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## Preface

The first Special Issue of ACOLIT introduces the work of young German scholars of the New Literatures in English and, at the same time, illustrates the variety of themes at hand and critical approaches practiced now, two decades or more after academics in Germany began to take serious interest in Commonwealth Literature. Similarly, with this issue the editors invite contributions, hopefully from students of many different German universities, to continue this project in future. There will be no restrictions as to thematic choice, methodical procedure or the use of either English or German. Rather, we feel that the main aim of further Special Issues of ACOLIT should be to inform colleagues as well as students of the New Literatures in English about the wide variety of studies and thus their increasing importance within the area of English Studies, understood as an interdisciplinary and comparative discipline in the humanities.

Although the seven papers collected here seem, on the surface, to differ widely, all of them clearly illustrate their authors' keen awareness of and concern with important segments of the contemporary critical debate, be it on the one hand, post-structuralism, deconstruction and gender studies, or on the other hand, post-colonial theory and minority discourse. This is as refreshing and exciting to note as, e.g. reflections on didactic and interdisciplinary aspects of teaching the New Literatures to German students.

With the Special Issues of ACOLIT we hope to open a new forum for a fruitful scholarly exchange and create an opportunity to present studies of students which otherwise hardly find a chance to leave the departments of their origin. Although no dateline has been fixed as yet for the next issue we hope to receive papers (of approximately 15 pages and preferably on disk) as soon as possible.

Dieter Riemenschneider

## Dreaming the Civil Society: Hybridity in the Novels of Wilson Harris

UWE SCHÄFER

*in mutual heart, mutual uncertainty across generations,  
across seas and spaces, as to who is divine parent,  
who human child, who will parent the future, who inherit  
the future, we surrender ourselves to each other*

Wilson Harris, *Carnival*, p.172

### Literature and Decolonization

While the millenium is drawing to a close, fundamental changes have occurred in the political landscape. Not only has the global map been recently re-written by the struggles of the peoples living in East Europe; an even more dramatic and far-reaching transformation of our conception of the world goes back to the mass migration of people all over the world. In its wake, neatly defined concepts of centre and periphery in our everyday thinking have become permeable and are causing a prevailing mood of constant liquefaction of dominant Western ideologies. Institutions designed for the production of these ideologies, such as universities, mirror these global processes. An increasing number of scholars have dedicated their efforts to the decolonization of knowledge 'as we know it', the knowledge of the white western male individual.

The reactions to these efforts are manifold: At the very best people feel obliged to retreat into lamenting postmodern tergiversation instead of welcoming cognitive change as an expression of "Europe's cultural awareness that it is no longer the unquestioned and dominant centre of the world"<sup>1</sup>; at worst the consequence is xenophobic structural violence, e.g. the establishment and maintenance of historically too well-known bars of admission, leave alone the daily acts of common violence enacted (but not necessarily perceived) just under our very eyes.

Nevertheless, these phenomena seem to be a secret confession of the efficiency of the unceasing efforts of people and peoples hitherto silenced by colonial discourse and depicted as Other in a European fantasy about a world order on European terms to give voice to their side of her/his/their story.

These efforts, however, are not sufficient for the establishment of a global democratic civil society; nor is the bare acceptance of the relativity of metaphysical concepts. It deems instead necessary to comprehend exclusions and silences as moral losses. A radical shift towards the unlearning of apparent institutionalized privileges, in other words, the decolonization of the colonizer's mind is required.

One of the postcolonial writers prominent in this respect is Wilson Harris. His writing provides profound insights into the architecture of cognitive dimensions of

colonialism and language experiments suitable (and urgently needed) to supersede realist modes of writing that are deeply involved in the production of their colonialist and neo-colonialist manifestations.

### Postcolonialism and Psychoanalysis

The Western individual conceives of himself (and usually to a lesser degree, herself) as a closed entity or space, an active, successful, progressive, social person - at least this is the daily enacted fantasy in the images produced in vast amounts by the media, in advertising, in the nuclear family, at schools, at work, and in other social contexts where subjects are normalized. Global machines and the persons working in them are manufacturing an ego-ideal that by way of consent and the implicit threat of exclusion or social marginalization is said to be worth striving for. This is a mechanism internalized from early childhood onwards: The ego learns to distinguish between her/himself and its body and to establish a hierarchical relation between them, an imaginary hegemonial order, or rather a Cartesian phallacy within her/himself.

Every individual acquiring this *Weltanschauung* (world-view) perceives its experiences structured by hierarchized dyads like the one mentioned above (which may be regarded as two related elements of the same pattern, that nevertheless remain dyadically structured). But the ego is not just a passive recipient of its 'world'; it also acts on reality and thus shapes it according to these cognitive structures. Therefore it comes as no surprise that these dyads structure almost every aspect of social life and are actively reproduced in distinguishing between and hierarchising Other and Self, object and subject, unconscious and conscious, female and male, socialist and capitalist, homo- and heterosexual, black and white, fantastic and real, nothing and being, etc.

Furthermore, there is no *positive* definition of the western ego; it defines itself always in terms of exclusions, by what it is not. Therefore, the following factors become a part of a creative approach towards decolonization:

- the de-centering of the Cartesian Ego, which provides a basis for the subversion of imagined dependence relations that allow for the establishment and maintenance of colonial and neocolonial power relations<sup>2</sup>
- the observation of the fundamental mechanisms of desire/sexuality contributing to the establishment and maintenance of symbolic orders
- the insight that power relations hinge crucially on the distinction between male and female. Because of the structural similarities of power relations that are involved, this is an issue that is highly relevant to any reading of texts in the postcolonial context

Two philosophers who are relevant in this context, and who constantly cross the borders of psychoanalysis and philosophy, are Deleuze and Guattari. In *A Thousand Plateaus* they take up the above-mentioned issue of hierarchized dyads (which they name 'binary oppositions') and describe the effects of this cognitive structure for the self-perception of the subject as follows:

We are segmented from all around and in every direction (...) in a binary fashion, following the great major dualist oppositions: social classes, but also men-women, adults-children, and so on (...) in a circular fashion, in ever larger circles, ever wider disks or coronas, like Joyce's letter: my affairs, my neighbour's affairs, my city's, my countries (...) in a linear fashion, along a straight line or a number of straight lines, of which each segment represents an episode or "proceeding".<sup>3</sup>

These segmentations are embedded in the subtle fabric of power relations in everyday life which postcolonial writers, and especially Wilson Harris, have set out to transform: "The modern political system is a global whole, unified and unifying (...) [M]odern life has not done away with segmentation but has on the contrary made it exceptionally rigid".<sup>4</sup> It is especially this problem of segmentation imposed by technology (Deleuze/Guattari's 'global machine') the transformation of which is addressed in Harris' writing:

How can we begin to revise the technologies in which we lodge our furies, technologies we have planted around the earth and which seem immovable? How can we begin to revise them unless one looks very deeply into the capacity of fiction by way of its imageries and textual perspectives to "consume its own biases"?<sup>5</sup>

### The Cognitive Legacy of Colonialism

Writers who are serious about their postcolonial, feminist and postmodern goals are trying to use the potentials of language to subvert existing power relations by the creation of spaces of the imaginary that allow for the re-creation of subjectivity and, in its wake, permanent social transformation. This involves, as I have pointed out earlier, the cognitive structures of the colonizer as well as those of the colonized.

The psyche of the colonized has been described by Fanon, and the influence imperialism has had on self-perception and world-view by Ngugi.<sup>6</sup> They emphasize the importance of the transformation of the individual being towards a consciousness of individual and collective being. The main problem here lies with the constant production and reproduction of differences by western capitalist society to the effect that the subject is restrained from conceiving of itself as a unified whole beyond exclusions of the Other as prescribed by Western epistemologies. Instead, the colonized subject conceives of itself as an alienated, fragmented entity unable to determine the institutions and ideological, historical, aesthetic and political systems which it is tied to,<sup>7</sup> i.e. the perception of hierarchical power relations. Nowadays the exertion of colonial authority is less characterized by direct intervention but takes its effect via the production of hierarchized dyads of 'Self' and 'Other'; the term discrimination in its literal sense refers to exactly this process. Under the conditions of capitalist production they form the pattern of a vast range of mass produced images serving to maintain power relations in the hands of the producers of these images: Western mass media and technology.

On the other hand, strategies of resistance have been developed in postcolonial writing which historically range from plantation songs, early novels (e.g. *Equiano's Travels*) or the writings of the Négritude movement to texts based on models of hybridity and syncreticity. In the beginning of postcolonial writing it was necessary to abrogate and appropriate the English language,<sup>8</sup> the latter models originated from



a desire to overcome the dangers of a "reverse ethnocentrism"<sup>9</sup> reproducing hierarchies set up by colonialism and "to communicate the message of revolutionary unity and hope".<sup>10</sup>

Wilson Harris has included these goals in his writing to the extent that

- the repetition of colonial images and signifiers and their interrogation, interpretation and appropriation within a postcolonial context exposes their function as insignia of authority and exposes them for a critical evaluation of power structures
- they may serve to establish a "creative and re-creative balance between diverse cultures"<sup>11</sup> in the sense that the compartmentalized conception of self and experience is re-shaped into a creative vision
- the biases and limitations of perception produced by commonsense realism, positivist science and imposed by technology can be replaced by an 'alchemy of the word': The truth is the alchemy of the word, alchemy of the image, is not allegory in Dantesque, large scale, absolute sovereign theatre or fixed abode. Alchemy converts, subverts all realms into profoundest unscience-in-depth.<sup>12</sup>

### Hybridity and Postcolonial Writing

The possibility of the transgression of alienation and the formation of subjectivity in these models of writing has led to the model known as 'hybridity'. Homi Bhabha gives the following definition:

Hybridity is the revaluation of the assumption of colonial identity through the repetition of discriminatory identity effects (...) It unsettles the mimetic or narcissistic demands of colonial power but reimplicates its identifications in strategies of subversion that turn the gaze of the discriminated back upon the eye of power. For the colonial hybrid is the articulation of the ambivalent space where the rite of power is enacted on the site of desire, making its objects at once disciplinary and disseminatory (...), a negative transparency.<sup>13</sup>

I regard this as the first step towards a transformation of the colonized mind: recognition of one's own situation by the carnival force of mockery and satire unveiling the 'masks of conquest'.<sup>14</sup> The next step is the re-discovery of 'denied' knowledges,<sup>15</sup> entering the dominant discourse which can neither be subsumed under an assumed identity between cultures and thus giving way to cultural relativism - a situation of permanent revolution:

Hybridity reverses the formal process of disavowal so that the violent dislocation, the Entstellung of the act of colonization becomes the conditionality of colonial discourse.<sup>16</sup>

But hybridity does not stop here for Harris. His writing takes the reader back to the re-discovery of a universal moral silenced by colonial and neo-colonial discourse. This moral cannot be achieved once and for all but has to be created over and over again:

[M]oral codes affecting humanity lie in the great rituals and religions of all peoples, but whatever consensus there is between such religions or rituals remains ceaselessly

imperilled, it would seem, by a failure of imagination within communities to make their moral codes creatively complex, creatively vital.<sup>17</sup>

### The Decolonization of Literary Texts

I would like to point out some ways in which the 'decolonization of the mind' can be achieved by literary texts in general and then proceed to Wilson Harris' poetics. One of the prerequisites is the creation of what Eco<sup>18</sup> has characterized as *opera aperta*, which provides a basis for the critique of monolithic unities created by realist writing. In a more thorough theoretical model, Deleuze/Guattari comprise the textual characteristics of a multi-layered text under the term 'rhizome':

Unlike trees or their roots, the rhizome connects any point to any other point, and its traits are not necessarily linked to traits of the same nature; it brings into play very different regimes of signs, *and even nonsign states*. The rhizome is reducible neither to the One nor the multiple.<sup>19</sup>

The meaning of signs is always attributed in a given context (which in western society works by exclusion). Within this framework signs or sign-systems going back to non-western epistemologies are necessarily perceived as non-signs. A textual system that includes non-signs must therefore be regarded as a rhizome. Many postcolonial texts, and especially those of Wilson Harris, are characterized by

- the disruption and liquefaction of Eurocentric notions of history as a linear process, and by the revaluation of space which guarantees the visibility of the subaltern suppressed in western historiography by the removal of the *aporias* of historical discourse. By working against the schemas of historicism and the silent extirpations of historicism that continue to produce the narratives of neo-colonialism, the institutionalized perpetuation of the construction of the colonizer's self-image can be transcended
- the subversion of the colonizer's ego-ideal by problematizing its artificial character as a construct based on a system of exclusions and evaluations
- the subversion of metaphysical truths.

All these factors combined allow for the re-discovery of creativity and imagination by the individual and collective subject who is now in a position to actively re-shape and validate perception and reality. The consequence is the discovery of the other side of the pre-fabricated forms of narcissistic enjoyment in our monolithic commodity-fetishistic society and an escape from the machine described by Deleuze/Guattari, and the "opportunity for the renaissance of a more 'balanced' civilization".<sup>20</sup>

### Hybridity: A Language of Difference

By formulating and practising a poetics of appropriating and transcending realist discourses, many post-colonial writers have embarked on this project. Although one has to be cautious in subsuming writers from different regions and different cultural backgrounds under the heading 'post-colonial radical aesthetics'<sup>21</sup> in order to avoid

the danger of appropriating the Other's individuality, I hold that this can be avoided if the individual historical and cultural background is not silenced and excluded from the analysis but used as a starting point for a process of cross-cultural, mutual fertilization of epistemologies; assumed inherent dangers should not inhibit cross-cultural readings per se. Furthermore, it can hardly be denied that literature in English is deeply marked by colonialism and the education of writers in institutions set up by the respective colonial authorities. To resort to cultural essentialism may entail the negligence of the historical determination of existing power relations; which, at least in my view, need critical evaluation and transformation. Writers belonging to this category are e.g. Amos Tutuola (*The Palm-Wine Drinkard*), Raja Rao (*Kanthapura*), Bessie Head (*Maru*), all referring to oral traditions; the magical realism of Salman Rushdie (*Midnight's Children*); the use of creole language in George Lamming's novels (e.g. *The Emigrants*), and many more. One of the reasons why I have chosen texts of Wilson Harris as examples of this kind of writing is that I have not only found him among the first and most radical post-colonial writers with regard to a poetics of 'anti-realism' and anti-European ways of constructing history. In perceiving fragmentation and hybridity as a positive, creative force he offends the common decency of academic discourse in the institutionalized forms of the human sciences which has recently begun - partly due to the introduction of new technologies - to develop heavily into the direction of a positivist science. This is certainly one of the reasons why there has been comparatively less critical writing published about him than about other writers of his generation, though his influence on many younger writers is considerable.<sup>22</sup> As early as 1967 Harris sets out to criticize colonial strategies of novel writing, which for him are characterized by a) the claim to truth (e.g. in realist writing), b) common sense, and c) ego-ideal:

'Character' in the [nineteenth-century, U.S.] novel rests more or less on the self-sufficient individual - on elements of 'persuasion' (...) rather than 'dialogue' or 'dialectic' (...). The novel of persuasion rests on grounds of apparent common sense (...). The tension which emerges is the tension of individuals - great or small - on an accepted plane of society we are persuaded has an inevitable existence.<sup>23</sup>

His key to the transformation of colonial and neocolonial Eurocentric ontologies and epistemologies is language and its restriction to fixed biases and meanings within and between texts.<sup>24</sup> He tries to overcome these by the transformation of fixed, reductionist dyads into a dialogue of multi-layered plateaus of meaning:

The paradox of cultural heterogeneity, or cross-cultural capacity, lies in the evolutionary thrust it restores to orders of the imagination, the ceaseless dialogue it inserts between hardened conventions and eclipsed or half-eclipsed otherness, within an intuitive self that moves endlessly into flexible patterns, arcs or bridges of community.<sup>25</sup>

Harris has emphasized the necessity of fragmenting classical narrative modes in the direction of "intuitive clues that appear in a text one creates. That text moves or works in concert with other texts to create a multi-textual dialogue".<sup>26</sup> This relates to Deleuze/Guattari's 'rhizome' as a statement like the following by Harris shows: "The tautology of the story-line is fractured in favour of a mysterious continuity that defies absolute models, absolute formula".<sup>27</sup> This fiction releases imaginative

powers in the reader (Harris calls this "fiction that seeks through complex rehearsal to consume its own biases").<sup>28</sup> His novels defy any authoritative reading; the reader is entangled in an Anancy-web of endlessly *becoming* interpretations. The characters of his early novels (e.g. in *Palace of the Peacock*), and in his later texts even the narrator, become agents of the text fictionalizing their author,<sup>29</sup> the most striking examples perhaps being the biographer Jonathan Weyl in *Carnival*, the character W.H. in *The Infinite Rehearsal* stealing the fictional autobiography of Robin Redbreast Glass,<sup>30</sup> and the manuscript given by Anselm to Wilson Harris (now giving his full name) before disappearing into the Macusi heartland in South America.<sup>31</sup>

By drawing on the creative subterranean powers of vanished pre-Columbian cultures (the music of the Carib bone-flute, the Toltec cosmogony of successive world ages personified in Quetzalcoatl etc.) Harris introduces nonsign states into the prevailing sign states in the rhizome of enlightenment rationalism (modern physics cosmogony, land surveying) and literature (Goethe's *Faust*, Dante's *Divine Comedy*, and Homer's *Odyssey* - all themselves hybrid works). The "subaltern" becomes not only visible, as in Spivak's dictum, but forms a part of a rhizome of non-exclusive traditions in which these heritages are shared in an infinite number of potential encounters of individual and collective imaginations. Therefore, Harris does not only conform to the concept of the rhizome, but extends and enhances it within the dimension of a moral vision.

For Harris the fabrication of colonial history is characterized by a narrative mode of 'realistic immediacy' and 'progressive realism'. The first serves "to reduce the world into convenient passivities and to enshrine a deprivation of the senses into tools of communication", the second "to erase the past (...) with its linear bias".<sup>32</sup> These are cognitive structures responsible for the ecological disaster we are facing because they reduce people and landscapes to passive objects. Instead, Harris opts for the conception of these objects as alive, as texts in themselves, "living texts",<sup>33</sup> and thus for rebuilding the links broken by the metanarrative of progressive realism. On the other hand, this is the common ground of cultures seemingly diverted by space and time. Harris exemplifies this in showing the links between science and art, European painting, the Aztec calendar and Australian Aboriginal painting set up by creative imagination.<sup>34</sup>

I have mentioned above that the preference of metaphorical over metonymical tropes is a characteristic of colonialist and neocolonialist universalist discourse. It leads to the eviction of differences of race, class and gender and to the silences that then again have to be broken by postcolonial writing. Here Homi Bhabha points out the "collaboration of historicism and realism"<sup>35</sup> and quotes Harris as an example for the inadequacy of universalist metaphors for the representation of an environment "steeped (...) in such broken conceptions as well as misconceptions of the residue and meaning of conquest".<sup>36</sup>

The ideal of the self-sufficient individual as a historical and ideological determinant of Western discourse is the point of critique I would like to focus on in the following readings. This is an issue that has been one of the central themes of Harris' critical writing and represents an 'Anancy' thread through all of his novels.



### Hybridity and Universal Consciousness

I will exemplify the goals listed above and their appearance in Harris' textual strategies by referring to some of his texts. First, there is the issue of the 'open text'. In his Cambridge lecture on "Judgement and Dream" he explains some of the different layers of meaning in the opening paragraph of his first novel *Palace of the Peacock* and their 'ceaseless rehearsal', which enables the reader to revise her/his biases, "the apparently solid ground on which we stand".<sup>37</sup> The language in this paragraph is that of the unconscious, of the "seeing closed eye" promoting creative resources as opposed to the conscious "living dead eye". The dyadical, hierarchized power structure of these terms is re-vi-sed; the "dead seeing eye" of clarity, realism, fixation and bias is relativized by the "seeing closed eye" of doubt, dream, unsuspected connections and rehearsal: Common sense gives way to a web of subtle connections. In *Carnival* the narrator of Everyman Masters' spiritual biography is able to feel the psychological wound Masters has received as a child when threatened by a rapist. This technique de-centers realist conceptions of space: the wound was received in New Forest, South America, whereas the location at the beginning of the text is London; further, time: the wound is actually felt by the narrator, though the event takes place in the early 1920s; individuality: the narrator is physically connected to Everyman Masters and re-lives Masters' experience: "I felt a shiver run through my veins as through his wound".<sup>38</sup> This experience provides an insight into the fabric of power of the hierarchized and separated elements in those cognitive structures serving capitalist commodity fetishism: "To crawl or to stop in mindless attachment to the instrument of power that fashions one's nerves is to appear to live in freedom".<sup>39</sup> The loss of the individual consciousness becomes a "creative amnesia",<sup>40</sup> allowing for a re-discovery of the collective unconscious, or to use Harris' term, the 'universal unconscious': "the blow that *dis-members*, yet may occasion one to *re-member*".<sup>41</sup>

Harris rejects the category of the 'author' the fantasy of an authority consciously controlling the process of text production according to a previously defined objective so that he can show the decisive role of creative imagination in art. He prefers to speak of his own vulnerability and intuitive imagination as the driving force behind his writing. This insistence makes his work difficult to understand and to incorporate within the parameters of publishing and academic discourse in a bourgeois capitalist society, which continues to treat texts in terms of 'author' and 'work', thus reproducing the ideology of commodity fetishism and its preference for partial images in the field of literary studies. These partial images, however superficially diverted, are nevertheless subconsciously interwoven and are not excluded from Harris' writing, but mark the point of departure for the complex intuitive vision his characters gain on their journeys. As Everyman Masters, one of W.H.'s masks in *Carnival*, explains:

The partial image is biased, yes, but it is also in conflict with inherent bias - it is a part of something incalculably whole and stark and true. Such wholeness cannot be confined or structured absolutely; its complex nakedness and community of spirit eludes us with every mask or costume or dress (...) Wholeness is the unique mediation of fiction and spirit between partial images.<sup>42</sup>

The second issue is the search for the universal unconscious: The infinite rehearsal of the Carnival masks actually produces this wholeness through the admitted partiality of the respective images or masks in a hybrid perception of reality that calls the relativity of the writers' and readers' points of view to attention. Jonathan Weyl, Masters' biographer, sets out to find this initial "unity of Mankind (...) within fragmented conventions and treaties, false clarities, false economic ideals",<sup>43</sup> a unity going back not only to pre-Columbian, but also to pre-Socratic thought. Therefore it comes as no surprise that the injunction above the portals of Everyman Masters' college implies that "The Aion is a boy who plays, placing the counters here and there. To a child belongs the cosmic mastery". These lines, ascribed to "Heraclitus the obscure" (only a few hundred lines of Heraclitus' philosophy have come down to us) run parallel to Harris' poetics: The quintessence of Heraclitean *logos* is the unity of all things.<sup>44</sup> This unity is a unity within difference;<sup>45</sup> in other words, a model of hybridity.

The third issue is the ego-ideal of Western thought mentioned above. The hierarchical, repressive metaphor as the preferred narrative mode of the realist ego gives way to metonymy. This is what Bhabha<sup>46</sup> alludes to when he speaks of the significance of metonymy for the process of decolonization (of colonizer and colonized). Drake<sup>47</sup> has shown that this technique can be traced back to animistic religions which ascribe life to objects regarded as lifeless in Western epistemology and conceive of the universe as a "play of forces".<sup>48</sup> Transferred to the realm of literature the life of a text can be regarded as the play of the elements of a text.

Another aspect is the idea that every 'object' generates other inherent possibilities of itself, a concept which originates from the idea of *zemi* in the epistemology of the South American Macusi Indians, a feature prominent in *The Four Banks of the River of Space*. *Zemi* is recognizable in the image of the rocks in the Waterfall coming alive:

The living sculptures were arising from the Waterfall and making their way along the Bank of the River. They left the cloak or shell they had worn in place in the Waterfall: cloak or tidal cloak through which to conserve another spirit, another existence within the rocks, the spirit of time that remained to invoke protective cover for the river and the Waterfall.<sup>49</sup>

I have mentioned already that I regard the fourth issue, that of the subversion of the hierarchized ego-ideal, i.e. the conscious control of the ego over the desires of the id as central in the project of decolonization. The relation of Ego and Id is described by Freud as follows:

In its relation to the id, the ego is like a man on horse back, who has to hold in check the superior strength of the horse; with this difference, that the rider tries to do so with his own strength while the ego uses borrowed forces. The analogy may be carried a little further. Often a rider, if he is not to be parted from his horse is obliged to guide it where it wants to go; so, in the same way, the ego is in the habit of transforming the id's will into action as if it were its own.<sup>50</sup>

In the first paragraph of *Palace of the Peacock* Harris' text enters into a dialogue with Freud's text:

A horseman appeared on the road coming at a breakneck stride. A shot rang out suddenly, near and yet far as if the wind had been stretched and torn and had started

coiling and running in an instant. The horseman stiffened with a devil's smile, and the horse reared, grinning fiendishly and snapping at the reins. The horseman gave a bow to heaven like a hanging man to his executioner, and rolled from his saddle to the ground.<sup>51</sup>

In this text Freud's rider is violently parted from his horse; and the desire of the text (or the reader) is set free to go where id/s/he wants. This is the prevailing theme of the novel: The characters detect that their ego is not a self-contained, autonomous entity but deeply intersubjective and shaped by desire. This is particularly valid of the development of the novel's main character, the prototypical colonizer and horseman, Donne. After their death (the violent loss of the controlling ego) and resurrection in the waterfall, the characters are able to detect their need of one another. The spiritual company described at the very end of the novel is a company of re-discovered mutual desire: "Each of us now held at last in his arms what he had been for ever seeking and what he had eternally possessed".<sup>52</sup>

### Summary

Harris sees desire, not nature, as the driving force behind our daily experiences and behaviours. There is no 'natural' superiority or inferiority, no 'natural' hierarchy of ruler and ruled, maleness or femaleness. His texts unveil the *social* character of these dyads and thus open them for discussion and change. The cognitive structures inherited from colonialism still serve neocolonialism and capitalism very well and are therefore produced in an ever increasing amount, especially with the recent development and imposition of European cognitive structures by the electronic media. In Harris' texts it becomes obvious that these hierarchized cognitive structures that continue to govern our daily experiences and actions represent only partial truths. These partial truths may be used as masks to achieve a specific goal; but in presenting them as limited and abridged perspectives Harris compels us to include their other possible forms into our own perspective. It is a technique that - in mathematical terms - raises interpretation to the power of multiplicity. Furthermore, writing thus becomes a political force: It enables us to recognize the inherent creative potential of any given historical situation and find access to a more complex understanding of the world and to think of ways of change. In the postcolonial situation the universal hidden arches as well as bridges between superficially diverted cultures provide a key to a cognitive transformation-in-depth. The biased and abridged cognitive structures inherited from colonialism transformed into creative visions may very well not only contribute to the rediscovery of the universal unconscious, but to our joining of a ceaseless creative process of an ever-becoming, non-hierarchical civil society.<sup>53</sup>

### Notes:

- 1 Robert Young, *White Mythologies: Writing History and the West*, London: Routledge, 1990, 19.
- 2 Two examples: Jan N. Pieterse describes the production of the image of and desire for Africa as the "Dark Continent" as a function of colonialism: "The explorers created the image of the Dark Continent, the churches created the images of the fallen heathen and the ignoble savage, stereotypes which colonialism would build on and elaborate (...) Europe's light shone brighter by

virtue of the darkening of other continents." in: Jan Nederveen Pieterse, *White on Black: Images of Africa and Blacks in Western Popular Culture*, New Haven/London: Yale UP, 1992, 75. The second example is given by Mary Louise Pratt in her description of Alexander von Humboldt's writings as a "source of new founding visions of America on both sides of the Atlantic (...) The human race in the New World presents only a few remnants of indigenous hordes, slightly advanced in civilization; or it exhibits merely the uniformity of manners and institutions transplanted by European colonists to foreign shores". Marie Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, London: Routledge, 1992, 111.

- 3 Gilles Deleuze, Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1987, 208/9. Deleuze/Guattari's theoretical framework is definitely not restricted to the description of literary texts which represent only one facet in the field of capitalist (cultural) production. Though often critical of capitalism in its implications, the kind of postcolonial literature discussed here is nevertheless produced by and unfortunately materially draws and depends on these conditions. I feel therefore justified to adopt their description for my readings.
- 4 Deleuze/Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 210.
- 5 Wilson Harris, "The Unfinished Genesis of the Imagination", *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* XXII, 1 (Autumn 1992), 23.
- 6 Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Decolonizing the Mind*, London: Currey, 1986, 88.
- 7 Homi Bhabha, "Representation and the Colonial Text: A Critical Exploration of Some Forms of Mimeticism", Frank Gloversmith, *The Theory of Reading*, Sussex: Harvester Press, 1984, 98; Homi Bhabha, "Signs Taken for Wonders: Questions of Ambivalence and Authority Under a Tree Outside Delhi, May 1817", *Critical Inquiry* 12 (1985), 156.
- 8 Ashcroft et al., *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*, London/New York: Routledge, 1989, 38-44.
- 9 Gayatri C. Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak? Speculations on Widow Sacrifice", *Wedge* 7/8, (1985), 121.
- 10 Ngugi, "The Language of African Literature", *New Left Review*, (March/April 1985), 141.
- 11 Harris, "The Unfinished Genesis of the Imagination", 103.
- 12 Wilson Harris, *The Womb of Space: The Cross-Cultural Imagination*, Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1983, 25.
- 13 Bhabha, "Signs Taken for Wonders", 154.
- 14 Gauri Viswanathan, *Masks of Conquest: Literary Studies and British Rule in India*, London: Faber & Faber, 1989.
- 15 Bhabha, "Signs Taken for Wonders", 156.
- 16 *ibid.*
- 17 Wilson Harris, "Adversarial Contexts and Creativity", *New Left Review* 154 (Nov/Dec 1985), 125.
- 18 Umberto Eco, *Opera Aperta*, Milano: Bompiani, 1962.
- 19 Deleuze/Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 21; (my emphasis, U.S.).
- 20 Hena Maes-Jelinek, "'Unfinished Genesis': The Four Banks of the River of Space", Hena Maes-Jelinek (ed.), *Wilson Harris: The Uncompromising Imagination*, Munksgaard: Dangaroo, 1991, 237.
- 21 See Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?", 120/1.
- 22 Gareth Griffiths, "Post-colonial space and time: Wilson Harris and Caribbean criticism", Maes-Jelinek (ed.), *Wilson Harris*, 61.
- 23 Wilson Harris, *Tradition, the Writer & Society: Critical Essays*, London/Port of Spain: New Beacon, 1973, 29.
- 24 I strongly disagree with Ashcroft et al.'s claim that "All of Harris's novels as well as his critical and theoretical writings form one cohesive body of work" (Ashcroft et al., *The Empire Writes*



Back, 153). Harris draws (like Joyce or Goethe in writing, or Derrida and Spivak in 'theory') on a wide range of various sources, from Amerindian folk-tales to chaos theory and modern quantum physics in a true *bricoleur's* fashion. To appropriate this strategical hybridity by accounting for Harris' writing against a traditional framework derived from high humanism, i.e. as a *Glasperlenspiel* separated from any historical, philosophical and political context, inevitably does a disservice to any project of decolonization.

25 Harris, *The Womb of Space*, XVIII.

26 Harris, quoted in Maes-Jelinek, "Numinous Proportions": Wilson Harris' alternative to all 'Posts', Ian Adam & Helen Tiffin (eds.) *Past the Last Post*, New York: Harvester, 60.

27 Harris, "The Unfinished Genesis of the Imagination", 15.

28 Harris, "Adversarial Contexts and Creativity", 127.

29 Maes-Jelinek, "Numinous Proportions", 53.

30 Wilson Harris, *The Infinite Rehearsal*, London: Faber&Faber, 1987, VII.

31 Wilson Harris, *The Four Banks of the River of Space*, London: Faber&Faber, 1990, XI.

32 Wilson Harris, quoted in Alan Riach & Mark Williams (eds.), *The Radical Imagination: Lectures and Talks by Wilson Harris*, Liège: L3-Dpt. d'Anglais/Université de Liège, 1992, 72.

33 *ibid.*, 33.

34 *ibid.*, 30.

35 Bhabha, "Representation and the Colonial Text", 94.

36 Harris, *Tradition, the Writer & Society*, 31.

37 Harris, *The Radical Imagination*, 18.

38 Wilson Harris, *Carnival*, London: Faber&Faber, 1985, 23.

39 *ibid.*

40 I owe this term to David Dabydeen.

41 Harris, *Carnival*, 23.

42 *ibid.*, 49.

43 *ibid.*

44 Heraclitus, in: Hippolytos, *Haer.* IX, 9, 1; Pseudo Aristotle, *Mund.* 5, 396b, 20ff.

45 Heraclitus, in: Aristotle, *Nik.eth. Theta* 2, 1155b, 4ff.

46 Bhabha, "Representation and the Colonial Text", 1984.

47 Sandra Drake, *Wilson Harris and the Modern Tradition: A New Architecture of the World*, Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1986, 173ff.

48 *ibid.*

49 Harris, *The Four Banks of the River of Space*, 39.

50 Sigmund Freud, "The Ego and the Id", *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, London: Hogarth Press, 1923, 25.

51 Wilson Harris, *The Guyana Quartet*, London: Faber&Faber, 1985, 19.

52 *ibid.*, 117.

53 Thanks to Tobias Döring and Heike Härtig for their comments and revision.

## The Perception of Landscape and Architecture in V.S. Naipaul's *The Enigma of Arrival* and David Dabydeen's *Disappearance*

MARK STEIN

*There is not much wilderness in this anciently worked island,  
and most of it is a man-made facsimile of the real thing.*  
Raymond Williams, "Between Country and City"

Juxtaposing V. S. Naipaul's *The Enigma of Arrival* with David Dabydeen's *Disappearance*, this essay sets out to investigate the perception of landscape and architecture in these two novels.<sup>1</sup> Both texts map out the responses of their protagonists to landscape, architecture and fellow human beings, to their surroundings generally, and raise the question, how these responses are generated and what they mean in view of the protagonists' specific backgrounds. First, the basis for the comparison is laid in that relevant similarities and differences of the texts are indicated. It is argued that Dabydeen's novel 'writes back' to *The Enigma of Arrival*. An analysis of the processes of perception as problematized in both novels follows, and subsequently the quest-motif of both novels and how it pertains to the concept of referentiality is examined. Finally, the inquiries of the two narratives are interpreted as a destabilization of 'Englishness' and its foundations.

### I

*Disappearance*, published six years after Naipaul's book, is related to *The Enigma of Arrival* in several ways. Both authors, born in the Caribbean of Indian-Caribbean parentage, British-educated and living in England, have their narrators journey from the Caribbean to Britain, where they both feel that they have come to England too late:

England had long ceased to matter. To smash up England would be no more than going berserk in a waxwork museum. (*Disappearance*, 179)

So I grew to feel that the grandeur belonged to the past; that I had come to England at the wrong time; that I had come too late to find the England, the heart of empire, which (like a provincial, from a far corner of the empire) I had created in my fantasy. (*Enigma*, 120)

Both narrators spend time living in rural areas of England - Dunsmere and Salisbury Plains, respectively - where they have difficulty in feeling part of the new environment and familiarise themselves with the alien yet familiar landscape by learning the toponyms and the names of flowers, trees. Their perception of the surroundings is influenced by their previous knowledge, their expectations, and by their childhood in Guyana and Trinidad. In *Disappearance* the narrator is reminded of a "brightly coloured drawing in my colonial story-book" when scrutinising Dunsmere

(92f), while Naipaul's narrator notes: "Of literature and antiquity and the landscape Jack and his garden and his geese and cottage and his father-in-law seemed emanations" (25).

*Disappearance* is preambled with five quotations, one of which acknowledges the novel's relationship with *Enigma*: "Was it Jack? I didn't take the person in; I was more concerned with the strangeness of the walk, my own strangeness, and the absurdity of my inquiry."<sup>2</sup> In their proper context, these lines are part of a self-critical passage in which Naipaul's narrator begins to understand his perception. He reconstructs how he initially saw and responded to his environment, determining what caused him to notice Jack. Extraction from this context, however, stresses the introspective nature of the passage and the entire book, with the quotation emphasizing the alleged egotistical character of *Enigma* as it is turned against the novel, branding it an 'absurd enquiry.'

In view of its thematic links, its modified stance, the explicit textual reference, and the correlation of their inquiries, *Disappearance* can be read as a rejoinder to *The Enigma of Arrival*. The following citation will take us further into the discussion:

Cottages were sprinkled here and there, each seeded in its own private bed and curtained off by trees, the meagre remains of the woodland that once flourished for miles around. Axes, then chainsaws, had reduced the forest to arable plots (...) Still there was a certain beauty in the sparseness of the landscape, a settled order such as follows inevitably from centuries of plunder. The generations (...) settled down (...) within the boundaries they had marked in the land, marks enshrined in law, protecting neighbour from neighbour. (...) [H]edges that defined territory, a stabilised woodland, secluded cottages and a sense of the Law of the land - this was Dunsmere. Nothing, it seemed had happened to the village in living memory. Other places had apparently suffered from an influx of young city people [who] disturbed the character of village life (...) Dunsmere though was preserved from the world outside its boundaries; the perilous state of the cliff meant that no one wanted to invest in property. From afar it looked like waxwork, colourful and still. (*Disappearance*, 92f, cf. 130, 179)

Dabydeen's narrator overcomes the distance from which Dunsmere looks like a waxen artefact. The very fact that it is "preserved" reflects that it was once built, and reveals the effort of maintaining it. The "order" perceived is a "settled" one. The land is "dissected," "defined," and marked by the law it embodies, granting the dwellers the privacy they find in their "curtained off" cottages which appear to be growing out of private flower beds. Through the eyes of the narrator who unveils England's "drift into a deliberate unconsciousness" (178), the village betrays that it *has* changed "in living memory." The chain saw (*Disappearance*, 92) which threatened the "fragile (...) little world" of Naipaul's novel (*Enigma*, 237), evocative of a history of "plunder," has cleared the space Dabydeen's villagers inhabit. However, Dunsmere has been "preserved from the world outside its boundaries," rather than "suffer[ing] from an influx of young city people", as lamented in *Enigma*. Ironically, "the perilous state of the cliff," which threatens the very existence of the community, concurrently helps to sustain the air of an unchanging "hortus conclusus" by fending off property investors.

Dabydeen's narrator, a Guyanese engineer, comes from a country which - lying below sea-level - is liable to flooding from the sea as well as from torrents discharged from the rain forest.<sup>3</sup> If the country owes its survival to Dutch engineers who erected a dam in the nineteenth century, and thus to a former colonial power, it is telling that the

narrator, educated by the British Professor Fenwick<sup>4</sup> and apparently whitewashed in the process, contributes to the construction of a sea-wall in Britain. On the one hand, the engineer comes to the aid of Dunsmere and is thus incorporated in "preserv[ing]" its "settled order." On the other hand, the engineer who has "carved [his] name in [English] history" (*Disappearance*, 177) but feels like a "transient worker" (178) resists this incorporation not only through his unveiling narrative, but also through constructing the subversive allegorical sea-wall. Its supposed stability might prove destructive by exposing Dunsmere to those investors which the "perilous state of the cliff" had fended off. Moreover, the wall is invisible from the village and serves the purpose of upholding Dunsmere and its pretence of invulnerability and continuity. Yet it becomes visible - and thus revealing - from below, from the beach. It is also subversive, 'overturning from below,' in that the engineer himself doubts its stability and has thus successfully undermined the foundations of Dunsmere. The Guyanese engineer has created a situation in which an English village depends on his sea-wall as much as Guyana depends on that of the Dutch engineers. The very rot and decay that he perceives and finds frustrating in Britain have become the basis for the sea-wall. The appearance of intactness is maintained but concurrently exposed as an illusion.

V. S. Naipaul inhabits a curious position in the field of Black British literature; while he is one of the most widely recognized and well-known writers in Britain, arguably second only to Salman Rushdie, he is a highly controversial figure in that both, his creative and his non-fictional work are heavily criticized. He is considered a traitor of his 'community' and the 'common man' by many, and has been charged with neo-colonialism, racism and misogyny.<sup>5</sup> Although the narrator is drawn to the 'seat of power,' with his withdrawal at the manor mirroring that of the aristocratic landlord, Naipaul's book can be read as a *critique* of 'Englishness' since the narrator confesses "my life in England had been savourless, and much of it mean" (95). In *Enigma* a tinned-milk label becomes the icon of English country life; note the scathing irony in "I was in the original of that condensed-milk label drawing" (297); "[t]his was something like the design on the condensed-milk label I knew as a child in Trinidad, where cows as handsome as those were not to be seen" (38). The irony is heightened by two accounts of mutated cattle which were "healthy, big (...) beaut[iful]" (81) but numbered and without "sanctity" (81). They were "reminders of assisted insemination or gestation going wrong (...) with that extra bit of flesh and hair (with the black and white Frisian pattern) hanging down their middle, as of cow-material that had leaked through the two halves of the cow-mould" (81). The deterioration and decay of Britain and its culture perceived by the narrator are set into relief by the mutated cattle: by appealing to the icon of the healthy larger-than-life cow, whose very proliferations are covered in Frisian pattern, cultural deformation and its dimension - however disguised - are debunked.

One reviewer of *Enigma* maintains that the novel quintessentially constitutes religious prose.<sup>6</sup> The novel indeed investigates spirituality and declares that "relics of recent Christianity dotted the region. So many kinds of religion here, so many relics."<sup>7</sup> The designation "relic" is ambiguous. It either denotes something which has *survived* from the past, or, contrarily, a remaining fragment, treasured as a keepsake, of something *expired*. The term conveys old-fashionedness and, in the Roman Catholic church, ironically also refers to parts of saints which are deemed holy. The melancholia conveyed through the repeated phrase "[s]o many kinds of religion here, so many relics" - and the description of the church's architecture (below) - suggest that



religion is lamented as something bygone. However, the ambiguity is not resolved as the melancholia of the phrase is so intense as to cast doubt onto its sincerity; the narrative is generally critical of sentiments craving antediluvian conditions, as the treatment of the landlord indicates.

The church stood next to "a building that *pretended* to be a rough old farmhouse." The narrator realizes that it "was restored and architecturally (...) as *artificial* as the farmhouse." He sees "the church not as 'church,' but as part of the wealth and security of Victorian-Edwardian times." This secular view of the church leads him to speculate that "perhaps not even the faith was old" (*Enigma*, 49, my emphases). "Play farmhouse, renovated church. Had that been a kind of play, too, the religion of the renovated church?" (50). Not only is religion depicted as equally "artificial" as the buildings it inhabits; its very function, "a kind of play", is also neglected. After one character, Brenda, has been murdered by her husband, the narrator observes that "[c]ollecting the dead person's things (...) seemed to call for some ritual. But there was none" (72). The narrator's opinions about religion constitute an indictment of English culture, especially if contrasted with the more convincing and successful Hindu rituals described in "The Ceremony of Farewell."

The "Arrival" in Naipaul's novel can be read as a grand gesture of reconciliation, a feeling of com-passion (with the emphasis lying on the prefix denoting inclusiveness). The narrator feels close to his lugubrious aristocratic landlord who can be described as his psychological double;<sup>8</sup> in view of their mutual relationship to the empire - be it at different ends - their affinity suggests an act of reconciliation. After the death of his sister, the narrator comes to see "value in Hindu ritual" although they are 'incorrect' and secularized, thereby "granting ordinary citizens of Trinidad due regard."<sup>9</sup> And where Naipaul has us expecting harsh criticism we are surprised by - admittedly slightly condescending - understanding:

History! He had run together the events of 1498 (...) 1784 (...) and 1845 (...). He had created a composite history. But it was enough for him. Men need history, it helps them to have an idea of who they are. (*Enigma*, 318)

Most importantly Naipaul's narrator, in a movement that would be interesting to compare to Edward Said's notion of 'migration as a universal condition,'<sup>10</sup> comes to realize that his "raw sense of an unaccommodating world" as a migrant from a former colony is shared by the people surrounding him, whom he initially had only superficially noticed:

I had thought that because of this I had been given an especially tender or raw sense of an unaccommodating world. (...) [But] it was only then that I saw how *tenuous*, really, the *hold* of all of these people had been on the *land* they worked or lived in. (*Enigma*, 87; my emphases)

In opposition to Naipaul's 'conciliatory gesture' towards the former colonizer and postcolonial Trinidad in *Enigma*, Dabydeen's narrator, who tries to deny his skin colour - "I'm not black, I'm an engineer" (102f) - significantly comes to realize that he was "invisible to the village," and, considering himself a "transient worker" (177f), presumably leaves for Guyana at the close of the novel. Naipaul's theme of reconciliation is thus counterpointed with a movement representing the impossibility of reconciliation between erstwhile colonizer and colonized. The engineer prefers

*historical amnesia*<sup>11</sup> to a constant struggle of working through the legacy of empire as he leaves his mentor and landlord Mrs Rutherford, and vanishes.

## II

In the following the perception of a cottage as rendered by the narrators of both novels is discussed. Both come to question the 'naturalness' of what they perceive - and relating to the reader. They sense that what they see is not simply there, but has been created either in order to achieve a specific effect, serving the interest of those who created it, or by a combination of factors not controlled by a single agent.

When visiting the Irishman Christie, one of his workers, the narrator of *Disappearance* reports that he was "looking around at the room and wondering whether its desolation was not designed" (164). He finds Christie's habitation in a desolate state which accords with Christie's account of his life: while his circumstances have now deteriorated he once knew "about pâté in an ornamental dish or scoops of foie gras" (161). Christie himself constantly undermines his own credibility by insisting on one story and then twisting it around, or revoking it altogether. This play-acting is an *inscenation* of his own personality.<sup>12</sup> The Irishman states that "playing Paddy is our national pastime: I joke, I grin, I talk in a bog accent, I get drunk and slur my grammar, I plot, I wave my shovel at demonstrations against the English, I believe in fairies" (164). The distinct and conflicting inscenations or versions of Christie are not only confusing and unsettling for his visitor (and through him for the reader) but for Christie himself as well: "After a while you crawl into your own entrails and disappear up your own disguise" (165).

Whereas the scepticism of Naipaul's narrator is a result of a long process from migration to "Arrival," the scepticism of Dabydeen's narrator is invited by Christie's behaviour. He has long been sceptical about Christie's inscenation of himself as cliché-Irishman. Nevertheless, Dabydeen's narrator is tenacious about the concept of "the real truth" (160) and has come to find out from Christie about Mr Curtis and his relationship to Mrs Rutherford. Naipaul's narrator expresses his reservations about his own perception in a more nuanced manner:

The Manor grounds grew on me. Unused to the seasons (...) and, so far as architecture went, still perhaps tending to take things too much for granted, seeing 'ordinary' buildings too much as natural expressions of a particular place, it took me time to understand what I was seeing (...) that my cottage, in spite of its name, was not a simple building. (...) It took me time to understand that this was no country 'naturalness,' that the cottage had been designed to create just that effect (...) I saw the design and the intention (...). (*Enigma*, 175f)

Being unfamiliar with the landscape and the architecture, the narrator has no experience to which to relate the images he perceives. Nevertheless he "felt that [he] had always known them" as they were "like the design on the condensed-milk label" (38). It takes him a long time to understand that what he regards as 'natural' landscape and "'ordinary' buildings" are not "natural expressions of a particular place," that they are as much 'designed' as the milk label with which he grew up.

Significantly, the narrator is misled by the term "cottage," associating this designation with a simple structure. Initially he cannot but see his abode in these terms

until he realizes "that the cottage had been designed to create just that effect." The problematization of this association accords with Naipaul's concern for semantics:

The point that worried me was one of vocabulary, of the differing meanings or associations of words. *Garden, house, plantation, gardener, estate*: these words mean one thing in England and mean something quite different to the man from Trinidad (...) a colony settled for the purpose of plantation agriculture.<sup>13</sup>

Naipaul seems fascinated by the linguistic implications of the migration of his narrator. In 1950 the young man leaves Trinidad for Oxford in order to become a writer, and the novel covers the writer's development during the following three decades. The displacement from one linguistic community to another heightens the narrator's awareness of the unstable and, with Saussure "arbitrary" relationship between signifier and signified.<sup>14</sup> Thus one reading of *The Enigma of Arrival* is that the text meticulously renders *how* the narrator's perception functions, and *why* this is so.

Dabydeen's narrator problematizes the process of perception more superficially than Naipaul's. He seems to believe that perception is essentially dependent on the 'correct' perspective. The quotation cited above continues as follows:

From a safe distance his cottage had the appearance of a picturesque shambles, (...) overhanging with moss. It was the kind of dwelling you'd imagine a hermit to be inhabiting, in an English fairy tale from one of my story-books. When I looked again I could see it for what it was - woodwormed, crippled with hatred, wanting to crash to the ground more catastrophically than the cliff's fall. (*Disappearance*, 169)

In this passage the engineer distinguishes between a mere "appearance" and "what it was," between 'illusion' and 'reality.' By putting the right distance between himself and the cottage, and by looking twice, he feels capable of truly perceiving Christie's dwelling, without interference of his knowledge of cultural patterns or "fairy tale[s]." This notion is reminiscent of Naipaul's narrator when he evokes the impression that an aerial view of Trinidad endows the landscape with "logic and larger pattern" (97). Yet in *Enigma* a critical perspective is retained as Trinidad becomes "like a landscape in a book, like the landscape of a real country" (97; my emphases): the repeated use of the preposition "like" inscribes doubt as to the 'truth value' of the perception, as does the conflation of a real landscape with one out of a book.

Naipaul's narrator apprehends the scene he describes in the passage quoted above as an inscenation. It is created, 'man-made,' and constructed rather than reflecting "country 'naturalness'" (*Enigma*, 176). As an inscenation it may be called 'fraudulent' yet that does not render it futile or ineffective; the quotation cited above continues:

And yet it made a whole. It worked. You could take it all for granted, as I had done at the beginning, and see it as something that went with an Edwardian big house in this part of the country. Or you could enter the fantasy, a child's vision made concrete, child's play by an adult or adults: extraordinary, this gratuitous expression of great security and wealth in this corner of an estate that once was so much bigger (...). And yet it was this element of play - the child's play of the toy settlement around the manor 'green' or lawn - which, when I recognized it, I yielded to. (*Enigma*, 177)

Again the narrator describes two distinct responses to what he perceives. While first "tak[ing] it all for granted," viewing his surroundings naively, he comes to problematize his perception at a *later* stage, thus stressing its temporal nature.

Perception ceases to be a physio-biological process of rays reflected by objects hitting the iris, decoded in the brain to inform the perceiver of the object(ive) world around. Instead it becomes an intellectual and emotional activity which dialectically establishes a connection between the subject and his or her world. As in the appreciation of a theatrical production, the narrator engages in full knowledge of the 'artificiality' of what he discerns; his appreciation is not vitiated but heightened by this knowledge. Using the example of a child playing, the narrator compares the arrangement, the inscenation, of the manor to a child's 'toy settlement.' The family of the dying landlord had the financial resources - "created in part by the wealth of empire" (52f), as the narrative acknowledges repeatedly - allowing 'play' on this scale. It is understandable that the narrator's "yield[ing]" to this kind of "play" is interpreted as an act of neo-colonial betrayal by many postcolonial critics.

The unnamed first person narrator of *The Enigma of Arrival* experiences an "awakening" (*Enigma*, 91) on a large estate that was founded during the Industrial Revolution and expanded considerably "with the spread of the empire in the nineteenth century" (174). In the beginning he is comforted by the soothing pace of life he observes on the estate. Observing Jack, his wife, and his father-in-law, other employees, glimpses of his landlord, induces in him a feeling of participation in a larger process and provides a measure of accommodation. He "considered [Jack] to be part of the view. [He] saw his life as genuine, rooted, fitting: man fitting the landscape. [He] saw him as remnant of the past" (19). The narrator is consoled by finding something apparently "genuine," by perceiving 'roots,' by considering the employees, the architecture, his landlord as "fitting" because this seems to counter his feeling of "out-of-placeness (...) [as] a man from another hemisphere" (19).

His perception of Jack "as remnant of the past" unmasks his desire to find a place where people are in possession of a history with which they are in touch, an 'uncorrupted' relationship with the past. This desire reflects his feeling of irrevocably lacking such a relationship due to the personal and communal experience of diaspora and displacement from India via Trinidad to Britain, to which he frequently refers.<sup>15</sup> This indicates that the narrator's endeavour to chart the process of his perception has been induced by his personal and communal history; in this respect, the novel appears to be *engagé* rather than "bloodless."<sup>16</sup>

The decay of the estate due to both, the landlord's financial incapacity and his illness, does not irritate the narrator; to the contrary: "I liked the decay, such as it was. It gave me no wish to prune or weed or set right or remake. It couldn't last, clearly. But while it lasted, it was perfection" (*Enigma*, 52). The process of decay enhances his feeling of accommodation. The trajectory of flux and decay, their "certainty," seem indicative of 'natural' processes taking place without the need of human induction, and are therefore consoling to him. In that they can be passively witnessed and do not necessitate intervention, they constitute "perfection."

The narrator relates that "it was [his] temperament" to "see the possibility, the certainty, of ruin, even at the moment of creation" (*Enigma*, 52) and that "the decadence (...) was in [his] eye" (77), thereby introducing a theme that is pervasive throughout the novel: the theme of perception, i.e. the relationship of 'reality' to its observation, and it is determined by the interests, disposition, and education of the perceiver. While it would take another essay to fully explore these strands, it is sufficient here to say that the affinity the narrator feels to the process of decay supports his sense of accommodation on the declining estate.<sup>17</sup> By stating that there exists an



affinity between the narrator and "decay" it is meant that they are interdependent; if "the decadence (...) was in [his] eye," then it was not an 'objective' condition, merely recorded *through* the eye. Rather, "the decadence" has always already been part of the perceiving I/eye and is thus only constituted in its perception, instead of having been previously externally constituted and then recorded.

It takes him time, but Naipaul's narrator comes to shed his romanticist notion of finding a landscape and a population in tune with its history, landscape, and architecture. He comes to historicize landscape and architecture, that is, to question their 'naturalness' and to perceive them as determined by human influence and design. By speculating on the design behind the construction of architecture and landscape, the narrator becomes a sceptic. Exposing various sites as "fraudulent," as "architecturally (...) artificial" (49), he recognizes "the design and the intention" (176) only to conclude that "[n]othing was natural here; everything was considered. Grass and trees concealed as much engineering as a Roman forum" (*Enigma*, 199).

### III

The foregoing discussion has shown that *Enigma* and *Disappearance* question the notion of referentiality. The Saussurean *sign*, constituted by the union of *signifier* and *signified*, is related to the *referent*, and it is this process of referentiality which according to Saussure leads to the production of meaning. Yet how exactly referentiality is established, how the two distinct systems of language and the 'real world' be linked, has not been satisfactorily answered, as we know from poststructuralist inquiries. The most radical 'solution' - revoked by *Enigma* and *Disappearance* - seems the assumption that there is no link, that the *signifier* can only point to other *signifiers*, ad infinitum, reducing 'reality' to a fantasy conjured up textually.

One example of how *Enigma* raises and deals with this question is the following bare three-word sentence from the opening page: "It was winter" (11). This seemingly unproblematic and straightforward statement is expounded in six consecutive paragraphs; we learn that "it was hard for [the narrator] to distinguish one section or season from the other" (*Enigma*, 11; my emphasis); the very idea of giving alternative terms, "section or season," accentuates the conventionality of our terminology, thus suggesting that the notion of seasons is a mere convention rather than a 'natural' phenomenon.<sup>18</sup> We learn of the different associations "winter" has for the narrator, and through which he perceives it. Moreover, reasons such as "[i]f I say it was winter (...) it was because I remembered the mist", are given for recognizing and naming the season. We get to the point where "[i]t was winter, too, because I was worried about the cost of heating," winter ceasing to be an external phenomenon as it is revealed to be constituted by the observer's preoccupations (11f; my emphasis). What emerges is that it can never simply *be* winter, but that it is always perceived as such and only thus becomes winter. "Winter" can be related to other concepts, words, signifiers but not directly to 'the real thing'.<sup>19</sup> Consequently, the regularity of the seasons, this consoling pattern, ceases to fulfil this function, and no longer houses the narrator.

Naipaul's narrator does not revoke the notion of referentiality altogether, but inhabits the margin between denial and acceptance of that concept, illustrating this position. When the novel draws to a close, and the narrator 'arrives,' he understands:

We had become self-aware. (...) We had made ourselves anew. The world we had found ourselves in (...) was one we had partly made ourselves; we couldn't go back. There was no ship of antique shape now to take us back. We had come out of the nightmare; and there was nowhere else to go. (*Enigma*, 316f)

As de Chirico's ark briefly flashes up, its absence emphasizing that *this* structure will also no longer serve to accommodate those it delivered into the diaspora, the narrator understands that the gained self-awareness does not only preclude "surrender[ing]" to religious ritual (316), necessitating the acceptance of secularisation, but by the same token precludes falling back onto "the world," for the latter is seen as 'constructed' rather than given. Although 'one found oneself' in it, the world "was one we had partly made ourselves." Significantly, though, autopoiesis here only "partly" accounts for the world, which is why it was asserted that Naipaul's narrator seems to be torn between denial and acceptance of the notion of referentiality. Behind this lies the endorsement of the notion of truth, prevalent in *Enigma* and *Disappearance*, and approved of by Naipaul in the following comment on his novel:

I felt that truly to render what I saw, I had to define myself as writer or narrator; I had to reinterpret things. (...) My aim was truth, truth to a particular experience, containing a definition of the writing self.<sup>20</sup>

While sketching the project of self-reflexive and self-interpretative writing, Naipaul here expresses his allegiance to the notion of truth.

The walks of both narrators, their restlessness, their quests for their imagined 'mother country,' for truth (about the absentee landlord, Mrs Rutherford, Prof Fenwick. etc.) are reminiscent of the image the critic Fredric Jameson includes of himself in one of his essays. When Jameson goes to LA he stays in the Bonaventure Hotel. Once he has entered it he has difficulty finding the "curiously unmarked" exit, as we gather from his "Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism."<sup>21</sup> To the Marxist critic, who investigates "postmodern culture," the hotel reflects developments in architecture (which correlate to those in painting and literature), and "the great global multinational and decentered communicational network in which we find ourselves caught as individual subjects." He reads facade and interior of the building, but despite its legibility illustrates the dehumanizing effect of both, 'postmodernism' and the prevailing economic order, by exemplifying with his own body that they lead (him) nowhere. "[P]ostmodern hyperspace," he argues, has "succeeded in transcending the capacities of the individual human body to locate itself, to organize its immediate surroundings perceptually, and cognitively to map its position in a mappable external world."<sup>22</sup>

In their efforts to map their position in their English context, Dabydeen's and Naipaul's narrators set out to explore. They try to retrieve the histories of people with whom they come into contact. They also explore their external surroundings. Naipaul's narrator finds the country curiously marked by "those oddly-placed rolled-up plastic sacks" (*Enigma*, 28) which Jack's father-in-law, ignoring *new* gates, had placed, "creating stiles and steps and padded passing-places over and through the barbed wire" (27). The old man has thus left visible traces of his daily walk which counters the new pattern etched on the land with barbed wire. As the narrator encounters one 'order' superimposed onto another, he realizes that a "whole life, a whole enduring personality, was expressed in that 'run'" (28). This kind of 'mapping' mediates

between imposing one's own marks and reading/utilizing those which others have left. While it has allowed the late father-in-law to inscribe himself into the land, it also provides the narrator with a model for accommodating himself to his new environment. The narrator's 'arrival' is facilitated by a similar act of reading and inscription: "My own presence (...) another kind of change" (34).

In contrast, Dabydeen's narrator encounters land 'hacked' by men, marked with 'axes' and 'chain saws', land which thereby has been 'dissected' into 'clearings' and 'arable plots.' Bearing 'protecting hedges' and 'boundaries' it embodies a 'settled order' and reflects 'centuries of plunder.' The marks left on it have ossified into 'the Law of the land' (cf. *Disappearance*, 92f). But, as shown above, the engineer distrusts the signification of this "waxwork" design, distrusts even his own mark, the sea-wall, and feels that he remains unrepresented in Dunsmere, invisible, and prefers to leave. Naipaul's narrator embraces the system of signification he encounters despite his scepticism, while Dabydeen's engineer is overpowered by his misgivings. And Jameson seeks to surpass 'postmodernism' and therefore does not refute but embrace it: "The point is that we are *within* the culture of postmodernism to the point where its facile repudiation is as impossible as any equally facile celebration of it is complacent and corrupt."<sup>23</sup> Despite his strategic espousal of 'postmodernism' and the conviction that there is no easy way out, Jameson provides us with the graphic image of the search for an exit which could serve as a coda to this essay. But he seems doomed to fail: his exit would only lead into a larger maze, that of the surrounding megalopolis, for he sees himself "*within* the culture of postmodernism." Looking for the exit becomes like tracing back a signifier to its 'origin,' trying to retrieve 'original' meaning, to transcend one system of signification in order to get to the referent. This quest for an egress is redolent of that of the engineer who seeks to escape England for his "vast and empty" Guyana.

Dabydeen's narrator is more tenacious about the notion of reality than Naipaul's. The engineer walks about in what appears to him a "waxwork museum" (*Disappearance*, 179), the heart of "venerable England" (p.8), trying to find an exit to "some reality or other (...) I don't care. So long as it exists. I'm beginning to think nothing exists in England. Everything is a reported story. You can't know anything for certain" (156). He searches for something concrete and real, unmarked, uninhabited, without and outside signification and history: the tangible, the virgin, the empty, the amnesic.<sup>24</sup> As the novel draws to a close, Dabydeen's narrator decides to withdraw, to escape to Guyana, hoping that "[t]he land was vast and empty enough to encourage new beginnings in obscure corners" (179). It is one of the subtle ironies of the text that it has its narrator presumably disappear in the fantasy of a "vast and empty" Guyana where he will be neither disturbed nor reassured of his notion of 'reality.' The subsequent sentence, "I had to believe this, otherwise there would be nowhere to go and nothing to do", discloses his fundamental "doubt of a concrete existence." This distrust also transpires from the novel's beautiful last sentences as the narrator vanishes with his "lover's memento" (108):

I eased it out: the head of the flower I had picked by the wayside on my first day at work. (...) I held it carefully in the cup of my hand, appalled that the slightest movement could cause it to flake and disappear. (*Disappearance*, 180)

As the novel ends, the narrative, its narrator, and the flower are carefully arrested. We retain a sense of an unreal 'Guyana' - where possibly only Swami's gold teeth, evoking

the myth of El Dorado, the gilded man and the gilded land, remain - and an equally unreal Dunsmere, both destined to disappear.

#### IV

Both narrators are 'on the move,' staging a migratory, fluid identity. Their journeying, a theme with which both narratives are imbued, representative of their respective quests for identity which for them imply leaving their home(lands) for England, impels the protagonists to question the ground they stand on, the very structures that reflect and symbolically house their identities. But theirs is an inquiry into 'Englishness' as much as into their own identity, for the two are connected. Rejecting the role of the 'colonial subject,' the 'black man,' the immigrant, while also resisting assimilation into white England, they, in different ways, come to question the barriers drawn by and for English culture, the boundaries and landmarks they encounter. In the case of *Disappearance* - which does not have patience with the filigree inquiry of *Enigma* but is propelled by an angrier, more passionate energy - the narrator who asserts "I just want to build my sea-dam" (103) explicitly articulates his project in terms of the construction of identity: "[D]EEP down I knew a dam was my identity, an obstacle I sought to put between shore and sea to assert my substantialness, my indissoluble presence, without reference to colour, culture or age" (133).

It is in keeping with the novel's conciliatory gesture that in Naipaul's narrator merge the disruption of the relationship of place and identity of the displaced émigré who has *chosen* migration (linking him also to those in *forced* exile), and that of the 'citoyen metropolitain' who feels the force of globalization, new technologies and the resulting 'time-space-compression' to similar effects; this is despite the narrator's withdrawn life-style, inasmuch as he shuttles between different parts of the world.<sup>25</sup>

"But then gradually the failure, the withdrawal at the centre, began to show" (*Enigma*, 79); in the 'metropolitan center' both narrators find reluctant workers, withdrawn individuals, patriots, narrow-mindedness, decomposition, death, decay. Dabydeen's and Naipaul's narrators encounter nervous illnesses and "madness" at their destinations. The Guyanese engineer is "more than ever convinced that [Mrs Rutherford] was mad" (107): "There was an intensity in her eyes bordering on disorder" (118), and her neighbor Mrs Goldsmith is "totally gone in the head" (118). In *Enigma* there are Alan, the suicidal writer, the landlord's accidia which "had turned him into a recluse" (53), and Ray's inexplicable tears that can only be stopped by psychopharmaca.

Both novels examined here make use of narrators whose perception is inflected by their particular cultural and historical background. Coming to England, where they are confronted with an iconography of landscape and architecture (and an intellectual topography) which is at once familiar and alien, their distinct sensibility allows them to perceive the post-Edenic landscape and architecture as an inscenation. Moreover, they perceive the people they encounter as inscenations, or rather as continuously inscenating themselves. Their own identity too, is construed in this manner. Naipaul's narrator regards picturesque English villages as 'fraudulent,' the charming farmhouse as 'artificial,' his landlord's imperial grandeur as a belated 'fantasy.' The preserved order of a waxwork museum which Dabydeen's engineer perceives, he considers to be as illusory as Paddy's playacting. Significantly, both narrators come to regard

themselves as irrevocably tied to this scenario: the waxwork world of the tinned-milk label is *their* stage as well.

The narrator of *Enigma* has a writer's fascination that embraces a world he may not fully comprehend, while Dabydeen's engineer is appalled by the incomprehensible. Naipaul's narrator 'arrives' as *Enigma* comes full circle (vide its circular structure), his broad-mindedness allowing him to live with the distortions he perceives. He is consoled by relics and fragments - even fraudulent ones. Witnessing decay provides him with the fiction of being part of a larger process (if not even, rather cynically, of a transcendent order of decay and mutation). Dabydeen's narrator follows a different path: the engineer is nauseated by the disturbing impact of England and prefers to return to Guyana. His desire for factuality, corporeality, certainty - not consummated by the construction of the gigantic sea wall - triggers in him the wish to retreat, to disappear: disgusted with the inscenations he has encountered, with transience, he paradoxically decides to have faith in the void, expecting that in Guyana he will at least not be unsettled. He seeks to exchange a stage brimming with disjointed histories for an apparently empty one, both of which are constructed and supported by dams. In mapping out their readings of Dunsmere and the Manor, the protagonists appropriate public space and thus inscribe their critique, two 'colonial' figures gravitating towards the former imperial center and inhabiting positions that they could scarcely have held during the empire. In relativizing their perceptions of the very ground they stand on, of the very villages they reside in, they destabilize these foundations - crucially not only for themselves.

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## Notes:

- 1 V. S. Naipaul, *The Enigma of Arrival* (London: Penguin, 1987) and David Dabydeen, *Disappearance* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1993). Page references to these texts are included parenthetically in the main body of the text.
- 2 Cf. *Enigma*, 15. The narratives are also connected through a character called Jack who despite his absence is frequently referred to in both texts.
- 3 Note that Dunsmere is assaulted from two sides as well; this heightens further the affinity between the two places on which I am drawing here: "[W]hile men were hacking the land behind, the sea was equally intent on the cliff before" (*Disappearance*, 92).
- 4 The British professor resonates the government surveyor Fenwick who is the protagonist of Wilson Harris's *The Secret Ladder*.
- 5 Cf. the comments by Selwyn R[eginald] Cudjoe, *V. S. Naipaul: A Materialist Reading* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988), pp. 191, 245n31, 255n2; Chris Searle, "Naipaulcity: A Form of Cultural Imperialism" *Race and Class*, 26, 2 (1984), 45-62 (61) and Ambalavaner Sivanandan, "The Enigma of the Colonised: Reflections on Naipaul's Arrival" *Race and Class*, 32, 1 (1990), 33-43 (33).
- 6 Andreas Isenschmidt, "Im Wendekreis des Nebels," Rev. of *Enigma*, by V. S. Naipaul. *Die Zeit* [Hamburg], 11 Mar. 1994, 73.
- 7 *Enigma*, 272. Asa Briggs argues that this topic is a typical feature of anatomies of England; he quotes the historian G. M. Trevelyan (1941) saying: "The Modern Englishman [...] is fed and clothed better than his ancestor, but his spiritual side, in all that connects him with the beauty of the world, is utterly starved as no people have been starved in the history of the world." Trevelyan's position is in accordance with my reading of *Enigma*. Asa Briggs, "The English: How the Nation Sees Itself," *Literature in the Modern World: Critical Essays and Documents*, ed. by Dennis Walder (Oxford: OUP, 1991), 189-94 (194).
- 8 Both do not only suffer from "raw nerves" but also share a passion for writing. The narrator's estimate that "perfection such as [his] landlord looked out on contained its own corruption" echoes the narrator's phrase: "decadence [...] was in my eye" (185, 77).
- 9 Robert D. Hamner, Rev. of *The Enigma of Arrival*, by V. S. Naipaul, *World Literature Written in English*, 27, 2 (1987), 289-290 (290).
- 10 *Culture and Imperialism*, (London: Chatto & Windus, 1994), 395-408 et passim.
- 11 The following quotation suggests a desire for *historical amnesia* (Fredric Jameson's phrase): "Guyana had its own legacies of deceit and cruelty, but there was space to forget" (*Disappearance*, 179). Cf. comments on the ending of *Disappearance* below.
- 12 The term 'inscenation' probably derives from the Latinate German theatrical word 'Inszenierung' which denotes 'theatrical representation,' 'mise en scène' (*OED*). It is used here to describe the intentional and unintentional formation of scenes, images, and atmospheres through architecture, landscape, and masquerade. These are constructed and thus *imaginary* formations. To claim the constructedness of an inscenation is not to assert its illusoriness or artificiality, where those terms are understood to reside within a binary that counterpoises the 'authentic' or the 'real' as oppositional. Evocative of the theatrical microcosm from which it originates, the term is used here since it links the concept of multiple identities, generated and assumed as in a masquerade, to the production of meaning by architecture and landscape, while implying an observer.
- 13 V. S. Naipaul, "On Being a Writer," *New York Review of Books*, 34, 7 (1987), 7.
- 14 See also the anecdote about the flower related at the end of Naipaul's essay "Jasmine," *TLS* 04 June 1964, n. pag., rpt. in *The Overcrowded Barracoon*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976), 24-31.

- 15 "I had given myself a past, and a romance of the past. One of the loose ends in my mind had vanished; a little chasm filled" (*Enigma*, 149); cf. pp. 26, 87, 94, 119f, 141, 147.
- 16 Salman Rushdie, "VS Naipaul," *Imaginary Homelands*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1992), 148-151 (150).
- 17 The themes of 'reality' and 'representation' are problematized via the prime importance which cultural artefacts such as writing, paintings, etc. have to the narration, construction and themes of *Enigma* (e.g. Gray, Eliot, Hardy, Wordsworth, de Chirico, Shepard, Constable; the tinned milk label).
- 18 This is at once a commonplace insight, and one that springs from a particular geographical location, i.e. Trinidad's vicinity to the equator and the resulting absence of four seasons.
- 19 A case in point is also the narrator's construction of the persona of his landlord in the exegesis of nothing but "a confused glimpse" (*Enigma*, 171).
- 20 V. S. Naipaul, "On Being a Writer," 7.
- 21 Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, (London and New York: Verso, 1991), pp. 39-42. For a powerful critique of Jameson's article cf. Robert Young's "The Jameson Raid", *White Mythologies* (London: Routledge, 1990).
- 22 *ibid.* 44.
- 23 *ibid.* 62.
- 24 The engineer's endeavour ties in with the epigraph from Wilson Harris's *The Secret Ladder* inserted into *Disappearance*: "All at once he leaned down and splashed the liquid extravagantly on his face to clear away all doubt of a concrete existence [my emphasis]." Here the reflection on the water's surface is obliterated and exchanged for tactile and tacit sensuality.
- 25 In scarcely two pages, at the beginning of "The Ceremony of Farewell", we learn of journeys between Wiltshire, London, Dallas, Berlin, and Trinidad conducted within a very brief period of time; these journeys are induced by 'news' such as Mrs Gandhi's assassination, and concurrently made possible and requisite by modern technology. Cf. "Generations of a new kind of education had separated us from our past; and travel; and history. And the money that had come to our island, from oil and natural gas" (316). Cf. the paragraph on aeroplanes (311 (bottom) to 312 (top)).



## The Creation of Nonentities in Austin Clarke's *The Bigger Light*

JULIA ALBRECHT

This paper examines Austin Clarke's creation of what I term nonentities in his portrayal of the Afro-Caribbean immigrant's attempt to find a place in Canada. By this I mean his main character's failure to establish an identity and subject position in the Canadian society of which they are a part, however marginal.

*The Bigger Light*<sup>1</sup> is the last instalment of Clarke's Toronto trilogy, which also includes *The Meeting Point* and *Storm of Fortune*. I am automatically forced into the position of dealing with characters whose personalities and circumstances have a beginning outside of the text dealt with. My reading of *The Bigger Light*, therefore, can but only be a partial one.

### The Second Margin(alization)

In *The Bigger Light* the focus is mainly on one character, Bertram Cumberbatch, better known as Boysie, and his relationship to his wife and the place in which he finds himself presently located, namely Toronto, Canada. Although the character of Dots, Boysie's wife, is given extensive consideration in the novel, it is nevertheless into Boysie's consciousness that the reader is submerged as he tries to make sense of the reality in which he lives and would have his being.

The novel at its onset introduces Boysie and the conflictual set of circumstances within which he is attempting to define himself. In his own view, he is a "successful immigrant" who has never personally experienced racism or police brutality, problems which he knows to exist in the city of Toronto and with which he would rather not concern himself. This contradiction between what Boysie admits is taking place and what he nevertheless maintains about himself, is symbolic of his displacement and of the larger paradox constituting Canadian cultural reality within which Boysie, Dots and the other West Indian immigrants in the novel are trying to find meaning.

Boysie who writes letters to the newspapers to voice his opinion only on matters which concern him, such as urban pollution, is stuck in the middle of an identity crisis. And throughout the novel he grapples unsuccessfully with the problem of negotiating an authentic relationship between himself and the place, Toronto, where he lives. Boysie's disorientation is the combined product of dislocation resulting from his migration, and the oppression of his indigenous personality in a host society which proclaims cultural tolerance.

In *The Invention of Canada*<sup>2</sup> Arnold Itwaru defines Canada "as a set of national self-statements presenting an inscribed reality".<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, these national articulations create an environment in which people are manipulated into seeing themselves in terms of the prescribed reality presented. This, however, produces the dilemma in which Boysie finds himself throughout the novel, because Canada's official declaration of multiculturalism different but equal, stands in stark contrast to the reality of marginalization experienced by the Black West Indian immigrant in Canada. It is within this tension that Boysie is forced to conduct his search for an

identity. In *The Bigger Light* Clarke thus puts the state's perception of its own reality in question.

Itwaru goes on to demonstrate that this disparity between Canada's official position and the experience of its inhabitants is more than a question of myth making which time will rectify. Rather, he recognizes a process at work which deliberately constructs this façade of the cultural mosaic with the intention of concealment. Inherent in this façade is the promise of material and social fulfilment as the reward for industriousness, and this in an environment of ethnic tolerance. The state is constructed as an object of desire, that which offers to its passionate adherents the tangible benefits of the Canada-dream. One is seduced into accepting the façade as all that there is and should be. Concealed beneath this surface, however, is a reality encompassing systematic forms of racism, cultural intolerance and pressure towards assimilation.

Within this setting the West Indian immigrant must invent meaning and find psychological identification. Being black and an immigrant signifies that s/he is contained within the paradoxical duality of anonymity and distinctiveness. To be distinctive in this context is to be the immigrant 'visible minority', other to an implied non-visible, assimilated, Canadian majority. Conversely, anonymous describes the faceless, the negatively homogenous black immigrant other/object which is relegated to the socio-political, psychological fringes of a society itself still gripped within the throes of (post)colonial alienation. Canada, I therefore propose, is for the West Indian immigrant the site of the second margin(alization).

### Assimilation Versus Cultural affiliation

Boysie Cumberbatch who spent his early years in Canada unemployed and dependent on his wife, Dots, has now achieved what by his standards is great material success:

He had everything he wanted in life in this country. He was solvent, his business showed a profit, his clothes were expensive, and he had the car of his dreams. He had recently installed a new stereo tape recorder, and he had the technician put in four speakers. (228)

Unlike many of the immigrants portrayed in Clarke's work, Boysie does not have to face the deprivations associated with poverty. He has made economic progress and he believes that this is the result of his hard labour and private endeavour. In so far Boysie's development is in keeping with the North American dream/promise of material success. And he is now in the process of claiming for himself the recognition from society that accompanies such success.

Boysie is here portrayed as the marginalized other who conceives of materialism as the means through which transformation into a dignified subject position is effected. In so doing he accepts the falsification of reality perpetuated by the Canada-dream façade. His decision to live in a manner which reflects his financial status is his first step in the search for dignity and recognition of his value as a human being.

He had become a man who wore ties almost everywhere he went; he had changed his manner, his manners, his appearance of relaxation and of leisure, in the same way as he had changed his hairstyle. (22)

This marks, however, the beginning of Boysie's unease, for it is here that the façade and daily experience are in violent conflict. And the magnitude of the resulting disorientation is such that it leads to Boysie's eventual self-destruction. When Boysie buys the new, expensive car which he has been prompted into believing is more fitting to a man of his appearance, he finds it difficult to enjoy his latest material acquisition. There is no one with whom he can share this latest triumph, including his wife, and he wins no admiring acknowledgement. In this episode we are reminded of another of Clarke's literary characters, Calvin, in the short story "The Motor Car" in *When He Was Free and Young and He Used to Wear Silks*.<sup>4</sup> Calvin is a young immigrant from Barbados who migrates to Canada with the dream of one day owning a brand new car. He also cherishes the phantasy that owning a new car will somehow win him respect and admiration. But he is disappointed to discover that after having sacrificed many things, including friends, in order to accomplish his goal, "Not one blasted person on the whole street look out at (his) new motto-car."<sup>5</sup> In both case Clarke highlights the treacherous pitfalls behind the promises of materialism.

Boysie, however, with the increasing conservatism which comes with material gain, aspires to white, upper middle class values and seeks recognition and acceptance not from his fellow West Indians (except for his wife) but rather from the source which made the original promise, the indistinguishable 'other/society'. This is the stimulus which leads to Boysie's "double outsidership",<sup>6</sup> for in his hope of being accepted by the 'other' he feels that he must adopt as much as possible of what he conceptualizes as the status quo. Conversely he rejects that in himself which links him to a West Indian identity and Black West Indians in general.

Boysie's West Indian associations become the 'noise' which hinders him from concentrating on his necessary transformation. For this reason he leaves his Black Nationalist barbershop with its photographs of Marcus Garvey and goes instead to the Italian barbershop next door. Because there

Nobody talked to him about his race, and he didn't have to hide his conservatism on these matters, nor exhibit either a knowledge or a consciousness of them. (...) he was not forced into becoming a black militant. (23)

Boysie reduces his identity from that of West Indian to being strictly Barbadian, but eventually even this is negated. His preference for classical or 'quiet' white North American music and his indictment of calypso as being noise and leading only to depravity, are representative of his increasing identification with white values and white perceptions of blackness. Boysie too begins to stereotype all Black West Indians as criminals and blames them for the rise of racial tensions in the city:

And when he began to hear and then read in the newspapers that youths were snatching purses from old women in the subway, he wished he was a policeman sent to arrest all of them. (...) every youth that he had met in the calypso clubs and in the street became a thief. When he happened to be passing them on the sidewalk his body was overtaken with spasms, and he clutched his wallet. (15)

Boysie's denouncement of these 'criminals' is so strong because he fears that "they making things more bad for everybody." (16) But he fails to see that the (il)logic operating behind such a claim is exactly what he himself is guilty of. It is the practice of stereotyping all West Indians as criminals, because a few commit crimes, which creates an environment where the part dictates the image of the

whole. Boysie thus unwittingly commits the injustice of which he, a Black immigrant, is already a victim.

Boysie's identification with the mosaic façade leads him to a vindication of its practices and an idealization of Canadian reality, hence his claim that he is a successful immigrant who has never experienced racism. And he further maintains that Canada is fair to everyone:

This country have enough jobs for everyone to get at least one. Look at a man like me. I come into this country, and I did truly and really suffer a little bit. But it takes a while to know the ropes. I know the ropes now (...) (16)

Boysie asserts that it is this 'not knowing the ropes' which many West Indian newcomers mistake for racism. He presents himself as evidence that the Canada-dream is realizable. And from this standpoint he desires to be recognized in the place which has afforded him material progress as a person of worth, different from those 'blasted thieves' which the newspapers report about.

### Linguistic Affiliation Versus Cultural Alienation

In his pursuit of whatever limited possibilities for assimilation available to him Boysie rejects his Barbadian speech in favour of what he refers to as "a proper Canadian-English manner". Through language Boysie hopes to gain access to a society in which the Anglophone speech-containment is a characteristic. That is, Boysie's Barbadian english, which is adequate for expressing his cultural 'otherness', is in conflict with the hegemonic Canadian English which he feels he must adopt in order to gain access to the power and prestige symbolized by this way of speaking.<sup>7</sup> Clarke here again draws the curtain of the mosaic to reveal that the possibility for success and acceptance in Canada is contingent upon one's facility with the dominant language. Boysie is required to and does accept English as a measure of wholeness which defines him as not being whole. For this reason he "tried never to speak in his Barbadian accent" (25) and is irritated by his wife when she persists in doing so. He listens to the CBC radio although he admits that the programs are "beyond his comprehension". (37) Boysie hopes that by changing his habits he will be able to change his language which in turn will change the quality of his life.

The choice between English or english represents "two quite opposed possibilities of speaking and therefore of (...) cultural identification".<sup>8</sup> Clarke employs language as having the power and presence of the culture it signifies and as being metaphoric in its inference of identity. That is, Boysie's Barbadian english is metonymic of his cultural difference and his ethnic identity. For him to adopt the Canadian English and eschew his native english is to become alienated from himself, and in those moments when Boysie's Barbadian english surfaces, he admits the benefits of linguistic fidelity:

[H]is thoughts were framing themselves in his own idiom, and he saw for the first time the power in being able to talk as he liked: because there was no one in the truck with him, just his goddam lonesome; and he could talk for so! lick his mouth, and refuse to speak the King's English which he felt he had to do, and did in fact do, when he was talking with the young Canadian fellow (...) (75-6)

This is in keeping with Albert Memmi's analysis of the linguistic dichotomy which comes into being when the speaker's indigenous language is in conflict with the dominant cultural force. In this case the small 'e'nglish

(...) becomes the hidden language, the language of desire, of privacy, of loneliness, (...) the language which makes this person different.<sup>9</sup>

Boysie continues in his disorientation because he does not allow himself 'the power in being able to talk as he liked', except when by himself. He continues, writing to the newspapers and imitating the speech patterns of the CBC in the vain hope that he would be recognized as belonging to the privileged status quo.

In Boysie's search for an alternative authenticity he misguidedly abandons his cultural distinction for the imitation of a linguistic reality which he has misread as being able to "release him from some of his torment".<sup>(56)</sup> His material success is not sufficient to resist the inherently diminishing forces which operate to oppress his identity. And his attempt to evade them through adoption of the dominant linguistic code remains ineffectual because the everyday experience of marginality continually contradicts any hope of such possible authentication.

### Why to Assimilate or Not to Assimilate is Not the Question

Boysie becomes locked into a prison of dualities, the dualities presented by two distinct ways of experiencing reality. The 'centred' or dominant reality is one of assimilation, the hidden discourse behind the mosaic façade which circumscribes the expression of self and defines what is legitimate. Within this framework alternative experiences are regarded as deviant and marginalized. Itwaru describes this as the impulse of a dominant group whose aim is to impose a certain political order, "to construct human living in the fixity and narcissism of its own image".<sup>10</sup> This imparts to the marginalized reality a destructive and imitative nature because the 'centre' dictates its reality in universal terms, which forces the marginalized to perceive of themselves as disorder and chaos.

Boysie, therefore, seeks recognition of his human worth in terms which are esteemed by the excluding 'centre', such as the ability to speak English. But the goal to which he aspires, middle class identity, is denied him, not only because of differences in ethnicity but also because of discrimination against his racial identity. Boysie's black identity is devalued in society and this is what prompts him to reject blackness. His wish to assimilate springs from the received awareness that his upward mobility, economically and socially, can be achieved only at the cost of his cultural and racial integrity.

But Clarke advances the analysis a step further to show that even for Black West Indians like Boysie, who aggressively deny their black selves, assimilation is not a realizable objective because "the ideological machinations characterizing the 'other' have been sedimented in the culture for the rejection of the human fact of blackness".<sup>11</sup> Despite Boysie's laboured imitation of the mainstream status quo he remains alienated from this exclusive world. Here his existence as a person is not even conceived of. Conspicuous because of his racial difference, he nevertheless remains an anonymous entity. He exists only as blackness, a (stereo)type, in contact with which society clutches its purse.

Boysie's double outsidership is thus completed. His efforts at assimilation are abortive, but what he does succeed in accomplishing is his own denigration through a series of self-negations. Boysie therefore becomes alienated from both sides and it is this which produces his mental confusion. His distinctive identity is devalued by the host society, but he is never able to abandon the values of the status quo because Boysie never develops the vision which could perceive of his ethnic identity as

having value. Therefore, in order for him to attain any measure of his worth as a human being, he is forced to resort to the yardstick of the dominant culture. A futile manoeuvre since it is this yardstick's devaluation of his Black identity which forces him into this dilemma in the first place. And so in an unending movement his nonentity status is perpetuated and his marginalization is maintained.

### Dots and Boysie: Marriage and Displacement

Dots, like Boysie, aspires to what she perceives of as the symbols of success, but unlike Boysie she makes no active attempt to reject her West Indian cultural roots. For this reason she does not suffer the same psychological disorientations as Boysie. Clarke, in an interview with Daryl Cumber Dance<sup>12</sup> maintains that

The Black woman is the receptacle of the culture; the Black woman is the stronger partner in the sense that she can withstand and has withstood more of the daily assaults on her personality, on her body, etc.<sup>13</sup>

Dots, however, also experiences loneliness and feelings of low self-esteem, but her and Boysie's respective race for success leaves them with little time for communicating with each other. This is what engenders their growing physical isolation from each other, leaving Boysie preoccupied with his dreams of social recognition and Dots enveloped in continuing silence.

Dots and Boysie become locked into this position of marital alienation because they both experienced a displacement of roles in the male-female relationship as a result of their re/dislocation to Canada. Clarke, in two of his interviews,<sup>14</sup> comments on this phenomenon. The system of racial discrimination which operates under the Canadian mosaic façade does so in such a way as to make it easier for the Black female to find continuous employment while the Black male remains often chronically unemployable, the Black man(hood) being seen as threatening and competing for higher stakes. This absence of employment and remuneration which the male immigrant is faced with creates a reversal in status and roles which leads to tensions in the male-female relationship resulting in additional disorientations.

It is this role-'displacement' which took place at the beginning of their life together in Canada which underlies Dots' loss of respect for Boysie and undermines his self-esteem. Whereas Dots becomes empowered by her newly acquired financial independence, Boysie experiences, in Clarke's terms, "the systematic draining of his manhood".<sup>15</sup> For despite his rejection of a West Indian self-image, Boysie still aspires to the old cultural macho persona.

These various tensions in their marriage lead to Dots' and Boysie's increasing sexual impotence and finally to the complete breakdown of their marriage. They are unable to find alternative terms on which to negotiate a new way of relating to each other. And Boysie drives off enclosed in his symbolic coffin/womb seeking death or rebirth, after having transferred everything he owns to Dots. Though it is possible to view Dots' treatment of Boysie as rendering him impotent in the wider sense, I would rather suggest that Clarke depicts the reality of the marginalized immigrant woman's existence and the tensions within which she must struggle to find a balance. Unlike Boysie, who slips through the gap created by his opposing realities, Dots manages to remain hanging on, even if she only does so precariously.

### Dots and Bernice: The Female Perspective

Dots and Bernice are portrayed as two migrant women growing old in an environment hostile to their female persons. For Dots, locked in a dying relationship to the insensitive Boysie, and Bernice, who briefly revels in an exploitative relationship with a student half her age, there is an awareness of years spent in an inhospitable atmosphere with no adequate reward. However, their common history as domestic servants in Canada provides the basis for an empathic and at times supportive relationship. Their financial independence in Canada also paves the way for a more progressive conceptualizing of themselves as women, particularly with regard to their own sexuality. With the aid of popular sex psychology, Bernice and Dots are shocked into verbalizing their sexual misapprehensions and unfulfilment. This new revelation brings relief from feelings of guilt and repression.

Dots especially is also aware of the possibilities for self-advancement available to women in Canada, and she regrets her inability to break away from her West Indian female tradition which she perceives of as retarding her progress in Canada. Despite this limited progress, Dots and Bernice nevertheless present a saddening picture. Both women have been so busy accumulating money that they did not spare the energy to maintain contact with old acquaintances. Lonely and unfulfilled, they are caught between two dissatisfying and unpromising ways of being, the old dependent status left behind, and the independent but alienated existence in Canada.

### Place, Displacement and the Canadian Mosaic

The disorientation which the Black West Indian immigrant experiences as a result of confrontation with the antagonistic underlying forces of the mosaic façade provokes a new awareness of the West Indian reality left behind, which in turn has an effect on the immigrant's approach to his new, adopted home. The experiences of exclusion and marginalization in Canada hinders the growth of a sense of belonging to the new place and affects the immigrant's preparedness to identify with Canada. On the other hand, this second experience of marginalization enables him/her to recognize that the existence left behind has similarly exploitative qualities. The difference being only that in Canada exploitation does not completely exclude material progress as it does in Barbados.

What the characters fail to do is to understand and come to terms with their Barbadian heritage. And Clarke demonstrates that the uneasiness experienced in the new home, Canada, is also a product of the void which the West Indian immigrant faces when conditions in Canada force him/her to look backwards for a secure sense of self. None of the characters, therefore, makes the necessary connection between his/her heritage and his/her possible future, which could be a starting point for gaining a new identity in Canada.

### Conclusion

Clarke in *The Bigger Light* demonstrates that the multiplicity of experiences promulgated by the Canadian cultural mosaic is an exclusive one which bars from its ranks aspirants considered to be objectionable on the grounds of racial difference. By doing so Clarke dismantles the hypocrisy of a multicultural idealism which obscures the reality of assimilation and prejudice and suggests that in such an environment the Black West Indian immigrant cannot afford to give credence to claims on behalf of a Canadian cultural mosaic.

Clarke has been criticized for his failure to maintain artistic distance from his work,<sup>16</sup> a criticism which I find to be well justified, as his manipulation of his protagonists to serve his socio-political agenda becomes at times too apparent. The claim that his characters do not quite win one's sympathy despite their obvious experience of oppression must be given credit as well.<sup>17</sup> It is not that one cannot at times identify with the characters or enter into their feelings, but his characters are presented at a certain distance from the reader which makes continued feelings of sympathy difficult to maintain. It is interesting to note here, however, that Rosemary M. George in "Traveling Light", defines the immigrant literary genre as being "often marked by a detached and unsentimental treatment of the experience of 'homelessness'".<sup>18</sup> This argument may be used in defence of Clarke's treatment of his characters if not necessarily that of his style. Taken as a whole though, I find that Clarke gives a comprehensive insight into the Black West Indian immigrant's position in Canada, and he is to be commended for making an attempt to deal with the West Indian female's psyche.

### Notes:

- 1 Austin Chesterfield Clarke, *The Bigger Light*, Boston/Toronto: Little, Brown and Company, 1975. All further references are to this edition.
- 2 Arnold Harrichand Itwaru, *The Invention of Canada: Literary Text and the Immigrant Imaginary*, Toronto: TSAR Publications, 1990. The following thesis in this section is based on arguments in the introduction to this text.
- 3 *ibid.*, 10.
- 4 Austin Clarke, "The Motor Car", *When He Was Free and He Used to Wear Silks*, Toronto/Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1971, 49-75.
- 5 *ibid.*, 70.
- 6 Arnold Harrichand Itwaru, "Austin Clarke: Being and Non-Being", *The Invention of Canada*, 94.
- 7 In my use of English and english with a small 'e' I have adopted the distinction made in *The Empire Writes Back* to distinguish between Standard British English which the colonies inherited from the empire and the language variant which developed in the colonies. I adopted this usage because I believe Clarke equates Canada with the former colonial metropolitan centre.
- 8 Bill Ashcroft et al., *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post Colonial Literatures*, London/New York: Routledge, 1989, 54.
- 9 Albert Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, Boston: Beacon, 1965, 107. Memmi speaks of language here in the context of colonial realities. But my view that in Canada the colonial situation is repeated for West Indian immigrants is supported by the applicability of Memmi's arguments.
- 10 Itwaru, *The Invention of Canada*, 9.
- 11 *ibid.*, 96.
- 12 Daryl Cumber Dance, *New World Adams: Conversations with Contemporary West Indian Writers*, Leeds: Peepal Tree Press, 1992, 65-78.
- 13 *ibid.*, 69.
- 14 *ibid.*, and Terrence Craig, "Interview With Austin Clarke", *World Literature Written in English*, 26,1 (Spring 1986), 115-127.
- 15 *ibid.*, 118.
- 16 Victor J. Ramraj, "Austin C. Clarke", *DLB*, 125-31.
- 17 *ibid.*, 30-31.
- 18 Rosemary Marangoly George, "Traveling Light: Of Immigration, Invisible Suitcases, and Gunny Sacks", *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 4,2 (1992), 75.



## Redefining Women's Roles?

### The Quest for Identity in Shashi Deshpande's Novels

STEFANIE GEHRKE

Shashi Deshpande belongs to a generation of Indian women writers who write predominantly in English and have entered the Indian as well as the international literary scene during the last two decades. Her heroines, always members of the upper middle-class and the highest castes in Indian society, find themselves at decisive crossroads in their lives. Thrown into a momentary void, they begin to question their subject positions as wives, mothers, daughters and professional women and develop strategies to cope with the fragmentation of self they experience. The release of (a) repressed self(ves) through a situation of crisis, triggering off the consequent search for identity through various acts of liberation, can be considered the major issue at work in the novels of this Indian woman writer.

As the texts under discussion expose oppressive mechanisms along gender assumptions, Deshpande's work, although embedded within the Indian cultural context, has clearly a Western feminist agenda, and the narratives are influenced by European and U.S. American feminist traditions. In Elaine Showalter's terms, Deshpande's writing can be characterized as "a phase of self-discovery, a turning inward, . . . a search for identity."<sup>1</sup>

In reading her four novels *The Dark Holds No Terrors* (1980), *Roots and Shadows* (1983), *That Long Silence* (1988), and *The Binding Vine* (1993)<sup>2</sup> from a feminist perspective, I am going to examine several recurring aspects, such as the expression of the oppressive force of silence, the negation of one's body and sexuality, the illusion of a whole and freed self and writing/reading as a path toward empowerment. Finally, I will discuss the question whether and how the author arrives at a re-definition of women's roles.

Besides examining Deshpande's fiction from a feminist point of view, the post-colonial gaze can be cast on her work as well, as she writes within a cultural context influenced by European imperial domination. Although Deshpande's concern regarding women's roles in post-colonial India opens up questions significant also in much older cultural practices which cannot necessarily be called post-colonial, the term is adequate in that her novels are set in modern-day India and also deal with debasing or writing against a centre: notions which are regarded as paradigmatic of post-colonial literatures.<sup>3</sup> However, this centre here is the dominant patriarchal system that is inherent in traditional Indian society informed by pre-colonial Indian philosophies as well as the Western imperial-capitalist system. Yet, as contemporary and in that sense post-colonial India forms the framework for dismantling commonsensical assumptions regarding women's roles in Indian society, I would argue that Deshpande's novels are examples where feminist and post-colonial agendas intersect, as "[b]oth [discourses] are articulated by resistance to dominant authoritarian and neo-authoritarian orthodoxy and both speak from their position within the hegemonic language to subvert that language."<sup>4</sup>

"In their creation of fictions, writers call upon the same signifying codes that pervade social interactions, re-presenting in fiction the rituals and symbols that make up social practice."<sup>5</sup> Taking this statement as a premise for my analysis, one of the codes that is called upon in all texts is that of silence. The silences of the female characters resonate their powerlessness within the roles assigned to them.

Back ache, headache, leucorrhea, menorrhagea, dysmenorrhea, loss of appetite, burning feet, an itch "there" . . . all the indignities of a woman's life, borne silently and as long as possible, because "how do you tell anyone about these things?" Everything kept secret, their very womanhood a source of deep shame to them. (DNT, 98)

At first sight Indu, the heroine in Deshpande's first novel *Roots and Shadows*, does not seem to fit in this theoretical frame. An outspoken, emancipated young journalist, she struggles for her autonomy, chooses her husband herself, leaves her family and becomes a member of the urban upper middle-class. After ten years of absence, Indu returns to her family's house due to the death of her matriarchal great-aunt Akka who had chosen Indu as the sole inheritor of the family's property, an event which induces the young woman to reflect on the choices she has made so far.

As the narrative unfolds, the silenced parts of Indu's consciousness are unveiled and a re-evaluation of accepted assumptions and convictions sets in. "What do you want?", one of the key questions, not only in *Roots and Shadows*, but also in Deshpande's other novels, surfaces throughout the narrative.

Indu is the youngest of the four protagonists in question and also the most naive in trying to come to terms with her identity. Constantly afraid of losing her self while in a relationship with another person, this fear of silencing one's own needs coincides with the belief in an autonomous, self-sufficient "whole self", as Indu explains with regard to her marriage to Jayant: "Sometimes I wonder if I will leave him one day and live by myself. The only way in which I can be myself, my whole self again." (R&S, 97) This notion of subjectivity is rejected as unattainable, even undesirable by the protagonists of the later novels who come to the conclusion that the self is always fragmented and has to be accepted as such.

Saru, the protagonist of *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, a doctor, mother of two and married to Manu, a former poet, now teaching at a college, is already more hesitant about her position. Silence as a means of oppression of one's own feelings and the consequent difficulty of entering into a dialogue with others is not only implied as in *Roots and Shadows*, but explicitly voiced. Marital rape and the internalized guilt of the protagonist concerning her brother's death are the central issues at stake in this novel.

From a stylistic point of view, the juxtaposition of inner monologues, triggered off by means of associative imagery, built into the third person narrative, underscores the necessity for the protagonist to "hide" the repressed voice within herself.

"And yet you said nothing. You were silent." It was his turn to accuse her.

"How could I? He was so normal - at all other times . . . what could I say? Each time I tried to speak, to open my mouth, my heart failed me. What if he said . . . are you crazy?" And there had been the other thing. Her feeling that so long as she did not speak, the thing that happened between them remained unreal. That by speaking she would be making it real. (DNT, 184)

The character, trapped in a cultural and social system where her position as a highly successful professional is already eyed with suspicion, punishes herself in remaining silent in order not to destroy her image and that of her family. In other words, Saru simply sees no way out of the oppressive pattern that controls her relationship with her husband for fear of being thrown into a void and left without any manual of how to cope with this situation. She hints at the dilemma of existing only as the Other, the object not subject of her own story, in comparing herself with a ventriloquist's dummy.

There is this strange new fear of disintegration. A terrified consciousness of not existing. No, worse. Of being just a ventriloquist's dummy, that smiles, laughs, and talks only because of the ventriloquist. The fear that without the ventriloquist, I will regress, go back to being a lifeless puppet, a smirk pasted on to its face. (DNT, 18)

This quote illustrates the problematic discussed in feminist as well as post-colonial discourses, that "[i]n patriarchal, eurocentric, phallogocentric culture the feminine and the post-colonial both exist in this dark chthonic region of otherness and non-being."<sup>6</sup>

Jaya, the protagonist and narrator of Deshpande's fifth novel *That Long Silence*, is a rather conventional character. She represents neither the young rebel nor the successful professional who suffers from the reversal of gender roles. Jaya is married to an engineer, she is an urban middle-class housewife, has two children and does some freelance work writing a weekly column for a women's magazine. Her life seems to be like the ads she loves so much. However, through the crisis situation created by her husband's business malpractice, Jaya's frustrations and fears surface and culminate in her having a physical breakdown, which triggers off the difficult process of an unrelenting self-analysis.

Jaya's story is the attempt to leave the ventriloquist behind by writing down her life as a way of coming to grips with oppressive social and cultural patterns. The prologue preceding the novel already resolves the silence by breaking it. Told from an inner point of view, employing formal devices such as interior monologue and associative imagery even more forcefully than in *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, constantly interrupting the plot framing the narrative, remembering and retelling episodes of the past, the text obtains the quality of a psychoanalytic discourse.

To a larger extent than in her previous work, women's silences in general are examined. *That Long Silence* touches upon the stories of women of lower social status, moving away from enforcing unreflected oppressive patterns of silencing along caste and/or class lines, visible for instance in Indu's statement about an old woman in *Roots and Shadows*.

An old woman was sitting in front of the other fire, rolling chappaties. There had always been a nameless old woman, invariably called Kaku, to help in the kitchen. This could be just one more of them. (R&S, 127)

To her I was just a childless woman. To get married, to bear children, to have sons and then grandchildren ... they were still for them the only successes a woman could have. I had almost forgotten this breed of women since I had left home. Now, seeing them was like discovering a new world. Each one of them, riddled with ignorance, prejudice and superstition, was a world of darkness in herself. And, even more amazing was their ignorance of their own darkness. It was almost superb. (R&S, 128)

Indu's remark illustrates that "opposition to the dominant ideologies of gender can be discomfitingly class or caste bound and draw on assumptions about race or religious persuasion that reinforce the hold of those ideologies and collaborate in extending their authority".<sup>7</sup>

In *The Binding Vine*, Deshpande's latest novel, the author problematizes the silence of women regarding the issue of domestic violence. While grieving over the death of her baby daughter, the narrator Urmi, a teacher, rediscovers the half-forgotten diaries and poetry of her dead mother-in-law. While leafing through the latter's writing, tracing the story of an unhappy marriage marked by domestic violence, the narrator develops a relationship with this female character whose poems help her overcome her own grief. Furthermore, Deshpande introduces a second story line where Urmi becomes involved in the fate of a young woman who has been raped and hospitalized. Disregarding class and caste boundaries, Urmi and Shakutai, the mother of the young woman, become friends. It is Urmi who finally convinces Shakutai to break the silence regarding the rape of her daughter by publicly announcing the fact that the daughter's own uncle committed the crime.

Thus, in Deshpande's most recent novels, *That Long Silence* and *The Binding Vine*, the upper middle-class heroines begin to take into account generational, caste and class differences while taking a closer look at the multifaceted story of gender oppression.

He saw strength in the woman sitting silently in front of the fire, but I saw despair. I saw a despair so great that it would not voice itself. I saw a struggle so bitter that silence was the only weapon. Silence and surrender. (TLS, 36)

From this "silence intact" that still encapsulates the life of Jaya's mother-in-law in *That Long Silence*, the narrative moves to voice. This search for voicedness does not imply the notion of a whole and fixed self that marks the beginning of the search in Indu's perception of herself in Deshpande's first novel. Jaya as well as Urmi scrutinize and dismiss the notion of this unified, fixed, transcended self, which lies at the core of phallogocentric and humanist thinking.

But what was that "myself"? "Trying to find oneself" - what a cliché that has become. As if such a thing is possible. As if there is such a thing as one self, intact and whole, waiting to be discovered. On the contrary, there are so many, each self attached like a Siamese twin to a self of another person, neither able to exist without the other. (TLS, 69)

In that sense, the four novels illustrate a process from silence as the locus of oppression to voice as the locus of claiming one's identity in its fragmentation and multiplicity.

Other sites of oppressive mechanisms inherent in patriarchal ideology interrogated in Deshpande's novels are the female body and sexuality.

Indu overtly rejects her being female. "Yes, it was true. I felt hedged in, limited by my sex. I resented my womanhood because it closed so many doors to me." (R&S, 87) The role assigned to her also shapes her sexual behaviour, silencing her body, because passion is not controllable and thus not appreciated by her husband who is afraid of Indu's passionate sexuality: "And now I know ... it shocks him to find passion in a woman. It puts him off. When I'm like that, he turns away from me. I've learnt my lesson now. And so I pretend. I'm passive. And unresponsive. I'm

still and dead." (R&S, 91/92) The denial of her body as a result of the way it is perceived from the outside is thematized already earlier when Indu reflects upon the negative concepts womanhood has entailed for her since she has been introduced to it. "And don't forget," she had ended, "for four days now you are unclean. You can't touch anyone or anything." And that had been my introduction to the beautiful world of being a woman. I was unclean." (R&S, 86/87)

Only after the intimate encounter with her cousin Naren does Indu experience her sexuality as a liberating and positive feeling, disclosing the possibility of an appreciation of and identification with her body. "There was a joyous sense of release, of passion I could experience and show and participate in." (R&S, 167)

In *The Dark Holds No Terrors* the body as a site of oppression is problematized through the marital rape. The beginning of the novel, seemingly describing a dream passage, turns into the account of a brutal crime. "Now there was no waking; The dream, the nightmare, whatever it was, continued. Changing now, like some protean monster, into the horror of rape." (DNT, 9/10) However, the fact that she is actually raped is displaced by the protagonist for a long time, reflected by the description in the prologue which does not unveil this act of utter violence in its entire monstrosity. This passage evoking the sphere between consciousness and dream (also through the change in letter type) renders the act itself less appalling because it remains opaque and somehow unreal. Thus, just as the protagonist tries to explain and justify her husband's behaviour as a reaction against her superiority in their relationship which can only be mastered by his invasion and conquering of her body, the representation of rape in *The Dark Holds No Terrors* seems also to shy away from a total confrontation.

The acceptance of such a situation appears plausible if one takes into account how womanhood is perceived in the first place. If the silent suffering of women is postulated as the norm, a revolt against this norm can only be evaluated as an overstepping of boundaries which cannot go unpunished. Like Indu, Saru is taught to negate her body while growing up. "And it became something shameful, this growing up, so that you had to be ashamed of yourself, even in the presence of your own father." (DNT, 54/55)

In rejecting the signs of femaleness in her body, Saru simultaneously rejects her domineering mother who has herself internalized the patterns of submission and power. Conflicting with this pattern is the behaviour of Saru's father. He, not unlike her husband, does not fulfil the role of the patriarch, a fact, Saru first appreciates regarding her husband. Yet, as the reversal of their positions becomes increasingly apparent during the course of events, she finally rejects him for being a failure, thereby repeating her mother's behaviour with regard to her husband. Deshpande describes how the cultural and social norms do not correspond with the actual behaviour of the characters. The pressure on them for not conforming to traditional gender roles results in Manu's attack on Saru's body, a way to re-establish and assert his power and thus the ideologically inscribed order. Unlike Indu who eventually experiences her body in a joyful, positive manner, Saru's body and her sexuality remain the negative and shattered sites of oppressive behaviour.

In *That Long Silence* Jaya is no longer preoccupied with the way others perceive her womanhood, but begins to analyze her own perception of herself and of what it means to be female.

Suddenly I was furious. What did he know? What did he understand of women? Was it the Greeks who had said that a woman is her womb? I had laughed when I had read that. But can any woman deny the link? Those painful spasms in the middle of each cycle, those massive driving-on-to-madness contracting pains of childbirth - could any woman endure them if not for the fact that they were reminders of that link? (TLS, 107)

Linking woman's body with her identity, Deshpande essentializes the female body as a site of revelation. She moves away from a separate analysis of, on the one hand, the body as the site of desire and oppression and, on the other, the mind hosting reason and rationality, to a synthesis of both, linking the female body with woman's gender role. Thus, whereas Indu and Saru still struggle with the perception of their womanhood and tend to ignore and negate it, Jaya links the idea of woman to her biological make-up which she cannot escape. There is no longer a revolting against this link but an urge to examine the very concept as it is ideologically inscribed in a male-dominated society.

Further pursuing this theme, *The Binding Vine* focuses on women's bodies as sites of oppressive mechanisms from a specifically female and maternal point of view. Urmi's grief over the death of her daughter resulting in her emotional and physical break-down underscores Deshpande's holistic approach in search of different concepts defining women's identity. Furthermore, rape obtains a high significance in this narrative and while Saru in *The Dark Holds No Terrors* struggles in the private sphere of her parents' house with the consequences of this crime, in *The Binding Vine* the violent invasion of a woman's body is finally revealed and made public, thereby openly confronting and challenging the sanctifying of women's subordination across the various socio-economic strata of Indian society.

In *That Long Silence* writing itself becomes the subject of the text. The novel represents the attempt of the narrator to write her life down. "I tried painfully to retrace my way back through the disorderly, chaotic sequence of events and non-events that made up my life. It was like looking through the eyehole of the magic peepshow of my childhood." (TLS, 187) Jaya's writing can be characterized as therapeutic as it marks the starting point of a process towards a different awareness and perception of selfhood.

However, before she can even begin this process, she experiences the whole spectrum of loss and utter insecurity.

Strange - I've always found writing easy. Words came to me with a facility that pleased me; sometimes shamed me, too - it seemed too easy. But now, for some reason, I am reminded of the process of childbirth. The only memory of it that remains with me is that of fear - a fear that I was losing control over my own body. And so I resisted. (TLS, 1)

The refusal to write her biweekly column represents the first step toward the realization that she is actually deeply unsatisfied with her life. "Perhaps he thought I was doing my fortnightly 'Seeta' story. But suddenly 'Seeta' had exploded. There was nothing left of her, not even bits and pieces that could be put together." (TLS, 68) In rejecting the image of the happy wife Seeta, Jaya discovers that she had suppressed other parts of herself in solely focusing on her role as daughter, wife and mother. She relives the crucial stations of her life while writing them down, also

scrutinizing the problematic relationship with her mother, overbearing and domineering like most mother figures in Deshpande's novels, until her preconceived opinions, for instance regarding her mother, begin to change. Jaya detects a link between the older woman and herself and she realizes that, like her mother, she also had silenced many parts of her personality for the sake of society's deeply embedded norms and regulations.

Another important incident that induces Jaya to turn "inward", writing herself, is her encounter with Kamat, a character who can be interpreted as her alter ego confronting her with her deep-rooted fears.

"All this anger ...?" Kamat had grinned at me. "Why didn't you use it here?" He had tapped the paper so hard that it had torn, yes the tear was still here, "Why didn't you use that anger in your story? There's none of it here. There isn't even a personal view, a personal vision. I'll tell you what's really wrong with your story. It's too restrained. Spew out your anger in your writing, woman, spew it out. Why are you holding it in?" (TLS, 147)

Whereas writing turns into a therapeutic healing experience for Jaya, Urmi, the protagonist in *The Binding Vine*, resorts to the process of reading her mother-in-law's poetry and diaries as a way to re-think her life while grieving over the death of her little daughter. Mira writes:

*Whose face is this I see in the mirror,  
unsmiling, grave, bedewed with fear?  
The daughter? No, Mother, I am now your shadow.*

Mira was only 22 when she wrote this. She had been married at the age of 18. Since then, she had lived a life which, even if normal to most women of that time, must have seemed terrible to her. It seems appalling to me when I think of the choices of my own life, of its freedom. Cloistered in a home, living with a man she could not love, surrounded by people she had nothing in common with - how did she go on? Perhaps it was her writing that kept her going, that kept her alive." (TBV, 127)

The process of introspection through writing/reading occurs most prominently in *That Long Silence* and *The Binding Vine*, but the issue of writing/speaking in order to reconsider and ultimately change one's position is also touched upon in *Roots and Shadows* and *The Dark Holds No Terrors*. In the former novel, the protagonist's cousin Naren questions Indu's integrity as a writer and provokes her to seriously confront the key question posed in the novel: "What do I want?"

In *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, the voicing of the unspeakable is emphasized. In talking to her father about being raped by her husband and in retelling the events the day her little brother drowned, voicing the feelings of guilt she has carried with her ever since, the protagonist is breaking taboos and is eventually in a position to confront the issues that have tormented her for so long.

They came to her then, all those selves she had rejected so resolutely at first, and so passionately embraced later. The guilty sister, the undutiful daughter, the unloving wife ... all persons spiked with guilts. Yes, she was all of them, she could not deny that now. She had to accept these selves to become whole again. But if she was all of them, they were not all of her. She was all these and so much more. My life is my own ... somehow she felt as if she had found it now, the connecting link. It means you are not just a strutting, grimacing puppet, standing furtively on the stage

for a brief while between areas of darkness. If I have been a puppet it is because I made myself one. (DNT, 201)

Finally, I will briefly address the question whether and how the author arrives at a re-definition of women's roles. For this purpose I will take a closer look at the various relationships delineated in the novels.

Examining the mother-daughter relationships, it is striking that they are depicted as highly problematic in all four narratives. The mother figures are portrayed as domineering or, in the case of Urmi's mother in *The Binding Vine*, weak women who share their loyalties mainly with their husbands and sons and seem to resent their daughters in one way or the other. Indu, whose mother dies shortly after her birth, remarks: "Maybe I'm lucky after all not to have a mother. To see your future self, to move inexorably towards it, to know there's no escape ...!" (R&S, 63) This statement summarizes the profound resentment against the mother all of Deshpande's protagonists express more or less vehemently.

Although the first three heroines try to trace their mothers' experiences as well as those of their aunts or mothers-in-law in order to come to a better understanding of their own situation, the overall tone remains detached and negative. There is an enormous lack of appreciation and valorizing of the lives of their foremothers. An unsurprising scenario, if one takes into consideration that mothers and daughters find themselves in a position where they have to compete for the love and trust of their sons and husbands in order to obtain a sense of positive subjectivity.

The relationship of the protagonist with other women becomes a major issue in Deshpande's latest novel *The Binding Vine*. For the first time the author explores the victimization women undergo across socio-economic boundaries by specifically focusing on female relationships which bring to the fore the subordinate and powerless position of many women within the family structure which, in turn, often culminates in domestic violence and rape.

Although *The Binding Vine* ends on a tragic note, as Shakutai's sister commits suicide because she had concealed the fact that her husband had raped her niece, the novel represents the most successful attempt in Deshpande's work regarding a re-definition of women's self-understanding. Unlike her predecessors, Urmi does not reject her femaleness, but has instead begun to create a positive and powerful "herstory" by rediscovering her mother-in-law's poetry. Furthermore, she has induced Shakutai to step out of the private sphere, thereby giving permission to make public the fact that her daughter was brutally raped.

Rape is a recurring theme in Deshpande's work, a subject touched upon already in *The Dark Holds No Terrors*. However, whereas Saru expresses this act of violence only indirectly in a dream sequence and later confides in her father, thus remaining within the concealed sphere of the family, and whereas Mira, Urmi's mother-in-law in *The Binding Vine*, also a victim of marital rape, has only her poems to give voice to the violence done to her, Shakutai's public statement ultimately breaks the century-long silence on domestic violence.

Contrary to the difficult female relationships, the father-daughter relationships outlined in the novels can be characterized as affectionate and less complicated. The positive father figures find their continuation in the protagonists' philosopher friends. Intellectually as well as sexually, these male friends challenge the overall weak husband characters who remain shapeless and peripheral. Yet, none of these



male advisers seriously threatens the protagonists' lives rooted in the established order. In *Roots and Shadows* and *That Long Silence* Naren and Kamat die, Madhav in *The Dark Holds No Terrors* is too young to achieve any significance in Saru's adult life, and the relationship between Urmi and Bhaskar is suspended after Bhaskar confesses his love to her. Although these male characters prompt the heroines to question the choices they have made so far, they eventually fade from the plot. The protagonists are not forced to act and the narratives remain vague and ambiguous as to whether they will succeed in changing their lives according to their needs.

Thus, although Deshpande's heroines revolt against their traditional roles as devoted wives and mothers, with the exception of Urmi in *The Binding Vine*, they claim male models in their search for a more fulfilling lifestyle. I would even argue that they do not essentially question the patriarchal system because they appreciate and valorize certain forms of knowledge, including traditional poetry or science, linked strongly to the dominant male order, whereas the knowledge of women is constantly debased. Although the hardships women have to endure are touched upon, emotionally these women are rejected.

The attempt of the protagonists to alter and reverse accepted gender roles, as portrayed in *Roots and Shadows* and especially in *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, on the one hand shows the enormous difficulty of even beginning to change preconceived ideas about gender, and on the other hand, confirms my assumption that Indu and Saru try to redefine women's position by dismissing traditional women's roles without fundamentally questioning the patriarchal system itself. Rejecting their womanhood as a result of their difficult relationship with their mothers whose life is viewed as undesirable, while idealizing the image of the father, they begin to fashion their lives along ideals of individualism, following male Western models of subjectivity.

Comparing all four novels one can nevertheless discern a change in the protagonists' awareness. They undergo a development from a revolt against oppressive mechanisms rejecting their bodies, their sexuality, and ultimately their mothers as the icons reminding them of the submissive and restricted position they long to escape, toward an understanding and acceptance of this heritage as a liberating force in moving from silence to speech.

The male humanist model of subjectivity based on a firm and stable subject who is in total control of its life is increasingly abandoned in favour of a more fragmented self which re-constitutes itself repeatedly in relation to others. This acceptance of a fragmented self is most eloquently undertaken in *That Long Silence*.

However, while Deshpande's first three protagonists begin to question their traditional roles, but are not yet in a position to create a more satisfying concept for themselves, in *The Binding Vine* - the title refers to a verse of Mira's poetry, symbolizing the interconnectedness of desire, love and grief - the specific link between women becomes the central theme. "The Binding Vine" can also be interpreted as a metaphor emphasizing the need to valorize female relationships as a positive and unifying force in redefining women's roles from within their own position. Deshpande's most recent novel can thus be viewed as an effort to create a distinct female tradition as a means to overcome the oppression of women, to revalorize the lives of their foremothers and to break the silence by creating a form of "sisterhood" irrespective of class and caste boundaries.

On the whole, Deshpande's novels can be characterized as attempts to create

compromises regarding the difficult relationship between the existing order and the female self. They do not reflect a radical feminist position. The author seems to believe in gradual change within the structure of the family, as none of the protagonists ultimately chooses a life outside the family, even when they try to escape it. With the exception of Urmi they do not rely on any female role model in order to reshape their perception of themselves; instead they choose male advisers to help them to solve their inner conflicts. Thus, it is not surprising that in *That Long Silence*, although Hindu faith is not central in Deshpande's work, Jaya finds justification for her newly discovered selfhood in the *Bhagavadgita*, in Krishna's last words to Prince Arjuna, quoted in her beloved father's diary: "... Krishna confers humanness on Arjuna. 'I have given you knowledge. Now you make the choice. The choice is yours. Do as you desire.'" (TLS, 192). However, in her last statement about Prakrit, a language assigned exclusively to women, " - a language that had sounded to my ears like a baby's lisp" (192), because women were not allowed to speak Sanskrit, the language of the poets, Deshpande qualifies the above mentioned freedom again by hinting at its underlying misogynist ideological basis, and thus makes a case for the necessity and the problem of altering old myths in order to create more positive and liberating roles for women.

Focusing on a woman's poetry, *The Binding Vine* takes this theme into another direction. It confers knowledge to a woman's words and does not alter old myths but turns instead to a woman's voice and her language as a revealing and ultimately empowering countertradition. In that sense, Deshpande's work marks a beginning, an attempt in redefining women's roles in a society based on ideologies, whether it is the traditional Indian caste society or its imperialist-capitalist counterpart, where patriarchal structures form still the very root of cultural, social and economic practices.

#### Notes:

- 1 Elaine Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977, 13.
- 2 Shashi Deshpande, *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, New Delhi: Vikas Publishing, 1980. Subsequent references to the novels are included in the text. Abbreviation used: DNT.  
---. *Roots and Shadows* Bombay: Orient Longman Ltd., 1983. Abbr.: R&S. Although published after *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, *Roots and Shadows* is Deshpande's first novel.  
---. *That Long Silence*, London: Virago Press, 1988. Abbr.: TLS.  
---. *The Binding Vine*, London: Virago Press, 1993. Abbr.: TBV.
- 3 For a comprehensive and influential study regarding the discourse on post-colonial theory, see Bill Ashcroft et al., *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*, London: Routledge, 1989.
- 4 W.D. Ashcroft, "Intersecting Marginalities: Post-colonialism and Feminism," *Kunapipi*, XI,2 (1989), 23. See also Chapter 5: Re-placing theory: post-colonial writing and literary theory: "Feminism and post-colonialism," in Bill Ashcroft et al. *The Empire Writes Back*, London: Routledge, 1989, 174-177.
- 5 Gayle Greene and Coppélie Kahn (eds.), *Making a Difference: Feminist Literary Criticism*, London: Routledge, 1985, 4.
- 6 W.D. Ashcroft, "Intersecting Marginalities: Post-colonialism and Feminism", 23.
- 7 Susie Tharu and K. Lalita (eds.), *Women Writing in India*, vol. I, New York: The Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 1991, 35.

## Growing Up to Become Multicultural?

### Adolescence in Postcolonial Literature: Beschreibung einer Unterrichtseinheit

MARTINA MICHEL

Englischsprachige Literatur von AutorInnen, die in England leben und schreiben, deren familiärer und kultureller Hintergrund jedoch aus einem Land des ehemaligen britischen Empire kommt, ist kein neues Phänomen. Relativ neu ist jedoch die literarische Verarbeitung von Erfahrungen einer Generation von "Immigranten", die in England geboren oder dort zumindest aufgewachsen sind. Nur schwer lassen sich die Romane von AutorInnen wie Ravinder Randhawa, Atima Srivastava, Farhana Sheikh, Vernella Fuller, Hanif Kureishi, u.a. wie bisher üblich nach nationalen Kriterien einordnen, können also nicht ohne weiteres etwa als eine Variante der indischen, pakistanischen oder jamaikanischen Literatur verstanden werden. So beginnen sich denn auch in England ebenso problematische wie umstrittene Begriffe wie *Black British Literatures*, *Writers of the Asian Diaspora* oder *Minority Literatures* zu etablieren, Begriffe, die - zumindest aus literaturwissenschaftlicher Perspektive - auf ein noch sehr unzulänglich beachtetes Neuland verweisen.<sup>1</sup>

Auf dieses Terrain begab ich mich im Wintersemester 1992/93, als ich am Englischen Seminar der Universität Hannover ein Seminar mit dem Titel "Growing Up to Become Multicultural: Adolescence in Postcolonial Literature" anbot. Ausgangspunkt meiner Überlegungen war dabei zum einen, ein Forum zu bieten, in dem über den zu einem Gummiwort verkommenen Begriff des Multikulturalismus<sup>2</sup> nachgedacht werden sollte. Ich wollte mit diesem Seminar der weitverbreiteten Auffassung entgegenwirken, nach der Kinder von "Immigranten" notwendigerweise an einer Identitätskrise leiden und in ihrer Persönlichkeitsentwicklung instabil sind, da sie angeblich zwischen zwei Kulturen hin- und hergerissen werden.<sup>3</sup> Die Gestaltung des Seminars wurde zum anderen von den Anforderungen bestimmt, die in Hannover an StudentInnen der Literaturwissenschaft im Grundstudium gestellt werden, d.h. dem Erlernen der wissenschaftlichen Auseinandersetzung mit Literatur sollte ein ebenso großes Gewicht verliehen werden wie der Auseinandersetzung mit dem gewählten Thema.<sup>4</sup>

Für die Planung meines Seminars hieß das erstens, daß ich die Frage in den Vordergrund stellte, ob die Literatur der sogenannten "second generation immigrants" die gängige Auffassung bestätigt, nach der der kulturelle Hintergrund von Kindern ethnischer Minderheiten die hauptsächliche Ursache ihrer Konflikte im sozialen Integrationsprozeß darstellt. Meinem Anliegen entsprechend sollte das Augenmerk darauf gelenkt werden, wie die Jugendlichen in den ausgewählten Romanen mit den verschiedenen Faktoren umgehen, die ihr Erwachsenwerden im "multi"-kulturellen London beeinflussen.

Diese Akzentsetzung fand ihre Entsprechung in unserem Analyseverfahren der narrativen Texte, indem zweitens danach gefragt werden sollte, wie Autoren und Autorinnen die Erfahrungen von Jugendlichen ethnischer Minderheiten in ihren

Romanen verarbeiten. Literatur sollte vorgestellt werden als realitätsverarbeitende wie auch als realitätsproduzierende und nicht als realitätsabbildende Texte, die sich diesem Bemühen entsprechend ganz unterschiedlicher erzähltechnischer Mittel bedienen.<sup>5</sup>

Als Beispiele boten sich drei Romane an, die in jüngster Zeit veröffentlicht wurden und unter deren AutorInnen bisher nur Hanif Kureishi weiter bekannt sein dürfte. In allen Fällen handelt es sich um Erstlingsromane, alle drei "spielen" im London der 70er und 80er Jahre, und in allen dreien sind Jugendliche die ProtagonistInnen der story. Doch damit enden bereits die Gemeinsamkeiten. Spannend und - wie ich meine - für Studierende zugleich anschaulich macht der Vergleich der drei Romane, auf welcher unterschiedlichen Weise und mit welcher unterschiedlicher (auch politischer) Akzentsetzung AutorInnen über den Prozeß des Heranwachsens im "multi"-kulturellen England schreiben.

In Vernella Fullers 1992 erschienenem Roman *Going Back Home* (Women's Press) steht die Frage im Vordergrund, wo die beiden Hauptfiguren, Joy und Esmine, zuhause sind - in Jamaika oder in England? Hier erscheint die Antwort der "second generation immigrants" eng verknüpft mit deren jeweilige Beziehung zu ihren Eltern bzw. deren Bindung an ihr Herkunftsland. Joys Sehnsucht nach einer Rückkehr nach Jamaika ist zugleich die Sehnsucht nach der Erfüllung der Träume ihres Vaters. Esmine hingegen, die eine sehr viel engere Bindung an die Mutter hat, teilt deren Auffassung, daß sie ein Recht darauf habe, als gleichberechtigte Bürgerin in England zu leben. Die Beziehung der in England geborenen Kinder zur Kultur und Geschichte Jamaikas erscheint somit hier als eine über die Eltern vermittelte. Wichtig dabei ist, daß in diesem Roman verschiedene Möglichkeiten des Umgangs mit der Frage nach der Verortung und Definition von Heimat vor- und gleichberechtigt nebeneinandergestellt werden. Erzähltechnisch wird dieses über wechselnde Einsichtnahme in die innere Gedanken- und Gefühlswelt der Figuren erreicht. Die auktoriale ErzählerIn bleibt im Hintergrund. Es sind Esmine und Joy, die am Schluß des Romans der jeweiligen Entscheidung der anderen Respekt zollen.

Ausgesprochen heterogen wird auch die Situation pakistanischer Frauen, die in England leben, in Farhana Sheikhs Roman *The Red Box* (Women's Press, 1991) dargestellt. Der Roman zeigt auf, wie Jugendliche ethnischer Minderheiten mit den unterschiedlichen Erwartungen ihrer Eltern einerseits und ihrer MitschülerInnen andererseits umzugehen und zwischen diesen zwei Welten zu vermitteln und leben lernen. Es wird jedoch betont, daß die Breite der Handlungsspielräume der Frauen eingebettet sind in die jeweiligen ökonomischen, kulturellen und patriarchalischen Machtstrukturen, die ihre Breite bedingen. Der Roman plädiert ferner deutlich für eine Solidarität der betroffenen Frauen untereinander, eine Solidarität also, die Klassenunterschiede überwinden soll. Die spezifische Konturierung der Figuren im Roman, für die die Kategorien "race", "gender" und "class" eine wesentliche Rolle spielen, findet ihre Entsprechung in den realistischen Erzählmodi, mit denen hier gearbeitet wurde (Interviews, Briefe, Sprachvarietäten, soziale Register, usw.).

Im Vergleich dazu erschien Hanif Kureishis Roman *The Buddha of Suburbia* (Faber and Faber, 1990) geradezu als Kontrastprogramm. In diesem Roman, der im traditionellen Sinne als Entwicklungsroman bezeichnet werden kann, steht ähnlich wie in D.J. Salingers *Catcher in the Rye* der Ich-Erzähler im Zentrum des Geschehens. Und ähnlich wie auch bei Holden Caulfield dominiert das erzählende Ich. Die Distanz, die sowohl zu dem erlebenden Ich des Karim Amir als auch zu der von ihm

beschriebenen Umwelt hergestellt wird, gewinnt in Kureishis Roman jedoch eine besondere Bedeutung. Die stellenweise provokante Unnahbarkeit und ironische Selbstdistanz des Erzählers Karim Amir entpuppt sich im Verlauf des Romans immer mehr als eine Verweigerungsstrategie, mit der sich der Protagonist jeglicher Festschreibung auf kulturelle Authentizität entzieht, einer Festschreibung, mit der sich Karim im Laufe seiner Entwicklung immer wieder konfrontiert sieht. Stärker noch als die beiden erwähnten Romane unterläuft Kureishi damit das gängige Vorurteil, die "second generation immigrants" seien innerlich zwischen zwei Kulturen zerrissen. Zerrissenheit, sofern sie in diesem Roman eine Rolle spielt, kommt von außen, wird als Erwartungshaltung an die Figuren herangetragen, die ihrerseits mit nichts mehr beschäftigt zu sein scheinen, als, ihren eigenen, von Synkretismus gekennzeichneten Weg zu finden. Somit stellt auch bei diesem Roman die besondere Berücksichtigung des gewählten Erzählmodus einen fruchtbaren Zugang zu der literarischen Verarbeitung der Erfahrung mit "Multi"-kulturalität dar.

Diese Verfahrensweise, die hier nur knapp angedeutet werden kann, bringt den Vorteil mit sich, daß eine ganze Reihe wichtiger Lernschritte geleistet werden kann. Eine Analyse narrativer Texte, bei der der jeweilige Erzählmodus besondere Beachtung findet, räumt nicht nur die Möglichkeit ein, Grundkenntnisse des literaturwissenschaftlichen Arbeitens zu vermitteln, sondern sensibilisiert gleichzeitig für die an die Erzählmodi geknüpften spezifischen Formen der realitätsverarbeitenden und damit zugleich auch realitätsproduzierenden Sinngebungsprozesse. Die damit hergestellte Distanz zum narrativen Text kann in einem nächsten Schritt erneut an der zur weiteren Information herangezogenen Sekundärliteratur geübt werden. Bei der Auseinandersetzung mit dem Roman von Vernella Fuller waren wir auf psychoanalytische Erklärungsmodelle verwiesen worden, um die jeweilige Bindung der beiden Hauptfiguren zu ihren Eltern einerseits und den beiden kulturellen Hintergründen andererseits analysieren zu können.<sup>6</sup> Farhana Sheikh's Roman lenkte sowohl durch den realistischen Erzählmodus als auch die spezifischen Figurenkonturierung unsere Aufmerksamkeit auf die sehr heterogene Situation asiatischer Frauen in England. Für weitere Informationen zu diesem Hintergrund konnten wir auf eine Reihe neuerer sozialwissenschaftlicher Analysen zurückgreifen, die ich in einem Reader für den Kurs zusammengestellt hatte.<sup>7</sup> In Kureishis Roman schließlich spielten Vorurteile, mit denen "immigrants" konfrontiert werden, eine besondere Rolle.<sup>8</sup>

Über das Erarbeiten dieser vielschichtigen Zusammenhänge konnte zum einen deutlich gemacht werden, daß trotz der Gemeinsamkeiten, dieser narrativen Texte, jeder einzelne nach ganz unterschiedlichen Hintergrundinformationen verlangte. Zum anderen, sind sie in ihrer Aussageträchtigkeit geprägt von dem jeweiligen psychoanalytischen, soziologischen oder diskursanalytischen Untersuchungsverfahren, das die Grundlage der jeweiligen Studie darstellte. Somit konnte sowohl über die Form der Auseinandersetzung mit den ausgewählten narrativen Texten als auch über die gezielte Verwendung von Sekundärliteratur die Komplexität der Situation der "second generation immigrants" und deren sehr unterschiedliche Verarbeitung vom Umgang mit Erfahrungen im "multi"-kulturellen England deutlich gemacht werden. Es wurde sichtbar, daß sich die vielschichtigen Probleme der Kinder ethnischer Minderheiten keineswegs auf ihren familiären und kulturellen Hintergrund reduzieren lassen.

Daß die Praxis nicht so strukturiert und konsistent aussah wie die hier nachträg-

lich formulierte Zusammenfassung, wird nicht weiter verwundern. Eine der Hauptlehren, für mich war, daß man das Unterrichtsvorhaben bei erneutem Durchlauf auf zwei Semester ausdehnen sollte. Obwohl wir arbeitsteilig vorgehen, kamen einzelne Aspekte zweifelsfrei zu kurz. Man könnte auch erwägen, dieses Seminar ins Hauptstudium zu verlagern, da dann nicht so viel Zeit für die Vermittlung von literaturwissenschaftlichem Grundwissen benötigt wird (bzw. benötigt werden sollte). Soll es bei einem einsemestrigen Seminar im Grundstudium bleiben, erscheint es ratsam, sowohl die Fragestellung als auch das zu erarbeitende Material enger zu fassen. Zu letzterem entschied ich mich im Sommersemester 1993, als ich ein Seminar mit dem Titel "Negotiating Identities: The Asian Women Writers' Collective" anbot. Darin konzentrierten wir uns auf das Konzept von Identität und dessen literarischer Verarbeitung und lasen ausgewählte Romane und Kurzgeschichten aus dem Asian Women Writers' Collective.<sup>9</sup> Leider kann ich den Verlauf dieses Seminars hier nicht näher ausführen, möchte jedoch bemerken, daß ich auch nach dem Sommersemester das hier in Kürze vorgestellte Konzept weiterhin für fruchtbar und verbesserungswürdig halte. Über weitere Anregungen oder Fragen würde ich mich deshalb sehr freuen.

#### Anmerkungen:

- 1 Vgl. dazu Alastair Niven, "Black British Writing: The Struggle for Recognition", in: Geoffrey Davis, Hena Maes-Jelinek (eds.), *Crisis and Creativity in the New Literatures in English*, Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1990, 325-332. Es sei an dieser Stelle erwähnt, daß sich diese Situation zur Zeit rapide ändert.
- 2 Die in mehreren Tageszeitungen veröffentlichten Überlegungen von Frank Olaf Radtke z.B. können hierbei als Diskussionsanstöße dienen: Frank Olaf Radtke, "Multikulturalismus - vier Formen der Ethnisierung", *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 19. Juni 1990, Nr. 139, S.13. Ich werde im folgenden den Begriff "multi"-kulturell mit Anführungszeichen versehen, da er m.E. eine bunte Vielfalt kulturellen Nebeneinanders suggeriert, das die bestehenden Hierarchien zwischen den jeweiligen Kulturen verschleiert.
- 3 Eine kritische Analyse bisher üblicher Untersuchungsmethoden bei Analysen der Identitätsbildung von Kindern ethnischer Minderheiten findet sich in Olivia Foster-Carter, "Insiders, Outsiders and Anomalies: A Review of Studies of Identity", *New Community* 8, 2, 1986, 224-233. Vgl. auch: Nimmi Hutnik, "Patterns of Ethnic Minority Identification and Modes of Social Adaptation", *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 9, 2, April 1986, 150-167.
- 4 Die notwendige Verknüpfung dieser beiden Aspekte ergibt sich unter anderem aus der Stellung, die dem Studium Postkolonialer Literaturen in Hannover bisher verliehen werden konnte. (Vgl. dazu die Ausführungen von Liselotte Glage in *Acolit* 32, Juni 1993, 10-12.)
- 5 Dieser Aspekt kann hier leider nicht ausführlicher diskutiert werden. Ich möchte jedoch betonen, daß ich keineswegs für eine textimmanente Interpretation plädiere. Vielmehr geht es mir darum aufzuzeigen, daß sich die Bedeutung der jeweiligen Erzählstrategien erst über eine Einbettung der narrativen Texte in ihre spezifischen Produktionskontexte erschließen läßt. Ich hoffe, daß die folgende Seminarbeschreibung verdeutlichen wird, was damit gemeint ist.
- 6 Ich habe hierfür auszugsweise auf die Ausführungen von Christa Rhode-Dachser zurückgegriffen: Christa Rhode-Dachser, *Expedition in den dunklen Kontinent: Weiblichkeit im Diskurs der Psychoanalyse*, Berlin, 1992. Hilfreich in diesem Zusammenhang war auch Susheila Nasta, "Motherlands, Mother Cultures, Mother Tongues: Women's Writing in the Caribbean", in: Liz Gunner (ed.), *Aspects of Commonwealth Literature*, vol.1, London: Institute of Commonwealth Studies, 1990, 28-36.
- 7 Zu den Aufsätzen in diesem Reader gehörten z.B.: Pratibha Parmar, "Gender, Race and Class: Asian Women in Resistance", in: Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (ed.), *The Empire*

*Strikes Back. Race and Racism in 70s Britain*, London, 1982, 236-275; Avtah Brah, "Women of South Asian Origin in Britain: Issues and Concerns", *South Asian Research* 7, 1 (May 1987), 39-54; Amrit Wilson, *Finding a Voice: Asian Women in Britain*, London, 1978.

8 Vgl. dazu: Suresht Renjen Bald, "Images of South Asian Migrants in Literature: Differing Perspectives", *New Community* 17, 3, (April 1991), 413-431; Tim Youngs, "Morality and Ideology: The Arranged Marriage in Contemporary British-Asian Drama", *Wasafari* 9 (Winter 1988/89), 3-6; Jim Pines (ed.), *Black and White in Colour. Black People in British Television Since 1936*, London: British Film Institute, 1992.

9 Wir arbeiteten zunächst mit Kurzgeschichten aus einer Anthologie Asian Women Writer's Collective (ed.), *Right of Way. Poetry and Prose by the Asian Women Writer's Workshop*, London: Women's Press, 1988. Anschließend lasen wir Ravinder Randhawa, *Hari-jan*, London: Mantra, 1992, und Leena Dhingra, *Amritvela*, London: Women's Press, 1988.

## A Long Night's Journey Into Day: Short Stories by New Zealand Women

ANNE BOERÉE / HEIKE PAUL

In numerous anthologies, introductions and articles on New Zealand women's fiction one fact is continually stressed and dwelt upon: literary critics, male and female alike, observe 'a gap' in New Zealand women writing - roughly between Katherine Mansfield's last volume in 1924 and Janet Frame's first collection in 1951.<sup>1</sup> Apparently, New Zealand women ceased to write fiction in this period for a number of social and cultural reasons. As Evans points out

[t]he initial explanation for this [gap] seems to be in what the society of the day made women make of themselves. Not taking themselves seriously was obviously something widely expected at a time when male and female roles were defined with ruthless clarity.<sup>2</sup>

From the 1950s onward women reappeared on the literary scene as writers of fiction, particularly of short stories. The period after this crucial turning point entails a reawakening, a revival of women's fiction in New Zealand.<sup>3</sup> Starting in the 1950s, New Zealand women have continued their own literary tradition, a tradition that mirrors their particular experiences, reflects the social and cultural developments and changes in the country and reveals the realities of Pakeha and Maori women alike. In applying a term coined by New Zealand's women's movement, the stories and fictions may be read as emphasizing a 'uniting distinctiveness' among New Zealand women and beyond. In a similar vein, the focus of this paper will be on how female identity is presented, constructed and/or developed in a number of short stories by New Zealand women. Our discussion of the short stories "Where to Lady?" by J.C. Sturm, "While my Guitar Gently Sings" by Keri Hulme, "Christmas" by Yvonne du Fresne and "Airmen" by Fiona Farrell Poole offers glimpses of different decades, different literary as well as thematic concerns, and portrays women who - each for herself - make both painful and exhilarating experiences in their quest for a female, national and/or ethnic identity.

In the context of New Zealand as well as women writing the genre of the short story deserves further commentary. First of all, the country looks back on a literary history and tradition in which the short story figures prominently. Katherine Mansfield and Frank Sargeson, both short story writers, are central figures in the literary history of New Zealand. Sargeson is even regarded as the writer who has contributed - through his literary works - to the shaping of a national identity in 20th century New Zealand. Secondly, our choice of women's short stories - as compared to novels or poetry - is not a purely arbitrary decision, as there is a clear affinity of women writers for this particular genre. A number of possible reasons may explain this affinity: apart from largely pragmatic aspects,<sup>4</sup> the short story gives comparatively great scope to experiment with narrative techniques and styles; it is exactly this experimenting which has led to revisionist scenarios in women's fiction.



"Where to, Lady?" by J.C. Sturm<sup>5</sup> is the oldest story in our discussion. Written in the 1950s, i.e. prior to the women's movement, the story clearly exposes the discontent of its protagonist Sally with her role as mother and suburban housewife. The heroine seeks a remedy for the repetitious circle of "life's responsibilities"<sup>6</sup>: in an act of spontaneous refusal she leaves her home and family behind in order to enjoy a "day off"<sup>7</sup> in the city. But the various encounters she has seem to confront her with the limitations of her female reality and to confirm her suspicion that there are no attractive alternatives to her role.

A visit at her friends' house presents Sally with an exaggerated version of her own situation: her friends, a couple, are only referred to as husband and wife, represented as types rather than individual characters. In an almost ridiculous fashion the husband tries to dominate the conversation and answers all the questions Sally addresses to his wife. The repressive atmosphere is further increased by an allusion to domestic violence: the fact that the wife is not wearing lipstick - ostensibly due to a mosquito bite - sounds like a lame excuse!

A Maori woman who works at a downtown grill-room serves as a counterfigure to Sally and seems to present the other side of the coin of women's existence: working class instead of suburban life-style, exploitation instead of confinement. The Maori woman, who - unlike Sally - is not referred to as a 'lady', suffers from the dual oppression of gender and race; she envies Sally her existence as a housewife who does not have to work for a living. Sally is shocked by the prospects of life as a single woman. A flirt situation in the grill-room increases her distress and confronts her with the fact that she is neither ready nor prepared for any far-reaching changes in her life: she reinforces the fact that she is a wife and mother as a form of protection against another man, thus choosing the stability and security of her domestic life over the uncertainty and insecurity she experiences in the 'outside world'.

The title sentence "Where to, Lady?" is repeated several times throughout the novel and echoes Sally's lack of direction, her aimlessness, her lack of determination. Inevitably, her final steps lead her back home. "Shutting [her] eyes against the city lights"<sup>8</sup> she ends her adventure, her day-off in the city, exhausted and disillusioned.

Significantly, the story abstains from explicitly stating the cause and the nature of Sally's problem. The reader is often left guessing at Sally's inner life, her feelings and intentions. The feminist implications of the story are hidden, e.g. in the name of the protagonist: Sally is the military term for an attempted escape. To explain this indirectness, one has to take into account the year of publication and to look at the situation of women at that time. The 1950s did not see a flourishing women's movement nor any other stimuli which may have encouraged women to write about personal issues; rather, a feminist vocabulary was not yet available. Sally suffers from "the problem that has no name"<sup>9</sup> which threatens to darken the image of the "happy housewife heroine".<sup>10</sup> The absence of a public feminist debate accounts for the terms in which we perceive the protagonist as well as the author of the short story. The female quest presented in "Where to, Lady?" appears to be two-fold: Sally's attempt to find an alternative way of life corresponds to Sturm's search for the appropriate language in which to express it.

Keri Hulme's short story "While My Guitar Gently Sings"<sup>11</sup> introduces us to protagonist and first person narrator Hinewai who has also been looking for an

alternative life-style. For Hinewai, who has grown up in a rural Maori community and spent most of her adult life in an urban Pakeha world, her situation as woman and as Maori is ambivalent. The death of her mother, with whom she had a complicated but intense relationship, triggers off a series of recollections. In retrospective Hinewai tries to make sense of their relationship and to find peace of mind. Her memories reveal the opposing natures of mother and daughter and a history of conflicts. Hinewai's mother, characterized as strong, confident, humorous and outspoken, has always been firmly rooted in Maori traditions, values and life-style. This may account for her strong sense of self which her rather melancholic daughter has never had. Indeed, Hinewai has rebelled against the values of her ethnic community and rejected Maori traditions as repressive for women; she left her hometown in order to attend a Teacher's College in the city. Discarding her background, her community as well as her mother, she also seems to have discarded part of herself: her life in the city is far from happy, she becomes a drop-out, has a 'self-willed' miscarriage and socializes with the "city underbelly".<sup>12</sup>

Only after her mother's death is Hinewai able to unravel their entangled lives. The story becomes the account of her mourning, her remembering and her guilt. A crucial metaphor in this context is the guitar she plays while thinking about her mother. A present from the latter, the guitar symbolizes the bond between mother and daughter, their means of communication. As an instrument it reveals Hinewai's melancholic sensibility and offers her a form self-expression. Music is of great importance since the entire story is structured like a song.<sup>13</sup> Key-words and key-phrases are repeated like a refrain:

E mama, taku whaea.<sup>14</sup>

E mama. I never told you.<sup>15</sup>

E Ma. I am sorry.<sup>16</sup>

Yet the story presents not only a song, it also takes on the shape of a 'confessional monologue': Hinewai addresses her mother directly as if in a conversation and apologizes for what she considers her failures.

Still, these failures can also be seen as the result of her precarious situation: as a young Maori she finds herself in a dilemma, caught between two cultures: one appearing as too traditional and not leaving her enough space as an individual, the other leaving her lonely and marginalized. Hinewai's references to Maori mythology imply that she has not abandoned her Maoriness completely but that she is trying to come to terms with it for her own and her mother's sake. Mentioning her dead daughter in this farewell to her mother, the narrator evokes the idea of female continuity. Their painful separation through death does not render communication impossible:

Different worlds, e mama. You are gone into the night, and I sit here, clutching the neck of my guitar, tears falling in tiny beads of sound. (...) [B]y now you will have met your secret granddaughter. By now you will know all the disgrace and emptiness of my noisy, crowded life.<sup>17</sup>

Hinewai has not managed to find a way of living that allows her both - to be independent and to belong. She has defied conventional expectations and her own cultural background to such a degree that she has harmed herself in the process. This is what she comes to realize in the wake of her mother's death.

Notwithstanding the major contextual and formal differences among the short stories, Yvonne du Fresne's "Christmas (Shirley Temple is a Wife and Mother)"<sup>18</sup> offers another variation on the subject of living as a single woman in contemporary society.

The title of the story already introduces and links the central issues of the text: the celebration of Christmas and marriage/motherhood. The title echoes the concept of Christmas as a family holiday and also alludes to the idea of reproduction, not only of traditions but also of humanity. After all, Christmas is the celebration of a birth. Mentioning a Hollywood star in this context ridicules and calls into question the significance of the event and hints at the values - and hence the pressure to conform - created by popular culture.

The first person narrator Cecil, a white middle-class woman who works as a teacher in the city, is about to visit her parents in her provincial hometown over the Christmas holidays. Her usual contentment with herself, her job and her life in general is disturbed by the approaching holidays and the forthcoming visit:

No husband. No child. Christmas is coming. The Festival of the Mothers and the Babies is about to begin.<sup>19</sup>

Cecil dreads the visit because of her parents and the repressive small town atmosphere in which she - single and childless - appears as exotic, if not deficient. Her mother signals Cecil her incompleteness by inquiring forcefully about her male acquaintances:

Well, how many broken hearts did you leave behind? Any exciting visitors suddenly dropping out of the skies - unable to bear your absence a moment longer? Any mysterious male voices on toll for this Christmas?<sup>20</sup>

Although the worldview of her parents is exposed as old-fashioned, it is still the prevailing attitude in society, and thus still powerful. Cecil's defense against these inquiries is her intellectual identity as a teacher; during her visit she shows off her intellectuality as a form of compensation for not having a husband and children. Her parents are somewhat consoled but still fear the talk of the town.

With the strain and the pressure of external expectations on her Cecil's visit slowly turns into a depressive experience: she actually starts to feel insufficient, incomplete, lonely. Her identity crisis, which significantly goes unnoticed by her family, is resolved by means of a psychological theory she happens to discover in a magazine. It is thus with the help of 'strangers' that she finds her way out of the depression. The family does not figure as an institution of concern, care and responsibility; quite on the contrary, the family - or its absence - appears as the first and foremost source of crisis. Her knowledge of the "Christmas depression" or "Holiday Paradox"<sup>21</sup> as a widespread phenomenon presents a consolation and offers a way to rationalize her own state of mind. Cecil envisages a Christmas which does not require a family to celebrate.

The conclusions drawn by the protagonists in the stories by du Fresne and Hulme are clearly opposed. While Hinewai feels she has to acknowledge her family background as a significant part of her personality, Cecil rejects the family as an outdated concept which no longer bears any relation to her own life. All the same, both women convey the large amount of strength and self-awareness necessary to hold on to their ideas and to 'survive' in their struggle for acceptance - by others as

well as by themselves.

The final story, Fiona Farrell Poole's "Airmen"<sup>22</sup>, deals no longer with explicit women's issues such as motherhood or marriage. Poole's first person narrator does not show signs of discomfort or dissatisfaction but seems to have arrived at a self-understanding of her identity as a woman. She is extremely self-empowered and self-conscious as 'subject' and writer. Her project is daring and challenging, an "adventure"<sup>23</sup>:

I shall write about three things I do not understand: a man, a motorbike, and an aeroplane.<sup>24</sup>

The woman narrator indirectly points out how men and maleness may be constructed in a literary text. At the same time she subverts this construction: her narrative is disrupted by frequent self-conscious references to the narrator/author; she never lets the fact be forgotten that she is inventing the story.

"I'll begin with two boys."<sup>25</sup>

"And that could be the end of the story. But..."<sup>26</sup>

This technique entails a reversal of traditional roles. Men become the objects in her story, like puppets on a string, at her disposal to be moved. In doing so, she is aware that she is crossing borders, that she is moving in "foreign territory".<sup>27</sup>

The plot of the story is about two boys, Graham and Eddy, and about Jim, their common hero and member of the Royal Flying Corps in World War I. Jim, the glorified "Knight of the Air"<sup>28</sup>, slowly degenerates from a hero into a pathetic veteran and alcoholic who finally loses his life in a plane crash during a flight-show. His admirers, Eddy and Graham, blindly follow in his footsteps and perpetuate the very norms and stereotypes of manhood which were fatal for Jim. The motorbike and the aeroplane figure as powerful, even phallic symbols of manhood; they symbolize speed, thrill, control and power:

Trees, hills, buildings, the mountain. You have never seen them so clear before. You will never see them so clear again. You are God on the seventh day, beating slowly over a new earth.<sup>29</sup>

These images of male omnipotence - i.e. man overcoming nature's laws - are counteracted and subverted by the title of the story: "Airmen" implies an airy quality without any firm substance; once the technological attributes are cast aside, the ideal of manhood quite literally falls to the ground. Further, the narrator's onomatopoeic imitations of aeroplane and gunfire sounds - "Nyerrowwwmmmm. Dadadadadat"<sup>30</sup> - ridicule the male "lingo"<sup>31</sup> as quite unintelligent, unintelligible and reduced to mere noise.

Ultimately the female narrative persona remains the one in control of the story and the boys. Existing 'outside' the story and constructed as the omnipotent and omniscient, she can choose to give substance to the "airmen", she can decide whether to let them "die" or "fly".<sup>32</sup>

To conclude our discussion we would like to draw attention to the similarities and differences among the stories and to point to the fact that they may very well be viewed as representing different phases or stages in the quest for a female identity.

In J.C. Sturm's story the protagonist Sally is unable to surmount the obstacles of her domesticity for any length of time. Apart from her day-off she remains locked

within the net of patriarchal traditions as wife and mother. Although the story takes on the form of a quest, its structure is circular rather than linear or progressive; its atmosphere conveys a sense of fatalism. Sally clearly lacks a role model. While Sally still leads a traditional life as wife and mother, this no longer holds true for the heroines in the stories by Hulme and du Fresne. Here we are confronted with two single women whose individual aspirations clash with a reality which is unresponsive to their ambitions. Both are exploring alternative ways of living. Female identity constitutes itself either in the rejection of traditional norms, as in Cecil's case, or in the synthesizing of opposing sets of values, as in Hinewai's case. The woman narrator in Poole's "Airmen" appears to be beyond a painful quest for identity. Apparently immune to male domination and control, the very scenario of the story allows her to remain unassailable.

Our discussion has highlighted a few stages in the development of New Zealand women's short stories. While all of the stories are concerned with different forms of female identity, they also deal - to varying degrees - with issues of national, ethnic and social relevance. Undoubtedly, the scope of this paper only allows for a rather brief illustration of the concept of a 'uniting distinctiveness'. Last but not least, this essay should also be taken as an invitation to undertake further journeys into the realms of New Zealand women's fiction.

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Hulme, Keri, *The Windeater/Te Kaihau*, London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1986.

#### Notes:

- 1 Patrick Evans, *The Penguin History of New Zealand Literature*, Auckland: Penguin, 1990, 82.
- 2 Evans, *New Zealand Literature*, 83-84. With regard to the literary scene, "[n]ot taking themselves seriously" implied that women were writers of literature with a "lower calling": children's books and light romance.
- 3 The fact that this revival occurs more or less parallel to an incipient women's movement in New Zealand is by no means coincidental. The women's movement offered a fresh impetus to question the status quo and, at the same time, may be seen as offering a political justification for women's writing.
- 4 The prospects of publication were certainly higher for short stories than for novels; feminist journals such as *Broadsheet* and *Spiral* offered this possibility and provided a forum where women could address issues and taboos of the male-female relationship.
- 5 J.C. Sturm, "Where to, Lady?", 1951; rpt., Elizabeth Webby and Lydia Wevers (eds.), *Goodbye to Romance: Stories by New Zealand and Australian Women Writers*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1989, 84-92.

6 *ibid.*, 84.

7 *ibid.*, 84.

8 *ibid.*, 92.

9 Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* 1963; rpt. New York: Dell, 1984, 15.

10 *ibid.*, 33.

11 Keri Hulme, "While My Guitar Gently Sings", *The Windeater/Te Kaihau*, London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1986, 107-117.

12 *ibid.*, 116.

13 The title of the story is clearly a variation on a famous song by the Beatles: "While my Guitar Gently Weeps".

14 Hulme, "While My Guitar Gently Sings", 108.

15 *ibid.*, 113.

16 *ibid.*, 117.

17 *ibid.*, 117.

18 Yvonne du Fresne, "Christmas (Shirley Temple is a Wife and Mother)", 1974; rpt., Webby and Wevers (eds.) *Goodbye to Romance*, 316-326.

19 *ibid.*, 316.

20 *ibid.*, 317.

21 *ibid.*, 326.

22 Fiona Farrell Poole, "Airmen", 1985; rpt., Marion McLeod and Lydia Wevers (eds.), *Women's Work*, Auckland: Oxford UP, 1985, 261-268.

23 *ibid.*, 261.

24 *ibid.*, 261.

25 *ibid.*, 261.

26 *ibid.*, 264.

27 *ibid.*, 261.

28 *ibid.*, 261.

29 *ibid.*, 267.

30 *ibid.*, 263.

31 *ibid.*, 261.

32 *ibid.*, 268.

## A Novelistic Portrait of South African Society:

### Alex La Guma's *A Walk in the Night*

JOHANNES FISCHER

Alex La Guma's first novel *A Walk in the Night*<sup>1</sup> portrays the Cape-coloured community of District Six, Cape Town, at the end of the fifties and the beginning of the sixties. However, it is not only a portrait of this particular community but also an analysis of South African society. Written during La Guma's house-arrest imposed on him by the South African police and smuggled out of the country clandestinely it first appeared in Ibadan in 1962 and proved to be a commercial and critical success. Lewis Nkosi, otherwise quite critical of South African writing,<sup>2</sup> praises "the masterly and creative way in which Alex La Guma handles dialogue" and the portrayal of characters and atmosphere that "are so real (...) and authentic that you can actually smell District Six".<sup>3</sup> Another critic, B. Lindfors, values the novel's technical achievements highly:

Scenes are changed and new characters brought in very strategically. Nothing is wasted. Nothing is irrelevant. Every description, every action, every character serves a function in the story. In such a carefully interwoven and closely knit fabric there are no loose threads or gaping holes.<sup>4</sup>

Thus, over the years, *A Walk in the Night* has gradually turned into a classic. And with its vivid illustration and subtle analysis of the mechanisms of violence fostered by the Apartheid-system and its considerable craftsmanship *A Walk in the Night* certainly is an outstanding and important novel. But the question remains, whether the novel nowadays, more than thirty years after its publication and in a drastically changed political situation still has relevance for the current situation in South Africa?

In the following I want to have a look at La Guma's first novel to try to show how he depicts the system of Apartheid and its cruel mechanisms of violence. By having a closer look at the portrayal of the novel's main character I also want to show how La Guma here, in contrast to his later novels which are more overtly political in tone and intent, stresses the importance of individual choice, moral integrity, family and community-life as extremely important for the individual. These are central values for La Guma and he cherished the hope that they could help to furnish a new South Africa formed by the victims of Apartheid.

The novel begins by introducing its 'hero' Michael Adonis:

The young man dropped from the trackless tram just before it stopped at Castle Bridge. He dropped off, ignoring the stream of late-afternoon traffic rolling in from the suburbs, bobbed and ducked the cars and buses, the big, rumbling delivery trucks, deaf to the shouts and curses of the drivers, and reached the pavement. Standing there, near the green railings around the public convenience, he lighted a cigarette, jostled by the line of workers going home, the first trickle of a stream that

would soon be flowing towards Hanover Street. He looked right through them, refusing to see them, nursing a little growth of anger the way one caresses the beginnings of a toothache with the tip of the tongue. Around him the buzz and hum of voices and the growl of traffic blended into one solid mutter of sound which he only half-heard, his thoughts concentrated upon the pustule of rage and humiliation that was continuing to ripen deep down within him. (1)

Later the reader finds out that Adonis just lost his job. Unwilling to bear the racist treatment of the white foreman he is forced to quit. Now, in the course of the novel, Adonis gradually develops from an ordinary citizen to a member of a violent street-gang.

The first three paragraphs already indicate some of the reasons for Adonis' criminal career: he literally "dropped off" his way and lost contact with those directly around him. He nurses "a little growth of anger" and refuses "to see (...) the line of workers going home". The self-centred, egotistic side of Adonis' character and his willingness to nourish self-pity and anger which make him lose touch with his community thus appear right at the beginning. This side of Adonis' character and his failure to cope with them become more marked later on. Instead of trying to find constructive ways to cope with his situation Adonis seeks relief in alcohol which makes matters only worse. In a sudden uncontrolled outburst of violence Adonis vents his anger about the white foreman on the innocent Uncle Doughty. By this unintentional murder Adonis continues the "chain of violence"<sup>5</sup> provoked by Apartheid. In the end the victims of this system are always the oppressed.

A chain of violence may begin in the White city or the Black ghetto, but it must end in the ghetto and its last victim must be Black. Thus, when a Black woman is unfaithful, a Black man kills a Black man (the anecdote on pp. 17-19); when a White woman is unfaithful, a White takes out his gun and kills a Black man (Raalt and Willieboy).<sup>6</sup>

Later, Adonis is blackmailed by the skollies - a violent gang of criminals - into joining them. Willieboy in turn is made responsible and shot down for the killing of Doughty.

However, Adonis can be very friendly and helpful which becomes most apparent in his first encounter with Joe. Here Adonis for once does not complain about his own fate but is friendly, talkative and generous enough to give Joe some money to buy food with. Yet this friendly mood is swiftly and completely crushed by the humiliating encounter with the two policemen "after which deep down inside the feeling of rage, frustration and violence swelled like a boil, knotted with pain." (12) Here, La Guma exemplifies how the South-African police creates the criminals they are pretending to fight against: while Adonis at the time of the encounter did neither smoke dagga nor steal money, he finally does, so as a result of the oppression he has to bear.

One important part of Adonis' problem is the isolation from his community and his inability to understand his personal and social situation. Not long after killing Doughty he wishes to have a wife and be married: "You ought to get yourself a goose (...) You've been messing around too long. You ought to get married and have a family." (44)

However, this daydream remains just a fleeting wish and ironically occurs when Adonis is actually further away from realising it than ever before. To underline the necessity to oppose the pressures of Apartheid by being defiant and at the same time



concerned with one's community and one's family, La Guma contrasts Michael's dream with the reality of Franky Lorenzo. Yet whereas Lorenzo could control the anger about his desperate situation by realising that due to his work as "a stevedore [who] worked like hell in the docks (...) he was tired [and] that made him angry". (37)<sup>7</sup>

Through a careful choice of words La Guma establishes parallels between Adonis and Lorenzo: Lorenzo is "angry" and feels "embarrassment" (37) which, however, does not result in an outburst of violence. During his second encounter with Joe Adonis also feels "angry and embarrassed" (71), but when Joe tells him that "he mustn't go with these gangsters" (71) he is infuriated and rejects Joe's advice.

Another contrast is suggested by Adonis' "nursing of hatred inside his belly" (23) and the love Lorenzo feels for his wife and the child she is pregnant with. Whereas Adonis' behaviour is destructive, Lorenzo's acceptance of the child turns it into a symbol of love and hope for a better future.

Adonis' separateness and his feeling of isolation threaten his identity and lead to notions of being persecuted. As a consequence he clings rather strongly to racial identity and emphasises being "not black" (4).<sup>8</sup> Without further reflection he defines himself according to the victimising principles of colour and race and thus supports the system of racial prejudice. Like Greene who also suffers from the violence among the oppressed, Adonis is unable to connect the anecdote told by the taxi-driver, the lynching of a black man in the United States, with his own situation in South Africa under Apartheid.

Adonis' weak ego paves the way for a criminal career because he desperately needs to assert himself in some way or other and to fight his own feelings of inferiority. After killing Doughty "he was suddenly pleased and proud of his own predicament. He felt as if he was the only man who had ever killed another and thought himself a curiosity at which people should wonder". Michael's "distorted pride" (67) isolates him further from his community; while he is proud to be a murderer he is also worried about being detected. The skollies exploit his mixed feelings and blackmail him by only thinly disguising their threats: "We saw some law going into your place. Heard a rooker got chopped or something". "And we seen you come out the side lane, too". (67-68) They also stress that he "could make some chink now you haven't got a job no more." (67) And Foxy appeals to the vanity of Adonis by declaring: "Mikey's a good boy (...) He got class. Don't I say, Mikey?" (68)

While the story illustrates the psychological and economic pressure the individual has to suffer under Apartheid, Adonis is not just an innocent victim of the system. Understandable as his behaviour might be, he still has to be seen, to borrow the words of U. Barnett, as "a failure".<sup>9</sup> She claims that in La Guma's work "it is the battle of the individual to maintain his humanity under the system which forms [its] underlying themes"<sup>10</sup>, and that "the individual still has his option in two respects. He can choose (...) whether or not to pit himself against the system and continue the fight. And he can choose to what extent he will allow his circumstances to deprive him of his humanity".<sup>11</sup>

Confronted again and again with a choice, Adonis repeatedly fails to change his situation. By demonstrating how Adonis fails, La Guma shows how South African society corrupts people and how failure to defy oppression invariably leads to increased violence which finally hits back at the oppressed.

The fate of Willieboy provides another example of the devastating effects of the Apartheid-regime. Although innocent he is punished for Michael's murder of Doughty. Throughout his life he has been victim and underdog. In a cheerless childhood

his mother beat him at the slightest provocation and he knew that she was wreaking vengeance upon him for the beatings she received from his father. His father came home drunk most nights and beat his mother and him with a heavy leather belt. (84)

Again, it is the lack of a secure community and family which leads to inner insecurity, violence and crime. Like Adonis Willieboy seeks out weaker victims to find an outlet for his aggression. The robbery and abuse of the drunken Greene is just one example. Like Adonis Willieboy seeks relief in drinking but finds only temporary consolation.

Worth noting is his insistence on the colour-bar. He tells the owner of the shebeen that the sailors "got no right messing with our girls" (54). And as with Adonis it is quite important for him and his frail sense of identity not to be black. He needs a group of people he can look down upon.

Still, despite similarities there is a marked contrast between Willieboy and Adonis: Unlike the latter Willieboy never had the choice to give his life a different direction. He is hardly responsible for being what he is and is basically innocent. Throughout his life he has been scapegoat and victim, and in the novel he symbolises the oppressed who suffer most under Apartheid. And yet, La Guma renders him with the distinct features of a Jesus figure. Interestingly, motifs in *A Walk in the Night*, as in other novels of La Guma, support the notion of the importance of the Jesus figure. The first time Willieboy appears he is wearing "a crucifix around his neck" although "more as a flamboyant decoration than as an act of religious devotion" (3). Shot by Raalt "he spun, his arms flung wide, turning on his toes like a ballet dancer" (86), thus resembling Jesus on the cross.

In La Guma's third novel *The Stone Country* a mass takes place, celebrated on the Sunday before the Casbah Kid has to face trial and is condemned to death. The Jesus parallel here is evoked by the biblical passage La Guma chose to let the preacher quote: "Straightway in the morning the chief priest held a consultation with the elders and scribes and the whole council, and bound Jesus and carried him away and delivered him to Pilate...."<sup>12</sup> Another Jesus-figure is the tortured Elias Tekwane in *In the Fog of the Season's End* whose "head dangled on his chest" and whose "legs were pierced by nails".<sup>13</sup>

Accordingly, Willieboy not only functions as a victim who has to suffer for the sins of others but also as a symbol for a better future. He dies on the same day Grace Lorenzo realises that she is pregnant and this end of the novel clearly symbolises hope.

Moreover, the very name of Michael Adonis also points to the motif of resurrection. According to Greek mythology, "Adonis is an oriental deity of nature, typifying the withering of nature in winter, and its resuscitation in summer".<sup>14</sup>

Despite all this Willieboy also resembles Adonis in his being a negative character, failing to give an example of constructive, positive behaviour. Remarkably La Guma decided to provide the negative heroes of Adonis and Willieboy with central roles in his first novel, an approach he later changed in favour of heroes who became more and more exemplary models of perfect human

and political behaviour.

Positive characters are, however, not totally absent from *A Walk in the Night*, but are only of minor importance. One of them is Joe, who "most of the time (...) wandered around the harbour gathering fish discarded by fishermen and anglers, or along the beaches of the coast, picking limpets and mussels. He had a strange passion for things that came from the sea" (9).

This description evokes the picture of "the Strand-loper, the Khoikhoi people who fished and gathered food on the coastal fringe of the Cape, at the time of the first white settlers",<sup>15</sup> "As a representative of the earliest forebears of the Cape Coloured people"<sup>16</sup>, Joe still preserves a strong feeling of community and concern for others. When Adonis gets furious about Joe telling him insistently not to join the gangsters, Joe declares "a man's got a right to look after another man. Jesus, isn't we all people?" (75), thus representing a position of unsophisticated and unarticulated humanity. Joe desperately tries to make himself understood by Adonis because he wants to help him out of gratitude for Michael's generosity earlier that day. Coetzee comments: "The moral force of his (Joe's) plea, particularly in view of his revelation of a childhood closely parallel to that of Willieboy (who is Adonis's *alter ego*), seems to argue that conscience need not die under the weight of social force"<sup>17</sup>.

"Like I said, we all got troubles. But Johns like them don't help you out of them. They in trouble themselves. You'd only add to the whole heap of troubles. I don't know how to tell it, but you run away with them and you got another trouble. Like those rookers. They started a small trouble, maybe, and they run away from it and it was another trouble, so they run away all the time, adding up all the troubles. Hell, I don't know." He felt desperate and a little sad, and did not quite know what to say. (68-69)

When Joe's mother was forced to abandon their flat and had to return to the country, Joe "didn't want to run" (70). He felt nothing would change way and thus decided to stay in town although this meant "no house, no people, no place" (69). But he clearly establishes a difference between his own conscious unwillingness to give in to the oppressive system and his father's irresponsible flight that only made matters worse.

Another counterpart of Adonis - and possibly the most important one - is, as mentioned already, Franky Lorenzo. Like Adonis and Joe he faces a crucial choice: "His wife had, a few minutes earlier, announced that she was once more pregnant and he was trying to decide whether it was good news or bad." (35) There are already five children to provide for and they all live in considerable poverty; he feels "tired and irritable and happy and worried, all at the same time" (35).

First, anger about his wife and the whole situation takes hold of him but then he felt a little ashamed (...) hearing her quiet sobbing, and he began to wish he could do something good and beautiful for her. He looked at her with his deep, soft eyes and wanted to say something kind, but he could not find the words, and rubbed the back of one hand across the back of his mouth instead. He had hurt her, he felt, and love suddenly welled up inside him and choked his throat. (37)

Apart from an intact family it is Lorenzo's knowledge of the mechanisms of oppression and aggression as well as a deeply felt humaneness that enable him to withstand the pressure upon him.

Thus he tries to stop John Abrahams who is so deformed by Apartheid that he

gets "a sort of shabby pride" (59) from co-operating with the police even if this means to act against his own community. Lorenzo warns him and in turn Raalt threatens Lorenzo who, however, "sensed the threat" but "still (...) met the constable's eyes holding them with his own" (62-63). This behaviour differs remarkably from that of Adonis in a similar situation.

The ways the characters behave illuminates the structures of Apartheid. The whites driven by material interests, a belief in racial superiority and an inability to handle their own shortcomings create an atmosphere of oppression, violence, random and often sadistic terror. This puts black people under severe material and psychological pressure. They

are living in a stone prison of their black skins, and nothing they can do, other than destroy white domination, can alter this. They are programmed by the system and this limits their free choice. Why did Michael Adonis have to be in the passage of his lodgings just as old Doughty was struggling to get to his room; why did Willieboy decide at that particular moment to visit Michael and why did a neighbour have to pass just then and see him near the dead man's room? Why was it that the trigger-happy Raalt, a policeman having trouble with his wife, should happen to be on patrol that night? (...) Was it fate that manoeuvred these events? Perhaps, but if the characters were not black in some instances and white in others, they would have been able to react differently to the circumstances.<sup>18</sup>

Still, even if white racism systematically discriminates the black population, La Guma nevertheless stresses the possibility of choice. There are different ways to counter oppression, and what the characters do and become is not entirely a question of fate. By juxtaposing the negative 'hero' Michael Adonis with the minor characters Joe and Franky Lorenzo he clearly advocates the idea of resistance and humanity. Accordingly, the novel ends on a note of hope:

Somewhere the young man, Joe, made his way towards the sea, walking alone through the starlit darkness. In the morning he would be close to the smell of the ocean and wade through the chill, comforting water, bending close to the purling green surface and see the dark undulating fronds of seaweed, writhing and swaying in the shallows, like beckoning hands. And in the rock pools he would examine the mysterious life of the sea things, the transparent beauty of starfish and anemone, and hear the relentless, consistent pounding of the creaming waves against the granite citadels of rock.

Franky Lorenzo slept on his back and snored peacefully. Beside him the woman, Grace, lay awake in the dark, restlessly waiting for the dawn and feeling the knot of life within her. (96)

Restlessness and doom which overshadow the characters is indicated by one of the novel's most important motifs, already alluded to in its title, namely that of "walking". When Doughty drunkenly recites the lines from *Hamlet* to Michael Adonis and adds "That's us, us, Michael, my boy. Just ghosts doomed to walk the night" (29), he expresses what the title and recurring references to the characters as "spooks" or "ghosts" (e.g., 21, 27, 28, 74) suggest.

La Guma's message (...) may be interpreted as follows: the injustices and ironies pictured here are some of the 'foul crimes' which a future generation must avenge and purge away or else the peoples of South Africa, white or non-white (...) will be

doomed to continue suffering. Without vengeance and purgation, South Africa, like Hamlet's father's ghost, will be doomed to continue walking in the night.<sup>19</sup>

This interpretation further supports the idea of Willieboy as a victim whose resurrection will end the troubles for the oppressed. Lindfors, however, criticises as

a major weakness of the novel (...) that this moral does not grow out of the story naturally. Rather, it hangs like a dead appendage, a label which La Guma has tacked onto the story in order to draw attention to the lesson he wants readers to learn.<sup>20</sup>

Lindfors here refers to a general tendency in La Guma's writing to let symbolism become too obtrusive and to create stereotypes through exaggeration and repetition. In *A Walk in the Night*, for example, the characters' eyes tell us a lot - and sometimes too much. Suggesting his yet undecided moral position at the beginning of the novel, Adonis' eyes are "very, dark brown, the whites not quite clear" (2), whereas Willieboy, indicating his use of dagga and his inner corruption has "yellowish eyeballs" (3). The policemen both possess "hard, dispassionate eyes, hard and bright as pieces of blue glass" (11). In contrast the eyes of Franky Lorenzo are "soft and bright and young, like those of a little boy" (35), and the eyes of his wife Grace "were dark wells of sadness mixed with joy" (36).

This tendency of La Guma's to bring his political message clearly across becomes increasingly important in his later novels, often with damaging results to their artistic merit. But it is exactly the mixture of politics and character portrayal which makes *A Walk in the Night* so convincing. Its vivid and realistic portrayal of the sufferings the black people have to endure is supported by the novelistic structure, which reflects the mechanisms of Apartheid. On the other hand, La Guma's concern seems to be more with the individual: How to preserve one's humanity and dignity under racist and cruelly unjust oppression?

*A Walk in the Night* is not an open plea for resistance nor does it give any advice as to how to overthrow the system. It merely advocates defiance against oppression and asks for solidarity among black people. By choosing the 'morally failing' Michael Adonis as his main protagonist, La Guma demonstrates the dilemma of the individual and at the same time makes the story credible and impressive. Adonis' failure raises questions to which La Guma does not offer ready-made answers. Instead he favours a certain approach of stoic defiance based on human values.

Even if the practice of Apartheid has been overcome this message is still of importance while South Africa suffers from Apartheid's legacy of violence, crime and hatred. And if one takes up the idea of hope at the end of the novel and tries to imagine what could have happened to the child of Franky and Grace Lorenzo in the real South Africa one might think of a child being born around the days of the Sharpeville massacre. A youth who spent his or her childhood in the aftermath of Soweto; who grew into adulthood under the increasing pressure and terror of the state and finally came to participate in the first national elections in South Africa where black people had the right to vote. Now, a bit older than thirty, this adult could help to build a new South Africa and help to lay the ghosts of Apartheid to rest who are still doomed to walk in the night.

## Notes:

- 1 Alex La Guma, *A Walk in the Night and Other Stories*, London: Heinemann, 1967. All further references in the text refer to this edition.
- 2 See, for instance, his scathing remarks at the beginning of the essay "Fiction by Black South Africans", in: *Home and Exile*, London/Ibadan: Longman, 1983, 131.
- 3 Lewis Nkosi, *The Transplanted Heart: Essays on South Africa*, Benin City: Ethiope Publishing, 1975, 113.
- 4 Bernth Lindfors, "Form and Technique in the Novels of Richard Rive and Alex La Guma", *New African Literature and the Arts*, Vol.1, 1966, 46.
- 5 A term coined by J.M. Coetzee in his essay "Man's Fate in the Novels of Alex La Guma", *Studies in Black Literature* 5,1 (1974), 19.
- 6 J.M. Coetzee, "Man's Fate", 19.
- 7 Michael Wade, "Art and Morality in Alex La Guma's *A Walk in the Night*", Kenneth Parker (ed.), *The South African Novel in English: Essays in Criticism and Society*, London: MacMillan, 1978, 167; Michael Wade bases his claim that "La Guma sees fulfilment (...) as for his characters, the great impossibility", very much on this scene. In stating that the novel concentrates "on the opposite of fulfilment - deprivation", (191) which "is rendered in terms characteristic of the liberal fiction of the last hundred and fifty years: identity, communication, personal fulfilment" (191), he manages to drain the novel of its political intent. I would argue it is this very scene in which Adonis' behaviour is contrasted with that of Lorenzo that La Guma sketches a kind of positive, political behaviour.
- 8 Adonis later in the novel makes a similar remark: "Well, the negroes isn't like us" (16). Although the characters in the novel distinguish between "coloured" and "black", I use the term "black" in a sense which includes "coloured".
- 9 Ursula A. Barnett, *A Vision of Order: A Study of Black South African Literature in English (1914-80)*, London: University of Massachusetts Press, 1983, 133.
- 10 Barnett, *A Vision of Order*, 132.
- 11 Barnett, *A Vision of Order*, 133. It has to be noted, however, that C. Abrahams is not that strict and tends to see Adonis as a helpless victim of circumstances. See, for instance, his *Alex La Guma*, Boston: Twayne, 1985, 50; Cecil A. Abrahams, "Alex La Guma: Defiance and Resistance", Robert L. Ross (ed.), *International Literature in English: Essays on the Major Writers*, London/New York: The University of Texas at Austin Garland Publishing, 1991, 195; "The Writings of Alex La Guma", in Hedwig Bock, Albert Wertheim (eds.), *Essays on Contemporary Post-Colonial Fiction*, München: Max Hueber Verlag, 1986, 153. To my mind Abrahams has too positive a view of Adonis and thus neglects the ambivalence of the novel.
- 12 Alex La Guma, *The Stone Country*, East Berlin: Seven Seas Publishers, 1967, 135.
- 13 Alex La Guma, *In the Fog of the Season's End*, London: Heinemann, 1972, 169.
- 14 *The Century Encyclopedia of Names*, E. Smith (ed.), London, 1904, [1894], 15.
- 15 David Rabkin, "La Guma and Reality in South Africa", *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 7,1 (1973), 56.
- 16 Rabkin, "La Guma and Reality", 56.
- 17 J.M. Coetzee, "Alex La Guma and the Responsibilities of the South African Writer", *Journal of the New African Literatures and the Arts* 9 & 10 (1971), 9.
- 18 Barnett, *A Vision of Order*, 132-133.
- 19 Lindfors, "Form and Technique", 49.
- 20 Lindfors, "Form and Technique", 49.

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