Opting out of the (Critical) Common Market: Creolization and the Post-Colonial Text

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Abstract
When, in 1938, Raja Rao wrote in his preface to Kanthapura of the difficulty faced by Anglo-Indian writers in 'conveying in a language that is not one's own the spirit that is one's own', he not only outlined the wider dilemma facing all those writers who, in many different social and historical circumstances and from many different parts of the world, have attempted or are attempting to give voice to a distinctively post-colonial culture in a language which has been repeatedly used throughout its history for the purposes of imperial/colonial cultural assimilation; he also anticipated the dilemma currently facing critics of the post-colonial literatures whose attempts to develop theories of and about post-colonialism are vitiated by a critical vocabulary which relies heavily on Eurocentric concepts of literary classification and textual analysis. The now outdated formula that postcolonial writing involves the adaptation of 'European forms' to a 'non-European content' has thankfully lost credence due to a recognition both of its tacit reinforcement of European assumptions of cultural leadership and of its theoretically untenable bifurcation between the formal and thematic properties of the literary text. Yet if the steady development of and, above all, wider academic exposure to critical theory in recent years has resulted in a welcome, if belated, inquiry into the assumptions on which critical reading practices are based, its Euro-American bias has ironically provided the impetus for a different kind of assimilation, this time involving the reincorporation of the various post-colonial heterodoxies within the admittedly pluralist and decentred, but now increasingly institutionalized, domain of European/American 'post-modernism'.

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1. 'EUROPEAN FORM, NON-EUROPEAN CONTENT': POST-COLONIALISM AND THE MODERNIST LEGACY

When, in 1938, Raja Rao wrote in his preface to Kanthapura of the difficulty faced by Anglo-Indian writers in 'conveying in a language that is not one's own the spirit that is one's own', he not only outlined the wider dilemma facing all those writers who, in many different social and historical circumstances and from many different parts of the world, have attempted or are attempting to give voice to a distinctively post-colonial culture in a language which has been repeatedly used throughout its history for the purposes of imperial/colonial cultural assimilation; he also anticipated the dilemma currently facing critics of the post-colonial literatures whose attempts to develop theories of and about post-colonialism are vitiated by a critical vocabulary which relies heavily on Eurocentric concepts of literary classification and textual analysis. The now outdated formula that post-colonial writing involves the adaptation of 'European forms' to a 'non-European content' has thankfully lost credence due to a recognition both of its tacit reinforcement of European assumptions of cultural leadership and of its theoretically untenable bifurcation between the formal and thematic properties of the literary text. Yet if the steady development of and, above all, wider academic exposure to critical theory in recent years has resulted in a welcome, if belated, inquiry into the assumptions on which critical reading practices are based, its Euro-American bias has ironically provided the impetus for a different kind of assimilation, this time involving the reincorporation of the various post-colonial heterodoxies within the admittedly pluralist and decentred, but now increasingly institutionalized, domain of European/American 'post-modernism'.

Unfortunately, attempts on the part of post-colonial critics to dissociate or at least differentiate post-colonialism from post-modernism have as yet proved unconvincing, not merely because of the intrinsically problematic nature of both terms but because of the continuing failure to account for
their complex relation to the literary/cultural ‘movements’ which preceded them. One cannot begin to formulate theories of post-colonialism, for example, without first setting up one’s parameters of colonialism: the same can be said of post-modernism which, if it remains an elusive, or merely a muddled, concept to some, may well be so because it is founded upon false assumptions about, or an insufficiently informed understanding of, modernism. This paper cannot claim to make up for these insufficiencies but seeks instead to address itself initially to an issue which, in the current lively debate on the relation between and relative merits of post-colonialism and post-modernism, risks being overlooked: namely the interrogation in/by many post-colonial texts of their European modernist predecessors. The critique of modernism will then be seen as an example of the way in which post-colonial writers seek not only to question the Great Tradition of European literature but also to challenge continuing Eurocentric critical and metacritical biases.

The influence of European modernist literature on post-colonial writing is vast; examples which spring readily to mind in the English writing are the many post-colonial revisions of Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* and the frequent references in post-colonial texts to such classic modernist works as Eliot’s *The Wasteland* and Joyce’s *Ulysses*. But let me make it clear from the outset here that I am not speaking of ‘modernism’ generally (whatever that amorphous category might mean) but of a particular variant usually referred to as High Modernism. High Modernism, like any other form of modernism, or, for that matter, any other literary category, is fraught with contradiction; for the purposes of this argument, however, I shall outline two aspects generally accepted as salient features: first, the tendency to look upon, portray, and in many cases celebrate the artist as an isolated, unadjusted but somehow salutary figure in an increasingly fragmented and disoriented cultural environment; and, second, the prevalence of cumulative, syncretistic patterns within the literary text which reflect the reparation and/or regeneration of that fragmented culture. Thus, from a post-colonial perspective, a discrepancy immediately emerges in the ideological project of High Modernist art between the supposed break with tradition implied by the notion of modernity and the exercise of cultural retrieval implemented by the High Modernist text which ultimately guarantees the continuity of, rather than portrays the disintegration of or crisis within, Western (European) culture. This retrieval, moreover, involves the critical appropriation of ‘non-European’ cultural symbols and their subsequent reincorporation within the dominant discursive systems of Europe.
Now, this – admittedly over-simplified – reading of the assimilative practices of High Modernist aesthetics allows us to infer the irony behind many post-colonial writers’ usage of the symbolic frameworks of European modernism to inform their own works. Thus, in revisions of *Heart of Darkness* such as Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* or Harris’s *Palace of the Peacock*, the post-colonial writer should not be seen as attempting to adapt ‘European forms’ (or, in this case, European cultural paradigms) to a ‘non-European content’, but rather as demonstrating the self-empowering process by which such critical distinctions can be made in the first place (in Achebe’s case, the ‘authoritative’ writing of ‘primitive’ African culture; in Harris’s, the ‘confirmatory’ replay of a catastrophic journey into a ‘primeval heart of darkness’). Achebe’s and Harris’s implied dissociation from the reconfirmatory project of European High Modernism is further enhanced by the former’s celebration of the wisdoms contained within and disseminated by an ancient, and predominantly oral, culture, and by the latter’s hybridization of European and Caribbean cultural myths is such a way as to stress the mutual benefits brought by alternative perceptions of a colonial past otherwise assumed to take its place within the self-authorizing annals of European history.

Harris’s celebration of the hybridity of Caribbean culture in *Palace of the Peacock* and other works supports his belief in the possibilities afforded by a new cross-cultural poetics which participates actively in the transformation not just of post-colonial, but of all, cultures. An interesting comparison can be made here between Harris’s theories of the cross-cultural imagination and the historical studies of his Caribbean colleague Edward Brathwaite, particularly the latter’s adumbration of the ‘interculturative’ process of creolization. Brathwaite takes care to distinguish between the prismatic perception of culture afforded by an appreciation of the interculturative nature of the creolization process and the monolithic perception afforded by those negative forms of creolization which either subscribe to the values of, and therefore reinforce the social hierarchy presided over by, the dominant (white) culture or, alternatively, which claim to have effected the total recuperation of the marginalized (indigenous) culture in terms which now exclude external influences of any kind. Brathwaite’s specific analysis of the creolization process focuses on the slave revolt in early nineteenth-century Jamaica, a high colonial period in which ‘interculturization was being made to take place ... in a predetermined manner, with the inferior/superior ranking of the inherited system maintained and extended’ (Rubin and Tuden p. 42). In this situation, claims Brathwaite, the various people and
communities involved in the creolization process were faced with a restricted number of choices:

There could be an acceptance of the colonial system: as was done of course by nearly all, if not all, the whites of the culture, and by the non-whites who had been bribed or coerced into it, or who had come into it through some accident or design of birth. There was also, arising from this acceptance situation, the ambiguous product: the freedom faced with the possibility of privileges and 'perks', the coloured or cultural mulatto, somatically defined as one thing; often socially promoted as something else; but never 'pure', since he was without ancestors (Rubin and Tuden pp. 42-43).

To illustrate his point, Brathwaite uses a symbolic framework familiar to Caribbean and other post-colonial writers, that of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, but provides it with a cast of 'ambiguous products' which conform to 'the personality types of creole cultures'. In the context of early nineteenth-century Jamaica, claims Brathwaite, 'Prospero, Ariel and Caliban were all creoles: that is, they had a life-style that was tropical, slave/colonial and dependent on independent of the métropole' (Rubin and Tuden p. 44). Brathwaite emphasizes, however, that

'to be 'creole' didn't completely mean or imply satisfaction, stabilization or completion of a process; quite the opposite, in fact. To be creole in the changing world of the early nineteenth century was to be in a state of constant bias (from/towards) ancestral cultures' (Ruben and Tuden p. 44).

This state of flux or irresolution, suggests Brathwaite, is most clearly demonstrated in the 'personality type' of Ariel, who acts as a catalyst for and transmitter of the tensions involved both in Prospero and Caliban's increasingly uncertain allegiance with their ancestral past and in their indeterminate or fragmented vision of their immediate (and more distant) future.

Although historically and geographically specific, Brathwaite's analysis, I would argue, is of wider relevance to the state of post-colonial cultures in the late twentieth century, both in 'Third World' nations such as Africa where a Calibanic reversal of Prosperan authority has gradually given way to a more sophisticated analysis of the complex, often indirect or covert, power-relations informing post-colonial societies, and in former 'settler colonies' such as Australia where the ongoing attempt to define a national culture in relation to or reaction against its colonial past has been increasingly problematized by the (re)discovery of alternative ('non-European') cultural affiliations. The critique of ethnocentism in a great deal of contemporary post-colonial writing can be seen in this context not just as a continuing interrogation of European colonial practices but as a more
up-to-date attempt to account for the ethnic diversity of post-colonial societies, a diversity which implicitly questions such notions as the recuperation of a 'common ancestry' or the search for 'cultural unity' and which implicates the transferred ethnocentric biases of post-colonial nationalist discourses.® Hence the relevance of Brathwaite's revisionist term creolization, which ultimately implies neither a perpetuation of 'white' (ex-colonial) values or a recuperation of 'black' (indigenous) values within the post-colonial society but an interculturative process within which a series of intermediary postures are struck up that elude or actively work against the binary structures (white/black, master/slave) which inform colonial discourse but which have also survived in modified or transposed forms in the aftermath of the colonial era. Creolization, I would further suggest, provides a theoretical model not only for the contemporary analysis of post-colonial cultures but for the contemporary criticism of post-colonial literatures. Thus, for example, the common post-colonial practice of 'writing back' against a European cultural/literary tradition is not reabsorbed within the contestatory, but paradoxically integrative, terms of contemporary European critical theories and methodologies but is perceived as part of a dialectical process involving the interrogation, displacement and ironic refiguration of the hegemonic practices of European culture.7

I suggested before that Brathwaite forges a link between the interculturative process of creolization and the ambivalent concept of 'Arielism' in which the elusive go-between of Shakespeare's play is made to feature as a kind of cultural androgyne, a 'free spirit' ironically in thrall both to a white and, less directly, to a black master, and consequently operating as a catalytic agent for the struggle both between and within nominally opposing, but implicitly interdependent, cultural representatives. This link, I would argue, also informs a recent post-colonial rewriting of The Tempest which powerfully dramatizes the forces at work within a post-colonial culture struggling to disabuse itself of its colonial past and to signal its own 'disidentification'® from the assimilative designs of the European literary tradition: Keri Hulme's novel the bone people (1983).9

2. ARIEL MANOEUVRES: THE BONE PEOPLE AS A POST-COLONIAL TEXT

Overriding critical concerns with the assertion or refutation of the bone people as a 'Maori' novel, a (or even 'the') 'New Zealand' novel, or some combination of both, have resulted in a curious reluctance to consider its wider implications as a post-colonial text. And unfortunately, in the few
essays which do consider these implications, the argument is weakened by
a failure to understand the ironic treatment of High Modernism in the novel
as an implied continuation of the tradition of European cultural supremacy
(Simon During’s otherwise instructive article in Landfall), or by an
insistence on the need for post-colonial literatures/cultures to develop their
own nationalist discourse, a discourse which has always seemed to me to risk
espousing precisely the same essentialist notions as imperial/colonial
self-proclamation (Anne Maxwell’s implied response to During in
Antithesis). Both of these essays discuss Hulme’s treatment of modernism
in the novel, but neither links it to a cultural tradition which traces back
through such classic texts of the colonial encounter as Robinson Crusoe and
The Tempest. Yet, although the circular framework of texts such as Eliot’s The
Wasteland, Conrad’s Heart of Darkness and Joyce’s Finnegans Wake is there for
all to see in the bone people, underlying it is the more obviously binary
framework of Defoe’s and, particularly, Shakespeare’s texts. This section of
the paper therefore addresses itself to the link between Hulme’s
idiosyncratic ‘creolized’ reading of The Tempest and her ironic reading of
European High Modernism in which the regenerative patterns outlined in
a series of ‘exemplary’ texts are discovered to advocate notions of
assimilation and recuperation which actually serve to reinforce the values
of the dominant culture.

In the bone people’s brilliant opening, a child appears as if out of nowhere
on the premises of a tower presided over by a reclusive bibliophile. ‘Rescued’
by her and taken in in what is later to become an ambivalent (dare I say a
tempestuous?) alliance, the child awaits the entrance of the third player in
the triangle, a physically powerful but emotionally troubled Maori,
‘dispossessed’ of his family, unsure of his place in society, and susceptible to
fearful acts of retributive violence towards the child, whom he considers his
own but who consistently deceives, defies or eludes him.

This network of displaced references to The Tempest sets the pattern for
the narrative which follows. But Hulme’s most telling displacement/
refiguration of Shakespeare’s text resides, I would argue, neither in her
feminization of Prospero nor in her identification of a Maori Caliban but
in her creolization of both Prospero and Caliban, a move which gives centre
stage to the intermediary, ambivalent figure of Ariel. In Kerewin’s case, the
status of a ‘creole’ Prospero is not merely a question of her mixed ancestry
(Scots/Lancastrian/Maori) but of her eclectic artistic and intellectual
preoccupations. An enthusiastic if quickly disillusioned dilettante, she
approaches painting, writing, sculpture and music with the same voracious
exuberance as she displays towards her reading (Oriental mysticism,
medieval lore, fantasy etc.). Moreover, Kerewin's very speech is a kind of 'creole', an unusual but identifiable combination of Elizabethan archaisms and contemporary vernacular interspersed with arcane allusions, colourful regional idioms and Maori proverbs. Joe's status as a 'creole' Caliban is less evident, though we are told near the beginning of the novel that he is not one hundred percent 'pure' Maori and informed later that his top-heavy physique is due to a childhood attack of polio which has left him 'imperfectly formed', ironic indications not only that his mixed ancestry precludes any single racial/cultural affiliation but that such unilateral affiliations may support erroneous notions of 'purity' and/or 'perfection' historically associated with imperial/colonial proclamations of cultural supremacy.

But it is above all through the character of the rebellious 'mute' child, Simon, that these apparent stylistic, physical and temperamental 'eccentricities' are transmitted and ironically intensified. Thus, as the relationship between Kerewin, Joe and Simon develops, it becomes more and more apparent that the so-called 'delinquence' of the child is in effect a transposition of the anti-social behaviour of his two self-appointed 'guardians'; for Simon is not only instrumental in bringing Kerewin and Joe together but in galvanizing and, as his abbreviated name, Sim, suggests, simulating their own 'delinquent' activities. Simon's sneak-thievery, for example, ironically reflects Kerewin's magpie intellectual acquisitiveness, while his frequent flashes of temper and petty vandalism mirror the more sinister physical abuse of his unstable foster-father. Simon's ability to mimic the faults of others, along with his elusiveness, his uncooperativeness and his concerted resistance to social norms indicate the disruptive nature of his mediating role: a mischievous but also, it would seem, a malevolent Ariel. But while Simon's persistent deviance leads to the brutal retributive battering which lands him in hospital and plunges his two 'guardians' into suicidal despair, the event also triggers the journeys which are to reveal knowledge of their linked ancestral past. Thus, while Joe and Kerewin recover lost contact with their Maori cultural heritage, they also discover the previously missing links in Simon's past which enable them to connect, and apparently 'integrate', their own multiple ancestries. Simon's disinherited father (Timon) provides one of these links; the discovery of the boat and its illegal 'treasure' (heroin) another: the origin of the 'tempest' jointly played out in the minds of Joe, Kerewin and Simon is revealed in a rancorous colonial past of dispossession, destruction and false (Mephistophelean) promise.

The recuperative structure of the novel, and in particular its 'happy ending', interpreted by many of Hulme's critics as an optimistic vision of a
more integrated Maori/Pakeha future, appear in a less rosy light when seen in this context, as an allegorical playing-out of a repressed colonial past which ‘brings to the surface’ the grim knowledge of deceit and (self)destruction. Moreover, Simon’s silence throughout the novel suggests that a gap, or rather a series of gaps, remain at the heart of the text which controvert its integrative thematics and its neat, apparently all-encompassing structure. I would further suggest that these gaps undermine the synthesizing aesthetic project of the novel, identifying it with Kerewin’s individualistic version of, but ultimately collusive relation to, High Modernist artistic practice. In the article to which I previously referred, Simon During rightly points out that the syncretistic tendencies of High Modernism have the effect of assimilating, and therefore of minimizing or even annulling, cultural differences. But whereas During sees this disguised expression of European hegemony as defeating Hulme’s apparent purpose in proclaiming the values of Maori culture, I read it as an ironic comment on Kerewin’s continued dependence on a cultural tradition which links her back through Joyce, Yeats and Eliot to that archetypal cultural ‘gatekeeper’, Prospero. For although Kerewin burns down her Tower and destroys the cultural ‘treasure’ it contains, we find her at the end of the novel enlisting the help of a certain Finnegan to retrieve the wreckage of Timon’s boat, a salvage operation which yields an altogether different kind of ‘treasure’. It could of course be argued here that the reinforcement of Kerewin’s Gaelic ancestry through this latest Joycean reference signals her resistance to the cultural imperialism of the ‘European tradition’, a resistance implied by her allegiance to a post-colonial culture (Ireland) with a history of militancy that her adopted country (New Zealand) lacks. But the ironic counterpoint between Kerewin’s discarded possessions and Timon’s re-emergent booty suggests that her previous cultural affiliations have, as it were, merely undergone a ‘sea-change’: the salvage of Timon’s ‘treasure’ thus reconfirms her residual allegiance to a dominant culture which has absorbed wayward or recalcitrant elements within its own all-enveloping discursive system. In this sense, despite her cultivated eccentricity, Kerewin can paradoxically be seen as embodying the reactionary process of negative creolization: mainly European, part Maori, she appears to disclaim the former in order to recuperate the latter but actually assimilates the latter within the former.

A different aspect of the same process is exemplified in Joe’s apparent reinherintance of the land of his Maori forefathers. For Joe’s recovery of the greenstone from a remote corner of the North Island, a prerequisite for his and Kerewin’s foundation of a revitalized Maori community in the South, is
not a unique event which definitively realigns him with his lost Maori ancestry but rather part of a double retrieval also involving the salvage of Timon’s boat and the unwanted reclamation of another displaced element of his cultural ancestry. The one, suggests Hulme, cannot exist without the other; the attempt to locate the current position of or to predict the future movements of a creolized post-colonial culture depends on the interaction between the enlightening myths of an indigenous tradition (or traditions) and the benighted history of the colonial encounter, an interaction which at once debunks the falsely homogenizing myths of cultural ‘purity’ and national ‘unity’ and implicitly dispels (or at least counteracts) the colonial stigmas of ‘mixed blood’ and ‘cultural schizophrenia’.

An alternative is suggested, however, to the overt antagonism of the colonial encounter or to the implied essentialism of projects of cultural recuperation through the agency of the go-between Ariel, whose ambivalent status, dexterity, defiantly maintained (rather than) silence and persistent frustration of the expectations that others place upon him can all be seen as strategies of resistance which signal his challenge to the standards imposed upon him by the various (legal, medical, etc.) ‘authorities’ he encounters, but also as his attempted dissociation from the wider discursive system which informs those institutions. And this system, it is implied, owes its predominantly binary structuration to a European rationalist heritage whose Manichean rhetorical divisions have clearly defined historical links with the colonial enterprise. But Simon’s own family background unfortunately relates him, at least indirectly, to the very hierarchical structures and institutions he seems intent on resisting; thus, although he is cut off from a father who had himself been disinherited by his aristocratic family, and is therefore twice removed from the country and culture of his forebears, Simon still carries within him and is recurrently haunted by the nightmares of a destructive colonial past.

Yet if, through Simon, Hulme indicates the impossibility of a total disinheritance from the self-destructive ties of the colonial bloodknot, suggesting by analogy that post-colonial societies/cultures cannot dissociate themselves wholly from the implications of their colonial past, she hints at the potential emergence of an emancipated post-colonial voice containing within it the contradictions of and hybrid elements in post-colonial cultures which perceive their creolized status in terms other than those of self-deprecatory assimilation or self-glorifying recuperation. But as I suggested, this is not the voice of the indigenous Maori Caliban; it is paradoxically that of the Pakeha Ariel who, liberated from his erstwhile ‘master(s)’, becomes an agent of cross-cultural exchange rather than a
facilitator/simulator of cultural antagonism. I stress himself/herself, because
the gender of Hulme's Ariel, like that of Shakespeare's, is nominally male
but otherwise ambiguous (significantly, Kerewin refers to the child in the
eyear stages of the novel as 'it'). Simon/Ariel can be seen in this context as a
principle of mobility or ambivalence oscillating between the more defined
but, as it turns out, equally unstable presences of Prospero and Caliban. The
introduction of an androgynous, or sexually ambiguous, presence into the
novel disrupts the socially constructed opposition between male and female
(also questioned in Hulme's presentation of a 'macho' female Prospero and
an ostensibly virile but latently homosexual Caliban). The powerful
intermediary presence of Simon/Ariel also indicates a desire to dismantle
other oppositional hierarchies involved in the construction of race and class
or caste which trace back beyond their immediate colonial context to a
history of Western culture and, more specifically, to a history of European
writing, in which the construction of a series of antithetical 'others' has
consistently been employed as a self-empowering strategy designed to
promote the values of cultural unity and to justify actions taken against
outsiders to, or non-conformist elements within, that culture.

If the emergence of an emancipated post-colonial voice in the bone people
remains deferred, this is not just because Simon/Ariel remains trapped
within the system which nurtures and supposedly 'protects' him; it is also
because an articulation of the silences or spaces between prescribed
discourses or discursive formations itself constitutes a kind of freedom, a tacit
assertion of elusiveness as the condition for post-coloniality.

3. AFTER EUROPE: TOWARDS A POST-COLONIAL POETICS OF
DISTURBANCE

The attribution of a positive value to elusiveness in the bone people lends
weight to Brathwaite's analysis of the creolization of post-colonial societies,
a process whose ongoing dialectics preclude any permanent resolution and
therefore rule out the possibility of a definitively 'achieved' or fully 'unified'
culture. Elusiveness also becomes the watchword for a widespread
post-colonial scepticism towards homogeneous or homogenizing categories
of critical discourse. This may well sound like a subscription to the
destabilizing procedures of European post-structuralist methodologies or to
the decentred discourse of Euro-American post-modernism; but there is a
crucial difference, for the scepticism shown by many post-colonial writers
and critics towards self-contained theoretical systems and explicatory critical
terminology is not so much founded on the 'global' concept of linguistic or
epistemological crisis or on a perceived loss of faith in the historical continuity provided by the so-called 'master narratives' of the Western (European) literary tradition as on the desire to interrogate that tradition, and the criticism which has so often either explicitly or implicitly reinforced it, in ways which uncover its continuing cultural biases.\(^{17}\)

I have suggested that one of the ways in which *the bone people* does this is through its ironization of the assimilative procedures of High Modernist art; thus, in a strategy characteristic of post-colonial writing, the text provides its own deconstructive reading of its literary/cultural precursors. The retrospective reading of European High Modernism through the imperial allegory of *The Tempest* provides a further strategy consisting in the ironic reconfirmation of a prescribed cultural pattern or paradigm: ironic again, because the palimpsestic overlay of texts belonging to a shared cultural tradition (*Heart of Darkness*/Robinson Crusoe/*The Tempest*) creates an effect of hyperbole further intensified by the novel's deliberately overwrought language and overexposed scenes of physical violence.

The combined effect of these textual strategies, I would argue, is to produce an exacerbated allegory of the colonial encounter which also lays bare colonizing practices inherent in the European literary and critical tradition. Ariel, I have suggested, is the medium through which this saga of cultural dispossession/appropriation comes to be told, but is also a vehicle for the articulation of a poetics of disturbance characterized not so much by the realistic expression of psychological complex as by the allegorical exposition of a relativism which problematizes 'normative' prescriptions of both social behaviour and literary/cultural value.

By shifting emphasis in the novel from the antagonistic relationship between Prospero and Caliban to the ambiguous character of Ariel who, despite his 'capture' and 'enslavement' (colonial paradigms ironically alluded to through recurrent images of appropriation and retention\(^{18}\)), continues to evade comprehension and resist domestication by his two 'guardians', Hulme sets up the possibility for a dissociative critical stance which recognizes the involvement of post-colonial literatures/cultures in but resists their circumscription by the naturalized patterns and paradigms of European literary/cultural history.

If the notion of a poetics of disturbance primarily suggests the implementation of a series of interventionary strategies which problematize 'normative' categories including those of literary criticism (allowing us, for example, to consider Simon's mimicry, silence and androgyny in *the bone people* as metatextual strategies of resistance), the process of creolization investigates ways in which different cultural paradigms may be adapted,
displaced and realigned in accordance with a 'prismatic' perception of cultural pluralism (i.e. one which acknowledges the interaction between various elements within the society rather than the fragmentation of that society into a series of discrete, hierarchically structured units: viz. Simon's intermediary role in the (re)connection of his own, Kerewin's and Joe's multiple ancestries). The capacity to 'disturb' established critical perspectives (by which I mean the institutionalized ways in which we read and evaluate literatures, societies, cultures), combined with the ability to formulate critical opinions which draw on different, cross-related cultural sources, suggest in turn that the qualities associated with Ariel – mobility, elusiveness, indeterminacy – are also those of the ideal post-colonial reader, a reader familiar with and resistant to the (re)appropriative tactics of European critical practice. The inscription of a reader (ideal or not) within the literary text is a common ploy in post-colonial writing, suggesting that more work needs to be done in the future on the applicability of reader-oriented theories to the study of post-colonial literatures. I have shown in this paper that the crucial role of Ariel in the post-colonial context implies the benefits of a deconstructive reading which adapts post-structuralist methodology to the critique of European cultural imperatives. But as the bone people exemplifies, this kind of reading is anticipated by the post-colonial text; the role of the reader seems therefore to consist in the recognition of alternative reading strategies already implemented within the text. Clearly an inherited Eurocentric vocabulary is not only inadequate to the task of elucidating these strategies, but is in direct contradiction with the interrogative practices of the text; I have suggested as one possible alternative Brathwaite's concept of creolization, which provides a critical framework for an analysis of deconstructive reading strategies internalized within the post-colonial text without resorting to the often mystificatory vocabulary of and paradoxically authoritarian assumptions underlying European post-structuralism. I have also outlined the potential function of the lexical pairings disturbance/creolization, elusiveness/mobility in a post-colonial criticism which seeks to avoid circumscription within the critical/theoretical 'mainstreams' of Europe and America. The avoidance of a fixed critical position or perspective need not be interpreted as obfuscatory or irresponsible; on the contrary, it suggests the manoeuvrability necessary, on the one hand, for a transformational conception of cultural (ex)change involving the dialectical interaction between different cultures or cultural groups not considered as discrete units or diametric opposites but as components within a wider interculturative process; and, on the other, for a distinctively post-colonial critical discourse which neither dispenses with nor subscribes to, but
problematizes and adapts, European models of literary/cultural analysis and classification. In this context, I would conclude, the insufficiencies of existing theories and methodologies can no longer by considered as symptoms of a general (Western) 'post-modern condition' but rather as specific examples of a critical 'common market' saturated with protected European goods for an inward-looking public.

NOTES

7. Tiffin, op.cit.
8. The term is Michel Pecheux'; for a discussion of its relevance within the post-colonial context, see Stephen Sleton, 'Monuments of Empire: Allegory / Counter-Discourse Post-Colonial Writing', Kunapipi, 9, 3, 1987, pp. 1-16.
9. Keri Hulme, the bone people (Wellington: Spiral, 1983).
12. See Maxwell's discussion in the aforementioned essay, in which she refers the reader to Gayatri Spivak's 'charting of the complicity between the rise of first-world feminist literature and that of European imperialism' (e.g. in 'Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism', Critical Inquiry, 8.2, 1981, pp. 243-261). Although Maxwell reads the bone people as taking its place 'in the line of descent from the narrative trajectory of the modernist woman artists engendered by Woolf's To the Lighthouse', she acknowledges that 'the woman artist's challenge ... is not without its own blindnesses, centred as it is within ideological practices which maintain its class-bound, first-world privileges': Maxwell, op.cit., esp. pp. 80-82.
15. See, for example, the essays collected in Francis Barker et al., eds., *Europe and its Others: Essex Conference on the Sociology of Literature 1984* (Colchester: University of Essex, 1985).

16. See Sherrill Grace's discussion of Margaret Atwood's 'articulation of the space(s) between' as an alternative to the 'violent dualities' of Canadian social/cultural experience, in 'Articulating the "Space Between": Atwood's Untold Stories and Fresh Beginnings', in S. Grace and L. Weir, eds., *Margaret Atwood: Language, Text and System* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia, 1983), pp. 1-16. The argument is of wider relevance to post-colonial societies/cultures seeking counter-discursive alternatives to the dualist discourse of the colonial encounter.

17. Tiffin, op.cit.

18. E.g. the multivalent image of the hook, which at once connotes appropriation, retention and the infliction of pain/suffering. Note also that Simon simulates these, as other, colonial practices; he is first discovered with a splinter in his foot, and later in a fishing accident sinks a hook into his own finger.