occupation, taking up most of the narrative and offering typical social practices, but it appears to be largely in the interest of describing the same complex interweaving of cultural, language and social interests, and drawing to our attention tensions existing along more universally ‘expected’ lines of, say, tradition and modernity (‘I never did approve of the manner in which he treated me. I still don’t. Perhaps, I don’t approve of it because I am now a learned man with modern ideas, while he was a man full of old fashioned learning’ [14]), embattled familial relations (the narrator spends a considerable amount of time and energy describing Dauji’s wife as the cause of much violent disruption in the former’s household), and class (he points to the presence of rich landowners and the disenfranchised).

The narrative concludes with the violent entry of Partition’s economy into the mohalla, described, not surprisingly, more as a violation at the symbolic than at the literal level (though it is certainly that too): Dauji is dragged through the streets by ‘outsiders’ (but by the new definition of nation and community ‘one’s own’), forced to recite the Kalma (which he knows only too well and is able to recite faultlessly), and physically and verbally abused and divested of the symbol of his Brahmin identity — his ‘bodi’. The closing sentence of this truncated narrative is: ‘Bareheaded, Dauji begun to walk behind the goats as if he was an angel with long and flowing hair’ (40). The narrative ends, then, with
the desacralisation of community space by a concept of enumeration, one which local troublemakers are able to employ to devastating effect. The direction of our attention to the excessive, overdetermined image of the revered teacher, however, suggests that Partition’s more devastating impact is far less subject to articulation than is the horrific physical violence and has to do with subjectivity. In re-reading the figure of the teacher such that he is removed to the iconic, the fictional writer removes his own inability at the time to act — an inability he addresses when he states ‘Scared, I ran to the other side of the crowd’ (40). Destruction of the community, then, is to be read as an inability on the part of its members to know how to act in the face of shifting notions of agency, a momentary stasis which, I would suggest, is located in the only conventional terms available to describe the response of the self in such a moment — ‘fear’. (Fear, after all, speaks of a sense of one’s entrapment in and by inadequacy; that is, by the sense that one is incapable of acting).

Post-Partition community has its origins, then, this text suggests, in a kind of reorganising of social space all of which occurred — took effect — rather suddenly and violently during Partition: Partition rendered visible the fact of social space itself, something that possibly explains the enumerative terms so present in these texts (naming characters in terms of their religious inheritance or practice, for instance). Partition also legislated the appearance of ‘foreigners’ and equally legislated the disappearance of ‘one’s own’. Finally it reduced an entire community to a kind of ontological uncertainty — ontological certainty until then apparently being indistinguishable from collective social practice.

A variation on the same reading of the Partition experience is to be found in Ismat Chugtai’s ‘Roots’. This narrative too indicates its historical engagement with Partition in the opening: the children play ‘as if nothing had happened on 15th August’ (9), (note the significance of this date) — a ‘happening’ that is described as a botched-up operation performed by an inept surgeon:

the British had left, and … before leaving, they had wounded us so deeply that it would take years for our wounds to heal. The operation on India had been performed by such incompetent hands and with such blunt instruments that generations had been destroyed. Rivers of blood flowed everywhere. And no one had the courage to even stitch the open wounds. (9)

The engagement is even more keen than may appear at first, for Chugtai draws on a discourse of ‘Western medicine’ that was a favourite of political cartoons and editorial columns in 1947 when commenting on the (proposed) vivisection of the country.13

Pre-Partition Mewar is described in terms of the kind of affiliation also described in Ahmed’s ‘The Shepherd’: the intricacies and intermeshed existence of a Hindu and a Muslim family form the domestic economy. The narrator establishes neighbourliness as an affiliation bordering on filiation. That is, s/he mixes two oppositional discourses (filiation/affiliation) to undermine this very
opposition and locate pre-Partition social practice in such a non-distinction. Comments such as the following proliferate: ‘When Abba had a paralytic stroke, Roopchandji had retired from the hospital and his entire practice was restricted to our family and his’ (13), and ‘After Abba’s death, Doctor Sahib not only continued to love the family, but also became aware of his responsibilities towards it’ (13). Note the narrator’s assumption that what we would refer to as affiliative bonds are most fully realised in notions of duty we would consider restricted to the nuclear family. Note also the insistence that bonds of duty are not manufactured but ‘real’ (here we recognise the governing presence of the customary).

This narrative too marks the moment of ‘crisis’ or fall in terms of an alteration of the very social architecture of Mewar, once it is invaded (offered as an inevitability) by the same sentiments as obtain in the world beyond: ‘for the last few days the atmosphere ... had become so foul that all the Muslims had gone into hiding’ (9). This reference to a shift in community organisation points to a rupturing of the affiliative basis of the social structure. Forced spatial reorganisation of Mewar acts to contextualise the emotional and psychological as well as physical rupture of the Muslim family (the focus of the narrative). While some of the family readily, and not so readily, adopt the new enumerative thinking, others resist (including the narrator). The difference concretises as opposing views on what was indeed the question of the day: should one move to Pakistan (or India as the case may have been) or not? The narrator’s position is made clear in the disapproval marking the moment of disruption — the arrival of a family member who convinces the family to leave: ‘Things changed, however, the moment my elder brother arrived from Ajmer [Rajasthan]. He incited everyone, aroused their anger, made them lose their sense of reason’ (10). All except one member, the matriarch, agree to leave. Her resistance to the new, enumerative thinking is expressed as a vow of silence, or so the narrator suggests: ‘She ... refused to speak, since the day the tri-colour had been unfurled over Doctor Sahib’s house and the League’s flag over ours’ (14).

The narrative concludes with what I consider to be an imagining of two resolutions to the narrative of individual and collective rupture that would normally be alternatives. The final scene, so to speak, opens with a description of the matriarch, apparently delirious: ‘All of a sudden the entire house came alive; all the ghosts of the house, it seemed to that unhappy woman, had decided to gather around her’ [19]). There is sufficient ambiguity attending the concluding scene to leave us uncertain about the status of the ending: does the family return or is it indeed a fantasy (as ‘ghosts’ suggest)? If the family has been returned (due in no small part to the determination of their Hindu neighbour), Chughtai has exercised the right to employ *deus ex machina* to remove an horrific and destructive ending to the realm of the bearable by writing a redemptive end. Given the Hindu neighbour’s instrumental role, such an ending affirms the affiliative.
In addition to performing this historical shift from within the perspective afforded by the mohalla, the narrator theorises the historical moment in an intriguing manner, one that suggests not only the forced interruption by categories of enumeration (that we know was an historical reality) but posits the same intervention as a simplification and reduction of identity itself to the most superficial of levels. The narrator states: ‘but in the Mewar Hindus and Muslims had become so intermingled’ (9) that ‘it was difficult to tell them apart from their names, features or clothes’ (9). These were, of course, the very unstable signs, on whose ‘correct’ or incorrect reading one’s survival hinged. The chances of an incorrect reading were staggeringly large, for reasons suggested by the narrator’s comment: Hindus and Muslims alike wear saris and salwar kameezes, Hindu and Muslims share names, Hindus and Muslims can recite the Kalma or from the Hindu epics and so on. Such a theorising clearly speaks to Chugtai’s involvement with the very ‘illogicality’ of Partition and by extension, definition of national identity that is based on the assumption of religious and cultural exclusivity (to the extent that reciting the kalma is supposed proof that one is a Muslim, for instance).

This is a pattern one encounters often in Partition literature. Narratives direct attention to a social practice that, because it is offered as the ‘everyday’, we are required to read as the (much valued) norm. By ending in or invoking Partition as desacralised liminality, these narratives paradoxically read teleology into a past concretised for us as space/mohalla which is expressive of non-numeric living, but also suggest an attempt is being made to articulate a notion that society and space are co-constituting. Hence, in so many stories, Partition marks the end of a social practice and the (space itself) mohalla (although the term continues to be used to describe localities in north India). You might say they date the entry into a dominantly temporal economy from a dominantly spatial one.

There are many other conclusions these texts, in their concern with historical moment as social order, encourage, particularly about community as practice lost to Partition. As suggested earlier, we can read such stories as emphasising one aspect of the Partition experience — its bringing to an end a notion of community. We can even speculate about the reasons for such an insistent and narrowed reading of community as practice: there is a need to challenge the dominant culture’s laying of the violence of Partition at its feet by insisting on ‘communalism’. We can also read the same focus differently: as consciously suggesting or allowing us to consider the mohalla and the social order it signified as the only space of resistance to geo- and socio-political colonial architecture. Here proof lies not so much in what is present — the shape of the social order in these texts — but what is not. The mohalla is offered in these texts as a completely separate, autonomous unit, without even the shadow of colonial presence — there are no signs of colonial administration or its many apparatuses (most notably
the Indian Civil Service and the Indian Police Service), not even the Indian urban elite. Partition, then, marks the violent entry of colonial reason, in the form of the categories of enumeration and a rendering of the mohalla into the type of community required by the same, at the very moment that supposedly signalled its dismantling. It marks the very delayed entry of colonialism in the pysche of inhabitants of the mohalla.

There are, however, some texts that act as partial intervention in the kind of reading Partition offered by Chugtai and Ahmad. For example, Suraiya Qasim’s ‘Where Did She Belong?’ questions the notion that Partition erased social practice of pre-Partition communities, thereby suggesting that the relatively benign (if not quite idealised) reading provided in a majority of texts is achieved at the expense of the othered in these communities. Such a narrative does not deny that space and social practice are co-constituting, but it does question or challenge the readings provided by Chugtai, Ahmad and others of social space. ‘Where Did She Belong?’ traces the same trajectory as the stories discussed earlier, but shifts the locale to the literal and metaphoric outskirts of pre-Partition society — the red light district — thereby offering a comment on the seemingly universal culture of the pre-Partition mohalla by virtue of its vexed but established relationship with the latter.

The narrative suggests an authorial uncertainty or a split focus. It is unsure whether to make the story a social critique of pre-Partition formations — as it is critically concerned with the exploitation of prostitutes — or to make the illogicality of Partition its focus. That is to say, the narrative appears to be more concerned with exploring the interrogatory potential of the particular form of social othering when it comes to considering the same question as we find informing the narratives discussed earlier: was communalism always already a reality in mohallas in the Punjab. At the centre of the text is a much valued prostitute, Munni Bai, who is uncertain of her religious identity. The brothel owner, Ma, informs her that she was found (abandoned at birth) ‘equidistant from a mosque and a temple’ (110). The point this narrative makes is that in pre-Partition India religion was only one indicator of identity. Munni Bai would also like to know who her parents were, what her mother was like, what her father did for a living, and whether Munni Bai was the name given to her at birth. These, we are told, ‘were the questions Munni Bai never tired of asking herself’ (109). The text comments obliquely, on the illogical fact of religion becoming the demarcator of identity by textualising the historical moment as one in which even prostitutes, who are most likely to remain ‘untouched’ because ‘in the world in which she lived, parentage did not matter; looks and youth alone did’ (109), are forced to relocate. Here is where the story reflects critically and differently on the historical moment: relocation is literally only an exchange of one geographic location for another, not even a cultural let alone a social one. The short story concludes with Munni Bai and her co-workers occupying an established red-light district that even looks the same, abandoned by a group of
Muslim prostitutes who, presumably, will settle into one of the abandoned quarters in cities across the border. The final irony is that here, as in Lahore, they are patronised by Hindu, Muslim and Sikh clients.

Clearly, Partition is offered as an historical event that changes the fortunes of some: outsiders continue to be outsiders — commodified in both social spaces, they experience little difficulty in ‘settling’, or in understanding how the ‘new’ social geography works. In both places and systems — pre-Partition social economy of Lahore and post-Partition social economy of Delhi — the red-light district legitimises the notion of the family. If the whorehouse offers an interesting twist to racial anxiety in colonial discourse, in the Partition era it offers an equally interesting twist to communal anxiety and distinctions. Set against texts that choose to locate inter-cultural permeability in the essentialised concept of community expressed in the term mohalla, this text more harshly locates it in the politics of sexual change. Yet this text too appears interested in rehearsing the historical moment of Partition primarily to think through the issue of vivisection of the country and the reasons for such Partition that have become part of the commonsense of the nation — the ‘commonsense’ of which is questioned.

Features of the Partition experience that dominate texts where the only chronotope present is the one associated with liminality and crisis — that is, texts that begin and end in Partition — are significantly different. In such texts, Partition is its own self-defining, self-constituting space and time. It appears consonant with Bakhtin’s description of the chronotope of the ‘threshold’. Here time is, as Bakhtin suggests, ‘essentially simultaneous — it is as if it has no duration and falls out of the normal course of biographical time’ (248), and space is liminal — manifesting in literary texts as settings of corridors, stairways, and the like. In this type of Partition literature, we find more culturally and historically specific images that speak of liminality and locate it in the gothic. Spatial locations of refugee camps, trains and foot-columns proliferate and they are almost always violated or violent spaces, suggesting that the Partition/Independence economy is properly located in violence. That is to say, in such texts Partition is offered as an experience of primarily spatial proportions — as an experience of spatial dissolution. In its emphasis on the spatial, such literature resists the dominant culture’s reading of the Partition as a political and historical ‘event’ — that is, a primarily temporal experience — focussed on a political centre and its fractious, ideological debates. In a formulation shared by much non-fictional testimonial, then, such literature offers Partition as a literal and metaphoric space that is polluted by a history that the dominant culture consistently buries in the positive trope of independence.

Probably one of the better known stories set in Partition, Sadat Hasan Manto’s ‘Cold Meat’, takes place in a hotel room — a quintessentially liminal space — and stages the pollution of the domestic economy by an infinitely-extending violence outside the hotel. Violence-laced sexual passion, sexual jealousy and
hints of the violence committed by Ishwar Singh (the protagonist) while ‘out’ are described at length in the story only to converge on a single image — the dagger — which is used to perform an act of violence within, as Kulwant Kaur (his wife/mistress) stabs him in a fit of jealousy. The remainder of the story focuses our attention on a linguistic event: Ishwar Singh describes his participation in group rape, which serves to ‘explain’ his comment that he has received his ‘just’ desserts: Kulwant has killed him with the same dagger he had used to kill ‘six men’ (95). The text, quite literally identifies Ishwar Singh as simultaneously both subject and object in this liminal space of Partition through the image of the dagger: it is at once that with which he exercised his ‘new’ power (a result of suddenly being enfranchised as an ‘Indian’), and that with which he is rendered the other/object by his wife in the politics of the domestic. One would be justified in concluding that in this narrative Manto suggests Partition was ‘horrific’ not only for the ‘events’ that transpired, here both in the ‘home’ and the ‘world’, but for its simultaneous location of an individual perpetrator in a sort of surrealistic space, where a confusing of undirected violence and directed violence is possible.

‘Open It’, also by Manto, and also a story which invokes Partition as a self-constituting, liminal space, is grounded in the unstable geography of the refugee camp, another metonymic space that points to both the conceptual and material space of Partition. The plot is minimal and representative. The text opens with a reference to the train, locating the text’s relationship with the history of and to which it speaks: ‘The special train left Amritsar at two in the afternoon and reached Mughalpura eight hours later. Many of the passengers were killed on the way, many were injured and a few were missing’ (69). Attention moves from this large canvas to one figure, a Muslim (Sirajuddin) who finds himself in the safe confines of a refugee camp. The rest of the narrative relays his frantic search for the (presumably) only other member of his family to have survived, his daughter, Sakina. He approaches some ‘self-appointed social workers’ (70) to extend the search outside the camp. The reader (but not the father) is witness to her discovery through the oblique comment of the narrator: ‘The eight young men were very kind to Sakina’ (71). The narrator thus lulls the reader into a sense of security and safety. The narrative shifts our attention back to the camp, the passage of time being referred to obliquely: ‘Many days passed — Sirajuddin received no news about Sakina’ (71). Sakina is returned to the camp, unconscious. The doctor arrives to examine her and casually requests someone to ‘open [the window]’, a request to which Sakina responds by untying her salwar — an action that suggests an expectation that she is about to be sexually assaulted. At this sign of life, the father ‘shout[s] with joy, “She is alive. My daughter is alive”’ (72).

By focussing on the father’s reaction, the narrative encourages us to ‘question’ the supposed safety offered by the new definitions. We are aware, even if the father is not, that it is his broaching of the subject of his daughter in this supposedly safe place that has led to Sakina’s being singled out by social workers in the first place. Further, the place where this betrayal occurs — the refugee
camp — throws into question the dominant culture’s attempt at the time to ‘manage’ the liminal. Inextricably related, is the text’s concern with the dominant culture’s refusal to consider the very devastating experience of ontological confusion and its potential in explaining the horrific violence that devastated much of the Punjab. In other words, it too encourages us to speculate about the impact of the liminal on the uncertain identity of some twelve to fifteen million people: this was a time in which ‘acting’ (occupying the subject position) even in places supposedly made ‘safe’ by the new definitions, was potentially life-threatening, as these could be the very places in which one was helpless — ‘acted upon’.

Narratives that are written from within the space of Partition, then, articulate the ‘separateness’ of those in the frontlines most clearly. They suggest that a divide exists between those who were its victims and the dominant culture, because the former were compromised in a way the latter was not. In fact, it is from the place of this very compromise — the attempt to explain the sense of pollution — that such texts emerge. Here, people (social workers for instance) are both enabling and disabling, or (as in the case of the Babu) inspire fear in others and are subject to fear themselves. Surely this is an attempt to locate ‘perpetration’ within the chaos *caused* by a reorganisation of social space in accordance with notions of identity proper to the nation-state. Equally, stories locate inaction (due to fear) in a similar confusion. Many are reduced to inaction because of their inability to think through the shift in quite the way the social workers in these stories do. Consequences of action and inaction appear similar too: inaction haunts as much as action (there are a number of narratives in which fictional perpetrators are framed in terms of a globalising guilt). Then there are narratives that approach the issue of agency in terms of the other significant aspect of Partition — survival itself. Many stories and testimonial locate ‘loss’ — social, cultural and psychological — in the exercise of agency that itself derives from a mistaken belief in the inviolateness of one’s subject position: individuals lose lives and family because they insufficiently ‘understand’ the confusion and act as if they occupy a subject position — either in terms of the inherited (mohalla) or in terms of the new (nationhood). Hence the number of narratives and testimonials about individuals who refused to leave because of their trust in the mohalla, and suffered or lost their lives as a result, and the equally significant number of testimonial and narratives that attest to those who left, feeling they trusted more in the newly articulated associations, also only to lose their lives or family members. It would appear that the more ‘appropriate’ understanding of one’s status, judging by such historical and fictional accounts, would have been to be confused about one’s ‘actantial position’ (*Van Alphen* 28).14

Finally, I turn to a consideration of some stories that begin post-Partition and also appear to be self-consciously concerned with speaking the crisis that Partition represents to the authors by making the social order itself a subject. In these, and others like them, post-Partition social order approaches the kind of social space
LeFebvre considers to be the abstract conceptualised space typical of a capitalist mode of production. The nuclear family appears in place of community, the boundaries of the house replace the village space, and when the public space of community is evoked, it is severely fractured. It appears to be subject to classification, and rationalising. A discourse that commonly appears to function metonymically in signalling this new social order is that of law: stories about individuals attempting to turn their past life into the figures and statistics required (of them) to claim ‘compensation’ in the new country proliferate, as do stories about the legality of second marriages (and the legitimacy, and the national status of children of such marriages) conducted in the belief that the first one was no longer valid given the disappearance or separation of partners and/or belief that the partner was a victim of Partition. Two stories I have chosen to consider here, however, while articulating post-Partition reality in these terms, choose not to focus so much on thematising it but on offering a space of resistance, not capable of transforming the culture that surrounds it but residing within it nonetheless. Resistance in both stories lies in the redefinition of the institution of family by individuals who have lost family to the Partition. In other words, in these stories, post-Partition is not without its compensations (or the promise of compensations). What prevents this promise from being realised is its violent disruption by an entry of the past, the seemingly free-floating synchronic moment of Partition itself.

Ramlal’s ‘Visitor from Pakistan’ opens with a rather serene domestic scene, without any suggestion that there is a horrific history attached to it. In fact, we are lulled into believing that this is ‘natural’ family with the expected history attached to it. The story opens with a typical domestic scene: ‘Munni and Meesha were playing in the sunlit courtyard. Saraswati quickly collected some hot water, a towel, soap and some clothes so as to give them a bath’ (179). This routine scene is interrupted early in the narrative with the appearance of the past in the form of a ‘stranger’, Saraswati’s former husband, Baldev, who is presumed dead. The narrative traces the attempt of all to deal with competing claims, the various positions being articulated by various characters. Saraswati’s mother, for instance, responds to this return of the past by re-reading her daughter’s second marriage and post-Partition life as one that brings dishonour to the family (now that her first husband has returned) and she does so by referring to Hindu epics that make women the repository of familial honour: ‘My daughter’s life is ruined. Her reputation lies in mud.... She has two husbands now. Hai, hai.... Why don’t you kill yourself, Saraswati? Why doesn’t the earth open up and swallow you? You escaped from Pakistan with your honour intact. But now death is the only solution left’ (182). The lack of logic in her response does not appear to be apparent to her. Sunderdas, Saraswati’s second husband, is determined to stake his legal claim to her and informs Baldev that if he wishes to contest the claim, he can ‘appeal to the court’ (185). Saraswati’s father advances the claim of the second husband on the grounds of indebtedness and makes the speech in the
hearing of Baldev and the local people who appear to function as an informal court: 'He saved us, shared our sufferings in the refugee camp through winter and summer. He helped us sort out our problems regarding our claims and the property we had left behind. This lion-hearted man saw us through our trials and enabled us to resettle here' (185). Finally, Baldev asks Saraswati to choose, but on the grounds of institutionalised morality (presumably) since he employs the discourse of legal justice to advance his moral claim. He too speaks within the hearing of the ad hoc crowd and family members: 'I shall ... knock at the door of another court, at this very moment, now. I have full faith in that court and know that I shall be dealt with justly' (186). In all this, Saraswati is herself absent and her response, when it comes, signals only the impossibility of choice: 'Suddenly there was a loud scream from the room. Saraswati broke down and wept' (186). While the narrative appears to be concerned with describing a situation that is impossible for all concerned, as culturally inherited codes of purity clash with the challenge to these very codes Partition encouraged, Baldev is singled out more than the others and it is with his announcement of intended return to Pakistan that the narrative ends.

Here too, then, we note that Partition appears in its long-term and seemingly ubiquitous challenge to agency — the right to act — by throwing the individual back into an actantial confusion. Individuals no longer know 'how to be'. Each chooses a different individual feature of the amorphous cultural inheritance to justify the position s/he 'automatically' settles on in the face of such confusion, all except the central figure: the mother chooses Hindu texts that proscribe the behaviour of a dishonoured woman (whether or not the dishonour has anything to do with her is immaterial); the father chooses the code of honour that dictates repayment of favour (the daughter being the gift that repays the debt); the second husband chooses the fact of civil law; and the first husband chooses the fact of an unspecified moral law. Post-Partition social practice is revealed to be threatening because not only does it reveal the continued hold of texts that dictate familial practice and female behaviour but, by not acknowledging the disruption — that has occurred — of such powerful dictates, does not allow for the construction of a social order that might accommodate shifting material practices.

Similarly, Mohan Rakesh’s ‘The Owner of Rubble’ stages post-Partition Amritsar as a city in which former Muslim residents (visitors now from Pakistan) and some of its Hindu and Sikh residents can and do attempt to piece together the life and place which continues to signal ‘home’ to them. Once again, the text’s engagement with historical process — that it is not just any time and any place, but a time and places metonymically linked with Partition — is indicated in the very first line: ‘They had returned to Amritsar from Lahore after seven-and-a-half years’ (67). The visiting Muslims, who walk down streets that ‘now belonged to strangers’ (67) ‘reminded each other of the past’ (67) and ‘Most people who met the visitors assailed them with a variety of questions — ‘What is Lahore like these days?’ (68). Even the perspective that informs the articulation
of identity (belonging) is informed by a sensibility that belongs to the other side of Partition, pre-Partition (in post-Partition India, it is the Muslims who are ‘strangers’ and the houses are not ‘their’ houses). The reader is lulled by this lapse of the ‘group’ into nostalgia, in spite of more than a few references to the post-Partition social order as one based in enumeration. More specifically, Amritsar is indeed translated and is literally a product of, and reproduces itself as, an ‘Indian city’. For example, the narrator states: ‘There were, of course, some who were still so suspicious of the Muslims that they turned away when they saw them on the road’ (68). This is largely because of the narrator’s own participation in a re-membering of the qualitatively different past, shared then by members of the cities that most speak the rupture of Partition — Lahore and Amritsar, a mere forty miles apart and separated by the border. The narrator states: ‘These questions were asked with such sincerity and concern that it seemed as if Lahore wasn’t merely a city, but a person who was related to thousands of people who were anxious about its well-being’ (68).

The security is fundamentally challenged when the story of Partition, as it unravelled in a locality of Amritsar, is progressively revisited when an elderly Muslim of this visiting group confronts the pile of rubble that was his home and in which members of his family were murdered and, unwittingly, forgives the ‘goonda’ responsible for the murder of his son and son’s family. (‘What happened was fated, Rakkhiya’ [75].) Partition has not shaken his faith in the (notion of) mohalla. He innocently asks: ‘Tell me, Rakkha, how did it happen?’ ‘You were friends. You loved each other like brothers. Couldn’t he have hidden in your house?’ (74). The narrator, however, is determined that readers are made familiar with the story that apparently everyone else in the local area but Gani, the old Muslim, knows. (As in the former story the local people act as a sort of impromptu folk court and wait eagerly for Rakha to receive his just desserts, which he does not). Not only does this figure suggest the inability of the new definitions to erase the mohalla but also the lack of such bonds in the new economy.

These two narratives, then, offer post-Partition reality as a post-eschatological one, forever haunted by the ‘end’ and unsure of how to imagine or live beyond its boundaries. Here too, time and history cannot sever, nor recreate, the bonds with the past. Quite literally, the characters disappear into the past: as we end with the devastation of the present, we can only assume the disappearance of the characters (forcible in many cases) into the past, reclaimed by this past, to which a revitalising future cannot be attached.

II

The importance of findings such as the following — that those who were most polluted by the process of Partition, most compromised by it, offer a fundamental confusion almost always contiguous with descriptions of scenes of violence and violation — is that they act in an interventionist fashion in dominant historiography and culture’s attempts to explain a violence that left over a million
dead. It makes one think twice about unfortunate comments that Punjabis are a violent people or that violence gets imprinted in the psyche of the colonised because of colonialism's dependence on violence for its own maintenance, that communalism was always already there, or a construct successfully habituated to the culture. Given the absence of a colonial apparatus and/or a strictly political one, I conclude that these narratives are as insistently anti-statist in their reading of the historical moment as Indian historiography has been statist. Further, they serve to point out the dominant culture's emphasising of Independence/Partition as a temporal event — after all, it is primarily remembered and revitalised in annual celebrations that mark the date of independence, a fact that reinforces our collective reading of it as a primarily temporal event. This, in turn, further discourages a consideration of the historical process as an experience, and Partition, in the words of Ashis Nandy, continues to be 'the unwritten epic, getting more tattered everyday in the minds of the survivors, perpetrators, onlookers, and chroniclers' (306). If postcolonial literature treats India of the last half of the twentieth century in terms of its colonial legacy, Partition literature offers a much-required corrective, or at the very least, an interrogation of the assumption that issues of identity are wrapped up in the rhetoric and logic of colonialism. Even from a reading of the few texts I have discussed here, it is clear that there is a determination to claim agency, even if it leads only irrevocably to facing a difficult fact — of individual and collective participation in violence. As for a comprehension of what it is that actually happened, the answer even today appears to be the one made by the narrator in Manto's most famous narrative on Partition, 'Toba Tek Singh'. Speaking from within the collective consciousness of the asylum, the narrator states:

Where was Pakistan? What were its boundaries? They did not know. For this very reason all the inmates who were altogether mad, found themselves in a quandary; they could not figure out whether they were in Pakistan or India, and if they were in Pakistan, then how was it possible that only a short while ago they had been in India when they had not moved from the asylum at all?' (2)

NOTES

1 Other published collections are: S. Cowasjee and K.S. Duggal, *When the British Left: Stories on the Partitioning of India*; S. Cowasjee and K.S. Duggal, *Orphans of the Storm: Stories on the Partition of India*; Mushirul Hasan, *India Partitioned: The Other Face of Freedom*.


3 Take, for instance, Bhalla's brief comments on some of the short stories included in his collection, comments that focus on 'theme'. One which I deal with here, Sadat
Hasan Manto’s ‘Open It’, he suggests is about ‘ordinary people, in whose restraint and decency others had placed their faith, become ruthless killers’ (xxi). This is, indeed, part of the point the story makes, but if one follows the logic of the text, which leads to the response of a father to signs that his raped daughter is not dead (as he had feared), the story makes a more subtle comment on Partition (discussed in the body of the article). Such a focussing on theme has also led Bhalla, and others, to create what Ravikant and Saint correctly label ‘restrictive typologies’ (xxv).

When it is noted, it is done so casually, in observations about the nature of pre-Partition communities. Alok Bhalla, for instance, comments that Partition brought ‘a long and communally shared history’ (vii) to an end. This history he describes in terms of a social order: ‘The experience of a life lived together was sufficiently secure and rooted to enable the communities to have evolved mechanisms for containing tensions and even outrage. So that even if there were disruptions, the rich heterogeneity of the life of the two communities was never seriously threatened’ (viii).

I am drawing here on Ed Soja’s definition of the term: ‘the social order of being-in-the-world can be seen as revolving around the constitution of society, the production and reproduction of social relations, institutions and practices’ (qtd. in Dear 66).

‘Communalism’ was offered by Congress leaders as the reason for their reluctant consent in June 1947 to the vivisection of the country. In ‘Prose of Otherness’, Pandey comments: ‘Historians have argued that it was this explosion of violence, amounting to civil war, which convinced many who were until then strongly opposed to Partition that any other course would be even more fatal: that it led not only the Congress leadership but large numbers of ordinary ‘non-political’ Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs to accept Partition as inevitable’ (206). Communalism, in Pandey’s well-known formulation, has a very specific connotation in the Indian context. He writes, ‘In its common Indian usage the word “communalism” refers to a condition of suspicion, fear and hostility between members of different religious communities’ (1990 6). He adds that the term takes on the connotation of a sectarian approach at the constitutional level. The term denotes, ‘movements that make sectional demands on state policy for a given share in jobs, education and legislative positions, leading on in some instances to demands for the creation of new provinces and states’ (6).

The large production of Partition literature in the form of the short story has been noticed by some academics. Aijaz Ahmad, for instance, comments on the centrality of the short story: ‘In India, as in Pakistan, the principal genre that served as a virtual chronicle of the Partition was the short story’ (27). Tejwant Singh Gill suggests the possible reason: ‘So traumatising was this event that Punjabi writers were forced to employ all genres for its portrayal. Since its traumatic aspect outweighed its dramatic and poetic facets, the short story came most naturally to be employed for the purpose’ (85).

Ashis Nandy quotes Suketu Mehta as suggesting that Partition itself turned a generation into writers because of the nature of their experience. Mehta: ‘There are millions of Partition stories throughout the subcontinent, a body of lore that is infrequently recorded in print or on tape, and rarely passed on to the next generation. All over the map of the subcontinent, there is an entire generation of people who have been made poets, philosophers, and storytellers by their experience during the Partition’ (qtd in Nandy 306).

Press statements by leaders such as Jawaharlal Nehru, Mohammed Ali Jinnah and Gandhi assuring the populace (particularly of the Punjab and Bengal) that they would not be forced to relocate, that both nations would have a secular constitution, proliferate in the first half of 1947. One of the many texts in which the assurance liberally dispensed by leaders in 1947 is referred to, obliquely, is in Bhisham Sahni’s
'The Train Has Reached Amritsar' where the narrator states: 'Given the history, everyone felt that after Independence the riots would automatically stop' (148). Of course, that is when they started in earnest and continued unabated till the middle of October 1947.

Here I disagree with Nandy, who suggests that memories of community pre-Partition are idealistic. He writes: 'One remarkable and consistent part of the memories is the fondness and affection with which survivors remember their multi-ethnic, multi-religious villages ... it would appear that, over the years, all struggle, suffering and conflicts have been painstakingly erased from the village of the mind. Above all, there is no communal tension in the remembered pre-Partition villages. Along with an easy life, prosperity (which usually means the availability of cheap foodstuff and articles of daily use) and cultural riches, the village as a pastoral paradise offers a perfect community life' (322). As my discussion of some texts suggests, such a global comment needs correction.

This comment occurs in a note (109), where Azzi argues that in pre-nationalist societies 'identification' did not 'necessarily involve legal, formal, and explicit definitions of categorical boundaries' (122). In yet another helpful formulation, Georges Gusdorf, who identifies Indian society in general as a non-individualist one, notes that in such societies, 'lives are so entangled that each of them has its centre everywhere and its circumference nowhere' (29–30). Hence narratives that 'show' an enmeshed living of individuals, the point of enmeshed living, however, being made through the seemingly paradoxical gesture of identifying characters in terms of their religious, affiliation, locatedness or inheritance — Hindu, Muslim and Sikh (mainly). This employment suggests that the overriding concern with combating the notion of communalism required such a labelling: how else is communal harmony to be described without identifying individuals in terms of differences?

Although Marx's description of the social order of pre-capitalist, agricultural economies — and he comments on India every now and again — in Grundrisse by no means privileges such economies, his attempt to describe the complexity of this social order is apropos. I quote from the section relevant to a consideration of the level of settled economy that approximates that of the mohalla in the early twentieth century.

This naturally arisen clan community ... is the first presupposition — the communality ... of blood, language, customs — for the appropriation of the objective conditions of their life, and of their life's reproducing and objectifying activity.... The earth is the great workshop, the arsenal which furnishes both means and material of labour, as well as the seat, the base of the community. They relate naïvely to it as the property of the community, of the community producing and reproducing itself in living labour. Each individual conducts himself only as a link, as a member of their community, as proprietor or possessor'. (472 [italics in original])

He adds that such a reading of individual agency is not compromised by the presence of economic and social inequality in such formations: 'it is not in the least a contradiction to it that, as in most of the Asiatic landforms, the comprehensive unity standing above all these little communities appears as the higher proprietor or as the sole proprietor' ([italics in original]472).

In a chapter on the press in Bearing Witness: Partition, Independence, End of the Raj (forthcoming), I discuss the employment of the discourse of medicine in political cartoons appearing in English-language newspapers of the nationalist press.

Van Alphen suggests that traumatic experience results in a confusion about 'actantial position: one is neither subject nor object of the events, or one is both at the same time' (28).
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Blue-Eyed and Brown-Skinned: Uncovering a Hidden Past

My name is R—. I was born in England in 1964, and this is my story. As part of my immediate family would be most unhappy if they knew I’d written it, I will withhold names to respect their privacy.

On the 1st of January 2000, I made several New Year’s Resolutions; among them was a pledge to solve the mystery of why half my family is ‘coloured’, that is, has dark skin. All I knew about my family was that my father’s family was English-born and bred, and that my mother was born in India and emigrated to England in 1948. She met my father there in the late 1950s, and the rest is history. My mother’s maiden name was Dobson and I knew she must have been born in the last years of the great British Empire, when the sun was rapidly setting on it, even though, just a little while before, it had been guaranteed never to do such an awful thing.

Upon Indian Independence in 1947, my family from India was broken up. My maternal grandfather’s brother ‘stayed on’ in Calcutta, while my Nan’s sister and her mother went to New Zealand. My own maternal grandfather and my Nan, my maternal grandmother (whose maiden name was Waterlow) and several cousins emigrated to England. In total, six adults and two children stayed in England, while the others later decided to join the rest of their family in Australia and New Zealand. The colour of my mother’s side of the family ranges from white to dark brown, with several shades in between. They never concealed the fact that they came from India, and they kept in regular contact with the branch of the family still in Calcutta.

I always had a fascination with India because as a child I would spend many weekends visiting or staying with my Nan who would tell me wonderful stories of how different life used to be in her childhood, of how she was free to roam anywhere without fear of attack or abuse and of how she met my grandfather, who was a friend of her cousin’s, at an apprentice’s ball in Jamalpore. My grandfather had wanted to be an engineering apprentice for the railways but had to settle for a printing apprenticeship.

As a child I grew up with my mother, father and sister in East Anglia, a very rural part of England, and never thought too much about who or what I was. It wasn’t until I went to the village school in Parson Drove that I realised I was slightly different from my classmates. They gave me two nicknames which stuck. It was 1972, when I was eight years old, that I was first called ‘Curry Powder’. I thought that I was being called this name because curry was indeed a part of
my staple diet — we would have it two or three times a week at home. My immediate reaction was to stop eating curries as I thought this would stop the name-calling and allow me to fit in with the rest of my classmates. It didn’t. Then, in 1976 I went to the Queen’s Boys’ secondary school, and immediately received the nickname ‘Black Man’. I was twelve years old and I understood that my skin was darker than the rest of my school friends and was not bothered at all by the name, just accepted it.

The first time I asked my family the reason why we are coloured was about this time. My Nan’s brother, Uncle Sid, had just been to visit and I remember asking why Uncle Sid was so dark compared to the rest of us. And I was told that the family was cursed by some magic man in the nineteenth century while they lived in India and that the curse should have stopped with my grandmother’s generation. As a young twelve-year-old boy I believed every word of this explanation and did not question it until I was about fifteen and no longer believed in curses or magic. Then, I decided to ask my mother’s brother Thomas if he could tell me where the colour in our family came from, and he told me we were of Maltese descent. I then went round to my Nan and asked if what my uncle had just told me was true. She sat me down and explained that my fourth great-grandmother was Maltese. And this story too, I believed — at least for the next five years. In 1981, the first time my English-born, English-bred, English rose wife-to-be met my family, she asked if we were Indian. I explained that part of my family came from India, were ‘born there’, but that we were of Maltese descent and that was where the colour came from. As for the accent, Mum came from India so we were bound to sound like Indians. After a long discussion she believed what I had told her.

In 1989 I was newly married, 24 and desperate to go to the amazing country where my mother’s people had lived, to see it for myself. In April I set off with my new wife to explore India. When I told my family that I was going to India they seemed very happy and excited that I was going to visit the family in the country they called ‘home’. My Nan also decided that I needed to know some basic Urdu and set about teaching it to me. I must confess I was totally useless at trying to speak the language, and I suppose she must have realised this too, as after several attempts she gave up.

On our arrival in India my wife again raised the question of my origins; she told me that I had ‘Indian hands’; she asked me to compare my hands with hers and those of the locals in Claridge’s Hotel where we were staying in Delhi. I knew that my grandmother had been born in Delhi, so that was where we started our trip. After several comparisons with the people around we decided that not only did I have ‘Indian hands’, I had Indian legs and feet as well. This discovery was starting to throw the story about the Maltese ancestry out of the window.

Quite separately from discovering that I have a lot of Indian features, I found India difficult to come to terms with. The country is rich with natural beauty, but
I was exposed to a degree of poverty that I had never known could exist. It really was a culture shock, and I must say, my trip to this foreign land completely changed my way of thinking about the world. We found Delhi to be very beautiful, and you could still feel the British influence on the city and could imagine how life would have been during the British Raj. We spent three weeks exploring Uttar Pradesh and then decided to visit the family in Calcutta. Compared to Delhi, Calcutta was a different world, one that my wife found very difficult to adjust to, for the pollution and the sheer volume of people sleeping out on the streets were shocking.

My maternal grandfather’s brother was retired and in poor health due to tuberculosis. He was living in Circus Avenue, Calcutta, with his son who is a manager in an electrical repair store. The rest of the family were in good health. The thing my wife and I found most strange about our relatives in India was that they would emphasise being British at every opportunity that they could get, though they never said that they wished they had gone to England. I remember finding it most strange when they told me, ‘You just can’t get decent servants these days!’: My wife and I found this comment quite amazing as we had never experienced the services of any sort of servants, and we could not believe that decent or indecent, they still existed in India. We stayed with my family for five days only. We were supposed to stay longer, but Calcutta was starting to get to my wife and she was desperate to leave it. We told the family that we wanted to visit Darjeeling to see the Mount Hermon School that my mother had attended, but the family persuaded us not to go as they considered it too dangerous. They told us that several people had been murdered en route to Darjeeling and that they thought that it was too risky for us to go there.

During our stay, the subject of each other’s colour and accent was never mentioned. The accent of these relatives was the same as the rest of my mother’s family, and I felt that they were my family and no different from the rest of us back in England. On my return to England, I asked my family if we were part Indian in any way. To me this was quite a logical question, as we certainly seemed to have Indian features and my mother’s side of the family came from India. My mother denied this and told me to speak to my Nan. Nan refused to listen to my questions and again told me we were Maltese. My family’s response to my question was in fact quite amazing. They became very defensive. To be honest, I didn’t buy the putative Malteseness for one moment any longer, but I decided to let it drop rather than cause an argument, and I was more interested in raising a family than tracing my roots.

It wasn’t until some eleven years later that I returned to the question of origins and made a pledge to solve the family mystery. I started by asking my Nan if she had any family records that I could use as I wanted to trace the family. With some reluctance she produced six pages of handwritten information on the family, going back to 1830. The pages said that William Johnstone, an Englishman,
worked for John Company and had a Maltese wife. Nan told me that her mother had written these records to help my Nan’s brother get in to the British army. Apparently, they would not accept him to start with, as they thought he was a native Indian. The record was a list of paternal and maternal ancestors going back to 1830, listing their names, occupations and other details. After studying it I decided to ask Nan some questions about William Johnstone’s descendants. She told me that she knew nothing more about the family and gave me the phone number of my Uncle Bob, telling me to phone him as he knew a lot more. Uncle Bob is my Nan’s first cousin who came from India to England at the same time and lives in Leicester.

After a brief conversation with Uncle Bob, he sent me a copy of all his records, going back to my fourth great-grandfather, James Johnstone, who was married in 1830 to a ‘wife unknown’. Uncle Bob had also written a document entitled ‘Introduction to the Family in India’ to explain how the family came to be in India. There were two things that I noticed about Uncle Bob’s records — one was that he had a different name from my fourth great-grandfather — Bob had a ‘James’, while my Nan had a ‘William’ — and the other was that he had included several paragraphs about Anglo-Indians (that two seats had been reserved in the Indian parliament for the Anglo-Indian community when India gained independence), though he did not state directly that the family was Anglo-Indian or connected to Anglo-Indians.

Armed with both sets of records I went to the Reading Rooms in the British Library in London to go through all the records there on the British in India. I was trying to find an Indian or Anglo-Indian ancestor, but failed, so I thought, to find either. But I did manage to find a James Johnstone, a Drum Major in the 2nd Native Infantry and his two daughters, Matilda and Margaret, who both ended up being my third great-grandmothers, as my grandmother’s parents were second cousins. The Reading Rooms had the complete set of microfilms on births, deaths and marriages in India, and because I knew the name and birth date of my third great-grandmother, Margaret, from my Nan’s records, I was able to find Margaret’s birth certificate. From this certificate I found the correct name of my fourth great-grandfather and grandmother too. These names turned out to be James — not William — and Isabella Johnstone. From this finding I knew that my Uncle Bob’s records were correct and that my Nan’s mother’s information had major flaws in it.

On my return from London I was a little disappointed as I had not found any Indian or unmistakably Anglo-Indian ancestors, and when telling my story to a friend he suggested that I entered the word ‘Anglo-Indian’ on the internet to see if we could find anything. I was absolutely amazed to find around forty sites on Yahoo about Anglo-Indians and one entry on the Rootsweb listserv archives. I decided to log on to the Rootsweb and track it to see what it was about. The Rootsweb is a site on the internet where, on its India-list, people researching the
British in India can talk to each other. After I had been on the internet, I realised not just what an Anglo-Indian was but what Anglo-Indian attitudes often were about their mixed-race heritage, and I thought it more than likely that my family were indeed Anglo-Indians, and that Anglo-Indianness would answer all the questions that I had been asking the family, including the one about why I had failed to get a reasonable answer for all these years. I remember thinking, ‘So that’s why we have English surnames, but are brown in skin colour, and that’s why my family insisted so strongly that they were British’ — Anglo-Indians are, traditionally, more often than not ashamed of their ‘touch of the tarbrush’ and have, till very recently, done their best to conceal it rather than talk about it, much less go searching it out.

Another web site listed about six contacts for Anglo-Indians in England, so I decided to contact each in turn. As I worked through the list I became more and more despondent, as each person in turn told me that their organisation no longer existed. Last on my list was the ‘British Ancestors in India’ contact name, Paul Rowland. Paul explained to me that the British Ancestors in India organisation, too, no longer existed, but that he was still publishing a magazine called The Indiaman Magazine. I told Paul that as James Johnstone was my fourth great-grandfather on both sides of my family, meaning that two of his daughters ended up as both being my great-great-great-grandmothers (what a coincidence!) I had decided that I wanted to research him. Paul asked if I had another name for him to look up. John Joshua Marshall, one of my third great-grandfathers, married James’ daughter, Matilda, and so I said, ‘JJM.’ I had found some fascinating information about him already. He started his life in India as a farrier before becoming a veterinary surgeon. He then served in the Meerut Light Horse during the Great Mutiny. After the Mutiny he went into horse breaking, and then spent his final years as an engine driver for the East Indian Railways. Nan’s family records stated that JJM served in the Meerut Light Horse, and she had also provided me with a copy of a letter from the British Government thanking him for his service during the Mutiny.

Five minutes after my conversation with Paul the phone rang, and it was Paul again. He told me that a lady called Eve had written an article for his magazine about the Khaki Ressalah, also known as the Meerut Light Horse, and that her ancestor was one John Joshua Marshall. I couldn’t believe what I was hearing, for as far as my family knew we were the only descendants of the offspring of John Joshua Marshall. Paul gave me this lady’s phone number and I phoned her straight away. It was truly fantastic as this lady turned out to be my Nan’s second cousin and was living in England in Yorkshire about 250 miles away. We decided to exchange family records. I also asked her if she knew where the family colouring came from, but she just laughed and said she did not know.

The good news was that in her records was a letter to her from Donald Jacques, a well-known genealogical researcher. He had found James Johnstone’s marriage
certificate to Isabella Matthew in Dinapore on the 5th of October 1829, so I now had a maiden surname for my fourth great-grandmother. He also said in his letter that he thought James was an Anglo-Indian as he was a drummer, and Anglo-Indians were often drummers in the army. I was now totally convinced that my family was Anglo-Indian and decided to tell them what I had found. My first approach was to tell my mother that I thought we were definitely Anglo-Indians, and I had a long conversation with her in which I gave her all the reasons for my conclusions. My mother’s reaction was to reject totally what I was telling her. I realised that I had hit a raw nerve and decided not to push the subject any further. As my mother was not interested in what I had to say about my findings about the family history, I decided to go and see my Nan and my mother’s brother Uncle Thomas again and try to tell them what I had discovered. I had just started to explain my findings when my Nan interrupted me, and said in a very loud, firm voice, ‘We are Domiciled Europeans, not Anglo-Indians. We are not Anglo-Indians’. I decided to drop the conversation as I knew it would get me nowhere, but at least my family had given me a term other than ‘British’ to explain what we are.

So I decided to look into what a ‘Domiciled European’ was, and I found an organisation on the Internet called the ‘Anglo-Indian and Domiciled European Family History Group’, which is run by Geraldine Charles. When I phoned Geraldine, I told her that I thought my family was Anglo-Indian and that they claimed that they are Domiciled Europeans. Geraldine explained to me that Domiciled Europeans originally started off as being white Europeans that had settled in India, but as time passed Domiciled Europeans intermarried with Anglo-Indians, that it always was difficult to distinguish between them, and is today even more so — and that though Domiciled Europeans insisted on distinguishing themselves from Anglo-Indians, they always had the same legal status. In other words, today most Domiciled Europeans are indeed, Anglo-Indians who reject the term.

After surfing the web a little more I mustered up enough courage to phone Uncle Bob to ask his opinion about the Maltese descent mentioned in my Nan’s papers. Uncle Bob told me that he had never heard of the Maltese story and as far as he was concerned too, we were of Anglo-Indian descent and that was why he had written about the race in his introduction to the family in India. I tracked the India-list on Rootsweb for about three months and then decided to put out a message on it. I received three replies, and one turned out to be from my Nan’s first cousin Basil, in New Zealand. At this point I was really in luck, as he had been researching my family for over ten years and had a much better understanding of it than I. He was quite open about the family and confirmed that James Johnstone was indeed an Anglo-Indian and that was indeed why he was a drummer in the army as Anglo-Indians were only allowed to be drummers and fifers. I had definitively solved the mystery and my quest for an Anglo-
Indian ancestor was complete. I had now found a knowledgeable member of our family who was willing to be completely honest, open and proud of the family history.

Bas told me that for some reason all the female members of our family have difficulties in coming to terms with what they are and have chosen several different ways to hide their roots. My mother would tell me of how the family had lived in India with servants and that she had attended boarding school there, but that when they arrived in Felixstowe, they spent their first months living in nothing more than a garden shed, and were subjected daily to racial abuse. Could this be partly the reason why my family decided to try to conceal their identity?

In early 2001, I sent a post to the India-list explaining my circumstances and asking for Anglo-Indian recipes, because I am interested in expanding my knowledge of both Anglo-Indian history and culture. Family from New Zealand have helped, and friends from the India-list too. I received several replies to my post. One was from Sanjay Sircar in Australia. Sanjay was interested in my request and helped me by email — it is he who is responsible for encouraging me to write this story, and without him, it would never have been written down. Sanjay explained that he is an English-speaking Indian Christian, something completely different from an Anglo-Indian — ‘adjacent minority communities’, he called them. He believes in trying to understand why people conceal their identities rather than jumping to judge them adversely, and that he also believes that whatever their reasons, the choice is their own to make, and must be respected, whether we approve or not. He also taught me that the Mutiny is now called the ‘First War of Indian Independence’ by historians, and that many feel continuing to say ‘Mutiny’ is a retrograde thing to do.

On a lighter note, Sanjay taught me how to make an authentic vindaloo, spicy sweet-and-sour, and when another member of the India-list asked for a recipe for ‘tepari jam’, the gooseberry jam that they made in India, Sanjay sent one that he said was Anglo-Indian to the core — with cinnamon-cardamom-cloves and whisky or rum in it as well, and told me how Anglo-Indians pronounced the word ‘tip-pari’, with the accent on the second syllable rather than the first. I had no idea that the gooseberries had anything to do with India until I took some in for Nan to try just the year before (2000). She was over the moon about them, and told me how she used to eat them in India. It’s funny, sometimes, how life works out, and I surprised her with some jam when the next lot of gooseberries had ripened well. One crop was very poor, but I was ultimately successful in making the jam as per the recipe — I guessed at the amounts to put in but it all seemed to work, so we had gooseberry jam on toast for breakfast and it was pretty damn’ good. Nan also mentioned that they ate Hunters Beef for Christmas, a dish I’ve never heard of, and we’ve tracked down a recipe, involving a de-boned round of beef hung for a day or so, powdered saltpetre, coarse sugar, cloves, nutmeg, allspice and salt rubbed into it and turned and rubbed for a few
weeks, dipped it into cold water, bound with tape, put into a pan with a little water, covered with a brown crust and paper, and baked for five hours. Saltpetre is not exactly common here, but my mother has said that if I get her the ingredients she will make it for Nan.

So one Indian Christian had entered my life, and strangely enough, two weeks later, I received an email from my Nan’s cousin Bas explaining to me that my fourth great-grandmother Isabella – the wife of the James (not William) Johnstone – was an Indian Christian from Lucknow. Bas told me that his grandmother said she could not find a maiden name for Isabella when he tried to do a family tree in 1945, and that Isabella may have been one of the female foundlings in religious institutions. Presumably it is Isabella who is responsible for the family’s second language being Urdu, as Nan always said.

I tried to get my Nan to tape her stories about life in India, but she refused to do this because she claims that she has a chi-chi accent (but hey she is not an Anglo Indian, which I find so funny!). She does have a strong chi-chi accent — or at least a non-British one — but what does that matter? Personally I love to hear the singsong ‘chi-chi’ accent as I associate it with the love and warmth that my grandparents have always given me. My Nan’s English has changed since I was a child, but I can always remember how I used to find it quite funny that my grandparents would put sentences together using a different syntax from the one we heard around us, speaking arse-about-face so to speak (and I mean no disrespect by using this colloquial phrase). So, when I tried to get Nan to write about her life in India, she first refused to put pen to paper, on the grounds of accent, but after a little persuasion, I saw her one night and made my first recording of her direct. Then, at the end of my visit, she said, ‘You will not be needing my book then,’ and produced a book with about twenty pages of writing. She is writing her life story for the family, and I am so happy. (One other thing Nan says is that her half-sister’s grandmother was an ‘Indian Princess’. I will try to prove her right. We shall see.)

There was a programme on TV as I was writing my story called ‘Trading Races’, about two white English people swapping colour with a black African and an Asian. The programme was trying to get both parties to feel what it is like to be the other person and to live in their communities. It was very well put together and tried to tackle a lot of the racial problems that exist here today in England. And it got me kind of wondering as to where I actually sit, as I am not a white Englishman nor a full blooded Asian but kind of somewhere in the middle, not belonging to any stable grouping. I am Brown British, and look upon Asians as cousins. When I saw this programme, my question was, was it the same for the Anglo Indians living in India under the British rule, being neither one or the other? Sanjay said, ‘As long as you are happy, what does it matter where you sit? We are all situated between something and something else, if not racially (which is really only a matter of appearance), then culturally
or in some other way', and it is something I must think about. I also wonder whether Anglo-Indians living in India under British rule, who formed an in-between community, the ones who were happy and well off serving the British, with job reservations and so on, identifying with the white rulers and sometimes looking down on and bullying the 'natives', sometimes completely denying any and all Indianness, ever envisaged an independent India and their place in — or out — of it.

As for myself, I'm glad I asked my questions as a child, glad my wife remarked on my 'Indian colouring' and 'Indian hands', and I'm proud of being Anglo-Indian, brown-skinned and blue-eyed, and of all my ancestors, whoever they were and whatever they achieved. I will tell my children what they are, and I hope that in the years to come they are interested in my quest and share my pleasure at the results.

NOTES

1 This story was written with the assistance of Sanjay Sircar, who notes: 'I encouraged R.B. to tell me his story, which he did slowly and painfully in fragments that I knitted together over a couple of years'. The following notes are Sircar's.

2 Park Circus in general, and Circus Avenue (like Royd Street, Elliott Road, Wellesley Street, Ripon Street, etc.) was traditionally (and still remains to some extent) an Anglo-Indian residential area at the furthest end of central Calcutta (Kolkata), sometimes looked down on as a 'phiringi', that is, mixed-race ('Frank', 'feranghi', Portuguese mixed-race, any European-mixed race) or phiringi-cum-Muslim one by the Bengali middle-classes.

3 The term Anglo-Indian once meant 'British-in India', but that is no longer its predominant meaning. It is also (incorrectly or confusingly) sometimes used to refer to people of South Asian origin in the UK. 'Indian Writing in English' was a phrase specifically invented to avoid using the phrase 'Anglo-Indian'.

4 'Chi-chi', for things and people Anglo-Indian, pronounced with the 'ch' as in 'Charles', and possibly deriving independently from 'Chhi!' or 'Chhi-chhi!', an ejaculation of disgust in many languages in both North and South India, was not heard in India in my own childhood (1955 ff.), though we knew what it meant. It should probably be distinguished from the phrase rendered in the same way but from the French for 'a curl of false hair', pronounced 'shee-shee' — though there may have been some interpenetration of the first meaning by the second.

5 Many Anglo-Indians claim descent on the lost 'distaff side' from Indian nobility of one sort or another — sometimes a princess saved from committing suttee on a funeral pyre: see the very peculiar form of this motif in Jules Verne's *Around the World in Eighty Days*, where it is used for a Parsi — Zoroastrian — wife of a raja (suttee is not a Parsi custom). Some of these claims may be true, others wishful thinking.
Border Crossing: An Introduction

*Border Crossings* began as an idea for a photographic installation which premiered in 2002 at the Wollongong City Gallery, in Wollongong, Australia. A merging of print and filmic texts, the show worked as a meditation on migration, through images and poems that travelled between Canada and Australia, though it also moved through other landscapes, from Switzerland to Turkey. The show attempted to challenge the way photographs were typically presented as well. Many of the Canadian works of dilapidated buildings, for example, were framed using recycled Australian materials: paling fences, decomposing sleepers, and rusted metals. Australian images were surrounded by Canadian timbers, so that the frames themselves spoke about a cross-culturality, a contamination of place and space, which arguably reframed and represented the images themselves.

The selection of images here are drawn from a forthcoming book which, like the photographic installation itself, explores the theme of reconstruction and deconstruction through photographs and texts that centre on buildings and places in growth and decay. In a way, then, the words and images are haunted by each other. And as in any relationship, the point of contact generates a different text, a scar that leaves its mark, that gestures towards another destination — a border crossing, in both the strictest, and the loosest, sense.

From the Introduction to *Border Crossings: Words & Images* (Sydney: Brandl & Schlesinger, forthcoming).
trace

and so the life you live forever in your mind
that you measure everything against
and hold up proudly to the world
is all reduced to this

the solid walls that held you in its arms
have withered in the field
the lock has rusted shut
on doors that children’s hands
could fold and take away

the stone crumbles like stale bread
and only darkness
figures forth

yet there is comfort here
a certain tangibility
in all that fragile
temporary
frame

as though decay
at least
is something
you can witness
and assess
scars

every job leaves its marks on you. some are just memories below the skin, bruises that leave an echo of a blow. others are more substantial — a nail permanently removed, a sutured snake, or a train track running up an arm, where surgeons held life and limb together. a splinter piercing through the skin in search of blood and aiming for the heart.

just as a house is testament to the builder, so the skin bears witness to the work.
the skeleton as palimpsest

you peel me open like a grape
porous tissues surrendering to fragile flesh
until I stand revealed
bleached white sternum
an exclamation mark inside an embodied phrase

hollow eyes stare back
I’ve grown horns, now, in anticipation

I’ve fused with this new landscape
but my former earth still lies embedded in these bones

the skeleton as palimpsest
trace elements
prehistory
it’s all there

waiting to be mapped
STEPHEN COWDEN

Colonialism, Nationalism, Modernism: Rethinking Furphy’s *Such Is Life*

‘**Offensively Australian**’

Joseph Furphy completed the first draft of his magnum opus *Such Is Life* in 1897, and, being unsure where to have it published, submitted the 1,125 pages of hand-written manuscript to the *Bulletin* magazine, of which he was an inveterate admirer. In a now famous covering letter he wrote to the magazine’s editor J.F. Archibald: ‘I have just finished writing a full sized novel: title ‘Such Is Life’; scene Riverina and northern Vic; temper democratic; bias, offensively Australian’ (Barnes and Hoffman 28). These latter phrases have come to be seen as expressive of the ‘legendary’ nationalist discourse of the 1890s. Though critical attitudes have never endorsed this view unconditionally, the predominant perception of the novel remains that expressed in the blurb on the 1991 Angus and Robertson edition of *Such Is Life*, which reads:

> Here are the real Aussies of the 1880s ... the bullockies, swagman, squatters and ‘foreigners’ who eked their existence from a harsh begrudging land. Purporting to be the diary of one Tom Collins, an ex-government official, a bushman and former bullocky with literary leaning and impulse to reminisce, SUCH IS LIFE has come to be regarded as a classic Australian novel, which, perhaps more than any other richly captures the spirit and humour of the legendary characters of the outback.

(back cover)

Thus *Such Is Life* comes to us as part of a body of work that celebrates the emergence of the ‘real Aussies’. My essay is an attempt to disrupt this nationalist narrative and to offer some new points of departure on the novel. I begin this by re-reading the debate over the book that took place in the post-War period between the Radical Nationalist critics and the New Critics — a debate now seen as largely irrelevant within contemporary Australian literary criticism. My reason for doing this is to suggest that the criticism of ‘new times’ can still learn a substantial amount from looking at the debates from ‘old times’. I then sketch out some new frameworks through which *Such Is Life*, alongside other works of the 1890s, could be reconsidered. The reason for doing this is not just to forward an argument for the continuing relevance of *Such Is Life* as a work of literature, but also to reveal the novel as one that has as much to tell about Australia’s past as it does the present. Instead of seeing this past in terms of a celebratory nationalist narrative, I have sought to locate the novel within the historical **conflicts** of the period — conflicts which revolve around issues of class and
property ownership, feminism and suffrage, and conflicts around ‘race’, racism and Aboriginal dispossession. All of these issues are still very much with us. In this sense, the re-reading of *Such Is Life* may help develop a greater understanding of the historical contours through which ‘Australian’ identity has been shaped. The centenary of the publication of *Such Is Life* is a great opportunity to re-read Furphy in the light of these contemporary concerns, which I would argue were present in the book all along.

**A.G. Stephens and the Emergence of Literary Nationalism**

One hundred years after it was first published *Such Is Life* still comes to us as a highly unconventional novel; indeed one of the things most worth celebrating is that it was published at all. A.G. Stephens undertook to have the novel published by the *Bulletin* as it was rejected by all other publishers, and considered this was worth doing because the novel was ‘an Australian classic or semi-classic’ which ‘embalms accurate representations of our character, customs, life and scenery’ (Barnes 254). It is interesting that a critic as well-read as Stephens should have perceived the story in such literal terms, in spite of fairly substantial hints to the contrary from Furphy himself,2 but even more significant was the way this literalism became linked with the perception of the novel as an affirmation of ‘national character’. The Sydney *Bulletin* magazine occupies a place of greatly reiterated significance in the history of this period largely as it was the first forum to articulate an explicit relationship between nationalism and literature in Australia. Not only was the *Bulletin* the main forum for publishing the ‘new’ literature of the 1890s, its main editor, J.F. Archibald and particularly its literary editor, A.G. Stephens, had a clear and self-conscious agenda concerning the need for a distinctively Australian literature. In his many essays and reviews in the *Bulletin* and in other literary journals, Stephens sought to express a sense of the potential for a significant shift in the way that ‘Australianess’ was represented. Though he saw Australia of his own time as ‘still a suburb of the Cosmopolis, where men from far away lands perpetuate in a new environment the ideas and habits acquired far away’ he also felt that ‘the literary work which is Australian in sense and spirit, as well as scene and incident’ was just beginning to be written (Stephens 9). He expressed this succinctly in *The Bookfellow* in 1907: ‘Let us restate the familiar universe in terms of Australia, and our literature will be Australian, and will be literature in the proportion that we make it universal’ (Cantrell 1977b 310). In seeking to ‘restate the universe in the terms of Australia’ Stephens was arguing for a transformation in the way literature portrayed the Australian landscape. He wanted Australian writing to be unapologetically local instead of perceiving it as colonial and therefore inferior or imitative.

**The ‘Return’ of Radical Nationalism: Russell Ward and A.A. Phillips**

Stephens’ sense of *Such Is Life* as a story which expressed fundamental truths about Australia and Australians re-emerged in the Radical Nationalist literary
criticism that developed in the post-World War II period. One of the key texts of this period was Russell Ward’s *The Australian Legend*. Ward described his book as an attempt to ‘trace and explain the development of this national mystique based on the powerful impression that the “Australian spirit” is somehow intimately connected with the bush and that it derives from the common folk rather than the more respectable and cultivated sections of society’ (1). He saw this as having given rise to a notion of the ‘typical’ Australian male, whom he described as:

a practical man, rough and ready in his manners and quick to decry the appearance of affectation in others. He is a great improviser, ever willing to ‘have a go’ at anything, but willing to be content with a task done in a way that is ‘near enough’. He believes that Jack is not only as good as his master but, at least in principle, probably a good deal better.... He is a fiercely independent person who hates officiousness and authority ... yet he is very hospitable and will stick to his mates through thick and thin. (Ward 1–2)

For Ward, these ideal-typical qualities came to be manifested in the character of the Bushman, who represented not ‘Australians in general, or even country people in general’ (2) but rather an essence of Australianness (and particularly of Australian masculinity, though gender issues did not figure hugely in his argument).

A.A. Phillips’ *The Australian Tradition*, also published in 1958, offered a similar, though more sophisticated view of the 1890s than Ward. Phillips also saw this period as the point of origin for a literature which was distinctively National: ‘Before the nineties there was no such thing as Australian writing, no continuous stream of creative work; there were only occasional books, standing like waterholes in a sandy bed of apathy. From the nineties, the creek has often run feebly, has never swelled to flood level, but it has never run dry’ (Phillips 38). For Phillips the key feature of the 1890s was the emergence of the essentially Australian values that were characterised by the ‘Democratic theme’:

the same belief in the importance of the Common Man, the same ability to present him without condescension or awkwardness, the same square-jawed ‘dinkum’ determination to do without the fripperies, the modes — and sometimes the graces — of aesthetic practice, the same unembarrassed preference for revealing the simple venities rather than the sophistications of human nature. It is by such qualities that an Australian writer usually reveals to the knowledgeable reader his national ethos. (56)

However Phillips also sought to situate this work in a global context through an emphasis on its working class standpoint. With Lawson and Furphy: ‘For the first time in centuries Anglo-Saxon writing has broken out of the cage of the middle-class attitude. Dickens, Hardy and Bret Harte had, it is true, written sympathetically and knowledgably of the unpossessing; but they had written for
a middle class audience.... To Lawson and Furphy it was the middle class who were the foreigners’ (38).

This latter is interesting not least for the way it suggests a new way of looking at the ‘legendary’ 1890s which is rarely taken up in Australian literary criticism. However one of the reasons this insight has remained buried under the weight of nationalist sentimentality relates to the theoretical weaknesses of Philips’ work; most notably his elision of ‘class’ and ‘nation’. Throughout Radical Nationalist criticism one sees this constant slippage between the representation of ‘class’ and the arrival of the plucky Australian ‘national character’ on the historical stage. Despite the leftist sympathies of Phillips and Ward, issues of class power and class struggle were almost always subsumed within nationalism, making their working class sympathies largely gestural. The consequence of this is that though notions of Australian national identity based on the 1890s encode a celebration of the ‘working man’, these discourses are now just as available to those on the political Right as elsewhere, as evidenced by the claims of the Australian Prime Minister, John Howard, to be on the side of ‘the battler’, while at the same time slashing the protection which the welfare state offered to such ‘battlers’. These images of national identity were similarly mobilised by Pauline Hanson’s ‘One Nation’ party, which sought to speak up for the ‘battler’ as a group of forgotten people, politically and economically marginalised by the ‘politically correct’ preoccupations of liberal bourgeois urban elites.

**CRITICS OF RADICAL NATIONALISM: NEW CRITICISM**

The post-war period also saw the emergence of a school of criticism which sought to challenge the hegemony of the nationalist model. Known as New Criticism, its principal exponents were G.A. Wilkes, Harry Heseltine, Vincent Buckley and Leonie Kramer, for whom the English critic F.R. Leavis was influential. The central theme of New Criticism was a critique of nationalist interpretations of Australian literature as limited and stereotyped. In a 1962 article, Gerald Wilkes was positively churlish about the significance of Furphy’s famous covering letter:

While [Such Is Life] may have a temper that is democratic and bias that is offensively Australian, these are surface features and inessential to its permanent literary worth.... *Such is Life* is memorable not as showing a stage in the evolution of the Australian democratic ideal, but as exploration of the abiding problems of destiny and freewill, moral responsibility, and the operation of chance in the universal scheme.

(Wilkes 39)

And as he argued in his 1981 book *The Stockyard and the Croquet Court*:

Australian cultural development has normally been seen in terms of an emergent nationalism.... It has normally been assumed that Australian cultural identity was achieved during the 1890s ... and that the typically egalitarian spirit of the day is reflected in the writing of such men as Henry Lawson, Joseph Furphy and
A.B. Paterson. As a model of cultural development this has had unfortunate consequences. Nationalistic leanings in the earlier part of the twentieth century, in Harpur or Kendall, have naturally been seen as strivings toward the Lawsonian ideal, and their true nature has passed unnoticed. Nationalism itself has been assumed to take only one form—the form familiar in Lawson and Furphy—and other significant manifestations of it have been overlooked. A parallel assumption is that Australian cultural development should be measured against the standard of English culture, and Australian nationalism by its departure from English values and loyalties. (2)

What Wilkes proposes in the above statement is very important, particularly when one looks at the fate of Radical Nationalist ideas politically. What he is arguing is that the Nationalist paradigm has failed to see the 'otherness' of the writing of the 1890s. reading some writers (such as Lawson and Furphy) in a one-dimensional 'celebratory' register and dismissing others altogether. His final point about the limitations of reading these novels purely as expressions of 'Australian cultural development' points to the fact that the novels of the 1890s need to be also understood as much in terms of international developments in literature, and I would add politics. A.G. Stephens' famous characterisation of Miles Franklin's My Brilliant Career as 'the first Australian novel' as opposed to the work of Marcus Clarke, Charles Kingsley and Rolf Boldrewood which was only 'written in Australia' (Lawson 172), encodes a distinction between the 'National' and the 'Colonial' which has been reproduced by most subsequent literary criticism. Following the logic of Wilkes' argument I would suggest that we can understand this distinction itself as representative of a shift in the novel internationally, manifested in 'Australian' terms. While accepting the idea that the writing of 'the 1890s' was different to that which preceded it, I would like to argue that this writing needs to be conceived in broader terms than those specifically set up by critics who have advocated both 'for' and 'against' the period. I would characterise these in terms of three separate but interrelated factors: firstly, a change in the social perception of the artist; secondly, a crisis of confidence in Victorian reason and rationality; and thirdly, the rise of urban social movements concerned with issues of inequality in terms of class (trade union and socialist groupings) and gender (particularly suffragism). My argument will be exemplified through a comparison of Boldrewood's Robbery Under Arms (1888) and Furphy's Such Is Life (1903).

The Changing Role of 'The Artist'

In Culture and Society Raymond Williams delineated a number of fundamental changes in the perception of 'the artist' in the first half of the nineteenth century in Europe. These took place as 'the production of art was coming to be regarded as one of a number of specialised kinds of production, subject to much the same conditions as general production. [Alongside this] the theory of a "superior reality" of art, as the seat of imaginative truth, was receiving increasing emphasis' (Williams 32). This resulted in a 'system of thinking about
the arts [which placed] an emphasis on the special nature of art-activity as a means to 'imaginative truth', [as well as] an emphasis on the artist as a special kind of person ... a specially endowed person, the guiding light of the common life' (Williams 36). Australia's isolation and small population delayed the impact of these shifts: however Richard White has noted that by the 1880s a professionalised class of writers and artists had emerged who for the first time sought to present their work to a mass audience: 'Science, art and literature were increasingly the province of full-time professionals rather than educated amateurs or men of letters with a private income' (White 1981 88–89). The '1890s' can thus be seen as the time when this new attitude to art and to the artist first became manifest in Australia. The difference can be seen if one compares a writer like Rolf Boldrewood, as an embodiment of the older attitude, with the writers of the 1890s. Boldrewood began his career as a writer quite by accident; his first published story, an account of a kangaroo hunt, was written while recovering from a leg injury which occurred after a riding accident (Brissenden ix). This piece was published by the Cornhill Magazine in London, which subsequently carried other short sketches of Australian life that he went on to write. His most famous work, Robbery Under Arms, was written as a serial in the Sydney Mail in 1882–83, at the same time as he was Police Magistrate in the goldrush town of Gulgong in NSW. Boldrewood was thus an 'educated amateur' who, in spite of his success, never saw his writing as a vocation. It was this latter notion which was central to the way Lawson, Franklin and Furphy saw themselves. The idea of having to dedicate oneself to writing above all else resonates in Lawson's early piece 'Pursuing Literature in Australia' (1899). Describing his feelings after his first poems were published he wrote, 'I was in print, and in the Xmas number of the journal I had worshipped and devoured for years. I felt strong and confident enough to clean pigsties, if need be, for the rest of my natural life — provided the Bulletin went on publishing the poetry' (110).

The notion of the precariousness of writing as a profession builds into a lament for the writer in a place such as Australia:

When out of graft in Sydney I helped turn the old Republican machine, and wrote 'Faces in the Street' for which I received a guinea. Along in those times I wrote Bush ballads for the T. and C. Journal, but only got an occasional half sovereign. 'Tom' Butler of the Freeman's Journal ... told me that they didn't pay for poetry.... (111)

My advice to any young Australian writer whose talents have been recognised, would be to go steerage, stow away, swim, and seek London, Yankeeland, or Timbuctoo - rather than stay in Australia till his genius has turned to gall, or beer. (115)

Despite the bitterness of the struggle, Lawson was part of a generation of writers who saw writing unequivocally as a vocation. In Miles Franklin's My Brilliant Career (1901) the process whereby the artist comes into being is the subject of the work of art itself (she later went on to satirise this mode of writing in My Career Goes Bung [1946]). Though Furphy's writing was in one sense a
spare-time activity, he always described the job in his brother’s factory as an act of painful necessity, the ‘Adamic penalty of each day’ which preceded his ‘labour of love’: reading and writing (Barnes and Hoffman 23). As he wrote to his friend and fellow auto-didact William Cathels in 1894:

I trust your penetration has discovered I’m not like the common herd. Fact is that in my younger days I dabbled in poetry and accustomed myself to personify all feelings, passions and habits — just as my ancestor, William does in his ode to the Passions (When Music, heavenly Maid! Was young etc.) and by this means am able to shift the blame of neglect referred to from my shoulders to those of Ignorance.

(Barnes and Hoffman 19)

Furphy’s work illustrates the crossover between the notion of the specialness of the artist and the rise of socialist politics, with its particular nineteenth-century emphasis on self-education, a background he also shares with Lawson and Franklin.

THE CRISIS OF VICTORIAN REASON IN THE NINETEENTH-CENTURY NOVEL

Terry Eagleton has argued that the key shift which distinctively established the ‘newness’ of the writing of fin de siecle Britain was the way it emerged out of a crisis of ‘Victorian Reason’. He has noted that in Britain in the 1890s

the era of Victorian prosperity is now over: the oldest capitalist nation in the world is now being shamefully outpaced by its juvenile rivals; the mid-Victorian bonanza has bred a minatory underworld of urban lumpenproletariat and the unedifying spectacle of too much Western capital chasing too few colonial territories is about to lead to the conflagration of the first imperialist world war. But the spiritual correlative of this human waste and wretchedness is a cataclysmic crisis of Victorian rationality itself. (13)

The ending of the hegemony of the doctrine which had dominated the public sphere in Britain and its colonies for most of the century created a situation which made possible new ways of thinking about the past, present and future. As Ledger and McCracken have noted, ‘The process of cultural fragmentation that characterised the fin de siecle threw the norms of the Victorian age into crisis: empires were threatened, feminism was on the march, and the first socialist parties in Britain were formed’ (1). Both the socialist and feminist movement which developed at this time were profoundly marked by this utopian spirit of re-thinking the familiar. Eagleton has noted that this idealism was as much concerned with the personal as the social:

What characterised the era was an astonishing amalgam of spiritual and material ferment; the boisterous emergence of new political forces to be sure, but also a veritable transformation of subjectivity.... The period is at once more concrete and more cosmic than what came before, either searching anxiously for some sure foundation or making do with the frail limitations of the infinite. (112–13)
Eagleton’s work offers a fertile way of understanding the shift in writing which happened in Australia at this time, and this can be illustrated further through a comparison of the opening passages of *Robbery Under Arms* and *Such Is Life*. *Robbery Under Arms* opens as follows:

My name’s Dick Marston, Sydney side native. I’m twenty-nine years old, six feet in my stocking soles and thirteen stone weight. Pretty strong and active with it, so they say. I don’t want to blow — not here, any road — but it takes a good man to put me on my back, or stand up to me with the gloves, or the naked mauleys. I can ride anything … swim like a musk duck and track like a Myall blackfellow…. But its all up now; there’s no getaway this time; and I, Dick Marston, as strong as a bullock, as active as rock-wallaby … have been tried for bushranging — robbery under arms they call it … and I must die on the gallows this month. (29)

The novel begins with an announcement of the age, physical description and social class of its narrator, situating him clearly and definitively in time and space. It is also highly significant that the major drama of the book — Dick’s ‘fall’ into crime, capture and search for redemption — are revealed immediately to the reader. The passage captures in embryo the order of things in the novel as a whole — the difficult childhood, the move from small time into big time theft, and Dick’s capture, punishment, repentance, of which the writing of the book itself is the most significant part. In this way the book functions as a Victorian morality tale, the story of the basically decent man who is lead astray by bad company and whose punishment and repentance returns the world to order.

There could not be a greater contrast between this and the opening passages of *Such Is Life*:

Unemployed at last!

Scientifically such contingency can never have befallen of itself. According to one theory of the Universe, the momentum of Original Impress has been tending toward this far off, divine event ever since a scrap of fire mist flew from the solar centre to form our planet. Not this event alone, of course; but every occurrence, past and present, from the fall of captured to Troy to the fall of a captured insect. According to another theory, I hold an independent diploma as one of the architects of our Social System, with a commission to use my own judgement, and take my own risks, like any other unit of humanity. This theory, unlike the first, entails frequent hitches and cross-purposes; and to some malign operation of these that I should owe my present holiday. (1)

The phrase aptly illustrates Eagleton’s characterisation of the mood of the *fin de siecle* being simultaneously ‘more concrete and more cosmic’ than the Victorian period. Furphy’s opening statement foregrounds the real material circumstances of his writing; the dilemma between the fact of wage labour, which gives him an income but no time to write, and unemployment, which gives him unlimited time but nothing to live on. Furphy’s opening phrase, at one level so simple, is infused with an irony which captures the ambivalent class and cultural location
of the working class auto-didact. But from this statement of 'the concrete' he leaps to 'the cosmic' through an exploration of that which caused his unemployment. This becomes the basis of a philosophical debate between determinism and free will, themes that will resonate throughout the rest of the novel. As this passage indicates, the book's narrator Tom Collins sees his purpose as *excavating meaning* in a world where acts of interpretation are inherently problematic, another of the novel's major themes. The opening page of this book is thus one which suggests an openness to an exploration of the 'relation between reading, interpretation and writing' (Devlin-Glass et.al. 315). which, as other commentators have noted, anticipates the high modernist literature of writers like James Joyce. Eagleton has spoken of the *fin de siècle* writer as one for whom: 'Every formula or social arrangement must now be provisional or self-ironising.... If God exists, then he would figure as the metaperspective which unified all others: but in fact he does not.... There is now an empty space which he once occupied, in which individuals collide and mutually misperceive. desire all the way through one another and out the other side' (15–19). In *Robbery Under Arms* God, embodied as the classically Victorian representative of Order and Reason, is omnipresent. Dick's journey through the novel concerns his dawning realisation of this, though the reader is made aware of 'His' presence from the very first page. The structure of *Such Is Life* by contrast operates around contingencies, such as Tom's unemployment, random events and chance meetings, though of course this whole process is highly organised and structured in a way which looks forward to a novel like *Ulysses*.

**Social Movements and Literature in the 1890s**

I noted that A.A. Phillips' most important insight was his understanding of the importance of the working class perspective in Lawson and Furphy's work, and I would suggest that this insight is more useful if the development of a working class subjectivity in literature is located in an international, rather than an exclusively national, context. In the third re-framing of the 'new' writing of the 1890s I would like to suggest that this can be seen as an Australian manifestation of an *international* shift in literature which occurred as a result of the rise of socialist and working class politics and movements during the latter decades of the nineteenth century. As H. Gustav Klaus has argued in *The Rise Of Socialist Fiction*: 'As Socialism got under way in the 1880s and 1890s in Britain, a variety of rival notions and doctrines ... successfully infiltrated imaginative literature.... To see the interest of this line of socialist narratives merely "in the illumination it casts on the mainstream of English fiction" ... is to miss its essence, which is its radical otherness' (Klaus 2–3). A 1914 review of Lawson's work from The Scotsman described him as a writer 'who set a high value on the brotherhood of man, seeing nothing but virtue in the attitude of Trade Unionism in its long war against capital' (qtd in Wilding 204). This illustrates that Lawson was being read in the context of an international socialist readership. The rise of
the socialist, and in the case of Franklin, feminist movements, at the end of the nineteenth century was for each of them bound up in their decisions to become writers. In ‘Pursuing Literature in Australia’ Lawson describes this in the following terms: ‘I watched old fossickers and farmers reading Progress and Poverty earnestly and arguing over it Sunday afternoons. And I wished that I could write.... Then came the unexpected outburst of popular feeling — called the Republican riots.... And I had to write then — or burst’ (1899 109).

In a similar vein Franklin stridently states her class allegiances in the first chapter of My Brilliant Career: ‘To me the Prince of Wales is no more than a shearer, unless when I meet him he displays some personality apart from his princeship — otherwise he can go hang’ (5). Franklin’s concern with her independence, both as a woman and as an artist, would not have been possible without the changes in attitude brought about by the feminist movement. Furphy, with his constant references to Shakespeare, the Bible, and debates concerning matters both scientific and philosophical, all in the context of a story about bullock drivers in the Riverina, equally epitomises the working class auto-didact. These movements provided a space for a new kind of writer to emerge on the scene, a writer who, in the words of A.A. Phillips, was able to ‘break out of the cage of the middle class attitude’ (38) affecting a radical shift in both the content and form of the novel.

The newness of these representations of class come out even more clearly through comparison, and I would do this through a further comparison of Robbery Under Arms and Such Is Life, focussing on the relationship between class and criminality. This theme closely relates to the way questions of ethical responsibility are posed by the two authors, and I suggest that the opposed positions the two authors take reflect the breakdown of certainty within the Victorian moral framework as it was affected by the rise of socialist politics as occurred at the end of the previous century. Michel Foucault has noted that one of the major achievements of the socialist movement was to create a link between the capitalist system, as a form of social organisation, and forms of human behaviour which were adopted as a consequence. Socialists argued that unemployment, poverty and criminality, were not failings of individual ‘character’, but were a product of the immiseration created by capitalism. In its day this link offered a profound and fundamental challenge to ideas about ‘character’ which were cornerstones of Victorian morality. Foucault has described this as a moment in which a ‘discourse of morality was displaced by one of politics’ (Foucault 1989 287). It was across this divide that Robbery Under Arms and Such Is Life were written. In his study of the prison system, Discipline and Punish, Foucault argues that as this system consolidated in the early part of the nineteenth century, it became apparent to its administrators that in most cases prisons ‘turned the condemned into lifetime offenders’. Reformers thus sought to introduce a distinction between those seen who were capable of returning to society, the reformable, and those
for whom this was not thought to be possible, the incorrigible. The effect of this distinction was to make the criminal’s attitude toward the crime of central importance (1977 120–22).

These distinctions resonate throughout Robbery Under Arms, which is perhaps not surprising as Boldrewood was serving as Police Magistrate at the time he was writing the book. Central to Dick’s repentance is the fact that he is not completely without good ‘character’. His initial turn to crime is seen to stem from the bad example set by his father and though his father’s criminality involves nothing more than small scale cattle-rustling, his transgressive attitude is revealed when he says: ‘But we must live as well as other people. There’s squatters here that does as bad. They’re just like the squires at home; think a poor man hasn’t a right to live’ (62). Boldrewood thus equates crime with acts of class resistance, as for him both represent challenges to the ‘natural’ basis of society. These themes are also present in the incident when Jim Marston rescues the squatter Falkland’s daughter. Though Jim emerges a hero, this is tainted by the fact that the rescue was achieved using a stolen horse. In discussing the question of how Jim came to own such a horse Jim asks:

‘It’s not a bad thing for a poor man to have a fast horse now and then, is it, Mr Falkland?’

‘I don’t grudge a poor man a good horse ... it’s the fear I have of the dishonest way that horses of value are come by, and the net of roguery that often entangles fine young fellows like you and your brother.’

... I looked him in the face, though I felt I could not say he was wrong ... if more gentleman were like Mr.Falkland I do really believe no one would rob them for very shame’s sake. (91)

As well as revealing the book’s didactic paternalism, Dick and Jim’s ‘shame’ suggests their redeemability to the reader, even though they are not yet ready to give up their criminal careers. For this to take place they must become reconciled to the ‘naturalness’ of class inequality. In these terms a worker should not aspire to the wealth of the squatter, but to the ‘steady’ life, values epitomised by George Storefield, whose gradual and incremental ascent from small time farmer to Police Magistrate is paralleled by the rise and fall of Dick’s criminal career. By the conclusion of the book Dick has not only repented, but has located his moment of original sin: ‘If I had stopped dead and bucked at father’s wanting me and Jim to duff those weaners, I really believe I might have come right’ (419). Having demonstrated his internalisation of the disciplinary basis of class society, Dick finds his death sentence rather miraculously commuted through pleas from Falkland, representing the benevolent upper class, and the ‘steady’ George Storefield. The irony of the constant reiteration of the Victorian values of respectability and conformity lie in the fact that the most exciting and charismatic character in the book is Captain Starlight who, as the book’s romantic hero, is allowed to break all the rules attached to private property on the basis of a
punctilious observance of upper class social etiquette. Unlike Dick and Jim, Starlight spends very little time agonising over the loss of the 'steady' life, with the result that the book can only conclude for him with a death which is as every bit as dramatic as his life.

The relationship between class and crime is brought out in a radically different manner by Furphy. In place of Boldrewood's paternalistic certainties, Furphy advances the idea that the laws which govern pastoral Australia exist solely to maintain the power of the owners against the propertyless. The image of the bullock drivers who are unable to do their work without obtaining grass for their teams, and unable to have access to this grass as it is the property of the squatters, expresses metaphorically the wider situation of the working classes who are cut off from access to the means of production and are therefore forced to engage in wage-labour. This is particularly shown in the chain of events in Chapter 5, which opens with the Chinese boundary rider Sam Young directing Collins to a place where ample grass can be obtained, the Trinidad paddock. Collins initially thinks he has fallen on an incredible stroke of luck, as do all the bullockies who subsequently arrive. It only becomes apparent during the evening with the suspicious appearance of 'Barefoot Bob', that they have fallen into a trap set for them by the squatter, Smyth. Next morning Collins and Helsmok awake to find that their animals have been impounded as a form of punishment for their trespass, and that they must pay Smyth to recover them. Furphy satirises the processes of bourgeois justice describing the drivers as 'outlaws' and 'culprits' and their animals as 'evidence' (201-203). However neither are the bullockies prepared to passively accept this state of affairs, as the conclusion of this episode reveals. In the mêlée of counting out and paying for their animals, the drivers Baxter and Donovan manage to make off with two bullocks belonging to Smyth. Collins, on meeting these two some months hence finds they both 'have a good conscience regarding the transaction. They maintained, with manifest sincerity, that Smyth's repudiation of the bullocks, and his subsequent levy of damages upon them as strangers and trespassers, gave themselves a certain right of trover.... Not equal to a nine pound receipt, but good enough for the track' (203).

What Furphy presents here are two opposing notions of morality; the first represented by the system of private property, administered by powerful property owners and the state bureaucracy, and the second based on the needs of ordinary working people. While in Boldrewood transgression against the social order can only result in chaos and anomie, Furphy presents the working out of an alternative moral code as an essential part of a humane existence. As Ivor Indyk has noted: 'Furphy's bullockies are intensely moral, and their morality is a complex affair. They have to feel that their actions are right, but since there is no acceptable code or standard by which the rightness of their actions might be judged, they have to work by feel or impulse' (313). Furphy clearly saw these acts of sabotage as a form of working class resistance, and hence the newness of his perspective
is both literary and political; in a political sense he is trying to work out on an
intuitive basis how a different form of morality might operate. In a literary sense
he is trying to work out a new way of telling a story that will reflect this, and it
is this sense that I would understand what Klaus has called the ‘otherness’ of
socialist fiction in this era (Klaus 2–3).  

CONCLUSION

Ledger and McCracken have argued that the nineteenth-century fin de siècle
can be seen ‘from the vantage point of the late twentieth century’ as the period in
which ‘many of the concepts and conflicts around issues of “race”, class and
gender ... have emerged’ (3). My focus in this piece has been largely on questions
of class, but this process of re-engaging with the 1890s with a view to
problematising the self-referential and taken-for-grantedness of nationalist
narratives also enables other questions about literature of the 1890s to be raised.
Joseph Furphy was a passionate reader and writer and my hope is that we try to
remember him through reading and re-reading his work, but also to continue to
teach reading and writing as he saw them — as critical tools for understanding
the world we live in.

NOTES

1 The significance of this phrase in Radical Nationalist criticism was exemplified in
the way it became the motto of the leftist literary journal Overland when it began
publication in 1954, appearing on the mast-head of every issue.

2 In Furphy’s letter to A.G. Stephens of 2 March 1897 he writes, in a passage that is
itself redolent of the ironic tone in the text, that: ‘a certain by-play in plot and
eclaircissement is hidden from the philosophic narrator, however apparent to the matter
of fact reader’ (Barnes and Hoffman 1995 29).

3 Micheal Wilding’s The Radical Tradition (1993) is a notable exception to this:

4 Given that this novel has been classified as belonging to the ‘Colonial’ rather than
the ‘National’ within Australian literary criticism it is interesting to note the plethora
of culturally localised signifiers in this passage; swim like a musk duck, track like a
blackfellow, active as a rock-wallaby, strong as a bullock. Alan Brissenden has noted
that, in relation to the other two ‘Colonial’ novels — For the Term of His Natural
Life and Geoffrey Hamlyn — the book is set entirely in Australia and its narrator,
Dick Marston, uses a more colloquial and vernacular voice with the ‘consequence
[that] the tone is more Australian’ (xiv). Though Boldrewood opposed, as a supporter
of the monarchy, the republican nationalism of the Bulletin, his presentation of the
self-defined Australian voice as working class exactly concurs with developments in
that journal. It is curious to note that in creating Dick as an authentic Australian
character Boldrewood has employed the very same elision of class and the National
that runs throughout Radical Nationalist criticism.

5 For reasons of space I have not been able to pursue this issue regarding the influence
of feminism as a social movement and the way this affected the form of the writing
of the 1890s, however this argument could be made in an analogous manner to that
of class. In this sense the discourse of gender in the ‘new’ writing of the 1890s can
be seen to contain both elements that were overtly feminist, such as seen in the work
of Franklin and Baynton, which represented a break from previous approaches to
these issues by male and female writers, alongside a fin de siècle emphasis on instability and uncertainty.

6 In Furphy’s second book Rigby’s Romance, the socialist ‘hero’ of the book, Rigby, expresses this view even more explicitly:

I tell you that from the present social system of pastoral Australia — a patriarchal despotism, tempered by Bryant and May — to actual lordship and peonage, is an easy transition, and the only thing that can prevent this broadening down is a vigorous rally of every man with a clear head and heart in the right place. (98)

Michael Wilding has commented on this passage that ‘the uncritical reference to arson as a ready reprisal against the squatters — Bryant and May’s matches “tempering” the “patriarchal despotism” — is as radical an account of the class wars as will be found in Australian fiction’ (40). Wilding’s central argument in this 1993 essay concerns the way this second book was originally part of the main text of Such Is Life and that it only became an additional, and thereby marginalised, book after A.G. Stephens called on Furphy to make substantial cuts in the book’s length so as to make it publishable.

7 Wilding has noted similarly that the theme of the economic exploitation of one class by another is the basis of his attack on the ‘colonial romance’:

The objection to these is not that they are the products of English writers, or that they are ‘unrealistic’, as commentators have tended to assume. The point is that these colonial romances are written from a remorselessly patrician or bourgeois standpoint. Furphy’s literary critique is at the same time a radical political critique. (43)

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In ways that had not occurred to me previously, I have discovered that having one’s own will can be terrifying at times and yet at others can be totally liberating. Although not happening as quickly as they might have liked, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander performance arts practitioners of disciplines that range from light and sound through to design, directing and acting, are becoming involved in a movement within Indigenous performing arts communities that supports young Aboriginal people in the exercise of their own will. Indigenous artists are developing a ‘voice’ of their own. This is a ‘voice’ that is free from the supposed performance constraints of earlier plays such as Jack Davis’ *No Sugar* (1986)¹ and *The Dreamers* (1982)², and Kevin Gilbert’s *Cherry Pickers* (1991)³, and certainly free from the infusion of non-Indigenous knowledge and dramaturgy of previous times (an infusion which still exists and will continue to exist until there are dramaturges from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds). It could be argued that Davis and Gilbert and others, including the likes of Brian Syron, who having been overseas and returned to Australia with a vision of a ‘Black Theatre’, saw and believed that perhaps one way, if not the only way, forward in the re-telling of Aboriginal history at that time — from the late 1960s through to the mid 1990s — was to adopt European style theatre practices and have their work displayed in mainstream theatres. Their strategy was a success and they worked hard to see their theatre performed on stages both across the nation and the world. The work of Australia’s earlier Indigenous playwrights, actors, directors and so forth, was, and still is, a success. The work of these artists was powerful in its own right and formed the basis for future work by Australia’s contemporary Indigenous playwrights and other theatre arts practitioners. For Brian Syron, the formation
of what is now the Australian National Playwrights' Conference — styled on the successful US National Playwrights' Conference and which is held annually — was a dream fulfilled prior to his death in 1992.

Today there is a new breed of independent professionals in Indigenous theatre, including the likes of playwrights Jane Harrison, Jarod Thomas, and Deborah Mailman; and directors, Wesley Enoch and Nadine McDonald and David Milroy, who in concert with other theatre professionals, are working to help bridge the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples everywhere. All of these people — Indigenous artists in traditional and rural Australia as well as in the contemporary urban environment - have a huge stake in the betterment of Indigenous theatre, literature and film. They are forging ahead in the retelling of history and in the installation of contemporary plays in mainstream live theatre. Within the theatrical and cinematic environments, they are collaborating in a cross pollination of actors, writers and technicians who are working on storytelling processes and building a body of new work upon which Indigenous theatre and literature can grow.

As a result of this current work and the formation of the Alliance of Indigenous Theatre Arts Practitioners there is a forward movement in Indigenous theatre. There is an awareness of 'something' - a new 'front line' that will take 'Indigenous Theatre' to another level of understanding. One man pro-active in this work and who, although quietly spoken, is persuasive in his presentations within both Yirra Yaakin Noongar Theatre and the Indigenous performance arts community, is David Milroy.

David Milroy has worked in theatre for many years as a director, musician and songwriter for various companies on a number of productions including Sister Girl and Deadheat (Black Swan); Wild Cat Falling (Perth Theatre Company); No Shame (Mainstream Theatre). Currently he is Artistic Director of Yirra Yaakin Noongar Theatre, in Perth where he has produced a series of works including Solid4, Aliwa, Alice6, King Hit (finalist in the 2001 Premier's Literature Awards, W.A.) and Runamuk. His plays for young people include Booyi Koora Koora and Djildjit. In 1999 David directed my play Buckley's Hope at both the Australian National Playwrights' Conference, [ANPC] in Canberra and then later in the same year as part of the US National Playwrights' Conference at the Eugene O'Neill Theater Complex in Waterford, Connecticut (an ANPC initiative). David is currently working on two new plays, Own Worst Enemy and Barking Gecko and developing a number of new works by other Aboriginal writers. I interviewed David at the Australian National Playwrights Conference in Canberra in April 2002.

EB  So David, as you are heading up what is arguably one of the most successful Indigenous theatre companies in Australia today and there is a lot you have already contributed to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's theatre and performance art right across Australia, I want to place on the
public record some of your insights and dreams for both Yirra Yaakin Noongar Theatre and the national push in Indigenous performing arts, an industry in which you enjoy almost legendary status.

DM  I hope that I can live up to those expectations.

EB  I reckon you will and in the case of the future I'd like to hear from you and about your vision for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander theatre arts, the playwrights, the actors and other practitioners and their work in contemporary Australia.

DM  You don’t want much.

EB  Well let's take it in small bites. I'd prefer to simply open this up to you, more in discussion rather than go through a long list of prepared questions.

DM  I don't have a problem with that.

EB  I have spoken to you before about the lack of Australian Indigenous performance companies and opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander performance artists and, by way of contrast, the way in which Yirra Yaakin Noongar Theatre Company seems to be building a history of its own. Can we start with some background information, a short history of the company or, if you prefer, just your involvement with the company.

DM  Well, the basic history of Yirra Yaakin? I’ll have to think about this for a moment.

EB  And before I forget, you have been talking about what seems to be an interesting concept and new initiative in a project working with some of the younger people in the Yirra Yaakin Theatre community.

DM  Let’s talk to that commitment first then and how I see things at the moment. It seems to me that every Indigenous theatre company operating today — and there are basically only three, Ilbijerri in Melbourne, Kooemba Jdarra in Brisbane, and ourselves — is enmeshed in what I call catch up theatre. It’s as if we’re writing history, all the time, we’re regurgitating stories. That’s not to say they aren’t important stories because they are, very important. However, it’s like we’re writing and then re-writing Aboriginal history.... No! It’s as if we’re trying to replace one history with another. A history from the Indigenous people’s point of view. One that hasn’t been taught. And, I believe it's an important role that theatre plays in doing that, although there are a lot of the young people coming up through the company that don’t get the opportunity to speak out. It’s almost like they’re shackled by their Aboriginality at times. They step into theatre and they think or believe they have to fit into these roles that we’ve created with this catch up theatre or historical theatre that we do. I believe we’ve got to
move beyond that with a lot of these young fellas coming through, allow them to be artists as well. If they want to write about their history that’s good, but I’m interested in developing a project where we get three or four, young and talented Aboriginal theatre artists and let them produce their own work. They need a space where they can develop their own play without any shackles of, ‘it has to be this’ or ‘because we’re an Aboriginal theatre company it has to be about blacksfellas’. It doesn’t have to be you know.

EB  Do you see this as applying only to urban Aboriginal artists or are all Indigenous artists doing this as well?

DM  Well both really. I’d like to think the Company has set the stage with a freedom, a total freedom, to just create without being caught up in the already established kind of theatre such as the historical plays or plays that deal with Aboriginal issues and stuff like that. So, I was pretty pleased when we got funding to do that. I know the kids are very happy. I mean it may be that they come around and actually do plays that are about Aboriginal issues but I just wanted to give them that opportunity. It doesn’t have to be anything, they can do whatever they want.

EB  I’m sure it will interesting to see what eventuates from this initiative. It may be that in three to five years we’ll be reaping the benefits of new and exciting ways of doing theatre from the Blackman’s perspective. However, about some of the history of Yirra Yaakin Noongar Theatre?

DM  It started out in the early ’90s. What happened was, although I wasn’t around Yirra Yaakin at the time when they did a play called Land Lovers — I think it might have been written by Jack Davis, I’m not sure — they got Paul Macleay, who had been in youth theatre at Canecutters (a youth theatre in Queensland’s cane fields) to run the project. It had young Aboriginal actors in it and stuff, and out of it came a pretty good play. The company had had to organise that by doing workshops down in Perth’s outer southern suburb of Kwinana and so on. It was a fairly difficult project with the involvement of Indigenous issues and actors. In the process they decided that they didn’t have the ability to be working with Aboriginal kids and that they didn’t have the sort of skills or cultural knowledge to go about it and felt it should be Aboriginal people teaching those kids. So, under their wings, they set up a sort of Aboriginal structure — not a theatre company at that stage — that tried to teach skills to young Aboriginal people. These workshops formed into a small youth theatre company which was called Yirra Yaakin Youth Theatre.

EB  What exactly has been your involvement in the theatre?
DM  At the time I was doing musical workshops for them, then someone left and Yirra Yaakin brought me on board as a workshop trainee. I continued with the musical workshops, all the time learning. Then I started directing a few workshops and later, in about 1995-96, I became artistic director. I decided we needed to move. I felt we needed a complete change in direction. So we broke with the other company, amicably. Everyone was happy with the break. We needed to be on our own and they needed to go their own way as well. We set up camp in East Perth because they were redeveloping the area so you could always get a cheap place. But, we kept getting moved on all the time. It was getting too much. We had to keep changing our letterheads, get new phone numbers, and all those intrusive administration problems that go with under funded groups. Eventually, in frustration, I said we want to do professional theatre not just youth work. You know my whole thing about Aboriginal theatre was that it was not being controlled or written or even produced by Aboriginal peoples. Just stolen from us. My aim was totally to bring it back, make it an issue that other people shouldn’t be writing our stuff, you know, it should be written by Aboriginal people. So from that point we came in pretty hard; pretty hard to government; pretty hard to funding bodies; and pretty hard to anyone else we had to deal with on this issue of Indigenous theatre. Slowly we started building up. We started to get and develop our writers, our own writers.
Ernie Blackmore

EB Did you work within the communities or through newspapers like the Koori Mail? Or the radio network.

DM Within the community mainly. Word of mouth. The fastest form of communication is over the fire with a mug of tea. [laughs] You know how it goes. And I knew a lot of people anyway, just from being in the Arts, and I'd been working here prior to Yirra Yaakin anyway.... So, that's basically how we started up and we haven't looked back really. With every production and every show we do we're getting smarter.

Initially, and to be honest with you, we didn't really know what we were doing. But now it was us making the mistakes, not white fellas, you know? That was the difference. We did some shows that weren't that good but it was us doing it and that was the big difference, and then the opportunities came. We came to the Playwrights' Conferences and so on. I did some pretty 'in your face' things; like I remember going into the office of Western Australia's Minister for the Arts, Mr Foss, and telling him I wanted triennial funding. I'd been told by the W.A. Arts Director that there was no way I was going to get funding but that I could go and see him anyway. The Minister wanted to know why I wanted the funding and I said, 'We want to be a theatre company.' He burst out laughing and said and I quote; 'Oh look, I'll fund you to do your community work as an Aboriginal community organisation and if you want to do theatre that's okay but I think you should just stick to the community work.'

That wasn't that long back, and that funding has now come through. In 2001 we had three shows touring the East Coast and there's more on the way. Do you know what, everyone's busting a gut to get hold of our product so there you go ... [laughs] ...

EB Which of the plays you've sent to the East Coast are you most excited about?

DM All of them really although Dallas Widmar's Aliwa (2002) has taken on a life of its own and has now toured overseas as well as nationally.

EB I have personally followed that piece since Dallas and I were at the Playwrights' Conference together in 1999.

DM It was very much under development at that stage.

EB And what else?

DM We had the one hander Alice, (2001) in the Melbourne Festival. Solid with Ningali Lawford and Kelton Pell (2000) following the International Arts festival went on to tour nationally through Alice Springs, then a small show at Brisbane which was followed by New South Wales and Victoria.
As for *Aliwa*, it had a season at the Belvoir Street Theatre in Sydney, directed by Neil Armfield, then toured overseas.

They’re all good shows in their own right. Different and exciting. Dallas’s play had taken three years to develop and is now at a stage where it is not only exciting, historical and humorous, it is just plain, good, theatre. So three of our shows on National tour in one year was more than any other company in Western Australia has ever done and we’re only a ‘pisspot’ company. We get funded, but we get funded at half of the lowest funded arts agency in Western Australia. So whatever the lowest funded theatre company gets we get half of that and yet we do twice the output, plus all the community work.

**EB**  
Do you get funding through the Australia Council as well?

**DM**  
Yeah we get funding from them. They’ve been good actually, the Australia Council.

**EB**  
And you’ve got this latest work by Mitch Torres?

**DM**  
Yes, *One Day in '67*. We’ll see how the piece develops. But after its successes locally and in Perth I believe it will tour. Mitch Torres is a great artist. She’s into film as well as theatre and she’s a full time mum as well. I have no idea where she gets her energy.

It’s a lot of luck sometimes, and a lot of hard work and we need the writers. We haven’t always got the writers.

**EB**  
No?

**DM**  
No! Sometimes it’s just tough. At present we may be just going through a lucky streak but I think ‘certainty’ will eventually happen. Just now some people are a bit sceptical about it. This happens at first but then they realise we’re doing good work and attracting talent and we’re here to stay. People want to bring their plays to us, they want to work with us and that’s been a major shift over the last year or two. It’s an encouragement to realise that people are trusting us with their stories and stuff.

**EB**  
What’s your footprint like in Western Australia? Like how much of the state do you cover?

**DM**  
When we tour, we tour the whole state at different times. It’s a huge ask but this is just a part of my soul and being. It’s all encompassing in some ways. I’ve been the only artistic director they’ve had so far that from the outset I said I don’t want to discriminate. I think Aboriginal people have enough discrimination without us discriminating against one another and that — even though we’re called a Noongar Theatre Company — we should have our minds open to do plays by any Aboriginal people in Australia and not just Western Australia. And to that end we’ve done plays that do
not discriminate against gender or sexuality or anything like that you know. Or age.

**EB:** *Or age*

**DM** Yeah … [laughs] … well all of those things I’ve felt it was really important from the outset that the company have a really clear objective on the type of theatre we are open to. There’s always been this sort of idea around that because we are Noongars we’re not going to do your play. Well, we’ve proven them wrong. I mean, we’ve done plays by Kooris, like yourself, we’ve done Mitch Torres from the Kimberley, and we’ve done Noongar work of our own. And we feel that we’ve now got a partnership with Magabala Books in the Kimberley, and after Mitch’s play tours we hope that it will be published by Magabala Books.

**EB** *That’s a step forward. There’s no money in publishing plays, at least not those which haven’t been subject to mainstream performance.*

**DM** That’s true and it will always be a battle.

**EB** *So, is that the story of Yirra Yaakin?*

**DM** I guess that’s about where the Company’s gone.

**EB** *And David Milroy? Where do you see yourself going in the next five years?*

**DM** Well. I think as an artist, and as an Artistic Director, there are many things I’d like to do, at least I think I do. Actually there’s so much to do. As I have said before, many times, I think Aboriginal theatre was really stolen from the communities. I believe as we get stronger we get more in a position to take it back more; to pull it back. So, I have issues with what I identify as three types of theatre:

One, I call ‘Puppet Theatre’. The problem I have with this ‘Puppet Theatre’ is that of ‘whitefellas’ writing our plays and directing them and calling it Aboriginal theatre. That is a big issue. I’d love to see that change because right now it’s the ‘whitefella’ is pulling the strings with the ‘blackfellas’ on stage being jerked around.

Two, there’s the other theatre which I call ‘catch up’ theatre which is what I think we’re producing now. I’d like to get to a point where we can still do these things but we can also do other work, other theatre. I want to do things like I was doing with the young kids. They’re our future and our responsibility. And I want to do stuff that’s not always tied to our Aboriginality and our history. Art for art’s sake I guess you’d call it.

And three, this is what I call *Kuta Kuta* — theatre which is sort of make up or fun theatre that I would like to produce. It’s made up of theatre stuff, just solely for an Aboriginal audience. It might only be 20 minutes,
30 minutes, or so of slapstick comedy, done and performed in community to people who would normally never go to the theatre. And that’s the first part of taking theatre back into the community, and claiming it and developing a new style because that’s never been allowed to happen I don’t think. I think it’s just been ‘oh this is interesting’ and white companies have grabbed it and they put it up on the stage, nothing goes back into the community.

Community doesn’t even go to the theatre or see the stuff and this is mainly because they don’t feel like they own it. So, the other thing I’d like to do in five years is do plays that are about and for kids and that are about cultural maintenance.

EB  *Are there any grander schemes trying to find a way through the complex personality of David Milroy? Do you have big ambitions?*

DM  As an artist in my own right, I am not that keen to take a big production to London, like the West End, or tour Europe or any of that stuff, although it would be very exciting to do that. As Artistic Director of Yirra Yaakin, I’m more interested in making contact with other Indigenous groups that use theatre as a political and/or cultural group and meeting them and seeing whether — how do you say this without sounding as if we’re up ourselves, ’cause we ain’t — if they’re not so good at it we could get in and help. Help and show them how we do it. Or, if they’re great at doing what they’re doing then we’d like for them to tell us what it is they’re doing and how they’re doing it. In this way, in this sharing of knowledge and culture and respect, it’s like a cultural exchange I guess. That’s what I’m really keen to do more than anything. You know, to engage other cultures.

I really think there has been a fire burning in my belly for a very long time. There have to be opportunities for our kids. They’re our responsibility and if we don’t do something for them, who will? It’s as if it has always been that way. I think it goes back to being a kid watching an alcoholic father operate and seeing how my mother or gran and other people were treated. From a very young age I didn’t like seeing anyone being hurt or picked on or teased because I’d seen it in my own family. I believe that really instilled in me the instinct to fight, to bounce back and so when I get down and jaded I tend to focus on bigger issues and it helps me get over the real little things. You know, if someone’s having a go at you or something didn’t turn out right or didn’t get funding or … anyway, I always believe that it’s important to surround yourself with good people. Because if you don’t you’ve got no one to catch you when you fall. And believe me there are times when you fall and if you haven’t got the people there you’ll hit the floor. You’ll hit the ground and you won’t get up but you know, there’s been times in our company when I’ve been down — right off out there with the fairies and I know people have been right all around me picking up
the pieces and patching it up until I’m strong enough to come back.

It’s the same with the company manager too. We’ve got a really good partnership. There was a time when he was in the same position. He’d just sort of lost his sense of who he was as a person and he was really down and depressed. The company just hung in there and covered for him and he took time off and when he came back he was back with a fury. There was a time when we were both actually ready to give it up and we said no. No way we’re giving up. And we decided to reinvent ourselves. We felt like we’d achieved a lot in such a short space of time so what we did was we tried to look at the things we hadn’t done. I said we haven’t toured the East Coast so we put our minds to it and that was only a year and a half ago.

EB  

And now you’ve done it. You’ve had three shows touring.

DM  That has revitalised us as artists and managers and it has revitalised the company. I believe that we’ve all got to do some kind of personal inventory every now and then.

EB  

All right. And just finally, can we talk about the future of Indigenous theatre? There has been some talk of an alliance, how do you see that? Is there any hope of seeing this get up and do you think an alliance of performance artists, writers, directors, technicians and whoever will make a change?

DM  I think…. Oh, I don’t know how to say this.

EB  

You can have this off the record….

DM  No, not at all. There’s no reason to hide. I think the alliance is something that should have happened two or three years ago. That was when we first started to talk about it and there was such a desire to do it, but unfortunately because of politics with the Aboriginal Playwrights’ Conference, the alliance was destroyed along with the conference really. And by saying that I’m not trying to stir up ill feelings. What was done was done and it’s finished.

EB  

So it’s taken this amount of time to bounce back?

DM  Yeah. But I think those issues that I’ve talked about, earlier, about the three types of theatre, I think they are the very issues that can be discussed at the alliance. For instance let’s look at who is in control of Aboriginal theatre. Then there is the notion of who we’re performing for. Are we encouraging groups to take the theatre back into communities? And the alliance can tackle things about how we get young people into the industry and doing their own material and learning the skills they need to succeed.

EB  

And about protocols and applying those protocols instead of going to
consultants who know nothing about the communities. We need the recognition of all Aboriginal people, we need to respect one another and this land we perform on and all those sorts of things. We need to come to understand one another and to have respect for the protocols as they apply to communities.

DM Yeah. Most definitely. I also think theatre or performing arts or music or whatever, is the one device that seems to cut through the bullshit in either community politics or any sort of politics. It’s the one thing that really can engage a community and bring it together. You wouldn’t think it the way artists fight sometimes but I think, and you know because you’ve seen it at work with your own play, both here and in the United States, I’ve seen it work many times, that it can be the glue.

EB Sure we fight and I think we always will because we enjoy it, but in the context of how we’re all competing against one another for a share of the pie. We know this and we acknowledge it and we still keep competing, but that doesn’t stop us from respecting one another or understanding, and I think that’s the nub of trying to maintain those relationships.

DM Let’s talk about funding. If we got no funding from whoever in the last round I wouldn’t have been angry. I would have been disappointed because we would have had to find the money somewhere else, and that’s not easy. We don’t try and beat ourselves up asking, ‘why did so and so get it and I didn’t’. It’s just good that someone’s getting funded and they’re doing good with it, that’s great.

EB Do you think an Indigenous Playwrights’ Conference could be put in place that would convene say every three years? Or, even every two years?

DM Mm. I think an alliance is the answer to that question. If we’re smart about it, and if we don’t try and soak up funds for an alliance and try and set up some sort of infrastructure that is supported by the existing Aboriginal theatre companies by providing the day to day tasks. If we can avoid setting up an office we don’t need that eats up scarce funds, I believe we can achieve a great deal. For instance, if we could keep the fire burning in our bellies and face up to the problems that are in the industry and we talk about those things at a national level say twice a year, then the alliance can become a very powerful thing. It’s the way in which we can deal and make sense of issues as they come up — issues that are of a national concern for Aboriginal theatre. If we’ve got an alliance, say, the Aboriginal Theatre Alliance, who can respond as a group that’s not in government but that’s outside of government — you know, something from which we only need to get one or two comments in The Australian each year, it’s
amazing just how much clout and power you can have.

**EB**  
*How do you see this alliance working?*

**DM**  
First and foremost for the benefit of the overall Aboriginal community. I think we ought to have a representative from each state, even if they don’t have a theatre, for instance Tasmania and South Australia, it doesn’t matter. All they need is someone who’s a writer or someone who’s a storyteller or whatever. Just so long as they are prepared to represent their state and get them on the alliance.

**EB**  
*It would be good to have an Aboriginal community theatre in Sydney but we don’t have one at present and we’ve survived a long time without one*

**DM**  
I don’t know if it will survive forever without it but I think the next port of call is Adelaide. When they can get over all the internal community stuff, it will definitely be the next place where it’s bloom and grow ... and I’ve heard this talk about Darwin. But we’re getting ahead of ourselves. The alliance needs to become a reality and then grow slowly. And if we can base a playwrights’ conference this will support the uptake of an Indigenous theatre out there competing with mainstream theatre.

**EB**  
*That’s good: call a National Black Playwrights’ Conference in Adelaide every second year. When you look at the geographical placement of South Australia, it’s as if no one has to travel too far, unlike as if it was placed in Sydney or Melbourne.*

**DM**  
And I believe there is a depth of talent there. Look at Jarod Thomas, he’s just a young man with a future. You said you were going to interview Robert Crompton. I think Robert’s such a talent: he can act, he can sing and he’s a great songwriter. I said to Rob, you don’t always have to see yourself as an actor. He could direct which could lead into being an artistic director of a company on that side of things. That’s what we need, those people. there’s plenty of actors and we need to see younger people who’ve got the experience as actors moving into maybe other areas. You know what it’s like. Once an actor and you’ve been bitten by a bug and I think there’s a lot of actors that would make good directors or dramaturges and god knows we need dramaturges. There are all sorts of things to do.

**EB**  
*Yeah.*

**DM**  
So, that’s what I’d like to see happen, you know the more skilled people we have in those positions that are Aboriginal the more we gain back control of our industry. It’s amazing how much we can do. There are doctors now that are going through where previously there had hardly been any Aboriginal doctors. There’s quite a few who are lawyers and all that sort of
stuff, the problem is that it hasn’t happened in theatre really. We haven’t seen as many kids coming through that have those directing skills and stage management skills that we need. It’s easy to get Aboriginal people involved in the artistic side but when it comes to technical...

**EB**  *Is it a lot harder?*

**DM**  Sure. Tech’s stuff is hard, stage management and lighting and sound, they’re all hard, but not impossible. It’s about getting the vision. A good lighting person is as valuable as any other person in the theatre. And sometimes even more. The bottom line is we need to remember as we try and work together that we are important to ourselves, to our colleagues and to the communities we represent.

**EB**  *I need to wrap this up and I’d like to thank you for your time and your candour. It has been good catching up with you.*

**NOTES**

7. *Land Lovers* was not a Jack Davis play and at the time of publication the playwright is still unidentified.
8. *The Koori Mail* is a national Indigenous fortnightly newspaper published in Lismore.
10. Noongar is one of the generic terms given to a geographically bound number of Aboriginal nations in Western Australia, (WA) which is the same as the term Koori representing the southeast parts of Australia and Murri loosely covering northern NSW and Queensland.
In recent times the term hybridity has become almost a cliché: it is used as both a descriptor and a category of analysis of certain kinds of cultural formations and identities. When hybridity is used as a descriptor it usually connotes a fusion of unlike elements. For example, world music is defined as a hybrid form consisting of a mixture of musical influences from various cultures (a bit of didgeridoo mixed with Pan pipes Tibetan chants African drumming etc.): likewise, the new Australian ‘fusion cuisine’ is based on a so-called East-meets-West culinary union.

Hybridity, in this sense, serves as a stabilising function which settles and resolves cultural differences: it creates a synthesis which subsumes and transforms its constituting parts into a new whole. This form of hybridity speaks to our postmodern globalising present: cultural barriers become increasingly permeable as we jet around the world, source exotic herbal remedies from our local Coles New World supermarket, read about feng shui in Women’s Day, and exchange information at ‘x’ bytes per second. Within this privileged developed world context, hybridity celebrates the proliferation of differences as cultural boundaries are crossed, collapsed, fused, confused, commodified and commercialised. It seems that anything is up for grabs, any cultural resource from any part of the world is available and marketable. I call this cultural free-for-all ‘happy hybridity’: there is little sense of tension or conflict involved in this conception of cross-cultural encounter. More importantly, by focussing only on the endless play of difference between cultures without a more considered sense of historical and political contextualisation, happy hybridity becomes nothing more than a celebration of political in-difference. It is best expressed by this little song:

I love the world
The world loves me
Let’s party on
Interculturally

But focusing only on the celebratory aspects of happy hybridity can be an excuse for staying under our collective coconut shell, and not dealing with the underlying issues of power asymmetries in our society and the ways in which we engage with other societies. Happy hybridity enables us to ignore issues of racism, gender discrimination, and economic exploitation. By representing the cross-cultural encounter as an unproblematic fusion, happy hybridity denies the existence of loss, of grief, of contradictions and irreconcilable differences which are also part of the cross-cultural experience.
‘She doesn’t look like a mail order bride ... though you never can tell. They all look alike.’

‘Well, she’s definitely not his!’

You can just see the scenarios being played out as they exercise the up-down zipper stare. In 1970s Perth, we were an oddity: Mum, my Caucasian step-dad and I. We’re not one of them, I tried to say ... this is legit. See, here’s the marriage certificate, her bank balance, his CV, my passport ... we’re legit ... we belong ... fair dinkum.

We build a home in the sandy white suburbs of Willetton, south of the River Swan in Western Australia. One morning as Ah Tae, my step-dad, steps out in his sarung to pick the papers, the garbage man yells out, ‘hey mate, your skirt’s getting wet!’

After that, the sarung was always accompanied by a dressing gown.

And the silk jackets, the beaded slippers and batik wraps, all the loving gifts from family back home lay secured in plastic bags on the floor of the wardrobe. I still hankered for sambal belacan and steamed coconut rice although I no longer ate using my fingers. I learnt that the body always betrays ... so clothes, gesture and accent had to be schooled for fear of letting the sarung show.

The uncritical celebration of hybridity runs the risk of collapsing the heterogeneous experiences of translated lives; it denies embodied experiences and instead transforms cultural difference into a fetishised display and consumption of Otherness. Happy hybridity acts as a kind of ‘white-wash’, giving the illusion of cultural diversity and social progressiveness while perpetuating the status quo. In Australia, the discourse of happy hybridity dovetails into official multiculturalism; the appearance of visible cultural pluralism fulfils the desire to claim that Australia has arrived on the world stage as a fully-fledged cosmopolis.

Official multiculturalism assumes that culture is fixed and the management of cultural diversity becomes a process of cultural pigeonholing. We are asked to identify as Greek, Thai, Chinese, Irish, Lebanese, French and so forth, beneath the folkloric banner. So, in a paradoxical way, multiculturalism actually perpetuates monoculturalism. Official Australian multiculturalism is based on the premise of cultural enrichment; that is, cultural difference from the ‘ethnics’ is perceived as a supplement to the dominant culture. The ethnics spice up the old meat and 3 veg; they gave us:

Rendang, yeeros, sushi, pho
laksa, roti, adobo
babagannoush with bak choy,
sangria, lasagne, focaccia ... I wantya!
It is not surprising that culinary cliches are often used to describe and legitimise Australia’s multiculturalism because the language of enrichment and in-corporation privileges the palatable and aestheticised elements of multiculturalism. The rhetoric of enrichment appeals precisely because it effectively reproduces an assimilationist economy of cultural containment and control.2

The use of culinary cliches is not just something that the dominant culture ‘does’ to the ‘ethnics’. ‘We’ are often equally complicit in subscribing to the use of food and other related ‘exotica’ as markers of our difference. The American writer and critic, Frank Chin, coined the term ‘food pornography’ to describe the conscious exoticisation of one’s ethnic foodways as a means of entering the dominant culture.3 He sees the often nostalgic use of food imagery, and references to eating and cooking rituals as food that has been detoxified, depoliticised and made safe for recreational consumption. The bottom line for Chin is that food pornography is self-defeating because it is determined by the limits of tolerance of the dominant culture.

While it is certainly a highly contradictory situation whereby the very cultural production of overt food imagery simultaneously proclaims and undermines one’s ethnicity and difference, I do not think it is entirely cut and dried. Pornography can also be a knowing and strategic play with desire: the desire to belong; the desire to maintain cultural autonomy; the desire to assert cultural difference. The pornographic performer can wield a degree of agency within such a transaction: it all depends on how consciously and critically that transaction is negotiated, and under what terms and conditions.

What is missing in the eagerness to embrace and celebrate the rhetoric of happy hybridity is a self-reflexiveness and awareness of the complexity of local histories and culture-specific knowledges in all their density, contradictions and contingencies. Instead, Australian society has a culture of mainstream criticism which attempts to convince itself that multiculturalism at the level of folk display is ‘a good thing’, so long as it doesn’t encroach on the political centre.

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Hands delicately laced with filigreed henna
Dreadlocks cascading over
Guess T-shirt
Sarung slung hips
Bindhi-spotted, kohl-rimmed
SBS-watching, cappuccino-drinking NESB-ian4.

I am
You are
...
Multicultural Chic.
consciously used to tease out the complexities of cross-cultural encounters. Hybridity as a critical strategy has the potential to unsettle and dismantle power relations because it focuses, not on fusion, but on the process of negotiation and contestation between cultures. Hybridity is not therefore perceived as just a ‘natural’ product of cross-cultural encounter but rather as a site of political agency, ironic commentary, and a knowing play with desire.

The aim of intentional hybridity is to focus on the process of cultural collision itself, and to create an ironic double-consciousness which foregrounds different worldviews and different forms of being. The cultural encounter throws up the possibility of at least two voices, two ways of knowing, which recognise, cross, contradict and dialogue with each other. Within this hybridising hyphenated space, new identities and new embodied knowledges come into being, bearing the rawness and rough edges of the cultural struggle.

Canberra, 1995

*Her first Anzac parade. It's really rather fascinating, she thinks, as she casts her ethnographic eye over the crowds. She's surprised at the number of teenagers and young families.*

*Soon, she's snug amongst them, sipping hot coffee, and clapping and cheering.*

*Then the Southern Vietnamese veterans march by, alongside their Australian counterparts.*

*And she suddenly remembers that the body is always marked, sometimes wrongly.*

*So she puts on her sunglasses, in case they mistake her for a Japanese.*

Asian-Australian is an identity category increasingly asserted by Australians of Asian-descent (both migrant and Australian born). The use of the hyphen between Asian and Australian draws attention to the hybrid interaction between the two cultures. Hybridity is claimed as an intentional strategy to counter dominant perceptions of the diasporic Asian as lacking — as inauthentic Asian (the banana or coconut syndrome: yellow or brown on the outside, white on the inside) and/or as illegitimate (because not White or Aboriginal) Australian. Asian-Australians claim hybridity and in-betweenness as a site of fluid identification which enables us to be both Asian and Australian, alternatively, simultaneously, provisionally. Our hyphenated hybrid consciousness as Asian-Australians may even allow us to dismantle some of the fixed preconceptions of what counts as Asian and as Australian. Self-identification in this sense becomes performative; it becomes a political choice, in response to the context, and is negotiated at every point.
Over and over I return to Body
my beginning, my end,
the Self that can never be left behind.

Hybridity as a mode of identification offers alternative ways of being Asian in Australia, it offers a counter-inscription to the gook, the chog, the new Australian, the migrant, the NESB-ian. Diasporic identities become adept at camouflage: for survival, for play, for pleasure, for security, for revenge. Camouflage is not about becoming something or someone else, leaving some body behind. Nor is camouflage a matter of pretence, about being something you’re not; rather camouflage is a process of transforming identity. Consider the chameleon: always changing, different yet the same as its environment. Camouflage is inherently performative because the source of being lies in adapting and transforming continuously, contingently, and partially, to the environment. The self comes into being through this multiple layering of camouflaged selves, one on top of the other. But these layers of camouflage are never able to produce a perfect fit, a perfect cover; there is always the sliver of slippage, the rasp of rupture. The edges of past selves insist on peeping out and disturbing the clean outline of the new layer, the new shape.

The camouflaging layers will never be able to fully cover and contain the plurality within, and it is this misfit, this excess, which best describes my understanding of intentional hybridity as an ironic and politicised consciousness. The sarung will always show; there can never be a perfect fit between the layers of camouflage. The choice, for me, is whether to ignore and deny its peeping presence, or to use this misfit strategically to navigate the hyphenated space of being Asian in Australia.

To go beyond hybridity is to resist taking hybridity at face value, no matter how seductive and attractive those ‘United Colors of Benetton’ advertisements with their multiracial cast of models might be. What’s needed is a more critical way of looking at how the discourse of hybridity is articulated and mobilised as a critical strategy so that issues of power inequities are not overlooked and more care is taken to understand what is lost, as much as what is gained, in the process of crossing cultures.

NOTES
1 For a fuller examination of the different modes of hybridity, see Jacqueline Lo, ‘Beyond Happy Hybridity: Performing Asian-Australian Identities’.
3 Cited by Sau-Ling Cynthia Wong, Reading Asian American Literature: From Necessity to Extravagance, 56.
SBS is an Australian television channel dedicated to multiculturalism; ‘Non-English Speaking Background’ (NESB) is a term used in official multicultural discourse in the 1980s and early 90s.

From Chin Woon Ping, ‘Details Cannot Body Wants’, p. 108.

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MOHAMMAD A. QUAYUM

Malaysian Literature in English: An Evolving Tradition

INTRODUCTION
In spite of the many early challenges and lingering difficulties faced by writers in the English language in Malaysia — challenges and difficulties of a political, literary and social nature — literary tradition in English in this newly emergent nation has come a long way, showing considerable dynamism and resilience since its inception. Critics suggest that the literature in English in post-colonial societies generally evolves in three stages. In *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*, Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, for example, explain these three stages as: (i) ‘[works] produced by “representatives” of the imperial power’; (ii) ‘[works] produced “under imperial license” by “natives” or “outcastes’”; and finally, (iii) the ‘development of independent literatures’ or the ‘emergence of modern post-colonial literatures’ (5-6).\(^1\)

If we apply the above evolutionary model to the local context and disregard the works of the earlier two stages for their overt ‘metropolitan’ bias — works by writers such as Hugh Clifford, Richard Winstedt, Frank Swettenham, Katherine Sim and Margaret Leong, who engaged in diverse literary exercises but mostly as “representatives” of the imperial power’, or the output of such expatriate writers as Gregory W. de Silva and Han Suyin who were presumably not adequately rooted in the local soil to depict the local imagination — and take into account the corpus of ‘independent’ local writings in the English language, characterised by local ideas and local experiences, or writings that hold up a mirror to the local reality, then, indeed, the literary tradition in English in this multi-ethnic society, standing at the cross-roads of cultures, would barely exceed a period of half a century. Its emergence can be traced back to the growth of a literary coterie at the University of Malaya, following the creation of its English Department and the appearance in print of *The New Cauldron*, a literary journal published by the University’s Raffles Society, in 1949. According to Dudley de Souza, the process of development of this ‘independent’ Anglophone literature was hastened by consequences of the Second World War, ‘that weaned the local literati from a complacent reliance upon the colonial power and stimulated the seeds of nationalism’ (2).

It is no doubt interesting to note that English writings in the Malayan Peninsula, unlike in other post-colonial societies, such as India, took its roots
only prior to the retreat of the Raj to its native shores and not during the heyday of colonial rule. In India, the history of literature in English spans almost two centuries starting with such early writers as Raja Rammohan Roy, whose appearance on the Indian political and literary scene broadly coincided with the violent de-Orientalising and Anglicising period between 1835–1855. A significant landmark in the history of English education in India was, of course, Macaulay’s Minute on Education in which he recommended that the best way to ‘civilise’ the Indians and to create a permanent bond between India and England was to introduce English education. Following Macaulay’s recommendations, it was resolved by Lord William Bentinck on 7th March 1835 that ‘the great objective of the British Government ought to be the promotion of European literature and science among the natives of India; and that all the funds appropriated to education would best be employed on English education alone’ (qtd in Iyengar 27).

The introduction of English, and of English literature in particular, to the Indian education system was a deliberate attempt by the colonisers to perpetuate their supremacy through the dissemination of Euro-centric values and the concomitant erosion of indigenous ideals among the colonised people. Gauri Viswanathan explains, ‘British colonial administrators, provoked by missionaries on the one hand and fears of native insubordination on the other, discovered an ally in English literature to support them in maintaining control of the natives under the guise of liberal education’ (17). It is somewhat baffling though that in spite of such strong convictions on the role of English and English literature in the continuation of the colonial process, and of so much emphasis on the implementation of an English education policy in India, the British were so slow in adopting a similar policy in Malaya, where English literature was introduced as an academic subject only in the 1940s. From a political point of view, this was, perhaps, a boon, as people were spared cultural and ideological contamination and consequently a more rigorous colonisation of the mind than, for example, in the case of India. But, ironically, from the point of view of English literary writings, it only serves to explain why India has produced so many world class writers in the English language such as R.K. Narayan, Raja Rao, Nirad Chaudhuri, R.K. Ramanujan, Salman Rushdie, Amitav Ghosh, Kamala Das, Vikram Seth and Arundhati Roy — with still more talented younger writers breaking into the scene everyday, with Jumpha Lahari, a Bengali-American, who received the 2000 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction, being the latest in a long string of gifted writers — while Malaysia can only optimistically hope to match that enviable list sometime in the future.

ACHIEVEMENTS

Perhaps it is unfair to compare the achievements of Malaysian literature in English to those of India, as the cultural and political circumstances in the two countries have been widely different throughout. However, even compared to neighbouring Singapore, the quantum of creative writing in the English language
in Malaysia looks discouragingly small, if not downright negligible. This is in spite of the fact that the roots of literature in English in the two countries were one and they continued sharing the tradition, until in 1965, owing to political differences, Malaysia and Singapore chose to tread separate paths, thus causing their literatures also to assume separate courses.

Notwithstanding this somewhat arrested growth, there has no doubt been, and continues to be, a tenacious stream of literature in Malaysia that is written and published in English. The major writers of the tradition include Wong Phui Nam, Lloyd Fernando, Lee Kok Liang and Ee Tiang Hong as pioneers, and Shirley Lim, K.S. Maniam, Cecil Rajendra, Kee Thuan Chye and Hilary Tham as second generation writers. Of these, Shirley Lim, K.S. Maniam and Kee Thuan Chye certainly seem the most prolific and versatile. Shirley Lim, currently a professor of English at the University of California, Santa Barbara, for example, has four volumes of poetry, three volumes of short stories, one novel and one memoir to her credit. K.S. Maniam, on the other hand, has published three novels, four volumes of short stories and four plays, while Kee Thuan Chye has three plays, two volumes of prose, a few poems and a novel in the making.

Among the ‘older’ writers, Wong Phui Nam has four volumes of poetry to his name; Lee Kok Liang, one novel and two collections of short stories; Ee Tiang Hong, five volumes of poetry; and Lloyd Fernando, two novels, one of which was also made into a play. Although Fernando’s creative contribution might seem relatively small, his contribution to the overall development of the tradition cannot be underestimated, as he was instrumental in instilling inspiration in many of the younger writers when he was a professor of English at the University of Malaya. His several edited anthologies also played a significant role in the formative years of the tradition. Moreover, Lloyd Fernando is perhaps the best known of the Malaysian literary critics in the English language, having published numerous articles both at home and abroad.

Of the writers discussed so far, Malacca born Nonya activist and feminist, Shirley Lim and Malaysian-Indian writer K.S. Maniam are perhaps the best known internationally. Shirley Lim has received several international literary awards, including the Commonwealth Writers’ Prize in 1980 for her first collection of poetry, *Crossing the Peninsula and Other Poems*, and the American Book Award twice, in 1990 and 1997 respectively, while K.S. Maniam was awarded the Raja Rao award for Fiction by the Indian Sahityya Academy in 2000. Wong Phui Nam and Ee Tiang Hong have not received any prizes but they are highly regarded in the region, with many considering them as two of the best poets in the English language in ASEAN countries. Lee Kok Liang and Kee Thuan Chye have also received considerable critical attention both locally and internationally but, of the two, Kee is the more politically active voice in Malaysian literature, often challenging the status quo and appropriating the role of the ‘other’ in Malaysian political binarism. In a recently published collection of
critical essays, *Malaysian Literature in English: A Critical Reader*, the first of its kind to deal exclusively with Malaysian Literature in English, Peter Wicks and I pay tribute to some of these better known writers by focusing on critical appraisals on their writings.

Of course, in addition to those we consider major writers, there are others both old and new. They include Muhammad Haji Salleh, Adibah Amin, Chuah Guat Eng, Lee Geok Lan, Salleh Ben Joned, Nirmala Raghavan, Ruth Ho, Karim Raslan, Marie Gerrina Louis, Lee Su Kim, Che Husna Azhari, Dina Zaman, Rehman Rashid and Amir Muhammad. Some of the female writers mentioned here have been discussed in considerable detail in a book I co-authored with Nor Faridah Abdul Manaf, *Colonial to Global: Malaysian Women’s Writing in English 1940s–1990s*. However, many of these writers are bilingual, suggesting an allegiance divided between English and their respective mother tongues. Furthermore, the output of most of them is very limited, generally to a collection of short stories (as in the case of Dina Zaman and Karim Raslan), or a volume of occasional writings (as with Karim Raslan, Rehman Rashid and Lee Su Kim).

Muhammad Haji Salleh, Adibah Amin, Salleh Ben Joned and Nirmala Raghavan are all bilingual writers. Muhammad Haji Salleh, for example, started his career as an English language poet but later changed his mind to concentrate on the national language as the only acceptable medium for his creative imagination. After the passing of the Language Act in 1967, Muhammad gradually came to view English as the language of colonisation and quizzically concluded, ‘Should I lick the hand that strangles my language and culture?’ (qtd in Nor Faridah and Quayum 124). Adibah Amin is widely known as a Malay language writer but, interestingly, she started writing columns in the *New Straits Times* (*NST*), a local English daily, under the pseudonym ‘Sri Delima’ in the 1970s when English was going through its most difficult phase. Her articles were later published in two volumes, in 1976 and 1978 respectively, under the title *As I Was Passing*. Salleh Ben Joned, a former lecturer in English at University Malaya and currently a freelance writer, is widely known as a rebel who stands against the grain of accepted social and political norms. Although his reputation lies mostly in the boldly defiant newspaper articles, published under the title, *As I Please*, in 1994, a second book, his only collection of poetry, *Sajak-Sajak Salleh: Poems Sacred and Profane*, consists of poems written in both English and Malay. Finally, Nirmala Raghavan, a writer who was born in Madras, India and migrated to Malaysia in the 1960s after marrying a Malaysian, is best known for her Tamil works, but she has nonetheless consistently written feature/occasional articles in the *New Straits Times* since the 1980s and, to date, has more than 200 such pieces to her name.

Among female writers in the English language, Chuah Guat Eng and Marrie Gerrina Louis are, perhaps, the best known and most accomplished, apart from Shirley Lim. Although Rfiah Yusuf and Karamiah Haji Saadon, writing in the 1940s, are recognised as the pioneering female novelists in Malaysia, both of
them were Malay language writers. The first English novels by Malaysian women writers were published only in 1994 when Holograms brought out Chuah Guat Eng's *Echoes of Silence* and Heinemann, in Singapore, published Louis' *The Road to Chandible*. In 1995, Heinemann brought out Louis' second novel, *Junos*. It is expected that this breakthrough will bring inspiration to younger writers and propel them to undertake equally challenging and ambitious literary enterprises in future. Shirley Lim's newly published novel, *Joss and Gold*, set partly in Kuala Lumpur but also in America and Singapore, is a credible addition to this rather small but growing list.

However, many Malaysian writers in the English language seem to enjoy dabbling in witty journalistic writings rather than engaging in serious literary activities such as the writing of poetry, drama and fiction. Many of the writers listed above are no doubt guilty of this. One reason why Malaysian writers venture more frequently into journalistic/occasional writings than into more serious forms of literature is, perhaps, because it allows them an easier and wider exposure to the potential readership in the country. Given the small pool of readers in English in the country, and as is generally expected in a profit-driven capitalist economy, publishing a book is an extremely challenging task for writers since publishers avoid works that are likely to incur loss. However, according to Rehman Rashid, in his 'Foreword' to a volume of occasional writing by Amir Muhammad, Kam Raslan and Sheryll Stothard, *Generation: A Collection of Contemporary Ideas*, the explosion of journalistic writing in the country is in keeping with the local literary tradition, as Malaysia, he says, has a 'grand old tradition of journalistic commentary ... going all the way back to Abdullah Munshi, no less' (‘xxiii).

One final word on the achievements of Malaysian Literature in English, with regard to drama. In spite of the strict censorship laws in the country, where, as Kee Thuan Chye informs us, ‘a permit to stage a play is required from the authorities and scripts are vetted by the Special Branch who give the final nod’ (2001b 318), there has been considerable interest in the form from the beginning. Commenting on the early years of Malaysian theatre, Jacqueline Lo explains:

> A relative explosion of theatrical activities occurred during this period. The Arts Council playwriting competition encouraged many writers to produce local plays; the newly established Drama Council organised at least two highly successful drama festivals in 1969 and 1970, and the Experimental Theatre in the University Malaya was used to stage a number of locally written and produced productions including *The Clay Model* by Patrick Yeoh and Goh Poh Seng's *Room with Paper Flowers (When Smiles are Done)*. The proliferation of locally written and produced plays is borne out by the publication of two volumes of plays in 1972 which to date, represent the only comprehensive collection of Malaysian plays in the English language. (95)

No doubt, with the English language going out of favour after the Amendment Act of 1971, which made it illegal to dispute or question the status of the national language as provided for in Article 152 of the Malaysian Constitution, drama,
Malaysian Literature in English

like all other forms of literature in the English language, suffered considerably in the country. But there has been a revival since the mid-1990s, with new plays being successfully performed on a regular basis. However, in spite of the presence of many talented writers in the theatre, one problem of undertaking a serious study of Malaysian drama in English is the crippling sense of modesty of the writers themselves, who often shy away from publishing their work or lending their script to researchers, sometimes even after the successful staging of their plays.

Challenges

There are many challenges encountered by English language writers in Malaysia. The most difficult of these is, of course, with regard to their creative medium. Malaysia is a plural, polyglot society in which English is one of the marginal languages spoken by a small group of Eurasians and English educated middle class. Owing to its historical connection with colonial rule, the language has never been able to fully rise above the many images of oppression and exploitation it invokes, to assert a strong cultural and emotional bond with the vast majority in the country. Moreover, the roots of the language are not deep enough for literature to flourish freely, and the speech community of the language is also not sizeable enough to provide the political and intellectual props required for the hearty growth of literary activity.

This problem of the alien quality of the English language and its lack of claim over the local cultures was no doubt compounded by the language policies adopted by the Government in the post-independence period. The passing of the National Language Act in 1967 and the Amendment Act in 1971, which were meant to unify an ethnically fractured nation through the use of a common language, did not augur well either for English or those writing in the language. It created a feeling of alienation and marginalisation in many of these English educated writers and stifled or threatened their creativity. The raised status of Malay as Bahasa Malaysia, the national language, also meant that Sastera Melayu or Malay literature, because of its symbiotic relationship with the language, would become the national literature, while literatures in other languages, including English, were but Kesusastraan sukuan or ‘sectional literatures’.

These developments, though deemed healthy for ‘homogenising’ the nation, put the English language writers an ‘invidious position’, (Ee Tiang Hong), forcing some of them to leave the country and others into a state of permanent or protracted hibernation. Ee Tiang Hong himself, for example, left the country in 1975 to take up residence in Australia, while Shirley Lim moved to the USA in 1969. Muhammad Haji Salleh decided to give up writing in the English language, following these political developments in the country, in order to avert a cultural betrayal of his people as well as to help restore the lost native culture, while Wong Phui Nam entered a phase of protracted silence. Wong’s first volume of poetry, How the Hills Are Distant, came out in 1968 and it took him twenty one years to bring out his second volume, Grandma and Other Poems, published in
1989. Krishen Jit, an eminent figure in Malaysian drama, crisply sums up the distraught state of English language writing in the country in the aftermath of the language policies adopted by the Government, in his following comment on the dwindling state of English language drama: ‘The battle for the national language has been fought and won, and English no longer threatens the paramountcy of Bahasa Malaysia…. By the end of the mid 1970s, local playwriting was a spent force — defeated by the nationalistic forces unleashed on May 13, 1969’ (qtd. in Quayum and Wicks xi).

It needs to be mentioned, though, that the circumstances have changed considerably since the mid-1980s, as Malaysia increasingly recognises the importance of English in the era of globalisation, especially for the purpose of fulfilling the national vision of 2020, when hopefully Malaysia will enter the elite league of developed nations and become a leading player in the international financial and technological markets. Apart from this pragmatism, perhaps time has also been a healing factor, as, with time and the development of new concerns both locally and internationally, the earlier hostilities towards the language, fresh from the memories of colonial oppression and exploitation, have slowly eased and subsided.

Apart from this excruciating challenge arising from the circumstances of English, there are other challenges confronting writers in the English language in Malaysia. One of them is the absence of a local English language writing tradition, and another is the heterogeneous make up of the national population. The absence of tradition makes the task of writers particularly difficult as they depend on tradition for their examples and inspirations. The local writers cannot draw from European tradition, of course, although their medium is European. To do so would make their literature redundant, rendering it inaccessible to local readers. As a first step towards establishing tradition, the writers will need to alter the language by giving it a more local flair and by infusing more ‘local blood’ into it. This will require considerable negotiation skills and creativity on the part of the writer. It will also require of writers the utmost patience, as traditions are not formed easily and overnight. One might recollect that it took American literature more than two hundred years to find an independent voice and a separate identity from that of European literature; the Pilgrim Fathers landed in New England to set up American civilisation in 1620, but the nation attained its cultural and literary independence only in the 1830s.

The heterogeneous make up of the population stands as a major stumbling block to the process of forming a local tradition. Given that writers are from diverse cultural backgrounds, their imaginations and value systems are likely to be different. This means that they will need to loosen the bonds of their rigid cultural systems to create an environment of ‘horizontal comradeship’, or of one and yet many, and slowly learn to empathise with one another’s cultures and thereby contribute to the formation of a common pool of consciousness. This is
again a matter of time and will require writers to step out into a ‘historyless’ zone (Walcott’s phrase), as an effective ‘contact zone’ between diverse cultures essential for the building of a common body of symbols and myths for writers to draw from can only become possible through a protracted ‘history of minglings’ between the groups, allowing room for a shared, collective memory.

There are some additional challenges to the ones mentioned above, but they are not specific to writers in the English language. These challenges are political and cultural in nature and they affect writers, and literature, generally across the board. The subject of a closed political environment in the country, resulting in widespread lack of freedom of speech, has been addressed adequately by Salleh Ben Joned and Kee Thuan Chye, and perhaps there is no need to go over the issue again here. However, something needs to be said about the challenges arising from the cultural state in the country. Malaysia is a tradition bound and yet modernising country. This push and pull tendency affects the writer and his imagination both ways. Tradition encourages a closed culture for the sake of its own perpetuation. This means new ways and behaviours are not welcome and people are expected to condemn in the harshest terms anything that violates the norm. This is very unhealthy for the development of literature as writers like to experiment and search for things that are different and new. One example of how tradition and cultural orthodoxy create a hostile environment for the writer can be found in the following complaints by two local writers. Lisa Ho, for example, has complained that she has been ‘gossiped about by spiteful women and men’ and accused of ‘living the sinful lives of her characters’ (qtd in Nor Faridah and Quayum 336–37) because she has created a female character with some sexual fantasies in one of her stories. On a similar note, Nirmala Raghavan comments, ‘When a woman writes a story about another’s affectionate feelings for a man, or so much as mentions the word “sex”, she is instantly looked upon with suspicion. Her family is justly concerned for her reputation’ (qtd in Nor Faridah and Quayum 424). This is how an orthodox society, entrenched in tradition, brutalises the imaginative freedom and creative sensibility of the writer. I believe male writers are also confronted with several problems associated with tradition, but perhaps of a different nature.

Finally, challenges arise from the process of modernisation. Ideally, by helping to open up the culture modernisation should create a more congenial atmosphere for literature, ironically though, it does more harm than good. By creating a culture of ‘getting and spending’ (Wordsworth’s phrase), in which people are more preoccupied with money and matter than the finer things of life, modernisation itself becomes a stumbling block to the growth of literature. When commerce and culture in a society do not converge, commerce slowly consumes the culture, leaving people with the bare practicalities of life and writers as useless entities, with little to contribute to a surrounding that is steeped in its own appetite.
PROSPECTS AND FUTURE

In spite of the many challenges and the relatively slow growth experienced to date, the future of Malaysian literature in English looks full of promise. Especially with the changed circumstances of the language, writers now enjoy greater freedom in expressing their imagination. They do not feel the political and cultural pressures that were endured by their predecessors. English is now no longer seen as a part of colonial hegemony, disrupting the formation of Malaysian post-colonial national identity. In a recent interview with Bernama, the country’s Prime Minister, Mohammad Mahathir redefined the role of English in Malaysian nationalism:

Unfortunately, some people feel that you should neglect English entirely if you are a nationalist. If you are a Malay nationalist (they say), then you should learn Bahasa Malaysia.... We believe that a nationalist is someone who has acquired all the knowledge and mastered all the skills and is capable of contesting against the rest of the world. That is a true nationalist. (9)

The impact of such a positive environment, where writers can choose their medium without feeling unduly conscience-stricken, is already evident in the proliferation of English writing in the country since the 1990s. Drama and Biography, which were lagging behind, have also made a strong come back in the last decade or so.

Another element that should help boost Anglophone literary activity in the country is the slow demise of nationalism and the rise of an international and a neo-universal world-culture. Nationalism has been the dominant force in global politics for the last two hundred years and was instrumental in creating a sense of identity in the once colonised societies, helping them to attain freedom from the hegemonic rule of the British. Now, however, it is being superseded by multinationalism and globalism. As Timothy Brennan comments, ‘we often hear that nationalism is dead’ (45). Daniel Bell is of the view that the nation state is simply too small for the big problems of life and too big for the small problems of life. Given this changing circumstance, in which the world will increasingly acquire an intranational and international syncretic culture, Malaysian writers in English who have chosen the global language as their medium, and ipso facto have chosen multiple ways of life and a sense of a multiple belonging, are well poised to depict the Malaysian ‘mosaic’ reality for the growing readers of a transnational world.

One common criticism against Malaysian literature generally has been that it is too communally oriented and inward looking. Explaining the lack of a holistic outlook in Malaysian writers that would enable them to rise above ‘pride and prejudice, irrational attachment to things, people or causes or blind loyalty arising from habit and custom’, Cecil Rajendra, in a recently published article in NST, in commemoration of Merdeka Day, most cynically and sarcastically
asks, ‘How many Malaysian writers are truly independent and have the courage to stand by their convictions? How many Malaysian writers do not have a blind loyalty to their language and race’ (NST, ‘Literary’, 29/8/2001 5). In the same article, the former head of the DBP’s publishing department and chief editor of Utusan Melayu, Johan Jaafar, comments, ‘After 44 years of independence, Malay literature as evidenced in the genre of the novel is still intractably Malay-centric. . . . Malaysian writers seldom explore the world outside their cocoon’ (NST, ‘Literary’, 29/8/2001 6).

Such comments imply that Malaysian writers have not been able to contribute to nation building in the way expected of them. Writers in a multi-ethnic society should preferably address national issues objectively and impartially, and dismantle all prevailing hierarchies for creating an all-inclusive nation, founded on a broad based understanding and mutual recognition of differences between the various ethnic groups. I believe this is a responsibility the English language writers in Malaysia should be able to fulfil easily. Because of their inherent multi-cultural make up — as they are often multi-lingual and exposed to more than one culture — they should be able to rise above the psychological and cultural moorings of their respective communities and appropriate a more balanced and equilibrated sensibility. This would gradually pave the way for them to make due contributions to the formation of ‘Bangsa Malaysia’, or a holistic national identity, that will eventually allow Malaysia to rise above provincial nationalism and to become part of a global community. After all, as Frantz Fanon astutely said, ‘[i]t is at the heart of national consciousness that international consciousness lives and grows’ (247–48). Every modern nation-state, in order to fulfil its destiny, ought to appropriate this sense of dynamic ‘twoness’, that allows the nation to experience a feeling of a separate identity and yet keeps it open to possibilities of connectedness through a processual unsettling/erasure of a monologic/monolithic sense of nationhood and/or a totalitarian sense of identity.

NOTES

1 Explaining the evolutionary model, in her article ‘Finding a Native Voice’, Shirley Lim comments, ‘The theory that post-colonial literatures go through three stages — the first imitative of the mother colony’s literature; a provincial stage when writers turn to local colour and nationalistic themes; and a final stage of confidence when writers are free to explore whatever they wish — has been promulgated by influential writers as diverse as A.D. Hope, the Australian poet; Frantz Fazon, the French-Algerian activist and A.L. McLeod, a Commonwealth Literature scholar’ (30–31).

2 Also known as Perankan cina, the term refers to the locally born Chinese men and women, especially in Malacca, Penang and Singapore, who have adopted some aspects of Malay culture, have a distinctive cuisine, and speak a Malay dialect.

3 In an interview, Wong Phui Nam points out that the readership in Malaysia is divided between several languages and ‘as a language of serious reading, English can account for no more than two or three percent of the population’ (Quayum and Wicks 243).
Mohammad A. Quayum

Harold Beaver, for example, explains that even in 1831 America had no ‘national literature’ (53), and adds, ‘But the 1830s, which first introduced the expatriate and international themes ... were also the decade of America’s declaration of literary independence’ (64). The following passage from Emerson’s ‘The American Scholar’ (1837), is often cited as America’s declaration of cultural independence:

Our day of dependence, our long apprenticeship to the learning of other lands, draws to a close. The millions that around us are rushing into life, cannot always be fed on the sere remains of foreign harvests. Events, actions arise, that must be sung, that will sing themselves. (564)


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**FICTION NOVELS**


Malaysian Literature in English

191


SHORT STORY COLLECTIONS


POETRY (COLLECTIONS)


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**Drama**


**Prose**


The new executive committee took over after the Copenhagen Triennial conference in Spring, 2002. It consists of Geoffrey V. Davis, University of Aachen (Chair); Marc Delrez, University of Liège (Secretary); and Bénédicte Ledent, University of Liège (Treasurer).

The Triennial ‘Bodies and Voices’ conference in Copenhagen (21–27 March, 2002) organised by Bruce Clunies-Ross and his collaborators turned out to be a marvellous success despite certain odds. As is now all but common knowledge, only a few weeks before the conference was due to start a grant made by the ‘Danish Centre for Cultural Co-operation with the Developing Countries’ was blocked by the right-wing government which had just taken office in Denmark, so that plans to bring writers from Africa, Asia, the Caribbean and Pacific were suddenly jeopardised. The participation of Australian writers in the conference also had to be curtailed for lack of financial support. However, although the list of readings had to be substantially reduced, there were still many notable events included in the programme, and the participants had a most enjoyable and profitable time.

The conference was dedicated to the memory of Anna Rutherford, our founder, whose life of devotion to the post-colonial cause was poignantly evoked by Hena Maes-Jelinek, a former President of EACLALS, during the opening ceremony. A series of ‘Anna Rutherford lectures’ was also opened — a new tradition which was inaugurated by Prof. Helen Tiffin (University of Queensland) and which will be carried on in the future.

One of EACLALS’s traditional functions has been to make journal subscriptions available to members. This we now do for The Journal of Commonwealth Literature, Wasafiri, and, of course, Kunapipi. Delivery of The Journal of Commonwealth Literature to our members under this system has been subject to considerable delay due to the fact that the ownership of JCL has twice changed hands recently. We expect that normal delivery will now be resumed at regular intervals.

It has now been agreed that the next EACLALS Triennial Conference will take place at the University of Malta from 21–26th March, 2005, i.e. just before Easter. This should be an ideal time as Malta’s best art treasures, which are kept in the churches, are traditionally brought out in preparation for the greatest liturgical event of the year in the week before Easter. This will include the ‘vari’ (groups of statues on large platforms representing the crucifixion), which will be exhibited in some of the villages during that week. The final day will be an excursion to Gozo. In view of the location the organisers intend to include a North African focus with both academic and artistic input. Writers such as Hoda Barakat, Tony Hanania, Albert Memmi, Ahdaf Soueif as well as the Booker-
prize short-listed Maltese fiction writer, Trezza Azzopardi, will be invited. The provisional theme is ‘Sharing Places’. Further details will be available in the autumn.

The committee will be implementing a system of book donations for universities in Eastern Europe this year. Anyone with spare copies of publications is invited to pass them on to us; we will be happy to pass them on.

In the period after the Copenhagen conference we have experienced something of a reduction in membership numbers. This seems usual in the period between triennials, but we intend nevertheless to counter this by initiating a recruitment drive in the run-up to the Hyderabad and Malta conferences, both of which should prove very attractive venues.

Geoffrey V. Davis, Marc Delrez, Bénédicte Ledent
NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

ERNIE BLACKMORE is a Gamilaroi man born in Leichhardt, NSW. He is a tutor at the Universities of Wollongong and Macquarie. Ernie’s play Buckley’s Hope was selected to represent Australia at the 1999 US national Playwrights’ Conference. He acts as Indigenous editorial assistant as well as individually contributing to the dramatisation of four volumes in the current Indij Readers Series written and illustrated by various Indigenous people from all over New South Wales.

ANNE COLLETT lectures in English Studies at the University of Wollongong. She is completing a monograph entitled Marketing Women that brings together the work of Canadian Mohawk post-performer, Pauline Johnson Tekahionwake and Mexican artist, Frida Kahlo. Anne is involved in a collaborative research project that explores the relationship between text and textile in colonial/postcolonial contexts. An exhibition of art and artefacts integral to this project will tour Australia in 2004, and includes work by contemporary artists Nadia Myre (First Nations Canadian), Kay Lawrence (Australian) and John Pule (Niue-bom New Zealander).

STEPHEN COWDEN completed a PhD in Australian Literature at the University of Kent in Canterbury, in 1999. His thesis looked at the process whereby a ‘white indigenous identity’ had been created in Australian Literature, and alongside Furphy he looked at the work of K.S. Prichard, Xavier Herbert and P.R. Stephensen. Since 2001 he has taught in the Department of Social Work at the University of Coventry, UK.

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LINDSEY MOORE completed her DPhil at the University of Sussex, England, on the subject of representations of Muslim women in literary and visual media from North Africa and the Middle East. She currently teaches courses at Sussex on postcolonial writing and cultures, Salman Rushdie and Black women’s writing.

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MOHAMMAD A. QUAYUM is currently visiting professor of Asian and Asian American Studies at the State University of New York at Binghamton. Author and editor of thirteen books. Quayum’s articles in American and post-colonial literatures have appeared in many distinguished journals in the US, the UK, Australia, India, Singapore, South Africa, Taiwan, Malaysia and Bangladesh. His latest book, *Saul Bellow and American Transcendentalism* is forthcoming from Peter Lang, New York.

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SANJAY SIRCAR, an independent scholar in Canberra, Australia, works on marginalised texts and marginalised literatures including children's literature, women's literature and folklore. His work has been published in the UK, the US, Australia, Germany, Austria, Japan and India. R.B.'s story is the third memoir from the margins in which he has been involved.

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KAY WILLIAMSON is British, holds a Ph.D. in Linguistics from Yale, and has spent almost all her working life in Nigeria, first at the University of Ibadan and then at the University of Port Harcourt, where she has worked extensively on the Ijo (Ijaw) language cluster, which includes Izon, as well as on languages of Nigeria.
KUNAPIPI

FICTION
Richard Freemann, ‘The Poor Man and His Vernacular Speaking Goat’; Jacqueline Lo, ‘Sarung Slippages and Hybrid Manoeuvres’

POETRY
Gerry Turcotte

ARTICLES

ESSAYS

INTERVIEWS
Tomson Highway in Interview with Mark Shackleton and Hartmut Lutz; David Milroy in Interview with Ernie Blackmore

COVER