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Postcolonial Novels and Theories

Feroza Jussawalla

The past few decades have seen an explosion of interest in the field of postcolonial literature and theory. Postcolonial literature in English emerged after the dissolution of the British empire on the Indian subcontinent, on the continent of Africa, and on certain of the islands of the Caribbean. At first labeled "Commonwealth literature," as countries gaining independence continued to stay connected to the British government via the "Commonwealth," this literature was then re-labeled "postcolonial literature" by American critics. Fredric Jameson's famous 1986 conference at Duke University on Third World literature, at which he presented his talk, "Third World Literature in an era of multinational capitalism," formally subsumed literatures from the Commonwealth under the aegis of "postcolonial literatures." "postcolonial," then, is a term that emerged from the American academy, building upon Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan's plea to the US Senate to erase the debt of nations recovering from colonialism.

Nomenclature

The question of a term has plagued this literature, and continues to do so, as theoretical concerns pervade the academy, and questions such as whether James Joyce classes as a postcolonial or a modernist author, continue to be asked. The writers creating this literature in English did not fall easily into the familiar categories of Victorian, modern, or postmodern. If E. M. Forster's writing about India was considered Anglo-Indian, then should Indians writing in English be classified as Indo-Anglian? For a period of time it was. As K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar has humorously noted in the introduction to his book, *Indian Writing in English*, it was even referred to as Indo-Anglican literature. As late as 1991, the Indo-British writer Salman Rushdie (b. 1947) used this same term in his book *Imaginary Homelands*. As growing nationalisms created dissatisfaction with the term "Commonwealth," the notion of "world

literatures written in English" came about. Even the term "postcolonial" came under fire in certain quarters for overplaying the connection with the colonizer; writers wished instead to be identified within their own national categories. The consideration of diaspora or immigrant writers is even more complicated. Both Salman Rushdie and V. S. Naipaul (b. 1932) now prefer to be called British writers, regardless of their countries of origin or of the fact that Rushdie is living in New York. Similarly with Bharati Mukherjee (b. 1940), who wrote of her origins in Calcutta in her fictionalized memoir, *The Tiger's Daughter* (1972), but who now sees herself as an American writer.

In his book *In Theory* the Marxist theorist Aijaz Ahmad maintained that the term "postcolonial" has been overused and used altogether too loosely. In a now famous review of one of the major books on postcolonial literature and theory, Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin's *The Empire Writes Back*, critics Vijay Mishra and Bob Hodge agree with Ahmad that it is important to use the term "post-colonial" (that is, with a hyphen) to denote an exact moment in time – the chronology of post-coloniality. But they also say that the term "postcolonial" can be used metonymically without the hyphen to indicate what might be called "an attitude" of postcoloniality, one that challenges the dominant hegemony and embodies notions of nationalism and liberation. Thus postcolonialism would neither be restricted to a period in time nor to those geographic regions affected by colonialism, but would include even works of British literature that embodied the attitude characteristic of "postcolonial" literature.

The literatures of Australia, New Zealand, and Canada have posed particular challenges to nomenclature, especially to the term "postcolonial," as critics have questioned whether "white" writing from settler colonies can properly be considered postcolonial. Mishra and Hodge (1994) justify the inclusion of literature by "white writers" from white settler colonies such as Australia, Canada, and South Africa and that of, say, indigenous peoples within the Americas, metonymically, since actual postcoloniality has not yet occurred. Indeed, some of the finest postcolonial writing is emanating from the indigenous writers of Australia and New Zealand, such as Patricia Grace (b. 1937), Keri Hulme (b. 1947), and Witi Ihimaera (b. 1944), the latter now famous for the Academy award nominated film *Whale Rider* (2003), based on his novel and screenplay. Here a young girl finds her origins in the complex, conflicted world of tradition in a struggle with modernity by connecting with her grandfather's tradition and by coming to an awareness of her Maori-ness. This is an example of the "attitude" of postcoloniality.

However, it must be acknowledged that this anti-imperial literature flowed almost directly from the tradition of British literature and was created by those well versed in English literature and skilled in the use of the language. Thus the irony of the term: although postcolonial literature is widely understood to be a literature that writes against empire, it is nevertheless a literature born of empire and one influenced by English literature – by, as Spenser put it in *The Faerie Queene*, "the well of English undefiled."

In introducing his Minute to Parliament in 1832 on English education in the colonies, T. B. Macaulay said:

We have to educate a people who cannot at present be educated by means of their mother tongue. . . . The claims of our own language it is hardly necessary to recapitulate. . . . The scepter may pass away from us. . . . But there are triumphs which are followed by no reverse. There is an empire exempt from all natural causes of decay. Those triumphs are the pacific triumphs of reason over barbarism; that empire is the imperishable empire of *our* arts and *our* morals, *our* literature and *our* laws. (quoted in Jussawalla 1985: 192-3)

Thus was invoked an empire on which the sun would never set. Macaulay did acknowledge, however, that "there are in [London] natives quite competent to discuss . . . with fluency and precision in the English language." Indeed, Indians were already creating (and continued to create) a literature written in English to express "their" India in contrast to that of British writers from William Makepeace Thackeray to E. M. Forster. Henry Derozio (1809-31), Kashiprasad Ghose (1809-73), Michael Madhusudhan Dutt (1827-73), and Bankim Chandra Chatterjee (1838-94) were some of the early colonials using English for their social and creative purposes. It was Mahatma Gandhi who turned English into an anti-hegemonic tool by using it to unify India's many different language speakers. For this he credits Ruskin's *Unto this Last* and Mr Bell's *English Reader*: "Mr. Bell rang the bell of alarm in my ear" (Iyengar 1973: 250).

Characteristics of the Postcolonial Novel

What most convincingly defines a postcolonial novel, then, is the author's attitude towards his or her country and its culture, an attitude of its distinctness and difference from that of the European colonizer. In the "postcolonial *Bildungsroman*," a favored form for the postcolonial writer, this attitude is reflected in the hero or heroine's developing affirmation of his or her native culture and history. In such novels, the process of the *Bildungsbeld's* personal growth and development almost always reflects his or her growing sense of national and ethnic belonging. This sense of national awareness, as opposed to a simple "coming of age," is a characteristic of the German *Bildungsroman* from Weiland to Hermann Hesse. Martin Swales notes that in Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister's Years of Apprenticeship* the awareness that the hero achieves is an awareness of both national and class identity. These two characteristics make this subgenre particularly relevant to the postcolonial literary tradition, as questions of both nation and class are raised by most of the protagonists in this literature.

A quick survey of postcolonial novels, beginning with R. K. Narayan's *Swami and Friends* (1935), often considered the first "postcolonial" novel written in English (though written more than ten years before Indian independence), to Salman

Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981) and Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997), reveals that virtually all of these works follow the form of a young child coming of age within the context of his or her concerns over national, cultural, and class identity and belonging.

It is interesting to ask why this is so. The answer is that English language and literary education particularly influenced writers in the colonies. In his memoir, *My Days* (1974), Indian novelist R. K. Narayan notes that when he started writing, his uncle asked if he could write like Dickens. He also notes the influence of canonical British literary works: "Keats, Shelley, Byron and Browning. [These poets] spoke of an experience that was real and immediate in my surroundings and stirred in me a deep response" (1974: 58). The importance of English literary education even in postcolonial India is underscored in Vikram Seth's *A Suitable Boy* (1993), in which we are shown an Indian university's English department meeting regarding the possible inclusion of James Joyce in the canon to be taught: "If Joyce goes in, what comes out?" (1993: 52)

Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* was one of the classics, widely read and taught, in the colonies. The story of a young girl growing up into a knowledge of herself, as belonging to England, even while wandering through a topsy-turvy world, was no doubt an influence not just on Anglo-Indian writers such as Frances Hodgson Burnett (as in *The Secret Garden*) but on "Indo-Anglian" writers such as R. K. Narayan. Even *Alice* can be read, metaphorically, as a "postcolonial *Bildungsroman*." Here a little girl falls into the colonies, which interestingly are called "the antipathies," and who discovers in this world turned "mad" a sense of her own Englishness. She may not like the duchess and the Queen, *her* queen, Victoria, but she is English after all and stands up for British justice, fair play, and everything that embodies her culture. Certain dimensions of the *Bildungsroman* were borrowed from other novels that Indian writers read: Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884), Rudyard Kipling's *Kim* (1901), which seems distinctly to have influenced Rabindranath Tagore's *Gora* (1923), and James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1917).

A comparison between an Indian novel and a Kenyan novel from the period under consideration demonstrates this influence further. When R. K. Narayan's *Swami and Friends* (1935) first opens, we encounter the 5- or 6-year-old Swami getting ready to go to the Albert Mission School that his father has chosen for him with great care because he wants Swami to get an English education so that he can gain a good government position, like his own, in the Indian Civil Service. One of the first classes he attends is "Scripture," in which "Mr. Ebenezer asks, 'Oh, wretched idiots! . . . Why do you worship dirty, lifeless, wooden idols and stone images?'" Mr. Ebenezer, a dark-skinned Indian Christian, further provokes the boys' ire by asking, "Did our Jesus practice dark tricks on those around him?" This form of colonial indoctrination and humiliation is also experienced by children in Kenyan writer Ngugi wa Thiongo's *Weep Not, Child* (1964). The headmaster in this novel believes that

the best, the really excellent could only come from the white man. He brought up his boys to copy and cherish the white man's civilization as the only hope of mankind and especially of the black races. (1964: 115)

In a conversation with his girlfriend, Mwihaki, the protagonist of the novel, Njoroge, says:

"All this land belongs to the black people."

"Y-e-e-s. I've heard father say so. He says that if people had had education, the white man would not have taken all the land. I wonder why our old folk, the dead old folk had no learning when the white man came?"

"There was nobody to teach them English." (p. 37)

This process of inculcating in colonized people the belief in the supremacy of the European is the shared experience of all formerly colonial cultures. In *Weep Not, Child*, for example, we read that "Njoroge came to place faith in the Bible and with the vision of an educated life in the future was blended a belief in the righteousness of God. Equity and Justice were there in the world" (p. 49). In Ngugi's *The River Between* (1965), the young people come to feel ambivalence towards the initiation ritual of female circumcision and would rather be westernized and Christianized. But they are soon to be disillusioned. Swami's Albert Mission School friend, the westernized Rajam, does not care about Swami when he disappears before the all-important cricket match in which they plan to lick the "local" boys. Njoroge finds that his schoolmasters, whom he greatly respects, turn him over for torture and questioning about the killing of a white man. It is this betrayal at the hands of those they had admired and a consequent sense of disillusionment and anger at the colonial regime that proves to be the essential knowledge gained by these "colonial Adams."

Another important characteristic of postcolonial authors, whether they write in English or in French, is the effort of taking the colonizer's language and making it their own. This is another aspect that is borrowed from Mark Twain and James Joyce. While Twain was really the first postcolonial writer to change and vary English to express his native voice, a call taken up so well by James Joyce, it was Indian writer Raja Rao (b. 1909), in his Preface to *Kanthapura* (1938), who gave voice most eloquently to this decolonizing effort:

One has to convey in a language that is not one's own the spirit that is one's own. One has to convey the various shades and omissions of a certain thought-movement that looks maltreated in an alien language. I use the word "alien," yet English is not really an alien language to us. . . . We cannot write like the English. We should not. We cannot write only as Indians. We have grown to look at the large world as part of us. Our method of expression therefore has to be a dialect which will some day prove to be as distinctive and colorful as the Irish or the American. (1960: vii)

In February 1922, when James Joyce's *Ulysses* was first published, what was to become the postcolonial novel received its greatest gift – the gift of the permission

to experiment with the English language. G. V. Desani's *All About H. Hatterr* (1948), a picaresque adventure that plays on *Alice in Wonderland*, won the most western encomia for being "modernist" in its approach to language experimentation. Salman Rushdie was directly influenced by Desani's word-play and temporally disjointed picaresque style. At first Rushdie disavowed any influence, claiming that his influences were "post-Joycean/sub-Joycean," but then in the special issue of the *New Yorker* that he edited for the fiftieth anniversary of India's independence, Rushdie acknowledged Desani's influence. In African literatures, the call to stylistic experimentation was taken up by the Nigerian writer Amos Tutuola (b. 1920) in his work *The Palm Wine Drinkard* (1953), which when he sent it to Faber and Faber was championed by T. S. Eliot, who urged a junior editor, "Surely keep 'drinkard.'" Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (1968) continued this experimental tradition in African literatures.

Within this tradition of linguistically experimental postcolonial fiction, the quintessential "postcolonial" novel, Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981), takes its place. Told in picaresque style and in Indian English, with much word-play and punning, *Midnight's Children* is the *Bildungsroman* of Saleem Sinai, who is born at the exact moment of India's independence, August 15, 1947. Exchanged at birth with the actual Saleem Sinai, a child of a wealthy family, the hero's plight revolves around this switch and mistaken identity. Saleem goes through the process of rejecting his Catholic school education, playing with the English language and making fun of it – while also making fun of the way in which it is used in India – until such time as Saleem can assert his Indianness, even if both the character and his creator seem to be criticizing the "neocolonialism" of Indira Gandhi in India. Similarly, in *The Satanic Verses* (1989), Rushdie's character Gibreel Farishta, bowler-hatted and English, metamorphoses from a monstrosity into a human when he discovers his antecedents in the Muslim community located in the Shandaar Café. He discovers that he wants to belong to his Muslim community despite having criticized his religion and his prophet. Indeed, each of Rushdie's three major works, *Midnight's Children*, *The Satanic Verses*, and *The Moor's Last Sigh*, is a *Bildungsroman* in which the main character comes to identify himself with his indigenous self – whether Muslim or Indian. *The Satanic Verses* and *Midnight's Children* reveal that Rushdie's chosen mode is social satire. Although this mode got him into trouble before (with Mrs Gandhi, who banned *Midnight's Children*), it was *The Satanic Verses*, most famously and decisively, that landed Rushdie in hot water. No other postcolonial novel has provoked such a reaction – either among certain Muslim clerics or in postcolonial theoretical circles. Rushdie had become a victim literally of "the death of the author" and of the condition of postmodernity, whereby authority was wrest from his hands and laid in the hands of warring groups of readers, who determined the "true" meaning of his novel. Prufrock-like, Rushdie said, "this is not what I meant at all": "*The Satanic Verses* was never intended as an insult . . . and [was] not representative of the point of view of the author" (1991: 431).

Female postcolonial novelists seem also to have drawn on the subgenre of the *Bildungsroman*. Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice-Candy-Man*, originally published in Britain in 1988

and re-published in the US as *Cracking India* in 1991, and made into Deepa Mehta's film *Earth* (1998), for example, is probably the most famous of these coming-of-age novels. Lenny, a young Parsi girl, neither Hindu nor Muslim and from a community with loyalties to the British, grows up in Lahore, in un-partitioned India. She overhears political discussions – talk of independence, partitions, and Hindu–Muslim hatred – by hiding under the table. She has polio and understands that such diseases were brought by the British. But she loves her *ayah* or nursemaid, who is a Hindu. Although the Muslims capture *ayah* by tricking Lenny, her sense of nationalism leads her to the awareness that she belongs in Lahore, which thereafter becomes Pakistan. This same pattern is followed in Sidhwa's *An American Brat* (1993), in which the main character, Feroza, finds that despite being Americanized she is really a Parsi subcontinental, one who wants to carry out her religious rituals in Idaho. These patterns were laid out by the earliest and one of the finest of Indian women writers, Kamala Markandaya, in such novels as *Nectar in a Sieve* (1954) and *Two Virgins* (1973). Her novel *Some Inner Fury* (1955) most closely resembles the pattern of Narayan's *Swami*, with the club-going father who at the time of independence tugs on the children's loyalties. Anita Desai's *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* (1975) is another *Bildungsroman*, while her *Voices in the City* deals with the serious issue of bride burning. Nigerian writer Buchi Emecheta's *Second-Class Citizen* (1974) and Caribbean writer Jamaica Kincaid's *Lucy* (1991) are the *Bildungsromane* of immigrant young people coming to an awareness of themselves as belonging to their communities in the western world – one in Britain and one in the US. Despite leaving behind their cultures with disgust, they find that they do not belong in the new world, either. This is what might be called the *Bildungsroman* of "unbelonging," after the black-British Caribbean writer Joan Riley's novel of that title, *The Unbelonging* (1985). The *Bildungsroman* of belonging and of unbelonging in England is also the favored form for Parsi novelist and British television producer Farrukh Dhondy's young adult novels, *Come to Mecca* (1978), *Trip Trap* (1982), and *East End at Your Feet* (1976). This pattern is continued in the black-British postcolonial novel of the present, among these Hanif Kureishi's *Buddha of Suburbia* (1990) and Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* (2000), and in the queer postcolonial novel, among these P. Parviraj's *Shiva and Arun* (1998) and Shani Mootoo's *Cereus Blooms at Night* (1999).

Post-1945 Indian Writing in English

R. K. Narayan followed up his *Swami* trilogy with an expression of his disillusionment with India's leaders in *Waiting for the Mahatma* (1955), in which waiting for Gandhi is rather like *Waiting for Godot*. In *The Painter of Signs* (1976) Narayan humorously probes the wrongs of the Indira Gandhi government, particularly in relation to "the family planning" initiative, which is also taken up in Rohinton Mistry's *A Fine Balance* (1995). Mulk Raj Anand (b. 1905) and Raja Rao both had

careers spanning the century, from pre-independence days to the present, with Raja Rao having published his most recent book, *The Chess Master and his Moves*, in 1988.

In *Imaginary Homelands*, Salman Rushdie names those writers who have kept Indian literature in "excellent shape": Vikram Seth, Allan Sealy, Amitav Ghosh, Rohinton Mistry, Upamanyu Chatterjee, and Shashi Tharoor (1991: 3). Since then, both Amitav Ghosh (resident in New York) and Rohinton Mistry (resident in Canada) have gained great prominence. Ghosh's *The Circle of Reason* (1986), *In an Antique Land* (1992), *The Calcutta Chromosome* (1996), and, most recently, *The Glass Palace* (2000) have contributed greatly to postcolonial and postmodern fiction. Of course, Rushdie could not have predicted the immense popularity of Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*, the *Bildungsroman* of a pair of twins coming to an awareness of themselves as belonging to their home state, Kerala, in south India despite their disillusionment with the Communist-dominated government of that state. Nor was Rushdie to have known of the subsequent great success of "writers of Indian origin" (after the new category created by the Indian government) such as Jhumpa Lahiri, the author of *Interpreter of Maladies* (1999) and *The Namesake* (2003). In the latter work, yet another *Bildungsroman* of identity, we read that "Being a foreigner is sort of a lifelong pregnancy – a perpetual wait, a constant burden, a continuous feeling out of sorts" (2003: 49).

Post-1945 African Literature in English

Postcolonial literature from African countries developed later than that from India. Alan Paton's *Cry, the Beloved Country* (1948) established the resistance novel on the African continent. South African novelists who challenged the racism of the apartheid regime became the first writers of "postcolonial intent" in Africa. Among these early novelists must be numbered Nadine Gordimer, who began writing in 1949 and won the Nobel Prize in 1991, and J. M. Coetzee, whose work comes later but is also part of that foundational generation of "African" writers in English (and who won the Nobel Prize in 2003 as well as being awarded two Booker Prizes). Unfortunately, these very writers have met with a sort of reverse racism in certain circles, stemming from Gayatri Spivak's seminal essay in postcolonial and feminist theory, "Can the subaltern speak?" which asks the question, "who can speak for whom?" that has become central to what has come to be called "subaltern studies." Both Nadine Gordimer's *Burger's Daughter* (1979) – another *Bildungsroman* – and J. M. Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1981) (as also Athol Fugard's plays) poignantly treat the crimes of apartheid. The crumbling of post-apartheid society and frustrations with neocolonialism are reflected in Coetzee's *Disgrace* (2001). In recent years there has been a surge of African novels in English, including the work of South African novelist Lewis Nkosi and Nigerian novelist Ben Okri, the latter of whom writes in the vein of Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and is often classified as "black British."

Frustration with "neocolonialism" and a dogmatic nationalism on the part of one's own people is echoed in the works of Kenyan and Nigerian postcolonial writers, the most famous of these being Ngugi wa Thiong'o in Kenya and Chinua Achebe (b. 1930) in Nigeria. Ngugi was expelled from Kenya for criticizing the "neocolonial" regime there in his play *I Shall Marry When I Want* (1982). Under the regime of Arap Moi, Ngugi was a wanted man. There was even a warrant issued for the arrest of his character from the novel of the same name, *Matigari* (1988). Achebe rightly belongs to that first generation of postcolonial/Commonwealth writers that included the earlier Indians, as he is among the first of the "black" African writers to write in English. After the great and enduring success of *Things Fall Apart* (1958), Achebe's *No Longer at Ease* (1960) and *A Man of the People* (1966) expressed disillusionment with the neocolonial government, leading to Achebe's long silence during the period of Nigeria's turbulent years.

In 1957 when Albert (later Chinua) Achebe went to attend the British Broadcasting Corporation's staff school, he became the first of the "colonial" writers to benefit from the BBC. One of the faculty members at that school, Gilbert Phelps, even helped him find a publisher for *Things Fall Apart*. The BBC also broadcast several other such novels for the "cultural" benefit of British overseas officers. This was the beginning of what might be called "the great school of BBC novels and writers." Cyprian Ekwensi and the dramatist Wole Soyinka also found there not only a new outlet for their creativity but also sources of employment. Edward Blishen ran a program called *A Good Read*, which covered writers from Achebe to Tsitsi Dangaremba and featured, among other writers, Okello Oculi (Uganda), Tayeb Salih (Sudan), James Ngugi (Kenya; later Ngugi wa Thiong'o), Mbella Senne Dipoko (Cameroon), and Ama Ata Aidoo (Ghana).

Perhaps the finest African novelist to experiment in a postmodern vein is the Somali writer Nuruddin Farah (b. 1945). *From a Crooked Rib* (1972) and *Variations on the Theme of an African Dictatorship* have female voices and concern female oppression. Farah tends to write in trilogies: *Sweet and Sour Milk* (1979), *Sardines* (1981), and *Close Sesame* (1983); and *Maps* (1986), *Gifts* (1993), and *Secrets* (1998). M. G. Vassanji, whose novel *The In Between World of Vikram Lal* won the Canadian Giller Prize in 2003, is an African writer living in Canada, but one who is proud to identify as an African writer. Born in Kenya, raised in Tanzania, and educated at MIT and at the International Writer's Program at the University of Iowa, Vassanji explores themes of memory, identity, and rootedness, particularly with respect to certain Asian communities in Africa.

Post-1945 Caribbean Writing

Vidiadhar Surajprasad Naipaul (b. 1932), born in Chaguanas, Trinidad but who eschews the label of "Caribbean writer," clearly acknowledges the BBC for employing him, for getting him out of the nervous depression he was in at Oxford, and

for providing him and C. L. R. James (whose cricket memoir *Beyond a Boundary* has become an important analogical source for that part of postcolonial theory called "border studies") with a room, not only one in which they could write, but also one in which they could share their drafts and thoughts. From what we know of the two and their respective politics now, it is hard to believe that they had this close relationship. Above all, though, V. S. Naipaul was launched as a journalist and author by his interviews with writers and his weekly column in *The Listener*, the BBC's magazine. Naipaul is probably the postcolonial novelist with the most substantial body of writing but the one most difficult to place. He has never wanted to be classified as a Caribbean. And he would particularly balk at being categorized as "black British," as this would run counter to his identity as a Hindu Brahmin (some Brahmins liked to see themselves as a "fairer" caste). From his *A House for Mr Biswas* (1961), another *Bildungsroman*, onwards, through his many novels and travelogues to his essays about writing, *The Writer and the World* (2002), Naipaul has deployed a pungent style to criticize practically all groups: British, Indian, Caribbean, and particularly Muslim communities. Some postcolonial critics have even claimed that his 2001 Nobel Prize was a reaction to the anti-Islamic feeling prompted by the 2001 destruction of the World Trade Center. His autobiographical *Enigma of Arrival* (1987) traces his coming to an awareness of himself as "a person of Indian origin," connecting with the chanting of the Gayatri mantra, "Om Bhur Buh Svaha," after having made his way through Anglicization, Stilton cheese, and all. It is in his "Hinduness" that Naipaul's identity lies. Raja Rao-like, he would say, "My India I carry with me." And this, despite his severe criticisms of Hindus in *A House for Mr Biswas*, *An Area of Darkness*, *India: A Wounded Civilization*, and *India: A Million Mutinies Now*. Notwithstanding notions of the "death of the author" and the post-structuralist sense that a text can be understood without reference to the author and to authorial intention, Naipaul's case, like Salman Rushdie's, demonstrates the importance of archival and interview records that indicate the writer's sense of identity and belonging.

Caribbean novelists who see things very differently than V. S. Naipaul include George Lamming, whose *Castle of My Skin* is a classic postcolonial *Bildungsroman*, Sam Selvon (1923–98), Wilson Harris (b. 1921), Earl Lovelace (b. 1935), and Caryl Phillips (b. 1958). Wilson Harris's *Guyana Quartet* (1960–3), starting with *The Palace of the Peacock* (1960), makes a major contribution to the postmodern-postcolonial novel. Earl Lovelace, whose novels are set in Trinidad and Tobago, is perhaps the Caribbean novelist most rooted in the West Indies. *The Wine of Astonishment* is probably his best-known novel to explore the juxtaposition of western Christianity and his indigenous vernacular culture. Caribbean literature is the model, within postcolonial studies, for a world-wide creolization that is developing. The poet Edward Kamau Braithwaite was the first writer to use the term "creolization" to embrace all of the cultures of the Caribbean that were oppressed by slavery and colonialism. Increasingly, with the importance of "hybridity" as a concept in post-colonial studies, notions of "creolization" and Edouard Glissant's *Poetics of Relation*

(1990) are helping to establish a "creolite" movement, one which dovetails nicely with postmodern notions of the fluidity of identity and consciousness.

The writers of the female *Bildungsroman* in the Caribbean, in the wake of Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*, tend to write novels that challenge colonial depictions of female natives. Novelists Michelle Cliff (b. 1946) in *Abeng* (1984) and *No Telephone to Heaven* (1987), Paule Marshall in *Brown Girl, Brownstones* (1959), and Jamaica Kincaid (b. 1949) in her fiction all explore female coming of awareness within the context of postcolonial ethnic and national identities

Theoretical Challenges

Postcolonial literature, especially of the Anglophone world, is a rich and heterogeneous field. Much of the early criticism focused on classifying and describing this vast new literature. This early work was carried out by such critics as William Walsh, David McCutcheon, C. D. Narasimhaiah, Meenakshi Mukherjee, Bruce King, G. D. Killiam, and, most importantly for African literatures, Bernth Lindfors. But in more recent years, with the development of postcolonial theory, questions of language and authenticity, nationalism and identity have been revived in theoretical terms. Some of these theoretical concerns reiterate those that have been touched upon above: (1) the political implications of the novelist's choice of language as a medium of expression, (2) problems of identity and national belonging, (3) hybridity and the place of postcolonial literature in an increasingly globalized world, and (4) the positioning of the critic in relation to the novel and the world.

The most important theoretical question concerning "postcolonial" writing has been that of the chosen language of the author. While engaged by postcolonial theorists it is the novelists themselves who addressed this question first. In India this question was raised over and over again, until the poet R. Parthasarthy finally dismissed it as akin to flogging a dead horse. Some Indian authors, Arundhati Roy among them, affirm that they write in English because in India English is the first language for most writers and readers. *Los Angeles Times* editor Steve Wasserman asked Nadine Gordimer to explain her choice of English as the language of her novels only to be told that she regretted having lived in South Africa for so long and not having learned an African language. She felt that the most vibrant writing comes from the Third World was in its indigenous languages. In African postcolonial literature this issue has been central ever since Ngugi wa Thiong'o proclaimed years ago that he would no longer write in English but would write instead exclusively in his mother tongue. By contrast, Chinua Achebe wrote his great paean to the English language in *Morning Yet on Creation Day* (1975), in which he argued that the English language should continue to be the language in which postcolonial literature is written. In his essay, "The African writer and the English language," Achebe stressed the importance of English as the language through which all African writers could talk to each other:

If it failed to give them a song it at least gave them a tongue for sighing. There are not many countries in Africa today where you can abolish the language of the erstwhile colonial powers and still retain the facility for mutual communication. Therefore those African writers who have chosen to write in English or French are not unpatriotic smart alecks with an eye on the main chance – outside their own countries. (1976: 77)

This was not, however, Ngugi wa Thiong'o's complaint against the English language. His complaint was that reading and writing in English would, in effect, continue the process of colonizing the mind of the formerly colonized peoples; that it would be a form of continued intellectual imperialism. As the title of his book, *Decolonizing the Mind*, suggests, Ngugi believes that completing decolonization requires a shedding of the oppressor's language altogether.

Early critical and theoretical attempts to grapple with issues of authenticity, indigeneity, and hybridity were to be found in the Negritude movement and the work of Aimé Césaire and Frantz Fanon, who believed in the importance of cultural affirmation and resisted the deracination that coincided with colonialism. In the wake of critic Homi Bhabha's theory of hybridity, which dismisses questions of nationalism and indigeneity as essentialist, "nativist" critics have resurrected not only the question of belonging and identity but that of "who can speak for whom." Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) argues against the deracination that comes with assimilation or what Bhabha has called "colonial mimicry." Half a century ago, Fanon articulated what writers and individuals reaching for hybridity today seem only now to be discovering: that for the dominant majority, those aspiring to the condition of "hybridity" will never be acknowledged as "white." However creolized and globalized the world is becoming, a sense of indigenous identity seems to be reasserted in the novels of many young writers, among them Chitra Divakurani Bannerjee (b. 1956), in which the mixing and merging of cultures seems to fail the characters. In her book, *A Mistress of Spices* (1997), for example, an Indian, Tilo, tries hard to westernize, even to the point of connecting with another indigenous culture, the Native American, but has to retreat back into her Indianness. Fanon would say that this is a classic example of the colonizer not allowing the colonized to become assimilated or "white," which allows the colonizer to continue not to recognize the colonized person as an equal. Fanon urged resistance to the "internalized guilt" of not being white and of trying to be white – particularly in the case of mixed race women who saw themselves as superior because of their "whiteness." In the early resistance to colonialism, therefore, it was important for the writers not to be "Calibans," as Aimé Césaire has said.

Raja Rao, who was educated at the Sorbonne, said in an interview that his early efforts to assert his Indianness in writing style and content stemmed from the intellectual company of colleagues such as Césaire and Amílcar Cabral, who asserted the importance of a "national culture" (Jussawalla and Dasenbrock 1992). But Fanon also notes that it is the "colonialists who became the defenders of the native style." In other words, the colonialists wanted the colonized to remain exoticized but denigrated "others" – different from and never equal to them. This more or less

becomes the premise of Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978), a book that is a cornerstone of postcolonial theory, as it explores how natives are represented by colonials and how that representation takes on a politically diabolical life and character of its own, not just in the colonial encounter but in current politics. Said's example is Henry Kissinger's portrayal of Palestine and, more recently, the American demonization of Islam in general. With the explosion of the Rushdie affair, this latter issue caught Said in a bind. Although Said had always criticized Naipaul for his characterization of Islam, it was Said's friend, Salman Rushdie, whose portrayal of Islam raised many more hackles (during the *Satanic Verses* controversy Said was embarrassingly quiet).

This typifies a dilemma of a number of postcolonial theorists. Gayatri Spivak, for example, argues in her famous 1988 essay, "Can the subaltern speak?" that the indigene female wishing to commit *sati* (the Hindu widow's "suicide" by burning on her husband's funeral pyre) should be allowed to "speak" for herself. She even makes the case for this "subaltern's" authentic Indianness and cultural rootedness, seemingly arguing for the Hindu widow's right to continue this barbaric tradition and for the colonizer not to interfere in the practice. While *Orientalism* questioned the colonial representations of indigenous subjects, Spivak raised the issue of who can adequately represent the colonial and gendered subject. In her most recent book, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* (1999), Spivak returns to the *Srimadbhagvatgita* (commonly referred to as the *Bhagvad Gita*) because she is "an Indian and born a Hindu," and feels obligated to "interpellate" her "native informant/postcolonial voice" (1999: 40). While "Can the subaltern speak?" was criticized in some quarters for being "essentialist" in nature, and while Spivak herself has disavowed national identities, in this new tome she indeed seems to have reverted, Naipaul-like, towards her Indian Brahmin, Hindu self. Like a *Bildungsroman*, Spivak's recent book explores her own coming into awareness of herself as Indian.

Of all the changes that have recently come to postcolonial studies, the change that is perhaps least welcome is a sharp and growing disjunction in the field. Those interested in postcolonial literature are increasingly divided into two groups: those who are interested principally in the literature and the writers who produce it and those who are interested principally in the theory of the "post-colonial" situation. This unfortunate division is at least partially a generational one, between older scholars who "discovered" Commonwealth literature and have worked to bring it to public awareness and younger scholars who approach the literature through the perspective of the theorists who have brought the literature to their awareness. Perhaps in the future this gap can be narrowed. Theorists of the field should welcome the opportunity to test the adequacy of their theories against more than a limited set of examples, while scholars of the literature should welcome the insights into the novels provided by fresh theoretical approaches. The study of postcolonial literature and theory should be two sides of the same coin, not two increasingly divergent intellectual discourses, as it has been of late.

Another unfortunate consequence of the rise of postcolonial theory is the unwillingness of some proponents to see anything in postcolonial literature except its

challenges to hegemonic forces. Indeed, some novelists have articulated a sense of frustration with continually being tied to the colonial millstone. V. S. Naipaul for example, at a 2002 postcolonial writers' conference in Delhi, abruptly interrupted Nayantara Sahgal to note that to define oneself against colonialism is not to become "post-colonial."

It has been widely argued and even more widely assumed that postcolonial literature is necessarily anti-canonical, part of the current movement away from a fixed canon of "great works" taught in the curriculum. Obviously, a great deal of the controversy over the teaching of this literature has focused on this issue. In my *Interviews with Writers of the Post-Colonial World*, many of the authors attempted to extricate themselves from any associations with an anti-canonical movement and to argue that their works are connected to and logically part of a larger canon of world literature. Moreover, their texts themselves seem to stand in a relation to central texts of western literature, as a number of these titles – *Things Fall Apart*, *A Grain of Wheat*, *Omeros* – suggest. In fact, Edward Said's *Culture and Imperialism* (1993) demonstrates that native identity is not fashioned by rejecting everything colonial but sometimes, for example in the case of Ngugi's *The River Between*, by reviving the western literary tradition. Another example of this is to be found in Derek Walcott's *Omeros*, an epic poem that rewrites Homer (and Dante) in the context of contemporary St Lucia in the Caribbean. In a clear parallel to James Joyce's *Ulysses*, Walcott's work of postcolonial literature is intertextually related to the canon.

Perhaps the most prominent school of postcolonial theory, one that concerns itself with the economics of imperialism, is the "Subaltern Studies group" (which takes its name from the British army's word for a "private," the lower level soldiers who would not bite the bullets greased with pig fat in the Indian mutiny of 1857, a term that comes to us via the work of the Marxist theorist Gramsci). As noted above, this group is largely led and promoted by Gayatri Spivak. In addition to Spivak and Said, the list of major postcolonial theorists includes Homi Bhabha, whose growth as a critic seems to be in direct opposition to this pattern, as he seeks to "de-privilege specific subaltern histories and identities" (1994: 192–3). He has moved over the course of his career from a focus on "colonial stereotypes" and "mimicry" to his notion of "hybridity." Instead of thinking in terms of essential identities and narratives of originary and initial subjectivities, he now maintains that the "social articulation of difference, from the minority perspective, is a complex on-going negotiation that seeks to authorize cultural hybridities that emerge in moments of historical transformation" (p. 2). Bhabha rejects what he calls "nativist" positions that set up "binary oppositions" (p. 35) between the first and third world. His aim is to revise precisely the kind of "nationalist/nativist" binary discourse that is reflected in much postcolonial theory and criticism.

Much postcolonial theory relies on and takes its terms from European Marxism and psychoanalysis, and for this it has been criticized as being Eurocentric and as continuing to colonize as opposed to challenging European hegemonic forces. Homi Bhabha has therefore borrowed from articulations of the postcolonial condition by

indigenous thinkers such as Frantz Fanon and Amílcar Cabral. But since these too follow in the traditions of western psychoanalysis and take their terms from western models, there is a growing feeling that the criticism and theory do not do justice to the literature and that new terms need to be articulated. The stark polarities that currently structure postcolonial theory become more complex and therefore less starkly polarized when we turn to the literature to see how they play out.

This study of the Anglophone literature of the countries that were formerly part of the British empire was until recently a marginal part of English studies; "Commonwealth literature" was seldom an integral part of undergraduate or graduate curricula. However, the continuing achievement and remarkable power of writers in English from the Indian subcontinent, Africa, the Caribbean, and other parts of the English-speaking world is now all but impossible to ignore. Many of these writers have attained considerable prominence on the international literary scene, and prizes such as the Booker Prize and even the Nobel Prize (following in the footsteps of Rabindranath Tagore, who was awarded the latter prize in 1913) have increasingly gone to writers from the postcolonial world. What had been a marginal and arguably neglected field can complain of neglect no longer.

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