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Abstract
The first texts produced in a post-colonial society, that is in a society which has undergone the experience of colonisation in one of its numerous forms (settlement, intervention etc.), are those produced by the representatives of the viewpoint of the colonising centre: e.g. gentrified settlers, administrators, box-wallahs and missionaries; or those ‘birds of passage’ such as travellers, sightseers etc., who seem to have been born hand in hand with the Imperial enterprise and the opportunities it offered for adventurous voyeurism. Writers as diverse as Froude, Mary Kingsley and Charles Wentworth fall into this category.

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The first texts produced in a post-colonial society, that is in a society which has undergone the experience of colonisation in one of its numerous forms (settlement, intervention etc.), are those produced by the representatives of the viewpoint of the colonising centre: e.g. gentrified settlers, administrators, box-wallahs and missionaries; or those 'birds of passage' such as travellers, sightseers etc., who seem to have been born hand in hand with the Imperial enterprise and the opportunities it offered for adventurous voyeurism. Writers as diverse as Froude, Mary Kingsley and Charles Wentworth fall into this category.

The second stage of production within this evolving discourse is the literature produced by 'natives' or 'outcasts', e.g. African 'missionary literature' (Thomas Mofolo's *Chaka*); any of the many nineteenth-
century Anglicised upper-class Indian poets; or even the few genuine 
Australian convict texts (e.g. Frank the Poet). The paradox of the 
marginal status of these texts is that their producers have by the very fact 
of writing in the language of the dominant culture, entered, if only in a 
temporary and precarious way, a specific and privileged class accessed to 
the language, leisure and sometimes education necessary to produce such 
works.

The Australian novel *Ralph Rashleigh*, now known to have been written 
by the convict James Tucker, is a case in point. Tucker, an educated man, 
wrote Rashleigh as a ‘special’ (that is a privileged convict) whilst working 
at the penal settlement at Port Macquarie as storekeeper to the Super-
intendent. Port Macquarie was, at that time, effectively a convict lunatic 
asylum and hospital. This unlikely sanctuary provided Tucker with one 
of the few secure, happy and productive periods in a life of tragic in-
effectualness and the manuscript, as the scholar Colin Roderick has 
shown, reflects this. Written on government paper with government ink 
and pens it was clearly produced with the aid and support of the Super-
intendent. Momentarily, Tucker had gained access to the privilege of 
Literature. Though, significantly, the moment of privilege did not last 
and he died, neglected, at the age of fifty-eight at Liverpool Asylum in 
Sydney.

Certainly one of the most noticeable characteristics of these early 
colonial texts is that the full potential for subversion is finally unrealised. 
Although their themes, such as the brutality of the convict system 
(Tucker’s *Rashleigh*), the historical potency of the supplanted and deni-
grated native cultures (Mofolo’s *Chaka*) or the existence of a rich cultural 
heritage older and more extensive than that of Europe (any of many 
nineteenth-century Indo-Anglian poets, for example, Ram Sharma), offer 
great potential for anti-colonial assertions. The problem is that none of 
these texts can fully adopt the viewpoint of the material they embody. 
They come into being within the constraints of a discourse and the 
institutional practice of a patronage system which limits their perspec-
tive. Thus, after a lengthy illustration of the arbitrariness, cruelty and 
injustice of convict life in nineteenth-century New South Wales, a life 
from which the only relief is the period spent in the company of the 
‘savage’ aboriginals who befriend him whilst on the run, Tucker 
concludes his work as follows: ‘Reader, the corpse of the exile slumbers 
in peace, on the banks of the Barwon, far from his native land. Let us 
hope that his sufferings and untimely death, alas, have expiated the 
errors of his early years.’ The ending returns uncomfortably to the 
perspective of the dominant power, occluding all the insights of the text.
Significantly it is the 'persona' who speaks here to the 'reader'. Tucker as 'persona' is contained within the discourse. Through the protagonist, Rashleigh, he may record much of what he has experienced, but as 'persona' he cannot make that experience explicit in the commentary. The 'persona' is limited in its range of expression by its implication in the power inscribed in the authority of 'the text'. The subversive nature of the protagonist, Rashleigh, is constantly denied by the persona because the persona may not endorse the subversive implications of the narrative events in an explicit commentary. A novel written on government paper with government pen and ink constrains its author and forces him to be explicit only within the permitted ideological postures of the ruling colonial elite. The institution of 'Literature' in the colony is accorded an authority which is directly under the control of the ruling class who alone can permit not only the writing but also the publication, distribution etc. of the resulting work.

The ending of Ralph Rashleigh is therefore quite unironic. Irony is only possible when the persona can locate him or herself outside the system described. The ironist may need to recall Aristotle's boast that given a lever long enough and a place to stand he could move the world. For the early post-colonial writer no such place appears to exist; yet, paradoxically such a place is potentially where he exists. It is the new world he inhabits. But his physical transportation to a new environment has not been extended to the language and the literary forms in which he might record his new experience. That language and those forms must themselves be transported, changed, appropriated. One might compare the treatment of a similar theme in Patrick White's A Fringe of Leaves where the experiences undergone amongst the aboriginals by the heroine Ellen Roxburgh in company with the escaped convict Jack Chance make it impossible for her to resume the European attitudes to both convicts and aborigines, still current in the fringe settlements of nineteenth-century White Australia.

This need to make the language over is a task faced by all writers in post-colonial societies, whether they acquire English by birth or by imposition. When they are faced with the need to record an experience which within the available discourse is marginalised, is outside the received norm, they can only do so by abrogating that discourse, that is by recognising that their reality is oppressed by the discourse and that any true language for them must involve the rejection of the hierarchy within which they are not privileged. They need to make English into english, an appropriated and indigenised language which embraces its variety as a positive and not as a negative quality.
Thus, although the accidents of its genesis are radically different, Ram Sharma’s poem *Music and Vision of the Anahat Chakram* is similarly constrained by his use of English. By implication the poem asserts the existence of a rich religious and philosophical Indian tradition:

Whate’er it be, I feel — I know,
To this sweet music in the heart —
Beyond the reach of human art —
A perfect calm of mind I owe,
A very sabbath of the Soul,
Resting in Brahma’s boundless whole!

The rest of this poem presents the Indian tradition and culture in rich detail but this attempt to write about Indian cultural norms is contained and surrounded by their unprivileged position within the English language just as the Indian experience itself is contained and surrounded by its lack of privilege in the colonial system.

As in Brindavan’s Kadamb grove,
Each happy in the other’s love;
His blue commingled with her white
Like a cloud lit by lightning bright;
While Triveni’s united wave,
With murmurs soft their feet doth lave!\(^3\)

The extensive referencing of Indian culture in these lines is contained and limited within the discourse of nineteenth-century British late Romantic versification.

Language and system are mutually sustained; the one supports and perpetuates the other. The possible explorative range for the Indian English text is limited by its material context. No specific and open assertion of the fate of the Indian culture under imperialism can be made within the limitations of RS-English (Received Standard English) and the institutional practice of Literature which this language sustains. The best the Indian poem in such English can do is to assert the continued presence and validity of the traditional values *vis-a-vis* the privileged and privileging norm of the imperial culture, a norm which the practice and the institution constitute as ‘universal’. Hence the nirvana of the poem is expressible only through the assertion of its equivalent validity with the nearest English concept, the Christian ‘sabbath of the Soul’. In order to progress beyond this the Indian writer, like the Australian, must restructure the language, reordering the hierarchies sustained within the Imperial discourse.
It is to this process whereby the language and forms of the metropolitan centre and its aesthetic are privileged that we should look for explanations of the 'imitativeness' and 'dependence' of many early post-colonial texts, and not to some formalist criterion which ignores the text as a site for the production of meaning.

Explanations which argue that such imitativeness stems from the fact that the height of the colonial period coincides with that period in the metropolitan literature (1750-1850) when the dominant aesthetic was imitative and conventional miss the larger point. Such imitativeness is part of the discourse of power operating between imperial centre and colony and can be seen to occur irrespective of the conventionality or otherwise of the dominant aesthetic theories of the metropolis.

For example, Romantic and post-Romantic theories of 'spontaneous' expression, individual observation of nature and an engagement with 'the language of common men' had percolated down into Indian poetry during the Victorian period. Although these had offered an opposing aesthetic and practice to that of the eighteenth century with its insistence on literature as 'an artefact ... something fashioned according to certain principles, much as a craftsman might fashion a table or a chair' and offered instead the idea of an individual, expressive creation which bent form to its needs, an identical imitative process is observed in the resulting works. The 'spontaneous', 'individual' and 'descriptive' work produced in India between 1850 and 1910 is produced in direct mimicry of the forms and idioms of the 'literary' example privileged by the prevailing discourse.

The dominance of this example and its privileged position has nothing to do with its intrinsic qualities, whether pro or anti conventionalised imitation. It is empowered to impose itself irrespective of its nature by its position within a hierarchy of discursive practices in which the Indian alternative models (religious epic, instructional poem etc.) are not privileged. Ultimately only the conscious abrogation of this hierarchy can liberate the text fully from this dominance.

In the poem 'Samarsi' by the nineteenth-century Indian poet Greece Chunder Dutt, one of the many writers produced by the famous Bengali literary family (and whose name 'Greece' suggests the relationship such families held with the European cultural tradition), Scottish and Indian references are mixed:
Despite the 'comic' responses which this text frequently evokes in readings by modern European critics in the post-colonial context, it represents an advance by its appropriation of an 'English' literary form (the Romantic ballad) to Indian literary discourse. The process of abrogation and appropriation characteristic of the post-colonial text is already set in train and the text is being constructed within the post-colonial discourse, itself formulated within the political dialectic which brings it into being. That the text is expressive of the oppressed position occupied by India in that discourse is countered by the larger political consequence of acquiring it.

Even if the text can only assert itself at the level of a local colour, through the introduction of the Indian names for flora, fauna and seasons to a form otherwise unchanged, such a hybridisation subverts (menaces) through its very imitativeness both the surface features and the ideological underpinnings of the discourse which seeks to legitimise and authorise it (European Romanticism). Take, for example, Sarojini Naidu's 'Summer Woods':

> Oh I am tired of painted roofs and soft and silken floors,
> And long for wind-blown canopies of crimson golmohurs!

> O I am tired of strife and song and festivals and fame,
> And long to fly where cassia-woods are breaking into flame.

> Love, come with me where koels call from flowering glade and glen,
> Far from the toil and weariness, the praise and prayers of men.

> O let us fling all care away, and lie alone and dream
> Neath tangled boughs of tamarind and molsari and neem! 

Two poems by another nineteenth-century Bengali poet, Hur Chunder Dutt, may serve to illustrate how this process can come about only by relocating the text within an alternative discourse based upon its reproduction at the site of consumption, not upon its use or misuse of formal techniques. So in the poem called 'Tarra Baee' the Indian context is contained only in the note preceding the poem which explains that
Tarra Baee is an Indian princess who rejected suitors unless they offered to redeem her inherited land, Thoda. The poem which follows is, in all respects, contained by the discourse of the Romantic ballad whose form it imitates:

She sat upon her palfrey white,
    That damsel fair and young,
And from the jewelled belt she wore,
    Her trusty rapier hung;
And chieftains bold, and warriors proud,
Around her formed a gallant crowd.\(^9\)

The limitations of such texts reveals not their ineptness nor their lack of complexity but their, inevitably unprivileged position within the dominant colonial patronage system.

Of course this is an extreme example of the suppression of the subject by the discourse. Nevertheless, when that subject is constituted within a political stance whose oppositional mode and sense of oppression subverts and appropriates the discourse, the moment of abrogation may be perceived to exist not as a formal property of the text but as a reproduction of those properties within the context of the text’s consumption. It is the relationship of author and perceived audience whose ambivalent position \textit{vis-à-vis} their polarisation within the post-colonial world is thus clearly revealed. The position of the Bengali Anglicised intellectual Hur Chunder Dutt is clearly revealed in a text such as ‘India’, as is the potential difference reproducible from the text by an Indian English-speaking reader as opposed to an English reader...

\textit{India}

And shall I to the future turn my gaze?  
The future is a sealed book to man,  
And none so high presumes his sight to raise;  
God’s mystic secrets who shall dare to scan?  
But sure it is no mighty sin to dream;  
I dreamt a dream of strange and wild delight,  
Freedom’s pure shrine once more illumed did seem,  
The clouds had pass’d beneath the morning light;  
And sighs and groans for ever fled the land;  
Science again aspired to the sky,  
And patriot valour watch’d the smiling strand;  
A dream! a dream! Why should a dream it be?  
Land of my fathers! Canst thou ne’er be free?\(^{10}\)
Ram Sharma’s poem *In Memory of Swami Vivekananda* addresses the dead Swami in English, using that language to suggest that his Guru will greet him 'in Elysium' with praise as 'Bengali’s gifted son' and 'all India’s pride'. Recently, at a reading of the poem, a contemporary Indian critic asked: ‘But what language would they have used when they spoke?’

Perhaps the question the poem and those like it poses is a slightly different one, not 'what language' but from what perspective? The post-colonial text, even when still so powerfully under the suppressive influence of the imperial discourse, may still show how the reproduction of the text is itself as constitutive of its meaning as the formal levels of abrogation which it has achieved. To go beyond this the writer must appropriate the discourse to his own use. But the example of the nineteenth-century post-colonial writer may show how from a post-colonial perspective a re-reading of all post-colonial texts must inevitably occur as part of that process.

NOTES

2. Ibid., p. 303.
4. For example, G.A. Wilkes in the introduction to *The Colonial Poets* (Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1974).
5. Ibid.
7. V.K. Gokak, op. cit., p. 27.
8. V.K. Gokak, op. cit., p. 110.
11. V.K. Gokak, op. cit., p. 35.