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# The Cambridge Introduction to Postcolonial Literatures in English

C. L. INNES

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## Preface

This book sets out to consider some of the writing that has emerged during the past century from the numerous and complex range of postcolonial societies which were formerly part of the British Empire. It seeks not only to discuss the authors and texts, but also to raise questions about the ways in which they have been thought about under the aegis of postcolonial studies, and to ask what varying meanings postcolonial literature may have in different contexts.

In the first decades of the twentieth century, European states governed more than 80 per cent of the world's territories and people. Of these the British Empire was the most extensive and powerful, claiming as British subjects a population of between 470 and 570 million people, approximately 25 per cent of the world's population, and laying claim to more than ninety territories in Africa, Asia, Europe, North America, the Caribbean, Australasia and the Pacific. Almost all those territories have now evolved and/or combined into independent states, fifty-three of which constitute the 'British' Commonwealth, a voluntary organization which several former colonies such as Burma, Egypt, Ireland, and Iraq declined to join when they gained independence.<sup>1</sup> To a greater or lesser degree, all these territories shared a history of cultural colonialism, including the imposition of the English language, and British educational, political and religious institutions, as well as economic relationships and systems.

Within the context of postcolonial writing, critics have often quoted Caliban's retort to Prospero in *The Tempest*: 'You gave me language, and my profit on't / Is I know how to curse.'<sup>2</sup> Perhaps less frequently quoted, but even more significant, are the lines which display Caliban's eloquence (in the English language) when it comes to describing the island Prospero has taken from him, with a combination of force, magic and the seductions of new learning:

Be not afeard; the isle is full of noises,  
 Sounds and sweet airs, that delight and hurt not.  
 Sometimes a thousand twanging instruments  
 Will hum about mine ears; and sometimes voices<sup>3</sup>

As George Lamming commented, 'Prospero had given Caliban Language; and with it an unstated history of consequences, and unknown history of future intentions.'<sup>4</sup>

Thus one major and unintended consequence of British colonialism has been an enormous flowering of literature in English by postcolonial authors, presenting the story of colonialism and its consequences from their perspective, and reclaiming their land and experience through fiction, drama and poetry, a representation and reclamation requiring a reinvention of the English language and English literary traditions.

This book cannot attempt to encompass the many literary texts and cultures that are an important feature of the anglophone postcolonial world. Even to try to acknowledge half of those ninety territories or former colonies would result in superficial lists of authors and a blurring of the qualities and issues specific to different colonial and postcolonial histories and cultural contexts. Hence, although there will be occasional reference to writers from other countries such as Canada, the Republic of South Africa, Sri Lanka and Zimbabwe, this book will concentrate on works from just a few former colonies, chosen as examples of particular kinds of colonial and postcolonial structures and traditions. These include Ireland, as England's oldest colony and the testing ground for many of her later colonial policies. More importantly for this study, Ireland's literary revival is acknowledged by many postcolonial writers in other countries as a model for their own construction of a national literature. In addition to Ireland, I have chosen India and West Africa (specifically Ghana and Nigeria) as examples of former colonies administered by indirect rule but with very different indigenous cultures. Kenya and Tanzania, with their varied indigenous populations together with a history of white settlement and occupation of farming land, as well as immigrants from the Indian subcontinent and the Middle East, provide examples of settler colonies in Africa with a multicultural history and population. Australia represents a predominantly white settler colony and postcolony whose identity involves not only two centuries of development and attachment to a natural world perceived as almost the reverse of Britain's, but also its origins as a convict settlement, and its history of brutal dispossession of the continent's Aboriginal peoples. The Caribbean islands of Jamaica, St Lucia and Trinidad provide histories of enforced immigration, enslavement and acculturation, where original languages and traditions were either submerged and/or masked and transformed. Finally, the diasporic communities in contemporary Britain from former colonies provide another point of departure for contrast and comparison with Caribbean and other multicultural or intercultural societies. An Appendix provides brief histories of the selected areas to help orient readers.

These histories have been compiled with considerable assistance from Dr Kaori Nagai, whose careful research and keen intelligence have also contributed to the biographical entries for the main authors discussed, and the glossary of terms. I also wish to acknowledge the contributions of many undergraduate and postgraduate students at Tuskegee Institute, Cornell University, the University of Massachusetts, and the University of Kent, whose varied enthusiasms and questions have informed my teaching and writing over the years. This book has benefited from insights and new material brought to my attention by former postgraduate students and I wish particularly to acknowledge Maggie Bowers, Sarah Chetin, Paul Delaney, Eugene McNulty, Kaori Nagai, Elodie Rousselot, Florian Stadtler, Amy Smith, Mark Stein, Monica Turci, and Anastasia Vassalopoulos. Past and present colleagues at the University of Kent and elsewhere to whom I owe a particular debt include Samuel Allen, Ashok Bery, Elleke Boehmer, Denise deCaires Narain, Rod Edmond, Abdulrazak Gurnah, Louis James, Declan Kiberd, Susheila Nasta, Stephanie Newell, Caroline Rooney, Joe Skerrett, Angela Smith, Dennis Walder and my husband, Martin Scofield. Tobias Döring's thoughtful comments on the draft manuscript have been exceptionally helpful, as have been his own publications.

Sections of this book have appeared previously in different versions as journal essays or chapters in books. Since they first appeared, they have been considerably revised, updated and elaborated within different contexts. I acknowledge their publication in earlier form and express my thanks to the editors and publishers of the following:

Howard Booth and Nigel Rigby, eds., *Modernism and Empire* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000).

Clara A. B. Joseph and Janet Wilson, eds., *Global Fissures: Postcolonial Fusions* (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2006).

Tobias Döring, ed., *A History of Postcolonial Fiction in Twelve and a Half Books* (Trier: WVT, Wiss. Verl. Trier, 2006).

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## Chapter 1

# Introduction: situating the postcolonial

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Over the past half-century, postcolonial literatures and postcolonial studies<sup>1</sup> have gained the attention of more and more readers and scholars throughout the world. Writers as diverse as Chinua Achebe and Wole Soyinka from Nigeria, Salman Rushdie and Arundhati Roy from India, Derek Walcott from the Caribbean, Seamus Heaney from Ireland, Margaret Atwood and Michael Ondaatje from Canada, Peter Carey and Patrick White from Australia, and J. M. Coetzee and Nadine Gordimer from South Africa have been prominent when major literary awards such as the Booker Prize or the Nobel Prize have been announced, and their works now appear on numerous school and university syllabuses. Concurrently, their writing has provided the nourishment for a variety of postcolonial theories concerning the nature of such works, approaches to reading them, and their significance for reading and understanding other literary, philosophical and historical works. Indeed, the production of introductions to postcolonial theory has become a major industry.<sup>2</sup> However, this book seeks to focus on the literary texts rather than the theories, and to give a general sense of the issues and choices which inform the writing and reading of those texts. It will discuss the ways in which these issues have changed over the decades, involving questions of genre, form and language, as well as social and political concerns; it will also discuss how these texts may be read and responded to in different contexts.

Although the focus of this book will be on texts rather than theories, and although I will use the adjective postcolonial (without a hyphen) throughout to refer to both the texts and their contexts, it is useful to be aware of the terms and theories that have become current in critical discussion, not least the terms 'postcolonial' and 'post-colonial' themselves, for their usage varies, is far from consistent, and is the subject of considerable debate. For historians, the hyphenated word refers specifically to the period after a country, state or people cease to be governed by a colonial power such as Britain or France, and take administrative power into their own hands. Thus India and Pakistan gained their political independence in 1947 and so became historically 'post-colonial' after 15 August 1947. But within the area of 'Postcolonial Studies', which tends

to embrace literary and cultural – and sometimes anthropological – studies, the term is more often used to refer to the consequences of colonialism from the time the area was first colonized. Such studies are generally concerned with the subsequent interaction between the culture of the colonial power, including its language, and the culture and traditions of the colonized peoples. And almost always, the analysis of those interactions acknowledges the importance of power relations in that cultural exchange – the degree to which the colonizer imposes a language, a culture and a set of attitudes, and the degree to which the colonized peoples are able to resist, adapt to or subvert that imposition. I should add that the label ‘postcolonial’ is rejected by some writers to whom it has been applied. The Indian writer Nayantara Sahgal, for example, dislikes the term because she considers that it implies that colonization by the British is the only important thing that has happened to India, and that it denies the history that precedes British colonization and the continuing traditions stemming from those earlier periods.<sup>3</sup>

Some scholars are also uneasy about the application of the term to such a variety of colonial and postcolonial contexts, and fear that its generalized use obscures the significant differences between different colonies and their histories and cultures. It has been argued that predominantly European colonies such as Australia and Canada, which were settled by British and other European groups over a period of two hundred years, and which now have a relatively small indigenous population, should not be grouped together with settler colonies such as Jamaica and Kenya, where historically a small group of Europeans dominated a majority African population, and where, after the achievement of political independence, indigenous Kenyans and Jamaicans of African descent took over the reins. Indeed, given that indigenous Australian Aborigines and Native Americans have yet to recover their territory and achieve self-government, it has been claimed that countries such as Australia and Canada should be classified as not ‘post-colonial’ but ‘colonial’. As an island settled and governed by the British since the twelfth century, Ireland is seen by some to have a dual status as a postcolonial state in the south while remaining a British colony in the north.

Nations which were historically settler colonies also differ significantly from those which were not settled by Europeans but governed by the British directly from London through the agency of civil servants, police, and soldiers sent not as permanent settlers occupying the land but as administrators and ‘peacekeepers’ to ensure that the laws and regulations promulgated by the British were enforced. The Indian subcontinent changed over a period of two hundred years from being seen as a series of states whose rulers collaborated, often as a result of military intervention, with the British East India Company, to becoming in the

nineteenth century an area governed by the British and subject to its statutes. In both Ireland and India, the British sought to establish an intermediate class of English-speaking people who could act as interpreters, teachers and lower-grade civil servants, and so provide support for British cultural, military and economic domination. Similar policies were followed in African colonies such as Ghana and Nigeria after the allocation of these territories to Britain at the Berlin Conference in 1884.<sup>4</sup>

Although this book will concentrate on literature written in English by members of the colonized groups just before or during the historically postcolonial period in the colonies formerly dominated by Britain – that is, works written in the phase leading up to independence or following the achievement of independence – it is important to bear in mind the differing histories of each former colony and the impact of those differing histories. It is also important to be aware of the development of postcolonial studies and the peculiarities of the discipline, in order not to be confined by its present boundaries and terms, but rather to question and modify them. As Stuart Hall remarks, ‘Those deploying the concept must attend . . . carefully to its discriminations and specificities and/or establish more clearly at what level of abstraction the term is operating and how this avoids a spurious “universalisation” . . . Not all societies are “post-colonial” in the same way . . . But this does not mean they are not “post-colonial” in any way.’<sup>5</sup> In the same essay Hall also insists on the need to view postcoloniality as a process, involving changing relationships and positions with regard to the colonizing culture and the postcolonial subject’s identity.

### **From Commonwealth to postcolonial literary studies**

Postcolonial literary studies owe their origin chiefly, of course, to the enormous and exciting efflorescence of creative writing which first came to the attention of readers and critics in the 1950s and 1960s, and coincided with a series of states in Africa, South East Asia and the Caribbean moving from colonial to postcolonial status.<sup>6</sup> Concurrent with the dismantling of the British Empire came the establishment of the British Commonwealth (more recently called the ‘Commonwealth of Nations’), a structure grouping together most of the former British colonies. In 1964 A. Norman Jeffares convened the first Commonwealth Literature Conference at the University of Leeds, and courses in Commonwealth literature became a significant part of the curriculum in English departments at various universities in Britain.<sup>7</sup> Later, such courses would also be introduced in Australia, Canada, India, Sri Lanka and the various African countries, though here the emphasis was more often on the country’s

own writers, rather than a comparative study or survey, and there was often considerable opposition to the introduction of such courses. The Kenyan writer Ngugi wa Thiong'o writes about the absence of any reference to writing by Africans in English departments in Kenya and Uganda, and describes his own struggle to introduce African literature courses at the University of Nairobi.<sup>8</sup>

The study of Commonwealth literature in Britain was reinforced by the presence of many writers and academics from the former colonies. Some, like Kamau Brathwaite, V. S. Naipaul and Wole Soyinka had come in the 1950s and 1960s to study in British universities; others, such as the novelists George Lamming and Samuel Selvon, and the poets Dom Moraes and Peter Porter, sought work and wider opportunities for publication. After World War II, Britain had recruited thousands of people from the West Indies and the Indian subcontinent to sustain the national health and transport systems and to work in the steel and textile factories. As the children of these recruited immigrant workers began to enter the secondary school and university systems in the 1970s, teachers and students alike sought to encourage the study of African, Caribbean and Indian writing.

While Commonwealth literary studies had on the whole striven to remain apolitical, focusing on aspects such as form and style in the novels of Australian authors such as Patrick White, or the use of language in the poetry of Brathwaite and Derek Walcott, sometimes drawing comparisons with works by mainstream British authors, there was also considerable pressure to read and understand these works within a political context. In Britain and the United States, texts by African, Caribbean and Indian authors were often read within the framework of area studies programmes, such as African Studies or Asian Studies, or, especially in the United States, Black Studies or Third World Studies. In North America the Civil Rights and Black Power movements, and in Britain the racist attitudes which kept black and Asian people out of all but the most poorly paid jobs and resented their presence in British cities and suburbs, led to an increasing emphasis on political, psychological and cultural resistance to discrimination on grounds of race and colour. For authors such as Achebe in Nigeria and Brathwaite in the West Indies, as for students and teachers of African descent in Britain, the Caribbean, and the United States, the writing and reading of texts by African and Caribbean authors were seen as a means of restoring dignity and self-respect to people who had suffered from hundreds of years of contemptuous dismissal, exploitation and enslavement by Europeans. Postcolonial literature is concerned above all with the issue of self-representation in two senses of the word, the artistic and the political. Writers from the former colonies wish to speak for themselves, to tell their own stories, including the story of the colonial encounter and its consequences, and so to

create the psychological base and historical understanding which will encourage wise choices in self-government. But, as Paul Gilroy and other critics have pointed out, one of the consequences of the colonial encounter has been what the African American writer W. E. B. Dubois described as a double consciousness, the ability to live within and between two cultures and two perspectives (and sometimes more), and with that the creation of a particularly postcolonial form of modernism.<sup>9</sup>

It is the amalgamation of Commonwealth literary studies, Black Studies and Third World Studies that has produced contemporary postcolonial literary studies, and which accounts for some of its peculiar features and the debates within the discipline. From Commonwealth literary studies it derives its embrace of a wide range of European settler colonies as well as predominantly indigenous and former slave colonies. The British Commonwealth category also involved an emphasis on English-speaking countries, writing in the English language (and the exclusion of writing in indigenous languages) and an emphasis on literary texts. Because the Commonwealth was set up in 1948, replacing the political structures and connotations covered by the term 'British Empire' for those ex-colonies which were now self-governing, it excluded former British colonies which had achieved independence and become republics prior to the 1940s, such as Ireland and the United States.

However, the influence of the Black Power and Black Arts movements in the United States, and the combination of Asian and Caribbean radicals in Britain, joining forces under the label 'black British' to contest racial prejudice and discrimination in education, law enforcement, housing and employment, as well as in society as a whole, encouraged an increasing emphasis on issues of identity, racial and cultural difference, and social and economic empowerment particularly with regard to people of African and Asian descent. In Britain and North America, academics and writers whose origins were in Africa, the Caribbean, the Indian subcontinent and Palestine became prominent intellectual leaders elaborating the connections between written discourses and Europe's political domination over the rest of the world. These academics also drew on the thinking of influential European intellectuals such as the philosophers Theodor Adorno, Hélène Cixous, Jacques Derrida and Jean-Paul Sartre, the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, and the sociologist Michel Foucault. The emphasis these intellectuals have placed on the power of language and modes of discourse has been particularly significant in the development of postcolonial theory.

Four names appear again and again as thinkers who have shaped postcolonial theory: Frantz Fanon, Edward Said, Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Of African descent and born in the French former slave colony of Martinique in 1925, Fanon was taught by the great Martiniquan poet and



Marxist politician Aimé Césaire. He studied medicine and psychiatry in France, where Lacan was one of his teachers, and published his psychological analysis of racism and its effects, *Black Skin, White Masks*, in 1952. This is a remarkable personal account and analysis of the effect of the 'colonial gaze' – of being seen, defined and stereotyped by the Europeans whose culture is deemed to be superior and to have greater authority than the cultures of Africa and the Caribbean. European appearance and culture is assumed to be the norm by which others are judged, making all others 'abnormal' and either exotic or inferior or both. Fanon writes:

There is a fact: White men consider themselves superior to black men.  
There is another fact: Black men want to prove to white men at all costs, the richness of their thought, the equal value of their intellect.  
How do we extricate ourselves?<sup>10</sup>

Fanon states his belief that 'the fact of the juxtaposition of the white and black races has created a massive psychoexistential complex,' and his hope that an analysis of that complex will help to destroy it.<sup>11</sup> He also declares that 'what is often called the black man's soul is the white man's artefact'.<sup>12</sup>

Thus *Black Skin, White Masks* is a psychoanalytical study, an attempt to understand the causes of racism, and more importantly, the effects of racism and colonialism on black people and how to overcome or deal with those effects. In short, Fanon believes that to a greater or lesser extent black people had internalized the racism of those who ran the society, and either accepted an inferior status or felt the necessity to prove themselves fully human and equal – but in the white man's terms. He discusses various ways in which black intellectuals have sought to challenge racist attitudes. One chapter discusses and reluctantly rejects *négritude*, an ideology dramatized in his poetry by Césaire and developed more extensively in essays and poetry by the Senegalese poet and politician Léopold Senghor. Senghor argued that African culture was completely distinct from but equal and complementary to European culture. Drawing on examples from the writing of Harlem Renaissance writers such as Langston Hughes, Claude McKay and Jean Toomer, as well as the cultures of his native Senegal, he claimed that rhythm, emotion and humour were the distinctive qualities of African writing, that 'emotion is completely Negro, as reason is Greek', and that Africans understood the world through intuition rather than objective analysis.<sup>13</sup> Senghor and other African intellectuals such as Cheikh Anta Diop also turned to precolonial African cultures and histories to illustrate the achievements of Africans ignored by modern Europeans. They wrote about the significance of Timbuktu as a centre of learning in the Middle Ages (as defined by European historians), and of the prestige

accorded kingdoms such as Mali by medieval Europe. They also reclaimed Egypt and its past artefacts and monuments as part of a continental African civilization.

Fanon acknowledged the psychological importance of this historical reclamation, but he saw *négritude* as an ideology trapped within the terms of a European dialectic, and unable to break away from the essentialism inherent in colonialist and racist thinking. He accepted Jean-Paul Sartre's description of the movement as a necessary but passing phase in that dialectic. Sartre had written, in his Preface, entitled 'Black Orpheus', to an anthology of francophone African poetry edited by Senghor:

In fact, *Négritude* appears to be the weak stage of a dialectical progression: the theoretical and practical application of white supremacy is the thesis: the position of *Négritude* as antithetical value is the moment of negativity. But this negative moment is not sufficient in itself and the blacks who employ it well know it; they know that it serves to pave the way for the synthesis or the realization of a raceless society. Thus *Négritude* is dedicated to its own destruction, it is passage and not objective, means and not the ultimate goal. At the moment the black Orpheus most directly embraces this Eurydice, he feels her slip away from between his arms.<sup>14</sup>

While *négritude* was an important movement, influencing the works of many writers and scholars in the Caribbean and the United States as well as Africa, Fanon's work has perhaps had a longer-lasting effect, and has been given new impetus in the work of postcolonial theorists and writers. However, it is important to remember that Fanon is writing from a particular position at a particular time – that is, a multiracial Caribbean colony ruled by the French, where the language is entirely French or French patois, and as one of the few black intellectuals studying in France. His situation was very different from that of Ghanaians, Nigerians or Senegalese living in societies which retained their own languages and continuing traditions. Nevertheless, many anglophone African writers shared Fanon's scepticism regarding Senghor's promotion of *négritude*. The Nigerian playwright Soyinka expressed his view that it was superfluous for Africans to broadcast their African identity, pointing out that a tiger does not need to proclaim his tigrity.<sup>15</sup> And Achebe was adamant that precolonial Africa must be presented honestly, not as 'some glorious technicolour idyll'.<sup>16</sup>

Fanon's experience working with Algerians fighting to liberate their country from French colonialism led to the publication of other essays and books, of which *The Wretched of the Earth* (*Les Damnés de la terre*, published in French in 1961 and in English in 1965) has become the most widely read. In this work



he continues his psychological study of the colonized, but also describes the psychology of the colonizers.<sup>17</sup> He asserts that in order to justify their rule and occupation of the natives' territory, settlers and administrators create and define a 'Manichean Society'; that is, they classify the world of the 'native' as the opposite of everything the European supposedly represents: civilization, morality, cleanliness, law and order, wholesome masculinity.<sup>18</sup> So the native is by definition uncivilized or barbaric, childlike, feminine, unable to rule himself, superstitious. He is deemed to have no historical monuments, no literature, and hence no history.

Indeed, a recurring European view of Africa was that it is a place which has no history, and that history does not become significant there until the European comes on to the scene. Thus the German philosopher G. W. F. Hegel in his *Introduction to the Philosophy of History* (1837) expresses an attitude shared by many European historians even in the mid-twentieth century.<sup>19</sup>

Africa proper, as far as History goes back, has remained shut up . . . The negro [*sic*] as already observed exhibits the natural man in his completely wild and untamed state. We must lay aside all thought of reverence and morality – all that we call feeling – if we would rightly comprehend him; there is nothing harmonious with humanity to be found in this type of character.

At this point we leave Africa never to mention it again. For it is no historical part of the world; it has no development or movement to exhibit. Historical movement in it – that is its northern part – belongs to the Asiatic or European world. What we properly understand by Africa, is the Unhistorical, Undeveloped Spirit, still involved in the *condition of mere nature* and which has to be presented here as on the threshold of the World's History.<sup>20</sup>

Attitudes such as Hegel's were used to justify colonization, since it was argued that Europeans brought civilization and progress, and thus history, to Africa, or India, or Ireland, for the first time. At the same time, Africans and other colonized peoples were seen as mentally and physically adapted only for menial labour or routine clerical positions. Such justifications had been used throughout the seventeenth, eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries to justify the enslavement of millions of Africans to work in the sugar and cotton plantations of the Americas; colonial settlers and governments continued to maintain that the people they colonized were incapable of self-government or of putting their land and its resources to good use. In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon maintained that European interests in retaining their hold on the lands and resources they had occupied made it almost impossible for them

to change their attitudes, as Senghor hoped the *négritude* movement could. Fanon believed that settlers and colonial governments could be uprooted only by violence. Moreover, Fanon argued, such violence was a means of destroying the mental colonization and sense of racial inferiority he had analysed in his earlier work.

While Fanon had focused mainly on the relationship between colonizer and colonized in Africa and the Caribbean, the literary and cultural critic Edward Said, who was born in Palestine, concentrated more on portrayals of Asia, including India, and the Middle East. In his influential and much-debated book *Orientalism* (1978), Said is concerned with the ways in which knowledge is governed and owned by Europeans to reinforce power, and to exclude or dismiss the knowledge which natives might claim to have.<sup>21</sup> Drawing on Foucault's work, and his notion of systems of discourses controlled by those in power which define the 'truths' by which we live and judge others, Said refers to anthropology, history, linguistics and literary criticism as well as European literary works as a network of 'discourses' which establish a particular view of 'orientals' as a people to be governed rather than as equals who are capable of self-government. In this case, he argues, the writers about the East (or the Orient) acknowledge monuments, but only those which belong to the distant past – they are ruined monuments, and the cultures are seen as degenerate. Scholars also acknowledge writings from India and Egypt, for example, but writings in the ancient languages – Sanskrit or Egyptian cuneiform script – not contemporary writers in Arabic or Bengali or Urdu, for example. In any case, contemporary oriental societies were perceived to be in need of civilizing, and that meant European civilization. Said stresses that Orientalism refers not to a place but to an idea, and can be seen as a 'Western style for dominating, restructuring, having authority over the Orient'. He contends that:

without examining Orientalism as a discourse one cannot possibly understand the enormously systematic discipline by which European culture was able to manage – *and even produce* – the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically and imaginatively during the post-Enlightenment period. . . . European culture gained in strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self.<sup>22</sup>

Said has been criticized on the grounds that his discussion of orientalist discourse moves too readily across time and geography and does not place particular texts precisely enough within particular economic and political contexts. The fact that Said himself is criticizing orientalist discourse on these same grounds, for its lumping together and homogenising of a variety of historical

and geographical examples of Eastern culture, does not entirely invalidate his critics. Nevertheless, the existence of such prestigious institutions as London University's School of Oriental and African Studies, where 'Oriental' includes such diverse areas as China, India, Japan, Iran, Iraq, Palestine and Turkey, might substantiate Said's argument.

*Culture and Imperialism*, which Said published fifteen years after *Orientalism*, responded in part to another criticism of his earlier work for its noninclusion of ways in which native writers had responded to orientalist attitudes, and so implicitly represented the Orient and 'orientals' as silent or silenced subjects. In this work he not only analysed the presence of empire in texts such as Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park* (1814) and Rudyard Kipling's *Kim* (1901), he also referred to writers such as Achebe, Fanon, Salman Rushdie and W. B. Yeats from colonized and postcolonial countries.<sup>23</sup>

Whereas Said in his earlier work had focused on academic research and European ownership of the study of the Orient and its problems, Fanon was more interested in the effects on those who have been conquered and how they should resist. In chapter 3 of *The Wretched of the Earth*, he discusses the various ways in which African and Caribbean intellectuals have responded to European stereotypes, first by internalizing European views of them and their cultures and showing that they can mimic the white man, and behave just like him. A second stage comes when these intellectuals, finding that they are discriminated against despite their demonstrably equal intelligence and educational attainment, begin to protest against this discriminatory treatment, often in terms of the very values which the Europeans have proclaimed – especially equality and justice. Another move by educated Africans seeks to validate their own culture and civilization by rediscovering a buried history and celebrating early achievements, including the Egyptian pyramids, the medieval cities and scholarship found in Timbuktu, Mali and Ghana, the kingdoms of Ashanti and the Zulu King Chaka, the kingdoms and buildings of Benin and ancient Zimbabwe, and so on. These acknowledgements of early African achievements were important, but to some extent they might be seen as accepting and responding to European views and values regarding what is historically significant, what is worth celebrating. And they also left open the question of why these kingdoms and centres of learning or artistic achievement did not survive.

Fanon believed that such restoration of the past was an important factor in giving colonized people the confidence to envision a future without European rule and a nation capable of future achievements. It responded to and negated the European insistence that Africans were incapable of creating a civilization – or anything worth while. Moreover, the writing of an African or Indian history might involve a different view of events already narrated by British historians.

For example, what the British named the 'Indian Mutiny' of 1857 is renamed by some Indian historians as the 'First War of Indian Independence' or the 'Great Indian Uprising'.

But Fanon also insisted that the recovery of the past was not enough. In other words, cultural nationalism of this kind was necessary if one was to restore confidence and create a sense of identity, but it was not sufficient if the land occupied by colonizers was to be retrieved and self-government achieved. Writers and intellectuals would need to be aware of current issues, political and economic concerns, and they would need to be in tune with the people as a whole, not just a small intellectual elite. For some writers, this meant an engagement with 'folk culture', a concern to speak of and for the folk – usually defined as the peasantry or rural population, rather than the urban residents. Fanon believed that it was also necessary for writers to propose a political programme to show the way towards liberation. This might be seen as one of the tasks Raja Rao took on in *Kanthapura* (1938), like Mulk Raj Anand previously in *The Untouchable* (1935) and *Coolie* (1936), and Ngugi in his later works such as *Petals of Blood* (1977) and *Matigari* (1986).

There is also a related historical movement with regard to the rewriting of history, which is referred to as subaltern history or Subaltern Studies. The term 'subaltern' signifies those who are not part of the ruling group, and subaltern history refers to the history of those groups – those who are subordinated by the dominant class, which is usually the author and subject of history. In other words, most historical narratives have traditionally foregrounded the achievements or misdeeds of kings, presidents, prime ministers and the classes and cultures associated with them; subaltern histories might deal with the groups they dominated – perhaps the working class, perhaps women, perhaps members of a lower caste. The study of subaltern groups has been particularly influential in India and has played a significant part in the work of another very influential postcolonial scholar, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Spivak, who was born in Calcutta but rapidly became a prominent academic in the United States after gaining her doctorate at Cornell University and publishing a translation of Jacques Derrida's seminal work *De la Grammatologie* (1967: published in English as *On Grammatology* in 1976), has taken on the difficult task of bringing Marxist, deconstructionist and feminist theory to bear upon her analysis of American, Bengali, British and French texts. Influential essays including 'Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism' and 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' explore the ignored or distorted presence of colonized women in texts such as Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847) and in official records maintained by British officials in India regarding *sati*. Spivak also insists that scholars should be self-conscious about the ways in which their own positions as academics in

tertiary institutions, most often in the 'First World,' relate to the ways in which their work is produced and received.<sup>24</sup>

A fourth critic and theorist whose name frequently recurs in discussions of postcolonial literary and cultural studies is Homi Bhabha. Drawing on psychoanalytical theory with particular reference to Sigmund Freud and Lacan, Bhabha has elaborated the key concepts of mimicry and hybridity. Whereas Fanon and Said have analysed the oppositions set up in colonialist and anti-colonialist societies, Bhabha has sought to demonstrate that their discourses contain ambivalences and ambiguities. He argues that the 'mimicry' of colonizers by colonized subjects can be a form of subversion, since it makes unstable the insistence on difference ('them' and 'us') which forms the basis of colonialist and nationalist ideologies.<sup>25</sup> Like Said and Spivak, Bhabha celebrates the 'hybridity' of postcolonial cultures, seeing their embrace of European as well as indigenous traditions as a positive advantage which allows their writers and critics to understand and critique the West as both insiders and outsiders.

Until recently, it has been the approaches and concepts developed by Said, Spivak and Bhabha that have dominated postcolonial literary theory and criticism. However, their work has been vociferously rejected by the Indian scholar Aijaz Ahmad, who attacks both Said and the American academic Fredric Jameson for their homogenizing of 'Third World' writing, and their concentration on European and European language texts to the neglect of indigenous language writing in, for example, Arabic, Hindi, Urdu or Yoruba.<sup>26</sup> Ahmad is also fiercely critical of poststructuralism and the abstractions which he sees as a feature of much postcolonial theory, especially the theories elaborated by Bhabha and Spivak. He shares with Benita Parry, another opponent of theories based on poststructuralism, a commitment to Marxism as a basis for analysing the conflicts between colonizing and colonized nations, and for resisting new forms of domination.<sup>27</sup>

While Bhabha, Said and Spivak, and more recently Kwame Anthony Appiah, Paul Gilroy, Edouard Glissant and Stuart Hall, have most strongly influenced the critics of postcolonial literatures, it is Fanon who has perhaps most influenced writers – particularly in Africa and the Caribbean, and particularly in the earlier phases of resistance to colonization and the creation of a national consciousness. (And for this reason this study places particular emphasis on Fanon's analysis of colonialism and its effects.) Ngugi has written about Fanon, and his later fiction and drama follows many of Fanon's precepts regarding the role of a revolutionary writer. Walcott's *Dream on Monkey Mountain* (1970; discussed in the next chapter) can be read as a dramatization of Fanon's analysis of black subjectivity in *Black Skin, White Masks*. Lamming's novel *In The Castle of My Skin* (1953), published one year after Fanon's first book, shows its

influence in the title as well as the portrayal of the internalization of racism by Barbadians. Some of Achebe's early essays indicate an acquaintance with Fanon and Sartre's responses to *négritude* as 'an anti-racist racism'.<sup>28</sup> Like Fanon, he writes of the need to restore the self-esteem of African people, to assert that they did not hear of civilization for the first time from Europe; and he declares that the greatest sin of all was the African's acceptance of inferiority. Fanon's work has also inspired Bhabha, who likewise draws on psychoanalytical models to discuss identity, and who has written a substantial introduction to *Black Skin, White Masks*.<sup>29</sup>

My discussion of postcolonial writing will be informed by these theories and concepts, and to other critics who draw on them, though my focus will be on the literary texts rather than the theories. Thus concepts such as hybridity, othering, Creolité, mimicry and the subaltern, will recur frequently in the chapters that follow. But it is important not to assume that 'theory' relevant to postcolonial literary analysis is confined to those three or four names which have become so dominant in the past two decades. Essays by many of the writers, such as Achebe, Lamming, Ngugi, Rushdie and Walcott have been equally influential in providing a framework and an orientation through which to approach not only their own writings but also those of others. Hence I have drawn attention to such essays as they became relevant. And of course much critical discourse which is not limited to postcolonial writing has also informed my thinking about these texts.

In the chapters that follow, each will include detailed analysis of one or more literary texts which relate to a particular concern in postcolonial writing and criticism. However, each chapter will also refer to relevant texts from other geographical areas, and other aspects of the chosen texts will be picked up and referred to in subsequent chapters. Rather than being arranged according to various territories (African, Caribbean, Indian, etc.), the structure of the book is designed in part to enable a sense of the diversity of texts and approaches as well as contexts, and an awareness that no one framework is adequate to all areas or texts subsumed under the postcolonial umbrella. I do not attempt to provide a complete coverage of postcolonial writing in English. As noted in the Preface, instead of skating thinly over many surfaces, I considered it more sensible to concentrate on literary texts from several areas which represent different histories of colonial and postcolonial relationships. Thus I have chosen to refer mainly to writers from the Indian subcontinent, from East and West Africa, from Australia, from the Caribbean, from the black and Asian diaspora communities in Britain, and from Ireland. By focusing on writers mainly but not exclusively from just three different settler postcolonial areas (Australia, East Africa and Ireland), three differing administrative ex-colonies (Ghana,

India and Nigeria), and two areas which contain large and diverse diasporic communities (Britain and the Caribbean), I hope the book will give its readers a fuller and richer sense of the cultural and literary contexts and debates within those communities, as well as the variety of writing which has been produced within and across these postcolonies.

One of the more contentious aspects of this study is the inclusion of Irish writers. While it is the case that because of the development of postcolonial studies from Commonwealth literary studies on the one hand, and Black Studies and Third World Studies on the other, Irish writing has traditionally been neglected in postcolonial literary studies, this situation is rapidly changing. Said includes a long section on Yeats as a nationalist writer in his *Culture and Imperialism*; David Lloyd has consistently written about nineteenth- and twentieth-century Irish writers in the context of postcolonial writing, as have Marjorie Howes and more recently Elizabeth Butler Cullingford.<sup>30</sup> Jahan Ramazani's *The Hybrid Muse: Postcolonial Poetry in English* (2001)<sup>31</sup> begins with a discussion of Irish literature and a chapter on Yeats, and there have been several 'postcolonial' readings of Joyce published in the past decade. Other American, British and Irish academics such as Gregory Castle, Joe Cleary, Terry Eagleton, Jed Esty, Colin Graham, Glenn Hooper, Declan Kiberd and John Nash have found comparisons between Irish and other postcolonial literatures fruitful.

Thus the inclusion of Irish literature under the postcolonial remit takes account of changing perspectives which are to some extent revising the earlier frameworks for viewing postcolonial writing. Such perspectives include a growing awareness of race as constructed rather than given, and an interest in varieties of colonial experience rather than simple binary paradigms along colour lines. In the context of the British Empire and the Darwinian evolutionary theory of the mid-nineteenth century, the Irish were often seen as an in-between race, belonging not only to what Bhabha has defined as the ambivalent world of the 'not quite/not white' but also to the 'not quite/not black',<sup>32</sup> as suggested in a letter written to his wife by the English novelist Charles Kingsley while travelling in Ireland in 1860. He wrote:

But I am haunted by the human chimpanzees I saw along that hundred miles of horrible country. I don't believe they are our fault. I believe there are not only more of them than of old, but that they are happier, better, more comfortably fed and lodged under our rule than they ever were. But to see white chimpanzees is dreadful; if they were black, one would not feel it so much, but their skins, except where tanned by exposure, are as white as ours.<sup>33</sup>

Postcolonial critics have also drawn attention to Irish literature in the context of making distinctions between the modernisms that were a product of colonial experience and those that were more clearly based in metropolitan centres.<sup>34</sup> Moreover, the Irish cultural renaissance was influenced by comparisons with other nationalist literary movements (especially in India), and in turn became a significant model for later postcolonial writers including Walcott. Some of those interactions will be discussed in later chapters, and especially the next one.

Chapter 2, 'Postcolonial issues in performance', will focus on the role of theatre in various African and Irish contexts, before going on to a more detailed discussion of two plays and the circumstances in which they were first created and performed: Walcott's *Dream of Monkey Mountain* and Brian Friel's *Translations* (1980). These texts and their first productions provide a means of discussing the complex cultural mixtures of Trinidad (and St Lucia) and the politics of (London)Derry and the Field Day project, leading to an exploration of the wider issue of reading the politics of the past through the politics of the present. Both Walcott and Friel interrogate various nationalist myths and notions of cultural purity such as *négritude* and Irishness. Both plays also raise the problem of translating cultures, and finding an appropriate language and idiom to express a culture distinct from the colonial one. The discussion of the Field Day project will also include brief reference to the question of Ireland as a (post)colonial territory and culture (acknowledging that territory and culture may not always overlap). This chapter serves as an introduction to many of the main topics to be explored later with regard to other specific texts, topics such as language, place, mapping, history, cultural hybridity, genre and audience.

Chapter 3 takes up the issue of alternative and subaltern histories, considering early cultural nationalist works, and views of local history and culture 'from the inside' in response to the colonial and Hegelian insistence on a lack of 'native' history. There will be reference to differing histories and cultural contexts and how these affect writing. In addition to 'historical' narratives, there will be analysis of how and to what purpose different writers and groups have invoked myth and legend, and also reworked and appropriated 'European' myths. Here further distinctions will be made between male and female writers and histories. The chapter includes detailed analysis of Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958), Brathwaite's *The Arrivants* (1973), and Aidoo's *Our Sister Killjoy* (1977).

One means of establishing a new starting point for the writing of a national history which is not defined within the terms of the colonialist version of history is autobiography. Chapter 4 explores the prevalence of autobiographical writing in much colonial and early postcolonial literature, analysing the ways in which

the story of the individual does and does not provide a base for departing from the collective history imposed by the colonizer on the one hand and the cultural nationalist on the other. Among other works in this chapter I will refer to Miles Franklin's *My Beautiful Career* (1901), as well as poetry and fiction by Joyce and Yeats. These analyses also draw distinctions between the projects of male-authored autobiographical works in relation to the nationalist project, and female ones which often question such constructions of the nation. Lamming's *In the Castle of My Skin* (1953) and Sally Morgan's *My Place* (1987) are considered in greater detail.

As Said remarked with regard to Yeats, geography and the naming of places plays a prominent part in the work of many anticolonial and nationalist writers.<sup>35</sup> Chapter 5 discusses the perceived importance of reclaiming, remapping and revisioning the land, its flora and fauna, particularly in settler colonies. It contrasts the portrayals of landscape and place in the works of early settlers and visitors and those of later postcolonial writers. Here the gendering of land and landscape and its consequence for women writers (as, for example, analysed by Aidoo and Eavan Boland) is noted, but will be developed in more detail in Chapter 8. The topic is explored in greater depth here through essays and selected poems by Walcott (and his view of the writer as 'Adam'), and then through four generations of Australian writers: Henry Kendall, Henry Lawson, Judith Wright and Les Murray.

The question of which language to use and its relation to authentic identity has been a fraught one from the beginnings of postcolonial writing. Chapter 6 outlines the debates over language (vernacular or English, standard or Creole) through a number of different positions, and the debates which took place in Ireland, Africa, and the Caribbean and Ireland. I analyse different attempts to create recognizably national or 'nation languages' in the works of Australian, Caribbean, Indian and Irish authors, and look in particular detail at works by Louise Bennett, Brathwaite, Synge and Walcott. This chapter also includes discussion of 'performance poetry'; the significance of its emphasis on voice, presence and communal response; and the use of oral 'literatures' and performance as a model in much postcolonial writing.

Alongside the issue of language, and whether the English language could adequately express the experience of people whose worlds, attitudes, histories and experiences were very different from those of people whose history was rooted in England, postcolonial authors and critics have debated the question of form and genre. Can the form of the sonnet, developed during the European Renaissance, be adapted to express contemporary Caribbean or Irish thoughts? Seamus Heaney, Walcott and Yeats have used the sonnet and other traditional forms, but have often given them a new significance. The Caribbean novelist

Wilson Harris argued that the traditional form of the novel of manners was inappropriate for societies which needed to break from European assumptions and conventions, and embraced a form of fiction which radically questioned our concepts of realism.<sup>36</sup> Chapter 7 therefore explores questions of genre conventions and expectations, and how they may or may not be appropriate to the aims and concerns of postcolonial writers. It concludes with a detailed study of Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981). The following chapter picks up and elaborates the brief discussions in previous chapters regarding gendered histories, narratives and landscapes, with specific reference to responses by postcolonial women writers to male colonial and postcolonial representations.

Critics have sometimes described postcolonial literatures as very roughly falling into several phases: literature of resistance; literature of national consolidation; literature of disillusion and/or neocolonialism; post-postcolonial literature; and diaspora literature. Although these categories rarely fit neatly, this book will have followed these phases to some extent, discussing literature of resistance and national consolidation in the first chapters. Later chapters deal with the literature by both male and female authors which portrays and opposes neocolonialism, whereby multinational companies and economically powerful nations such as Britain and the United States continue to control the economies and often the politics of newly independent states. Chapter 9 will focus on the sense of disillusion expressed by authors such as Ayi Kwei Armah, Ngugi, Arundhati Roy and Rushdie, who expose the betrayal of the nation and its ideals by its leaders. However, as this chapter will discuss, authors such as Roy and Rushdie are also concerned to make room in their novels for marginalized peoples and groups. Whereas earlier nationalist novels and plays often implied a homogenous national identity, many later writers seek to acknowledge and celebrate a heterogeneous and inclusive nation. In some cases, for example Australia and Canada, this movement also involves increasing acknowledgement of indigenous peoples as writers and speaking subjects, rather than simply subjects for writing. But in all cases there is also a sometimes troubled recognition of the nation as an immigrant nation with a multiplicity of ethnicities and cultures. Here, too, the question of languages and voices becomes significant. In this chapter Abdulrazak Gurnah's novel *Paradise* (1994) is given detailed attention.

Chapter 10 continues this discussion of heterogeneity, but with a specific focus on Britain, exploring the particular relationships of postcolonial writers within the 'heart of empire'. It will cover briefly the changes occurring since the 1950s, responses to the 'mother country', the establishment of communities of writers and audiences, and the development of institutions and publications which encouraged such writing and readerships.



The concluding chapter discusses why and how different kinds of readers respond to postcolonial texts. For example, a Trinidadian reader might read V. S. Naipaul's earlier novels with delighted or dismayed recognition, finding his or her own world portrayed in the work of a fellow national, whereas a reader who has never been to Trinidad may feel he or she is discovering a new and exotic world. But there can also be a complex interplay between these kinds of readings. Readers are also influenced by critics and varying critical approaches, by publishers and cultural institutions (including educational ones and books such as this one), and by state institutions which may censor or ban the works of particular authors. This final chapter refers back to texts previously discussed for examples.

## Chapter 2

### Postcolonial issues in performance

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Drama has played a crucial part in the development of national cultures and audiences, and yet has received relatively little attention in postcolonial literary studies. This is all the more surprising given that dramatic performance raises so many issues that are central to postcolonial cultures – questions of identity, language, myth and history; issues regarding translatability, voice and audience; problems relating to production, infrastructures and censorship. In *The Wretched of the Earth* (1965), it is drama rather than poetry or the novel that Frantz Fanon advocates as the best means of raising the consciousness of people involved in an anticolonial struggle. In cultures where literacy has been confined mainly to a small elite group, and where there is a continuing oral culture with roots in precolonial traditions, drama and performance provide a means of reaching a much wider indigenous audience and tapping into forms and conventions which are already familiar to them. As W. B. Yeats wrote in retrospect in his *Autobiographies* (1926), 'the great mass of our people, accustomed to interminable rhetorical speeches, read little, and so from the very start we felt that we must have a theatre of our own'.<sup>1</sup>

Thus Yeats, Lady Gregory and Edward Martyn set out in 1897 to create an Irish Literary Theatre (using the term 'literary' to emphasize that it would not cater to purely commercial interests). They stated their aims thus:

We propose to have performed in Dublin in the spring of every year certain Celtic and Irish plays, which whatever be their degree of excellence will be written with high ambition, and so to build up a Celtic and Irish school of dramatic literature. We hope to find in Ireland an uncorrupted and imaginative audience trained to listen by its passion for oratory, and believe that our desire to bring upon the stage the deeper thoughts and emotions of Ireland will ensure for us a tolerant welcome, and that freedom to experiment which is not found in theatres of England, and without which no new movement in art or literature can succeed.

Kochyma, single-minded in her prejudices, largely responsible for the ruin of their mother, spending her days dreaming of romance with the Christian priest Father Mulligan, and filling in coupons which might win her unneeded goods from those who advertise them. In Roy's novel, as in *Ice-Candy-Man*, *Clear Light of Day*, *Paradise* and *The Moor's Last Sigh*, we are shown both the desirability of coexistence between diverse peoples and cultures, and at the same time the difficulty of sustaining a community which accommodates difference.

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Chapter 10

## Transnational and black British writing: colonizing in reverse

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The previous chapter considered some of the ways in which postcolonial writers have revisited concepts of nationality and community by attending to the diverse histories and cultures of the areas they grew up in, histories which precede and accompany European colonization. Many of those writers, including Abdulrazak Gurnah, Wilson Harris, Michael Ondaatje and Salman Rushdie, had emigrated to Britain or Canada, and to some extent their attention to those early multicultural communities is influenced by their location in the more recent immigrant communities which have become a feature of those countries since World War II. Australia, Britain and Canada had all encouraged large-scale immigration to rebuild their postwar economies and supplement diminished labour forces. In Australia the immigrants came mostly from Britain and Europe, and until the 1970s non-European peoples were turned away under the White Australia Policy; Britain, on the other hand, actively recruited workers from the West Indies and the Indian subcontinent to service transport systems, the new National Health hospitals, and the steel and cotton factories. Consequently, although all three still have predominantly white populations of Anglo-Saxon and Celtic origin, Australia, Britain and Canada provide different contexts for the development of multicultural societies. Moreover, as the primary colonizing power, seen and seeing itself as the metropolitan centre, or as the 'mother country', Britain also differs significantly from Australia and Canada as a symbolic and actual site for those who had formerly been her imperial subjects.

Although there had been a trickle of immigrants and visitors to Britain from her Crown Colonies for a good two hundred years prior to World War II, there is a significant change in numbers and reasons for emigration after 1948, when the first boatload of people from the West Indies arrived on HMS *Windrush*. During the next three decades, the percentage of people in Britain of African or Indian descent increased from less than 1 per cent to more than 6 per cent, of whom nearly half settled in London. Additionally, during the postwar decades many Irish immigrants sought work in London, Liverpool, Glasgow and other major cities, joining the large Irish communities already established there since



the famine of 1845–9 and the depression that had been a feature of the Irish economy until the 1980s.

The majority of those who came to Britain assumed they would find work; they sought money to send back to and feed and house their families in the Caribbean, Ireland, India or Pakistan, and most of them expected to return to those families and houses after a few years. For many, there was also a sense of adventure and glamour in the possibility of living in England, and becoming acquainted with the scenes and the culture which had formed the substance of their education. Some, like Kamau Brathwaite, Buchi Emecheta and her husband, and V. S. Naipaul, came as students; others, like George Lamming and Samuel Selvon, wanted to be writers, and in 1950 it was difficult to be accepted as a writer (either by others or in one's own mind), unless one had the imprint of British publication. In a 1960 essay entitled 'The Journey to an Expectation', Lamming writes:

It is now ten years since that morning in mid-March when Sam Selvon and I left for England. I have tried to chart, through my own experience, some of the events of that period, for it is also the decade in which the West Indian acquired recognition as a writer, first outside and later within his own society. The order of acceptance was logical since a native commodity of any kind must always achieve imperial sanction before it is received back in its own soil . . . England lay before us, not a place, or a people, but as a promise and an expectation. Sam and I had left home for the same reasons. We had come to England to be writers.<sup>1</sup>

Another writer, James Berry from Jamaica, expresses in 'Migrant in London' the mingled feelings of achievement and apprehension, of nostalgia for the world left behind and excitement at being in the 'worl' centre' and recognizing a city and its landmarks already known through a shared culture. Here he is both culturally at home, and physically homeless.

Sand under we feet long time.  
Sea divided for we, you know,  
how we turned stragglers to Mecca.

An' in mi hangin' drape style  
I cross worl' centre street, man.  
An' busy traffic hoot horns.

I see Big Ben strike  
the mark of my king town.  
Pigeons come perch on mi shoulder,  
roun' great Nelson feet.

I stan' in the roar, man,  
in a dream of wheels  
a-vibrate shadows.  
I feel how wheels hurry in wheels.  
I whisper, man you mek it.  
You arrive.  
Then sudden, like, quite loud I say,  
'Then whey you goin' sleep tonight?'<sup>2</sup>

Both the imagery and the language of the poem convey that paradoxical double experience of familiarity and strangeness. The sensation of sand underfoot and the sound of the sea in the speaker's island homeland is contrasted with the streets of the city and the noise and confusion of traffic. As the memories of the past are supplanted by the sights and sounds of his present setting, his sense of self, and his ambivalence are marked by the variations of language from Jamaican English to Standard English. And the speaker's reference to London as Mecca not only suggests the central symbolic significance of London for West Indians, as a place where one can and must pay homage, but also a place to be visited rather than lived in. (A later collection of short stories by Farrukh Dhondy, *Come to the Mecca* (1978), also indicates the ways in which British imperial culture has appropriated 'exotic' place names such as Mecca for more commercial ends. One could compare the use of 'Araby' in the story of that title by James Joyce.)

Among those who came to write, study and work in Britain in the first two decades following World War II and then remained there were the poet Dom Moraes from Bombay; the novelist and short story writer Attia Hosain from Lucknow; the novelist Kamala Markandaya from Bangalore; the poet Ketaki Kushari Dyson from Bengal; the historian and travel writer Nirad Chaudhuri from Bengal; the novelist and journalist Farrukh Dhondy from Poona; the novelist Salman Rushdie from Bombay; the fiction and travel writers V. S. Naipaul and his younger brother Shiva Naipaul from Trinidad; the novelist Selvon also from Trinidad; the poets James Berry and Andrew Salkey, who was also a novelist, from Jamaica; the novelists Wilson Harris and Edgar Mittleholzer from Guyana; the poets and critics Peter Porter and Clive James; the novelists Christina Stead and Randolph Stow from Australia; the poet Fleur Adcock from New Zealand; the novelist and poet Elizabeth Smart from Canada; the novelist and short story writer William Trevor from Ireland; and the novelists Buchi Emecheta from Nigeria, Lauretta Ngcobo from South Africa, and Abdulrazak Gurnah from Zanzibar. Gurnah and Ngcobo came to England as political refugees, as did many writers of Asian descent from East Africa in the

late 1960s. The list is by no means exhaustive, but rather is indicative of the multifarious places and cultures from which these writers came.

Both the size and the diversity of this influx of writers and other workers produced a significant shift in British writing and perspectives on Britain. White novelists like Doris Lessing and Stead from settler colonies took either the world they had left behind or a changing postwar English society as their subject, offering sharply observed critiques. In 1952, according to Ann Blake, Stead had applied for a grant to write a novel of the 'New Australia', provisionally called 'Migrants'.<sup>3</sup> The grant was unsuccessful, so instead she wrote several stories about migrants in England, including 'Days of the Roomers', which portrays a European landlord who has emigrated to London rejecting 'dark-skinned foreign students'.<sup>4</sup> Her 1965 novel, *Cotters' England* (originally published as *Dark Places of the Heart*, perhaps suggesting a reference to Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1902)) analyses the material and psychological poverty of working-class Britain through a study of the Cotter family in Newcastle and three generations of working-class activists. Both this novel and *Miss Herbert: Suburban Wife* (1976) depict a bleak postwar England, in which neither the working class nor liberal intellectuals like Miss Herbert can escape from the dead hand of traditional attitudes. In contrast to Australia, whose lack of a feudal past made possible, in Stead's view, 'a Labour Commonwealth', postwar England seemed little changed from the England she knew in the 1930s, when she wrote to one of her brothers:

I detest and despise the London Englishman who runs the Empire; they are the smuggest, bootlickingest, most class-saturated, most conceited and ignorant people I ever met. This only goes for the middle and Eton classes, too, the clerks and counter-jumpers and the white collar brigades of London. The underdog is smart, comical and lively, in London. But the 'intelligentzia' – woe is me.<sup>5</sup>

Whereas white authors from the Commonwealth presented a jaundiced view of England for an English audience and readers back 'home', writers from the Caribbean, and later from Sri Lanka and the Indian subcontinent, increasingly spoke of and to a black and South Asian community *within* Britain; moreover, this new group of immigrant authors was often seeking to *create* a community here and now in Britain. It is in this role as a creator of community that Selvon's writing is particularly innovative and significant. *The Lonely Londoners*, published in 1956,<sup>6</sup> assembles a cast of African and West Indian men seeking companionship and support in the face of a bleak, impoverished and unfriendly white London. Through their stories (or 'ballads') and through the voice of the narrator, Moses, this diverse group of Africans, Jamaicans and Trinidadians

comes into being as a gathering of people who find their identity less through their different places of origin than through their mutual presence in London. This new group identity is expressed through the ambivalent sense of longing for 'home' and belonging in London, as well as the language of the narrator, a subtle blend of Trinidadian and other West Indian idioms and inflections with Standard English which we find in passages such as this one towards the end of *The Lonely Londoners* where Moses reflects on his position and that of his fellow immigrants, remembering and hearing in his head the voices of other speakers:

Why don't you go back to Trinidad.  
What happening man, what happening.  
If I give you this ballad! Las night –  
You went to see the Christmas tree in Trafalgar Square?  
Harris giving a dance in Brixton next Saturday – you going?

A fellow asking the Home Secretary in the House of Commons: 'Are you aware there are more than 40,000 West Indians living in Great Britain?' 'You know who I see in Piccadilly last night? Gomes! He must be come up for talks of federation.'

One night of any night, liming on the Embankment near to Chelsea, he stand up on the bank of the river, watching the lights of the buildings reflected in the water, thinking what he must do, if he should save up money and go back home, if he should try to make it by next year before he change his mind again.

The old Moses, standing on the banks of the Thames. Sometimes he think he see some sort of profound realisation in his life, as if all that happen to him was experience that make him a better man, as if now he could draw apart from any hustling and just sit down and watch other people fight to live. Under the kiff-kiff laughter, behind the ballad and the episode, the what-happening, the summer-is-hearts, he could see a great aimlessness, a great restless, swaying movement that leaving you all standing in the same spot. As if a forlorn shadow of doom fall on all the spades in the country. As if he could see the black faces bobbing up and down in the millions of white, strained faces, everybody hustling along the Strand, the spades jostling in the crowd, bewildered, hopeless. As if, on the surface, things don't look so bad, but when you go down a little, you bounce up a kind of misery and pathos and a frightening – what? he don't know the right word, but he have the right feeling in his heart. As if the boys laughing, but they only laughing because they afraid to cry, they only laughing because to think so much about everything would be a big calamity – like how he here now, the thoughts so heavy like he unable to move his body.

Still, it had a greatness and a vastness in the way he was feeling tonight, like it was something solid after feeling everything else give way, and though he aint getting no happiness out of the cogitations he still pondering, for is the first time he ever find himself thinking like that.

Daniel was telling him how over in France all kinds of fellars writing books what turning out to be best-sellers. Taxi-driver, porter, road-sweeper – it didn't matter . . .

He watch a tugboat on the Thames, wondering if he could ever write a book like that, what everybody would buy.<sup>7</sup>

In this passage Moses gropes for the words which might express the strangely ambivalent feelings he recognizes in himself and the other West Indians who have become 'Londoners'. And out of his desire to express and make some sense of his and their experience he contemplates becoming a writer, a possibility made real for someone like him by the publications of African, African-American and Caribbean immigrants to France such as James Baldwin, Aimé Césaire, Léon Damas, Sembene Ousmane and Richard Wright. And, of course, the book he contemplates writing is the book we have just read, *The Lonely Londoners*.<sup>8</sup> That impulse to write out of the experience of dislocation or estrangement is one shared by many immigrant writers, and is expressed cogently by Gurnah in a BBC programme broadcast in 2001:

To write in the bosom of my culture and my history was not a possibility, and perhaps is not a possibility for any writer in any profound sense. I know I came to writing in England in estrangement and I realize now that it is this condition of being from one place and living in another that has been my subject over the years, not as a unique experience which I have undergone, but as one of the stories of our times.<sup>9</sup>

The presence of a black and Asian community in the metropolitan centre also helped to create a new sense of community and shared aims between representatives of the colonial cultures in Britain and 'back home'. Moreover, immigrants from Africa, the Caribbean, the Indian subcontinent and Ireland were confronted with prejudice fuelled by years of imperial rule and contemporary caricatures in the British media responding dismissively to the freedom struggles of African and Caribbean nations seeking independence. This was the era when British troops were being sent to confront the so-called Mau-Mau fighters in Kenya, and the British media portrayal of the stark division between the two sides in terms of bestial Kikuyu 'terrorists' opposed to civilized Britons is presented ironically in this line from a poem published by Derek Walcott in 1962: 'The gorilla wrestles with the superman.'<sup>10</sup> Those who came from the Indian subcontinent faced different attitudes, which mingled prejudice against

darker-skinned people who did not speak the English language or adhere to the Christian religion with an interest in the 'exotic' and a certain glamour attached to India as a realm of Indian princes and palaces, metaphorically as well as actually providing 'the jewel in the crown'. Those attitudes, in relation to the popular films and television series *Gandhi* (1982), *A Passage to India* (1984), *The Far Pavilions* (1984) and *The Jewel in the Crown* (1984) were incisively critiqued by Rushdie in his 1984 essay 'Outside the Whale'.<sup>11</sup>

Among the increasing numbers of temporary and permanent immigrants from all parts of what was now named 'the British Commonwealth' were many students and professional writers such as Kamau Brathwaite and George Lamming from Barbados, Ngugi wa Thiong'o from Kenya, and John (Pepper Clark) Bekederemo and Wole Soyinka from Nigeria. It was in Britain that writers such as Ngugi encountered writings by the francophone Caribbean author Frantz Fanon, as well as Lamming's powerful and innovative novel *In the Castle of my Skin* (1953)<sup>12</sup> and his eloquent and influential essays on cultural politics, *The Pleasures of Exile* (1960),<sup>13</sup> all of which were to have a profound influence on Ngugi's career as an educator and writer.

Lamming was one of the key speakers at the first two Caribbean Artists Movement (CAM) Conferences, held at the University of Kent in Canterbury in 1967 and 1968. The conferences grew out of a series of smaller group meetings which began in January 1967, and featured monthly readings and discussions of work by African, African American and Caribbean writers and artists. Brathwaite was a regular participant, as were the poet and publisher John LaRose, the novelist and sociologist Orlando Patterson, and the poet and novelist Andrew Salkey. Others who frequently attended or spoke at the meetings and conferences included Berry, Harris, C. L. R. James and Kenneth Ramchand.<sup>14</sup>

Both the interaction between artists from different Caribbean islands, and the discussions and formulations concerning the objectives of a meaningful Caribbean art, were to have a continuing influence on art and cultural politics produced in the Caribbean itself once writers such as Brathwaite and Lamming had returned there. In Britain and in the Caribbean, it had the consequence of questioning the centrality of the English canon, and of creating alternative foci and lines of communication and response. Journals such as *The West Indian Gazette*, edited by Claudia Jones, and the CAM Newsletter and its successor in the Caribbean, *Savacou*, became important outlets for the publication of black British and Caribbean writers. Publishing houses such as LaRose's New Beacon Press and Eric and Jessica Huntley's Bogle L'Ouverture Press came into existence and have continued to publish important new works and collections by black British and Caribbean writers.

The CAM group debated and sought to redefine the language, forms and content of a black British and Caribbean writing appropriate to a community which had also redefined its audience. In Britain CAM writers and artists were becoming aware of innovative fiction and poetry drawing on oral and folk traditions, jazz structures and spoken idioms, published by African and African American writers such as Chinua Achebe, Ralph Ellison and Langston Hughes as well as Hispanic and francophone Caribbean writers such as Césaire, Damas and Nicolas Guillén. Encouraged by their creative brilliance and success, Brathwaite, Lamming, Selvon and others fashioned a language which recalled the voices and idioms and rhythms of everyday Caribbean life and culture. For Brathwaite, as was discussed in chapter 6, this involved specifically rejecting in his poetry the iambic pentameter line characteristic of the English poetic tradition; and instead drawing on calypso, blues, and African drum rhythms. Berry, Brathwaite and Selvon also drew on oral and folk traditions, as had Louise Bennett and Una Marson earlier, to make Caribbean voices heard within the English literary tradition. Berry's series of 'Lucy' poems, in the form of letters from a Jamaican woman settled in London and writing back to a friend in her former home, and reminiscent of Bennett's use of Jamaican women speakers, vividly evoke the contrasts in place and culture through the voice of a Jamaican Londoner.<sup>15</sup> These poems, like Brathwaite's, were most effective when performed by the poet and heard by audiences – first at CAM meetings and later much more widely throughout England. Such poems, and works by a subsequent generation of poets such as John Agard and Grace Nichols from Guyana, and Linton Kwesi Johnson from Jamaica, both celebrated and authenticated the presence of Caribbean-inflected voices, and hence bodies, in Britain. Through the performance of their poetry to multicultural audiences within the United Kingdom, these poets created and reinforced a sense of communal identity and established a hybrid oral/literary tradition different from but affiliated to the preexisting English literary tradition. Or rather, in their speaking directly to and of groups rather than individuals, one might see their work as giving new life and new directions to an older oral/literary tradition characterized by Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* and the drama of Shakespeare.

The aims and aesthetics embraced by some members of CAM did not appeal to all writers who had emigrated from Africa, the Indian subcontinent or the West Indies. Naipaul was never a member of CAM, and his fiction, unlike Selvon's, maintained a clear distinction between the Standard English of the narrative persona, and the Trinidadian voices of his characters. As Susanne Mühleisen contends, Naipaul uses Creole speech in his early fiction to symbolize and satirize what he described and dismissed as the 'half-bakedness' of colonial society.<sup>16</sup> Despite the sympathetic fictionalizing of his father's story in the most

Dickensian of his novels, *A House for Mr Biswas* (1961), West Indian critics such as Harris and Lamming saw Naipaul's early fiction as cruelly mocking and disdainful of the Caribbean community, while Harris argued that Naipaul's adherence to what Harris saw as the traditional genre of the 'novel of manners' reinforced static and unchanging views of a people and a society desperately in need of growth and change, particularly as the new West Indian nation states came into independent being.<sup>17</sup> Although reservations have frequently been expressed by Caribbean and other 'Third World' writers and critics, such as Achebe, Naipaul's reputation within Britain has continued to grow, resulting in the award of the Booker Prize in 1971, a knighthood in 1990, the David Cohen Prize recognizing 'a lifetime's achievement by a living British writer' in 1992, and the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2001.

Notwithstanding their differences and disagreements, Naipaul in his early fiction shares with other immigrant writers a preoccupation with the search for accommodation in both the literal and the metaphorical sense. That search is suggested by the title of *A House for Mr Biswas*, in which at one point the protagonist expresses a kind of existential terror at the thought of remaining alone, isolated and unaccommodated. *The Mimic Men* (1967) regards with disdain and sharp scrutiny the disjunction between European architectural, political and cultural structures and traditions, and those of the newly independent peoples and places in the Caribbean. Its narrator, an exiled political leader, traces his life and search for order through a series of bleak lodgings and hotel rooms in London, as well as ramshackle or pretentious villas in the Caribbean, finally affirming his existence as a permanent lodger or guest, a man without rootedness. For Naipaul's narrator, this discontinuity between his past and his present allows him to reinvent himself, sometimes in terms of the fantasies of British people, so that, for example, he can become 'the exotic dandy'. Selvon's characters, on the other hand, cling to an identity which links them to their Caribbean past and continues ways of speaking and narrating ('it have a ballad'), so that they also identify with one another rather than with white Londoners. Thus there is a difference, and not only in class, between Naipaul's inhabitants of isolated attic rooms and Selvon's narrator and friends who come together in the basement rented by Moses. But, as Susheila Nasta has pointed out, there is also an affinity in their sense of transience, the discovery that the myth of finding a home and motherland, a tradition to which they could lay claim, was a barren one. For Naipaul's protagonist, Ralph Singh, the magic of the past is powerless, the city remains colourless and two-dimensional.<sup>18</sup> Moses and his black London compatriots invoke with a certain awe legendary names such as Piccadilly Circus and Trafalgar Square, but even after many years, London remains both theirs and not-theirs.

The Irish author William Trevor, who moved to England from Cork in 1953, is one of the few white writers of the period who consistently acknowledge the presence of African and West Indian immigrants. Like Naipaul and Selvon, and later Caryl Phillips (in *The Final Passage* (1985)), he sets his fiction in lonely boarding houses, lodgings and hospitals. Combining compassion and irony, his novels, whether set in London or Ireland, portray the lives of those who are lonely and alienated. In a comment which compares interestingly with Achebe's remarks about the benefits of being a Christian outsider in Nigeria, Trevor said of his childhood in Ireland, 'What is now apparent to me is that being a Protestant in Ireland was a *help*, because it began the process of being an outsider – which I think all writers have to be.'<sup>19</sup> *The Boarding-House* (1965) has a cast of nine diverse characters, including a Nigerian, Mr Obd, who continues courting an Englishwoman long after she has stopped acknowledging him – an analogy perhaps with England's unwillingness to respond supportively to the African, Irish and West Indian immigrants who had seen England as an admired mother country. The novel's ending, in which Mr Obd, finally realizing his rejection, sets the boarding house on fire, might also be seen as analogous to the burnings of Anglo-Irish 'Big Houses' during the Irish Civil War, acts which accompanied the end of empire in Ireland and which also feature in some of Trevor's later fiction (as well as Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966)). *Miss Gomez and the Brethren* (1971) has as its central protagonist a Jamaican woman who has been orphaned by fire. In London she has worked as a stripper and a prostitute before becoming an ardent member of the Brethren of the Way and a cleaner at a decaying English pub, 'The Thistle Arms'. Her newfound faith allows her to act as a mainstay of compassion and intuitive understanding for the other (English) characters. She discovers on returning to Jamaica that the leader of the Brethren is a fraud, but nevertheless is able to sustain her faith. Despite the comedy that is a feature of Trevor's novel, and despite the illusions which arise out of deep psychological need and border on insanity, Miss Gomez is portrayed as a redemptive figure who clears up the physical and psychological mess that is postimperial England.<sup>20</sup>

The generation of writers who came to England in the 1950s and 1960s were typically male and single, and often believed themselves to be transient. Twenty years later, a new generation of authors, male and female, write out of the experience of being located in Britain, many of them either born in the United Kingdom or arriving as young children. Their fiction often focuses on the attempt to make a home in Britain, and frequently the protagonists are women, seeking to hold their families together and establish some sense of permanence. Emecheta's *Second Class Citizen* (1974), David Simon's *Railton Blues* (1983), Phillips's *The Final Passage*, Ravinda Randhawa's *A Wicked Old Woman*

(1987), Gurnah's *Dottie* (1990) and Farhana Sheikh's *The Red Box* (1991) all explore with varying degrees of complexity and ambivalence the meaning and consequences for young African, Asian and Caribbean women, their husbands, siblings and children, of living in a British community which is reluctant to accommodate them. The 1980s also saw the emergence of many women writers and supportive groups such as the Asian Women Writers Collective (to which Rukhsana Ahmad and Randhawa belonged), and the Caribbean Women Writers group. Much of their early work was featured in anthologies specifically devoted to writing by Asian and/or black women, and often reinforcing a rather homogenized sense of the situation and writing of immigrant women in Britain. Such collective identities were useful in establishing the presence of Asian and black women writers in Britain, expressing a sense of empowerment through collaboration, and often addressing specific grievances against their male counterparts. Many of the women anthologized in those early years have gone on to create powerfully individual visions and, indeed, to influence male writers to give greater attention to women characters.

Writers such as Gurnah, Phillips, Randhawa, Rushdie and, more recently on film and television as well as in fiction, Hanif Kureishi and Meera Syal, also play mockingly and ironically with the stereotyped identities within and against which those of Asian and African descent in Britain find themselves living. Agard, who arrived in England from Guyana in 1977, performs his sardonic poem 'Stereotype' with straw hat, beach shirt and accompanying trappings denoting popular images of the Caribbean. Such texts and performances reiterate the understanding that race and ethnicity are constructed identities, which may be performed differently within different contexts and for different audiences.

Kureishi's novel *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990), later translated to film, wittily satirizes both the English liberals and the immigrant Asians who trade in ethnicity. The child of an Indian father and English mother, Kureishi questions and subverts notions of fixed racial or sexual identity (his main protagonist, Karim, is bisexual), and writes from the perspective of someone who grew up in London in the 1960s. The novel begins:

My name is Karim Amir, and I am an Englishman born and bred, almost. I am often considered to be a funny kind of Englishman, a new breed as it were, having emerged from two old histories. But I don't care – Englishman I am (though not proud of it), from the South London Suburbs and going somewhere. Perhaps it is the odd mixture of continents and blood, or here and there, of belonging and not, that makes me restless and easily bored.<sup>21</sup>



That opening line recalls Homi Bhabha's description of the ways in which educated Indians were seen as 'white but not quite',<sup>22</sup> but here it is the protagonist who identifies himself, partly in acknowledgement of how he is perceived by others, as 'an Englishman born and bred, almost'. But if his mixed race and sexuality fix certain parameters and contexts for his identity, they also allow him to construct and perform changing selves. Above all, they allow him (and the author) to cast a sardonic eye on the ways in which his father, Haroon, and others cater to and profit from certain stereotypes. Thus Haroon presents himself as an Indian guru, teaching the 'Path' to enlightenment. And although Karim expostulates that 'Dad couldn't even find his way to Beckenham',<sup>23</sup> his performance as a guru is eagerly accepted by his white liberal mistress, Eva Kay, and her friends. Meanwhile, Karim and Eva's son Charlie are equally seduced by white working-class culture and each other. As Ruvana Ranasinha comments, *The Buddha of Suburbia*

illustrates two defining features of Kureishi's work. First it exemplifies the liminality of Kureishi's position as an 'in-between' or insider/outsider, which relates to the ironic distance that characterizes the novel, and is linked to Kureishi's specular function. From this position as an 'in-between', Kureishi (via his deeply autobiographical Karim) holds up a self-ironizing and satirical mirror to the white and minority communities that he moves between . . . This pervasive ironizing is linked to the second characteristic: the subversive, anarchic streak in Karim/Kureishi that resists all forms of authority. Karim/Kureishi is not simply positioned against the dominant culture, he takes that form of resistance as given: he questions all forms of subcultures, affiliations, and collectivities.<sup>24</sup>

Ravinda Randhawa also takes as her subject the temptation to appropriate and perform stereotyped roles, but in contrast to Kureishi her 1987 novel *A Wicked Old Woman* suggests, in the end, the need for 'affiliations, and collectivities'. The central character, Kulwant, is culturally, if not racially, hybrid, having grown up in England, the daughter of immigrant parents from India. The motif of multiple identities, a series of exterior layers which hide inner selves, is introduced in the novel's opening childhood memory, where Kulwant remembers her attempt to transform a Russian doll into an Indian one that has a *bindi*, a red mark on its forehead. As a schoolgirl, Kulwant has responded to a reflected image of herself as an oriental princess, an exotic and mysterious maiden who is the focus of desire for the blond English Michael. This image gives her status in her all-white school, and also provides an escape from her embarrassingly

un-English parents. But when Michael seeks marriage, Kulwant retreats in confusion from assimilation into an English family and goes to the other extreme, seeking to become 'the complete Indian woman'. From accepting an identity defined as 'the other', she turns to an identity which asserts her belonging within the Indian community, and demands an arranged marriage. Inevitably, her attempt to conform to that stereotype is doomed to failure, for it is based on fear, resentment and self-denial. Only later, after her husband has sought a more fulfilling relationship elsewhere, does Kulwant begin to understand the paradox that in her attempt to reject assimilation into Englishness, she took as the signifier of Indianness that special feature emphasized by Europeans as the mark of cultural difference, the arranged marriage.

Kulwant's third assumed identity, which corresponds to Western media images of India in the 1970s and 1980s, is that of the Third World Victim, the needy recipient of Oxfam and welfare state handouts. If she cannot become 'English' or 'Indian' in more acceptable terms, then she will become the monster they have created, as the title of this episode, 'Frankly Frankenstein', implies. As such, she need no longer take responsibility for her failures, for her family, or for her community. Her only project is to retreat, and perform her role as a helpless and poverty-stricken old woman, from whom nothing can be expected. She envisions her future as one of the unaccommodated, so marginalized that she will be able to take refuge as 'a smelly old hag whose address would be a patch under Charing Cross Bridge'.<sup>25</sup> As in *The Lonely Londoners*, *The Mimic Men*, Emecheta's *Second Class Citizen* and Phillips's *The Final Passage*, the motif of accommodation as a metaphor of belonging, or not belonging, in the larger society becomes significant. But as in these other novels, the problem of finding a home is not just metaphorical; there are numerous images of rejection and homelessness, or fear of homelessness. Randhawa's novel also contains the story of Rani, who runs away from home, denies any Indian identity, assumes the name of Rosalind, and finds meagre shelter in hostels, empty houses and squats. Most horrific are Kulwant's memories of the Indian family burned to death in their house by racist arsonists, an event which recalls other actual arson attacks in the 1970s and 1980s, such as the fire which caused the deaths of Mrs Abdul Karim and her children,<sup>26</sup> and the burning to death of thirteen young black people at a party in New Cross Road, London, in January 1981.

Although characters like Ammi and her daughters, who place community commitment above personal fulfilment, are presented positively, Randhawa is by no means uncritical of the artificiality of some aspects of Indian community in England. For Kulwant, the Asian Centre is a 'simulation Sub-Continent patched together with a flotsam of travel posters, batik work, examples of

traditional embroidery, cow bells and last but not least woven baskets that you knew were from Oxfam'.<sup>27</sup> She wonders if centres like these provide work merely for 'professional coolies', 'making a profession of their nationality'. Randhawa is also sceptical of writers and media workers who seek to write 'ethnic novels' or to present the community on stage and screen, and there is mingled sympathy and satire for Maya, who has embarked on research for a television programme on 'Madness in the Indian Community'. Randhawa's ambivalent portrayal of Maya's project is a precursor to the ambitious Indian women media presenters who are major characters in Atima Srivastava's novel *Transmissions* (1992) and Meera Syal's novel (subsequently a television series), *Life Isn't All Ha Ha Hee Hee* (1999).

Nevertheless, Randhawa's novel suggests that it is through community and storytelling that healing and some sense of wholeness can be found, and in this aspect it reflects Randhawa's own involvement in the Asian Women Writers Collective. Kulwant sheds her isolation and her chosen identity as a helpless cripple when she joins Maya, West Indian Angie and others in a marathon of storytelling which gradually pulls Rani back from semi-consciousness and the abyss of madness. Storytelling can heal the individual whose mind has been nearly destroyed by the seeming contradictions of being Asian, British and female. Communication can in turn create community and heal divisions within it. But collective political action is also required in the face of the vicious hatred displayed by white Englishmen who are unwilling to hear the stories. As a novel by a writer who explores the alternatives for immigrants of assimilation and/or reinvention as opposed to adherence to an ancestral identity, *A Wicked Old Woman* compares interestingly with Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* (1988), though Rushdie focuses on male immigrants rather than female ones.

Along with the many writers who explore a new sense and consequence of location and identity in Britain, these and others also continue the tradition of travel writing which was such a feature of colonialist writing, and still represents an important genre in contemporary British writing. While Anglo-English works emphasize the 'otherness' of the regions they explore and the people they encounter, postcolonial British writers often revisit and revision those places depicted by metropolitan travellers, or focus their travel writing on Britain and Europe. Here V. S. Naipaul is perhaps the preeminent example of a writer who alternates writing about his encounters with other cultures and places with the search for location within England and Englishness, culminating most powerfully and complexly in *The Enigma of Arrival* (1987). Naipaul described his return to and turn away from the Caribbean in *The Middle Passage* (1962), contentiously (and in contrast to C. L. R. James) pronouncing that

'History is built around achievement and creation; and nothing was created in the Caribbean.'<sup>28</sup> The incisive detail of Naipaul's descriptions led reviewers to compare him to D. H. Lawrence as a travel writer, and encouraged commissions for later works, such as *An Area of Darkness* (1964), which traverses India and finds there a static and sterile culture, *A Congo Diary* (1980), and *Among the Believers: An Islamic Journey* (1981). Naipaul's later novels often incorporate and build on the places and cultures described in the travel books, and simultaneously allude to earlier novelists and travellers such as Joseph Conrad. Thus *A Bend in the River* (1979) draws on his earlier 'Congo Diary' and essay on Conrad to create a contemporary version of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1902), while *Guerrillas* (1975) fictionalizes his series of essays on Michael X while also alluding to both *Jane Eyre* (1847) and *Wuthering Heights* (1847). One of the main protagonists, a South African journalist, is named Roche, while the Michael X figure sees himself as a kind of Heathcliff.

Whereas earlier British novels have tended to separate the genres of adventure/travel/quest and domestic/romance fiction, one of the distinctive and intriguing features of these novels by Naipaul is the creation of a hybrid fiction combining the quest and the domestic genres. Naipaul has generally focused on contemporary settings, but a later generation of black and Asian British novelists has begun to combine the exploration of place with the exploration and revisioning of history, resulting in a remapping and revisioning of both. Thus Phillips has published trenchant travel writing, most notably *The European Tribe* (1987), where he echoes, in his description of himself as both of and not of Europe, James's more optimistic vision of a new generation of black Britons. But his fiction also moves across time and location. Set in the late eighteenth century, *Cambridge* (1991) alludes to both Equiano and the Brontës through its linguistic mimicry and its two main protagonists. One is a deeply religious slave named sequentially Olumide, David Henderson and Cambridge; the other is Emily Cartwright, whose diaries express a romanticized and evasive picture of the Caribbean plantation she visits and the slaves who work on it. In this novel Phillips also alludes to yet another predecessor, the white Caribbean novelist Jean Rhys, and her response to *Jane Eyre* in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. The name and character of Cambridge's common law wife, Christiana, echoes the name of the formidable black servant and supposed 'obeah woman', Christophine, in Rhys's novel. In his 1989 novel *Higher Ground*, Phillips links the story of an eighteenth-century African with those of a twentieth-century African American prisoner and a Jewish woman whose family died in the concentration camps in Poland. *The Nature of Blood* (1997) revisits and revisions the Venice of Shakespeare's Othello and Shylock.



Like Naipaul, the novelists David Dabydeen and Gurnah have also drawn on Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* as a textual background and map against which to ground a new vision of African or black identities and terrains. *Paradise* was discussed in the previous chapter. Dabydeen's *The Intended* (1991) provides a sharp and witty rereading of Conrad through its relocation and 'filming' of the novel in the heart of London by a group of schoolboys of African, Asian and Caribbean descent. Like Phillips, Dabydeen has also turned to the eighteenth-century and the history of slavery as a means of bringing to life a suppressed history. *Slave Song* (1984), *Coolie Odyssey* (1988) and *Turner* (1994) are long poems or poetic sequences giving voice, sometimes in the Creolized and vivid language of Guyanese 'coolies' and slaves, to the experience of plantation life and immigration from India to Britain and Guyana. *Turner* takes as its starting point J. M. W. Turner's painting *Slavers Throwing Overboard the Dead and Dying*, with both the picture and the poem recreating the 1783 HMS *Zong* case, in which the captain of a slave ship was tried for throwing more than a hundred slaves overboard in order to collect insurance for this 'property', a crime which the ex-slave and abolitionist Olaudah Equiano had been instrumental in publicizing and contesting. In almost all his works, Dabydeen sets up a linguistic and aesthetic struggle between the cultural traditions and experiences framed by the Western canon, and histories and experiences which he as the descendant of a Guyanan plantation worker seeks to express.

The *Zong* case is also taken as the inspiration for Fred D'Aguiar's novel *Feeding the Ghosts* (1997), which writes back to Dabydeen, Turner, and the early slave narrators in its recreation of the consciousness and voice of an imagined survivor, Mintah, an enslaved woman. Mintah's memories, dreams and visions as she floats in the sea encapsulate the struggle between a destructive history and the potentially redemptive powers of imagination. As members of that younger generation who were educated in Britain in the 1970s, both Dabydeen and D'Aguiar offer in their poetry and fiction a confident response not only to a specifically canonical English literary tradition, but also to a tradition of black and Asian writing within and without Britain. For Dabydeen and D'Aguiar that tradition includes a distinctively Guyanan one, featuring the powerful visionary and antirealist fiction of Harris, and later Pauline Melville, as well as other poets such as Agard and Nichols.

This later generation of writers (including Gurnah, Phillips and Rushdie) responds implicitly or explicitly to the experience of living in a Britain which heard outbursts of racist and anti-immigration rhetoric from Enoch Powell, Margaret Thatcher and other prominent members of the establishment. It also witnessed riots in many British cities, and a concerned response to these by liberal institutions and members of the public. Schools and some universities

in Britain in the late 1970s and 1980s sought to revise the literary curriculums to include works by African, African American, Asian and black British writers such as Achebe, Agard, Anita Desai, Dhondy, Ellison and Toni Morrison. Organizations such as the Inner London Education Authority (ILEA) and the Association for Teaching Caribbean and African Literature (ATCAL) brought together teachers and writers from educational institutions and community organizations throughout the country to discuss texts and curriculums, and to disseminate information about Asian and black writing. ATCAL was responsible for inaugurating in 1984 the still flourishing journal of Caribbean, African, Asian and Associated literatures, *Wasafiri*. Under Susheila Nasta's editorship *Wasafiri* has continued to fulfil its original aim of creating an accessible forum for multicultural debates and to promote and give space to new creative writing. As a focus for postcolonial writing both inside and outside Britain, *Wasafiri* remains unique, though its presence has had a considerable influence on other journals and publishers in encouraging them to include within their briefs anglophone writing from a wider spectrum of writers and cultural traditions. But perhaps most importantly for this discussion, it has helped to reinforce that sense of a wider cultural community, a multicultural audience, which is responsive to black and Asian British writers.

Such a sense of a diverse and multicultural audience has in turn encouraged a greater diversity of writing which paradoxically often rests upon a feeling of solidarity among black and Asian Britons in the face of the 'little England' mentality expressed by Mrs Thatcher, some members of her cabinet, and some newspapers. In the 1980s Rushdie celebrated the 'hybridity' of his culture and identity, and 'hybridity' has become a term proclaimed by many later writers and critics, including preeminently Homi Bhabha. In a 1995 manifesto, 'Re-Inventing Britain', Bhabha advocated a move away from 'the multi-culturalist thinking of the eighties', which in his view 'sought to revise the homogenous notion of national culture by emphasizing the multiple identities of race/class/gender' and thus reinforced the notion of national or ethnic identities as given. For Bhabha, multiculturalist thinking obscures 'the hybrid cosmopolitanism of contemporary metropolitan life', a hybridity which is constantly in process and transformation.<sup>29</sup> Like Rushdie, he draws attention to the transformational powers of a cosmopolitan migrant culture, for not only do migrants reimagine their 'homelands', their places of ancestral origin, they also 'impose their needs on their new earth, bringing their own coherence to the new-found land, imagining it afresh'.<sup>30</sup> Commenting on Bhabha's manifesto, Stuart Hall perhaps reflects his experience as a Jamaican who came to England in the 1950s, and his academic grounding as an eminent sociologist, when he expresses some scepticism about the view that globalization 'has completely evaporated the space

of national culture'.<sup>31</sup> Indeed, he sees in many cases a hardening of cultural nationalism in the face of dislocation and globalization, though he, too, has also advocated a move away from fixed identities to an acceptance of the 'positionality' of identity, a sense of self which foregrounds different aspects (race, history, gender, family, location, work, cultural affiliations, etc.), according to the context in which one is speaking or acting.<sup>32</sup>

Rushdie's own fiction is perhaps the most widely recognized example of writing which reinvents histories and identities and celebrates hybridity, in terms of not only cultures but also genres. Various described by critics as magic realist, postmodern and postcolonial, his novels draw on traditional Indian oral and written narrative forms, and popular Indian film and theatre, as well as shifting and often disconcerting perspectives embraced by writers such as Gabriel García Márquez. Remarkable for their energy, linguistic playfulness and exuberance, his novels are also sharply satiric regarding the politics of India, Pakistan, and contemporary Britain. *Midnight's Children* (1981), discussed in chapter 6, won the Booker Prize in 1981 and was subsequently named the 'Best of the Bookers' in the twenty-five years of the award. Paradoxically *The Satanic Verses* (1988), the only one of Rushdie's novels which is mainly set (if not grounded) in Britain, is also the one which has received the most virulent attacks from abroad, and resulted in a death sentence (*fatwa*) by Iran's Ayatollah Khomeini, as well as bannings, book-burnings and death threats elsewhere.

Sharply critical of conservative British nationalism (as well as other nationalisms), *The Satanic Verses* revisits British history and migrancy through the scenes set in the Hot Wax Club, an alternative version to that established by the iconic figures in Madame Tussaud's. Here the wax figures include the eighteenth-century black British writer Ignatius Sancho, Mary Seacole 'who did as much in the Crimea as another magic-lamping Lady, but, being dark, could scarce be seen for the flame of Florence's candle',<sup>33</sup> Abdul Karim, Grace Jones, Septimus Severus (a black slave brought to Britain by the Romans), and the eighteenth-century African antislavery campaigner Ukawsaw Gronniosaw. Its episodic structure, its linguistic and generic transformations, and its character as a kind of *Bildungsroman* also recall G. V. Desani's *All About H. Hatter* (1948), whose influence Rushdie has acknowledged. But as Leela Gandhi points out, the historical icons of an immigrant history in Britain are deployed by the Hot Wax Club's DJ, Pinkawalla, to 'lay claims to the nation's present'.<sup>34</sup> And, in a mode reminiscent of the poet Linton Kwesi Johnson (the novel also playfully refers to a character named Hanif Johnson, presumably an amalgamated allusion to Kureishi and Johnson), the DJ chants: 'Now-mi-feel-indignation-when-dem-talk-immigration-when-dem-make-insinuation-we-no-part-o-de-nation-an-mi-make-proclamation-a-de-true-situation-how-

*we-make-contribution-since-de-Rome-occupation*.'<sup>35</sup> Pinkawalla is described as a remarkably hybrid character, 'a seven-foot albino, his hair the palest rose, the whites of his eyes likewise, his features unmistakably Indian, the haughty nose, long thin lips, a face from *Hamza-nama* cloth. An Indian who has never seen India, East-India-man from the West Indies, white black man. A star.'<sup>36</sup> As an albino Indian and a singer, Pinkawalla recalls the albino child in 'The Feast of Lights', a story written almost a century earlier by another immigrant from India, Cornelia Sorabji,<sup>37</sup> but the difference between the child's shrill mimicry of Englishness and Pinkawalla's confidently hybrid mingling of cultures and linguistic forms marks the historical change that has taken place in the movement from a bicultural identity, opposing two established traditions and homelands, to the fluidly communal and immigrant inflected cosmopolitan culture that Rushdie celebrates.<sup>38</sup>

In the 1990s and the first years of the twenty-first century, new realist fiction and drama continues to make an impact, for instance in the prizewinning *White Teeth* (2000) by Zadie Smith, which gives voice to Anglo-Saxon, Asian and West Indian families in a grounded London setting, or the 'yardie' novels of Courttia Newland, or the historical revisiting of the eighteenth-century black British community in S. I. Martin's *Incomparable World* (1996), or the *Bildungsromans* by Andrea Levy of young West Indian women rediscovering their family histories.<sup>39</sup> But the last decade of the century also produced some striking experimental fiction and poetry, which sidesteps the powerful models provided by Rushdie by drawing on African and Amerindian traditions which in turn transform canonical English and European literary icons. Ben Okri's *The Famished Road*, awarded the Booker Prize in 1991, takes the traditional Yoruba (and Igbo) figure of the *abiku* (a child returned from the dead) to portray a hauntingly surreal picture of urban Nigeria, and its thoroughly hybrid culture. Pauline Melville links Dante, Amerindian legend and clever mimicry of Claude Lévi-Strauss and Evelyn Waugh to revisit Guyana in *The Ventriloquist's Tale* (1997). Bernardine Evaristo's *Lara* (1997) combines verse and prose in a richly evocative traversing of Brazilian, British/Irish and Nigerian traditions and communities. Evaristo is also a witty and unusual poet, whose second verse novel, *The Emperor's Babe* (2001), recreates the world of a young girl of Sudanese parentage who grows up in Roman London 1800 years ago. In her autobiographical *The Adoption Papers* (1991), a set of poems which interweave the voices of a natural and an adoptive mother with that of their Scottish Nigerian child, Jackie Kay draws on the distinctively Scottish female tradition exemplified by Liz Lochhead. Kay's novel *Trumpet* (1998) tells the story of the love between a Scottish woman, a black trumpeter who 'passes' as a man, and their adopted mixed-race son. *Trumpet* allows the reader to understand the

extent to which individual selves as well as visions of Britain may be continually invented and reinvented. Her writing, like Evaristo's, Phillips's and Syal's, is also a reminder that London is not the only locale for black and Asian British writing; within Britain the voices and accents of writers from the postcolonies have become multiple in their inflections, locations and hybrid cultures, transforming concepts of Britishness.<sup>40</sup>

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## Chapter 11

### Citizens of the world: reading postcolonial literature

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Over the past forty years, writing by postcolonial writers in Britain and the former British colonies has attracted numerous prestigious literary prizes. The Nobel Prize for Literature has been awarded to the Australian novelist Patrick White, the Nigerian playwright, poet and novelist Wole Soyinka, the St Lucian poet Derek Walcott, the Trinidadian author V. S. Naipaul, the South African novelist Nadine Gordimer and the Irish poet Seamus Heaney (and earlier in the century to the Irish writers W. B. Yeats and Samuel Beckett). Since its inception in 1969, nearly half of the winners of Britain's most prestigious literary award, the Man Booker Prize for fiction, have been writers from former colonies, including Salman Rushdie (whose 1981 *Midnight's Children* was also named 'Best of the Bookers' J. M. Coetzee (twice), Peter Carey (twice), V. S. Naipaul, Michael Ondaatje, Margaret Atwood, Ben Okri, Keri Hulme, Nadine Gordimer, Thomas Keneally, J. G. Farrell, Roddy Doyle, John Banville, Arundhati Roy, and Ruth Praver Jhabvala. Many of these writers have also appeared several times on the shortlist, as have other postcolonial authors such as William Trevor, Abdulrazak Gurnah, Rohinton Mistry, Carol Shields, Doris Lessing, Anita Desai, and André Brink.

As journalists and critics have been quick to point out, literary prizes provide welcome publicity not only for their sponsors but also for the publishers of these authors, and the Man Booker Prize is conducted in such a way as to maximize publicity and book sales through advertising the shortlisted writers and encouraging speculation and participation by readers before the televised announcement of the winner. Many critics, including myself, would agree with Richard Todd's argument that the Booker Prize awards have encouraged a greater awareness of Britain as a pluralist society,<sup>1</sup> and welcome its recognition of writers from 'the Commonwealth'. However, the very success of postcolonial writers in these and other awards has given rise to cynicism, a suspicion among certain critics that the metropolitan centre has appropriated postcolonial writing for its own ends, and has sought to control which ones should be given the seal of approval. Thus some African and African American critics claimed that the award of the Nobel Prize for Literature to Wole Soyinka and