

The Postcolonial Indian Novel in English

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By

Geetha Ganapathy-Doré

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P U B L I S H I N G

The Postcolonial Indian Novel in English,
by Geetha Ganapathy-Doré

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For
Sendhil Kumar

The perceptions and ironies double and triple and quadruple. You're getting everyone's point of view at the same time, which, for me, is the perfect state for a novel: a cubist state, the cubist novel.
—Michael Ondaatje

I find, in all great novels, a human project, call it passion, love, liberty, justice, inviting us to actualize it to make it real, even if we know that it is doomed to fail.
—Carlos Fuentes

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¹ http://www.sothebys.com/app/live/lot/LotDetail.jsp?lot_id=3Z546, accessed December 26, 2010.

² http://www.artnet.fr/Galleries/Artists_detail.asp?G=&gid=738&which=&aid=676792&ViewArtistBy=online&rta=http://www.artnet.fr, December 25, 2010.

³ http://www.christies.com/LotFinder/lot_details.aspx?pos=8&intObjectID=1862393&sid=, December 25, 2010.

Note

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⁴ http://www.amazon.com/Namesake-Kal-Penn/dp/B000U2U0E4/ref=pd_sim_b_2, accessed January 29, 2011.

FOREWORD

I have been fortunate as an academic based in the United States to have read many an excellent book on postcolonial studies at large and it gives me great pleasure to write a brief preface to Geetha Ganapathy-Doré's outstanding book *The Postcolonial Indian Novel in English*. Accounts of the beginnings of Postcolonial Studies in the US can be conflicting, but most would agree that Edward Said's *Orientalism* was and remains a key foundational text. In *Orientalism*, Said provided a critical and largely Foucauldian account of the manner in which discourses about the orient helped shape centuries of perception of the land and its peoples. He underlined the intricate web of power/knowledge that shapes a discursive field and in doing so forever changed the mode in which scholars studied and understood the literature, history, art and culture of the Middle East. But Said did something more. He altered the ways in which one examined canonical Western texts and laid bare the imbrications between politics and aesthetics. His own book, *Culture and Imperialism*, took the underlining argument of *Orientalism* and used it to read seminal nineteenth century and early twentieth century British novels through the lens of empire. I begin with Said here because it is through a Saidian lens that I understand Geetha Ganapathy-Doré's book on the Indian novel in English. She undertakes a similar sweeping and panoramic study of the discourses that have helped shape, give rise to and consolidate the Indian novel in English.

The Indian novel in English has had an amazing success in the Western world. One only needs to look at the Booker prize list in the last twenty years to gauge its success. The increased visibility of the Indian writer in English has led to a slew of articles and books on the subject. Most books choose a critical angle, a particular aspect through which to read a set of novels. One of the most common subjects has been the examination of the rise of nationalism and the independence movement as depicted in the Indian novel. A corollary to this has been studies that deal with the trauma of partition and communal violence. Still others have focused on novels that deal with familial relationships, the politics of gender, depictions of continuing caste discrimination, politics of the underworld, and the like. A lot of critical attention has been and continues to be paid to writers of the Indian diaspora beginning, of course, with Salman Rushdie. But before Rushdie there was Raja Rao, R.K. Narayan and perhaps most famously

Mulk Raj Anand, a writer befriended by the Bloomsbury group. Today, the names of women writers like Arundhati Roy, Kiran Desai, Bharati Mukherjee and Chitra Banerjee are part and parcel of the canon. But before them there was Kamala Markandaya, Nayantara Sahgal, Anita Desai and Shashi Deshpande. There are writers like Deshpande and Sahgal who always lived and wrote in India and today Penguin India publishes a host of writers, men and women, who never quite enter the Western market. In other words, there exists a vast, complex and amazing corpus of Indian writing in English and an equally vast array of critical discourses examining them. Geetha Ganapathy-Doré manages to bring all of this together neatly, clearly and succinctly. One finds a mention of all of the above themes and more, all of the above writers and more in this well executed book.

The most significant contribution of Geetha Ganapathy-Doré's book is, as I said earlier, its sweep. It reminds me, on the one hand, of Kenneth Ramchand's early assessment of the West Indian novel which provided a critical idiom for understanding an emerging body of work from the anglophone Caribbean. On the other hand, it functions like Australian critics Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffith and Helen Tiffin's *The Empire Writes Back*, an absolute must for anyone beginning to understand the major themes and writers from the postcolonial world. Ganapathy-Doré's book is divided into eight chapters with each chapter undertaking an examination of many novels under a particular rubric. Thus novels are read for their engagement with the empire and with the idea of secular democracy. But rather than read the novels only in terms of their politics, the book pays scrupulous attention to the poetics and aesthetics of representation, the deployment of the genre of self-writing for the novel, the novels' novelistic use of time, space, the emphasis on migration, diaspora, hybridity, home, homelessness, gender, caste, religion, and the use of language. Again and again, I marveled at the author's ability to bring together a wide range of novels, spanning years and continents (India, the US, UK, France) to make her point. While readers will find familiar names like Rushdie, Mistry, Roy and Desai they will also find the unfamiliar, the not so well recognized, the old and the new.

I particularly liked the fact that this is not a book that provides close readings of four or five novels. Rather it is a study of the Indian, postcolonial novel in English in all its diversity. As an expert, I was surprised to discover writers and novels that I have yet to read and know. It will be an indispensable book for anyone who has even a marginal interest in the field and an absolute necessity for the expert who wishes to learn more. The book is unique in its scope and in its situating of the

Indian novel in English is not just discourses of postcoloniality but the novel at large by drawing on the work of scholars like Franco Moretti and Milan Kundera. It has been my privilege to read this book and write this preface for my colleague in France.

—Sangeeta Ray
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In the following pages, I propose a concise cross-sectional analysis and synthesis of the past three decades of the Indian Novel in English. My interest in Indian Literature in English goes back to the late 1970s, when I was an undergraduate student at Annamalai University in South India. My inspiring teachers and the well equipped library there helped me develop a deep interest for this then fledgling branch of English Studies. Therefore, when I came to France for my higher studies, I decided to do my research in Indian Poetry in English. I presented my thesis in French at the University of Paris 7 under the guidance of Julia Kristeva in 1987. I have lived and worked in France ever since. This linguistically, culturally and geographically decentred position has allowed me to look at the development of the postcolonial Indian novel from a different point of view. Both the defects and merits of this book could be attributed to this “third position”.

Though surveys of Indian Writing in English (K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar, William Walsh, Arvind Krishna Mehrotra, M.K. Naik and Shyamala A. Narayan), individual studies of Indian novelists (published by Creative Books, Manchester University Press, Continuum, Foundation Books), indeed even investigations of the Indian Novel in a historical perspective (Meenakshi Mukherjee, Priyamvada Gopal, Denise Coussy, Dirk Wiemann) and postcolonial fiction as such (Richard Lane) exist, a specialist approach to postcolonial Indian novels that surveys the warp and woof of the novelistic text is not yet available. This study attempts to explain the stunning vitality, colourful diversity, and the outstanding but sometimes controversial success of the postcolonial Indian novel by discussing them in the light of ongoing debates. Its purpose is not to question postcolonial methodology as such but to show how the potentialities of the novel form have been taken to new heights in this particular postcolonial practice. I hope it will be of interest to students and scholars in postcolonial literatures, Indian studies, English studies and comparative literature.

This book would not have seen the light of day without the interest shown by Cambridge Scholars Publishing. My thanks go to Carol Koulikourdi, Amanda Millar and Soucin Yip-Sou for their friendly co-operation throughout. Without the trust shown and the editorial know-how transmitted by Ranjini Mendis of *Postcolonial Text*, I would have not

dared to launch myself into the task of actually writing a book relating to the field. Thanks be to her. I am deeply indebted to Prof. Cornelius Crowley of Université Paris-Ouest Nanterre La Défense not only for guiding me in writing and getting a postdoctoral degree but most importantly for his faith in me and his constant encouragement. My script has benefitted from the critical but highly valuable remarks made by Professors Evelyne Hanquart-Turner, Claire Joubert, Chantal Delourme, Michel Naumann and Alexis Tadié to whom I owe my gratitude. My heartfelt thanks to Prof. Sangeeta Ray for writing the foreword and Prof. Helga Ramsey-Kurz for stimulating my research with her unfailing passion for intellectual exchange.

I recall with fondness the SAHIB Research Centre in the University of Rennes-2 and its head Prof. Michel Renouard who were the first provide me a forum to publish my ideas. The Head of the CREE Research Centre in the Université Paris Ouest-Nanterre La Défense, Dr. Corinne Alexandre-Garner, hosted me in more than one sense of the term, providing me temporary lectureship in the department of Social and Administrative Studies and membership in the research centre and sponsoring me for European and international conferences. I thank her warmly and sincerely for her support. Professors Claire Bazin, Denise Coussy, Emily Eells, François Gallix, Martine Piquet, Hélène Thomas and Susan Visvanathan have helped me find my way in the maze of academia and I am beholden to them.

I would like to specially thank Artist Vivan Sundaram for providing me with a digital image of Amrita Sher-Gil's *Self Portrait at easel* and giving me his kind permission to reproduce it on the cover illustration.

This list would not be complete without acknowledgement made to the help of my colleagues and friends Michel Perdu, Patrick Griffin and Michel Olinga. To the distinguished colleagues in the Law Department in the University of Paris 13 who had facilitated my research interests by showing their care and courtesy, many thanks.

—Geetha Ganapathy-Doré
Université Paris 13

CHAPTER ONE

POSTCOLONIALISM, A THEORETICAL OVERVIEW

Unending Empire

The imperial sun has set, as Salman Rushdie puts it in his collection of Essays, *Imaginary Homelands*.¹ Well before him the Ivoirian novelist Ahmadou Kourouma had employed the solar metaphor in his novel written in 1968, *The Suns of Independence*² in order to describe decolonization in Africa, though the luminous plurality of this title was somewhat eclipsed by the inadequate postcolonial regimes denounced in the text of the novel. Hardly had these countries finished celebrating independence and had the time to reterritorialize³ their imagination by narrating the identity crisis they had had to face as young and sovereign nations that they are confronted with another phenomenon which overwhelms them due to the “fundamental disjunctures between economy, culture and politics”⁴ it provokes, i.e., globalization. Globalization itself is viewed as a form of American imperialism by authors like Arundhati Roy, who sees therein the domination of multinational and private companies,⁵ and Samir Amin, who looks at underdevelopment as a corollary of the accumulation of

¹ Salman Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands* (London: Granta Books, 1991), 129.

² Ahmadou Kourouma, *The Suns of Independence*, trans., Adrian Adams (Teaneck, New Jersey: Holmes & Meier Publishers, 1981).

³ For the concepts of de- and reterritorialization, see Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: capitalism and schizophrenia* (London: Continuum, 1984), 37.

⁴ Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large, Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 33.

⁵ Geetha Ganapathy-Doré, “Deconstructing the Instant-Mix Imperial Democracy: Arundhati Roy’s Political Essays” in *Colonization or Globalization? Postcolonial Explorations of Imperial Expansion*, eds. Silvia Nagy-Zekmi and Chantal Zabus, (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2009), 79-90.

capital on a global scale.⁶ Contrary to Arundhati Roy who sustains that the British Empire has morphed into an Anglophone one,⁷ Amitav Ghosh discerns in the war in Iraq not the trace of a new American empire but “a new phase in the evolution of the most powerful political force of the last two centuries, namely, the Anglophone Empire.”⁸ Thus envisaged, would the postcolonial moment have been a mere parenthesis in the history of British or Western hegemony? Would the Orient disoriented,⁹ the rhetoric of revenge by the reverse conquest of the language of the Other, the aesthetics of decentring, emancipated self-representation, hybrid identity which gets rhizomic, exile and migration, imagined communities, and cultural syncretism have been but partial, plural and provisional expressions of resistance in the ongoing march of the liberal and mercantile Empire? The idea of a continuing Anglophone Empire helps us review, indeed even call into question, the “exotic” body of texts that is called postcolonial literature.

Postindependence or Postcolonialism?

Literary critics of decolonized countries, especially India, spoke about postindependent literature for a while. Of course, the prefix “post” carries the imprint of the Western tradition of studying literature in terms of historical movements. In *Masks of Conquest*, Gauri Viswanathan links the origins of English studies with the British conquest of India.¹⁰ Pioneering research in modern social sciences such as economics, geography, anthropology and linguistics was the outcome of the confrontation between European ways of thinking and those of “native or indigenous peoples” elsewhere, the intermingling of their destinies and the activities of learned societies. The confinement of knowledge in disciplinary

⁶ Samir Amin, *Unequal Development: An Essay on the Social Formations of Peripheral Capitalism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1976).

⁷ Arundhati Roy, *The Checkbook and the Cruise Missile* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: South End Press, 2004), 141.

⁸ Amitav Ghosh, *Incendiary Circumstances* (Boston, New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2005), 28.

⁹ Salman Rushdie plays with Edward Said’s concept of Orientalism and deconstructs the West as Disorient in his novel, *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1999). See Geetha Ganapahty-Doré, “An Orphic Journey to the Disorient? Salman Rushdie’s *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*” in *World Literature Written in English* 38: 2 (2000): 17-27.

¹⁰ Gauri Viswanathan, *Masks of Conquest, Literary Studies and British Rule in India* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989).

compartments, the rigid frontiers set up between them, the oppressing linearity of a systematic approach, the overwhelming weight of literary and artistic output on the peripheries by the Metropolitan centre have been interpreted by Mary Louise Pratt¹¹ as signs of the reinforcement of patriarchy and empire as dominant models. The decolonization of subjugated territories was supposed to go hand in hand with a decompartmentalization of knowledge. The concepts of inter- and multidisciplinary seem to translate this epistemological break. However, more than the term “postindependent” which presents the point of view of the previously colonized, or the terms “inter” and “transcultural” which imply an equal status granted to all cultures and the possibility of transcendence, it is the term “postcolonial” which embeds the reality of colonialism in the very signifier that is more frequently used.

The term appeared first in its composite form in the *Oxford English Dictionary* of 1959 and without hyphen in the *American Heritage Dictionary* of 1959.¹² It refers to the field of study which came into being by enlarging the field of English studies to include American studies and more contemporary national and regional literatures such as Australian, Canadian or Caribbean literatures.¹³ The epithet “postcolonial” much like the terms “third world” and “Commonwealth” presupposes an imperial and metropolitan territory from which the critic speaks and which gives legitimacy to his or her discourse. Several voices have been raised against this despising, indeed even segregationist gaze, of the centre versus the periphery. A series of denials, “the third world does not exist,”¹⁴ “Commonwealth Literature does not exist,”¹⁵ have followed and the idea of “overworlding the third world”¹⁶ in order to put things into perspective. Nevertheless, the term “postcolonial” has prevailed even in the so-called Southern nations during the 1980s. The inherent tension between the two terms “postindependent” and “postcolonial” and thus the tension between

¹¹ Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992).

¹² Deepika Bahri, “Once More with Feeling: What is Postcolonialism?” in *Ariel: A Review of International English Literature* 26.1 (1995): 51-82.

¹³ Stephen Slemon, “Post-colonial Critical Theories” in *New National and Post-colonial Literatures: An Introduction*, ed. Bruce King (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 105.

¹⁴ Shiv Naipaul, “The Illusion of the Third World” in *An Unfinished Journey* (London: Abacus, 1986), 31-42.

¹⁵ Salman Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands*, 61-70.

¹⁶ Ania Loomba, “Overworlding the Third World” in *Colonial Discourse/Postcolonial Theory*, eds. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (Columbia: Columbia University Press, 1994), 305-323.

two different visions of the world, was perceptible till the end of the last century. For instance, *ARIEL*'s special issue (A Review of English literature) edited by Gauri Viswanathan in 2000 was entitled "Institutionalizing English Studies: The Postcolonial/Postindependence Challenge."

Benita Parry's wariness about the "downgrading of anti-imperial texts written by national liberation movements" and the obliteration of "the role of the native as historical subject and combatant, possessor of an-other knowledge and producer of alternative traditions"¹⁷ sensitizes us as well to the inherent danger in putting too much emphasis on postindependence reverse discourses. Laura Chrisman too has expressed concerns over the preoccupation with the postcolonial to the detriment of the colonial. "Imperialism, in remaining unanalyzed, also remains unwittingly albeit, hegemonic."¹⁸

Postcolonialism distinguished from postmodernism

Edward Said's denunciation of the construction of the Orient as Europe's alterity,¹⁹ Gayatri Spivak's creative use of Antonio Gramsci's term subaltern to connote "everything that has limited or no access to the cultural imperialism ... a space of difference"²⁰ and Homi Bhabha's theorization of the third space of enunciation arising out of the non-synchronous temporality of global and national cultures²¹ are seminal ideas that marked the beginnings of postcolonial studies. Stuart Hall²² for his part stressed the power of the discourse to recreate and reinforce Western dominance over the subaltern. The institutional history of postcolonialism has been retraced by Bart Moore Gilbert.²³ However, there is a general perception that the asperity of the colonial struggle had

¹⁷ Benita Parry, "Problems in Current Theories of Colonial Discourse" in *Oxford Literary Review* 9 (1987): 27-58.

¹⁸ Laura Chrisman, "The Imperial Unconscious? Representations of Imperial Discourse" in *Colonial Discourse and Postcolonial Theory*, eds. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (Columbia University Press, 1994), 498.

¹⁹ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin, 1977).

²⁰ Gayatri Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak" in *Colonial Discourse and Postcolonial Theory*, 66-111.

²¹ Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 37.

²² Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay, *Questions of Cultural Identity* (London: Sage Publications, 1996), 4.

²³ Bart Moore Gilbert, *Postcolonial Theory: Contexts, Practices, Politics* (London: Verso, 1997).

been relinquished in the endorsement of the convenient label²⁴ of postcoloniality, where a will to master the world persists, making it an ideological project that still remains imperialistic.

Critics like Kwame Anthony Appiah, Linda Hutcheon, Homi Bhabha and Leela Gandhi have taken care to differentiate the prefix “post” in “postcolonialism” from that in “postmodernism”. Fredric Jameson, defines postmodernism as a “cultural logic of modes of production of late capitalism.”²⁵ According to Ihab Hassan, literary postmodernism possesses eleven distinctive traits: the uncertain character of the text, fragmentation, dislodging of the canon of grand narratives in favour of numerous local language games or micronarratives, the erasure of the subject, irrepresentability, irony, a deformation of cultural genres via hybridation, parody and pastiche, carnivalization, performance that fills in the gaps of the text, constructionism and an immanent semiotic system that invents a blind escape.²⁶

For Appiah, the postcolonial condition refers to a set of notions: post-realist writing, post-indigenous politics, transnational rather than national solidarity, optimism. The prefix “post” in postcolonialism, as in postmodernism, is a “post” that challenges the legitimizing narratives of yore. It is a “space clearing gesture.”²⁷ Linda Hutcheon has studied the intersections between postmodernism and postcolonialism which share a certain number of problematics such as interrogation of the past, importance of margins and textual interstices, and irony as well the differences which exist between them such as their conception of history, the space of their discourse and their evaluation of discursive effects on subjectivity.²⁸

Homi Bhabha defines postcolonialism in terms of the place in which it is located and from where it is articulated:

²⁴ Anne McClintock, “The Angel of Progress: Pitfalls of the Term “Postcolonialism” in *Social Text*, nos. 31/32 (1992): 84–98. See also Ella Shohat, “Notes on the Postcolonial” in *Social Text*, nos. 31/32 (1992): 99–113.

²⁵ Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991).

²⁶ Ihab Hassan quoted by Daniel Pageaux, *Naissances du roman* (Paris: Klincksieck, 2006), 150. My translation.

²⁷ Kwame Anthony Appiah, “Is the *Post-* in *Post* modernism the *Post-* in *Post* colonial?” in *Critical Inquiry* 17 (1991): 336–357.

²⁸ Linda Hutcheon, “Circling the Downspout of Empire, Past the Last Post” in *Theorizing Postcolonialism and Postmodernism*, eds. Ian Adam and Helen Tiffin (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993), 167–189.

It is from this hybrid location of cultural value – the transnational as the translational – that the postcolonial intellectual attempts to elaborate a historical and literary project.²⁹

Bhabha borrows the notion of translatability from Rushdie. An immigrant, according to Rushdie, is a translated being by the fact of being borne across frontiers.³⁰ Thus the postcolonial intellectual reviews and renames the postmodern from the margins of modernism. Homi Bhabha's definition implicitly poses the question of languages in postcolonialism.

In order to discuss the meaning of the "post" in postcolonialism Leela Gandhi starts by using Jean-François Lyotard's theory. The prefix "post" in postmodernism, as Lyotard has written, "elaborates the conviction that it is both possible and necessary to break with tradition and institute absolutely new ways of living and thinking."³¹ This does not mean one has forgotten or repressed the past, but merely keeps repeating it, not surpassing it. By analogy, she concludes that "postcoloniality can be described as a condition troubled by the consequences of a self-willed historical amnesia" and postcolonialism as "a therapeutic retrieval of the colonial past."³²

Achille Mbembe adds the new dimension of intersectionality to postcoloniality seen as intervention in the third space:

I define the postcolony as a timespace characterized by proliferation and multiplicity. As a temporal formation, the postcolony is definitely an era of dispersed entanglements, the unity of which is produced out of differences. From a spatial point of view, it is an overlapping of different, intersected and entwined threads in tension with one another.³³

²⁹ Homi K. Bhabha, "The Postcolonial and the Postmodern" in *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 173.

³⁰ Salman Rushdie, *Shame* (London: Picador, 1983), 87.

³¹ Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Explained*, trans., Don Barry (Sydney: Power Publications, 1997), 76.

³² Leela Gandhi, *Postcolonial Theory* (Columbia: Columbia University Press, 1998), 5-7.

³³ Interview with Achille Mbembe by Christian Hoeller, <http://www.utexas.edu/conferences/africa/ads/1528.html>, accessed September 24, 2010.

See also Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

The postcolonial not only writes from the dominated country³⁴ but also in the language of the Other. Are works written in non-European languages or translated from non-European languages into European languages postcolonial? This is a tricky issue in the sense that the concept of postcoloniality includes only those works that are susceptible to be understood and included in the Western canon. Hence Ngugi wa Thiong'o's observation

thus language and literature were taking us further and further from ourselves to other selves, from our world to other worlds.³⁵

and his exhortation to decolonize the mind.

Is Postcolonialism a concept that is evolving or obsolete?

Aijaz Ahmed recalls the context in which the concept emerged in the 1970s before being appropriated by cultural theorists:

Participants in that debate had been concerned with, first, a specific temporal moment, namely the wave of decolonization in the aftermath of the Second World War; second, a specific structure of power, namely the type of state that arose in the newly independent countries, and third, the theoretical problem of re-conceptualizing the Marxist theory of the capitalist state with reference not to the state of advanced capital but to the state that arose out of the histories of colonial capital, in the moment of decolonization.³⁶

Placed in its temporal axis, the “post” in postcolonialism of course lays emphasis on the end of colonialism. What is problematic is its ideological sense. As the prefix itself is borrowed from Latin, we might wonder whether the continuity between the Roman Empire and British Empire has truly been broken in people's mindset. Indeed Marc Crépon argues that even in the supranational community of the European Union, there still exists a dividing line between member states that were formerly connected to the Western European Empire and those that were not.³⁷ Some scholars find that the “post” (beyond colonialism) which is affirmed in the concept

³⁴ Patrick Chamoiseau, *Ecrire en pays dominé* (Paris: Gallimard, 1997).

³⁵ Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (London: Heinemann, 1986), 12.

³⁶ Aijaz Ahmed, “Postcolonial Theory and the ‘Post-’ Condition” in *The Socialist Register* 1997, 353-381.

³⁷ Marc Crépon, “Mémoires d'empire” in *Transeuropéennes* 22 (2009): 45-58.

is not truly operational because the ideological break between the Empire and previously colonized countries has not really taken place. For Vijay Mishra and Bob Hodge, postcolonialism is “an always present tendency in any literature of subjugation marked by a systemic process of cultural domination through the imposition of imperial structures of power. ... This form of “postcolonialism” is not “post” something or other but is already implicit in the discourses of colonialism themselves.”³⁸ On the contrary, Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, view postcolonialism as “a continuous process of resistance and reconstruction” and consider the prefix “post” as “more logical than chronological.”³⁹ The qualifying adjective “postcolonial” can also be read as an alternative to “colonial” which inevitably links these two alterities. Conversely, in some cases postcolonialism happens to be a euphemism for neocolonialism or international- or paracolonialism. Stephen Slemon has commented on the conceptual vagueness of the term “postcolonialism” and the uneasiness it suscitates because of the ambiguities it hides:

It has been used as a way of ordering a critique of totalizing forms of Western historicism; as a portmanteau term for a retooled notion of “class”, as a subset of both postmodernism and post-structuralism (and conversely, as the condition from which those two structures of cultural logic and cultural critique themselves are seen to emerge); as the name for a condition of nativist longing in post-independence national groupings; as a cultural marker of non-residency for a Third World intellectual cadre; as the inevitable underside of a fractured and ambivalent discourse of colonialist power; as an oppositional form of “reading practice”; and - and this was my first encounter with the term - as the name for a category of “literary” activity which sprang from a new and welcome political energy going on within what used to be called ‘Commonwealth’ literary studies.⁴⁰

In the French speaking countries,

The function of the epithet “postcolonial” is to underscore another concern: evaluating the social and symbolic consequences of colonization... In this

³⁸ Vijay Mishra & Bob Hodge, “What is Post(-)Colonialism?” in *Textual Practice* 5.3 (1991): 399-414. The quotation is from page 284.

³⁹ Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, Helen Tiffin, *The Postcolonial Studies Reader* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 2.

⁴⁰ Stephen Slemon, “The Scramble for Post-colonialism” in *De-scribing Empire. Postcolonialism and Textuality*, eds. C.Tiffin, A. Lawson (London: Routledge, 1994), 16-17.

sense, one continues to study the effects of colonization which persist after the formal disappearance of its causes.⁴¹

Jean-Marc Moura quotes Peter Sloterdijk for whom the domain of culture is henceforth organized as a market of differences:

The gesture that corresponds to this rolling bustle is that of necrology. It is the dominant manifestation of a culture that that lives entirely on the play of current deactualization. For this reason, the 'post' of postmodernity (or postcolonialism) signifies in the first place the "post" of posthumous praise. No other form of discourse is as adequate to the culture of the elevator as posthumous praise and necrology, which, in the midst of a permanent movement and chronic darkness, recall the latest certainty: the past is not the present.⁴²

The least that can be said about the term "postcolonial" is that it is a "a definition in progress" as John Yang suggests,⁴³ defined sometimes with regard to history, sometimes with regard to ideology, sometimes with regard to geography, sometimes with regard to writing, sometimes with regard to reading and at other times with regard to teaching. Critics like Ania Loomba and Rukhmini Bhaya Nair had already envisaged a critical horizon beyond postcolonialism that can be situated in translinguistic, transhistorical, transnational, transexual approaches. Much in the same manner, diaspora studies⁴⁴ offer an alternative to postcolonialism.

Theories in dialogue

One of the characteristics of postcolonial literature is the abundance of parallel theories on postcolonialism that mark out its dislocated space and its sinuous path. In Brown University's well known website⁴⁵ on

⁴¹ Abdellai Hajjat quoted by Vincent Geisser, "L'intégration républicaine, Réflexion sur une problématique postcoloniale" in *Culture postcoloniale 1961-2006*, eds. Pascale Blanchard et Nicolas Bancel (Paris: Autrement, 2005), 145. My translation.

⁴² Jean-Marc Moura, "Postcolonialisme et comparatisme" in *Vox Poetica*, <http://www.vox-poetica.org/sflgc/biblio/moura.html>, accessed September 24, 2010.

⁴³ <http://www.scholars.nus.edu.sg/post/poldiscourse/yang/1.html>, accessed September 24, 2010.

⁴⁴ Sudesh Mishra, *Diaspora Criticism* (Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2006).

⁴⁵ http://www.postcolonialweb.org/poldiscourse/theorists_note.html, accessed September 24, 2010.

postcolonialism, Leong Yew counts at least seven categories of theoreticians: anticolonial revolutionaries, the Subaltern studies group, feminists, Marxists, discourse analysts, major theoreticians and general theoreticians who study ethnicity, race, society, culture, nation, geography, non-anglophone worlds and globalization. Their theories, which are found to be obscure and filled with jargon, are supposed to enrich our reading but function as mystifying barriers instead, for in some of these theories “what is said matters less than the fact of saying it.”⁴⁶ It is as if there is a competition for fame between the authors and the critics so that writers themselves turn into their own critics and the critics of other writers and critics. Of course, history of literature always offers us examples of creative writers who have been critics. But we can observe more frequently postcolonial authors accompanying their creative fiction with the production of non-fiction. This competition between authors and critics is an indirect offshoot of the rivalry between hard sciences and humanities and social sciences. In order to study literature and pretend to “scientific rigour,” it was necessary to theorize. In the heavy heritage of postcolonial theories, one should also consider the influence of Russian formalism, structuralism and generally “French theory”⁴⁷ which were fashionable (Derrida, Foucault, Lyotard, Lacan, Kristeva, Deleuze and Guattari are a few eminent examples) in American universities. Marc Crépon points the fallacy in such a conception. These theoreticians, though based in France, were open to outside influences, especially from Europe and America. Besides the nature of their theories is such that they defy any appropriation and identification in a “hold-all” category.⁴⁸

The passion for theory understood as an initial outlay with a guaranteed value or as *shibboleth* with a view to obtaining a cultural recognition,⁴⁹ which has taken hold of literary critics in general and postcolonial critics in particular, is related to “the aporia of an avant-gardist modernity whose ethics and aesthetics of rupture have resulted in a sterile formalism or illusory progressivism, in the fetishisation of the new

⁴⁶ Terry Eagleton “In the Gaudy Supermarket”, review of Gayatri Spivak’s *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, *London Review of Books*, May 13, 1999. http://www.lrb.co.uk/v21/n10/eag101_.html, Accessed September 24, 2010.

⁴⁷ François Cusset, *French Theory* (Paris : La Découverte, 2003).

⁴⁸ Marc Crépon, “Les français, tous xénophobes ?”, <http://www.philomag.com/article,dossier,les-francais-tous-xenophobes,942.php>, Accessed September 24, 2010.

⁴⁹ My sincere thanks go to Prof. Cornelius Crowley for explaining the passion for theory to me in this way.

and of the theory” as Antoine Compagnon points out in his book, *Le démon de la théorie*. Such an attitude

recalls the doctrine of double truth in Catholic theology. Among the adepts, the theory is at once the object of faith and disavowal. One believes in it and at the same time one is not going to behave as if one believed in it absolutely.⁵⁰

Antoine Compagnon’s idea is not to discredit theory as such. By putting theory to the test of common sense, he advances the idea of perplexity as literary ethics. Todorov’s *Littérature en péril* also concludes that the predominance of theories in teaching has led to a “formalist or nihilist or solipsistic vision of literature.”⁵¹ Jane Hiddleston’s recent exploration of the interpenetration of poststructuralism and postcoloniality deduces the symptoms of an anxiety of theory from the “text’s unease with itself, its slippages and contradictions, and the disavowals of the theorizing persona.”⁵²

A Shared Origin

One of the postcolonial theories situates the inaugural moment of postcolonialism in the “after Bandung” conference where Alfred Sauvy and Georges Balandier had formulated the expression “third world” modelled after the “third estate” of the French Revolution.⁵³ Indeed a more fluid reading of history allows us to displace the inaugural moment of postcolonialism in the birth of American literature much more so owing to the fact that the American revolutionaries were the first to write back to the Empire and American poets were the first to celebrate multiculturalism:

Year of the marriage of continents, climates and oceans!
(No more Doge of Venice now, wedding the Adriatic)
I see, O year, in you, the vast terraqueous globe, given, and giving all,
Europe to Asia, Africa join’d, and they to the New World;
The lands, geographies, dancing before you, holding a festival garland,

⁵⁰ Antoine Compagnon, *Le démon de la théorie* (Paris: Seuil, 1998), 278. My translation.

⁵¹ Tzevetan Todorov, *La littérature en péril* (Paris: Flammarion, 2006), 88.

⁵² Jane Hiddleston, *Poststructuralism and Postcoloniality* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2010), 8.

⁵³ David Scott, “After Bandung: From the Politics of Colonial Representation to a Theory of Postcolonial Politics” in *Refashioning Futures, Criticism after Postcoloniality* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 221.

As brides and bridegrooms hand in hand (Whitman, *Passage to India*)

Bill Ashcroft and Gareth Griffiths plead for the inclusion of United States in postcolonial studies because its relation to the metropolitan centre has been paradigmatic from the point of view of postcolonial literatures.⁵⁴ As a matter of fact, *Ulysses*, James Joyce's stream of consciousness novel could be considered the pioneer of all postcolonial novels. Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* are undoubtedly the heirs of Joyce.⁵⁵ However, postcolonial theoreticians are divided on the issue of settling the beginning of postcolonialism in literature. The oppression the non-European peoples were victims of during colonization and the spiritual crisis that the newly independent nations had undergone could not be compared to the situation of American subjects or the Irish subjects of the Empire in so far as the subjugation primarily concerned "white men".⁵⁶

Drawing inspiration from Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic*⁵⁷ which shows that there exists a common strand of Black culture across their African, American, Caribbean and British nationalities, Michelle Stevens's *Black Atlantic*⁵⁸ argues that, independently of the intellectual and cultural history of the United States which played a role in understanding postcolonialism, literary production by Africans in the US and the Caribbean, whether in English or French, largely contributed to the emergence of postcolonial literature. G.V. Desani's *All About H. Hatter*, a novel published in 1948 one year after the independence of India and Pakistan and claimed to equal James Joyce's linguistic verve could also

⁵⁴ Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths & Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back*, 2.

⁵⁵ http://www.wsu.edu:8080/~brians/anglophone/satanic_versions/joyce.html, accessed September 24, 2010. Some recent works deal with Irish representations of India, the influence of Irish thinkers on the Indian nationalist struggle and the postcolonial between Ireland and India. Joseph Lennon, *Irish Orientalism, a Literary and Intellectual History* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2004); Julia M. Wright, *Ireland, India and Nationalism in Nineteenth-Century Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Tadhg Foley and Maureen O'Connor ed., *Ireland and India: Colonies, Culture and Empire* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2007); Gauri Viswanathan, "Ireland, India, and the Poetics of Internationalism" in *Journal of World History* 15-1 (2004): 7-30.

⁵⁶ It is however necessary to bear in mind that a cultural minority is a relatively autonomous category whose non-recognition is not determined by or indexed on economic destitution.

⁵⁷ Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1993).

⁵⁸ Michelle Stevens, *Black Empire, The Masculine Global Imaginary of Caribbean Intellectuals in the U. S., 1914-1962* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005).

constitute a striking event if not the founding moment of the history of postcolonial literature. African critics would propose the Nigerian Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* published ten years later for the title of the inaugural work of literary postcolonialism. This multiple and shared origin with reference to the British Empire signifies that postcolonialism is a trend that traverses literature at different moments. The fact that French and Portuguese decolonization took place a decade or two later further postpones the beginnings of literary postcolonialism. Latin America's postcolonialism, on the contrary, has a century of advance over India or Africa.⁵⁹ Hence Robert Young's identification of the importance of the Havana Tricontinental of 1966 as the moment in which what we now call "postcolonial theory" was first formally constituted as a specific knowledge-base of non-Western political and cultural production.⁶⁰ Indeed Che Guevara's speech in the United Nations on December 11, 1964 expressed postcolonial political solidarity in much more striking terms than the Bandung conference of the non-aligned:

The final hour of colonialism has struck, and millions of inhabitants of Africa, Asia and Latin America rise to meet a new life and demand their unrestricted right to self-determination.⁶¹

One could argue that this line of historical divide makes no meaning and that literary postcolonialism has preceded political postcolonialism by citing examples such as R.K. Narayan's *Swami and Friends* (1935) or Aimé Césaire's *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* (1937). English critics have tried to circumvent this question by first indicating the nationality of the writer and then the language (Indian Writing in English, Welsh writing in English in 2005) and later by inventing the term "new literatures" in order to signify the political change as well as its consequence on literature, i.e., the emergence of liberated and plural voices. In France, a similar movement could be remarked in the labels "littérature africaine d'expression française (African Writing in French) and "francophone literature". But the logic is different in the evolution of the term "francophone literature". Francophone literature engulfs French literature rather than simply help categorize literature from the former colonies written in French. Between the plural in the English label and the singular

⁵⁹ Pascale Casanova, *La République mondiale des lettres* (Paris: Seuil, 1999), 177.

⁶⁰ Robert Young, *Postcolonialism : An Historical Introduction* (London: Wiley Blackwell, 2001), 5.

⁶¹ <http://www.marxists.org/archive/guevara/1964/12/11.htm>, accessed September 24, 2010.

in the French label, we get a spectrum of intermediate terms such as the composite Black British or Asian American or Diasporic literatures which interrogate the main stream from the margins.

More than as a literary trend or critical pursuit, postcolonialism has been perceived as a field of academic specialization. Arif Dirlik stated in 1994:

For Third World intellectuals who have arrived in First World academe, postcolonial discourse is an expression not so much of agony over identity, as it often appears, but of newfound power.⁶²

Kwame Anthony Appiah calls postcoloniality

the condition of what we might ungenerously call a comprador intelligentsia: a relatively small group of writers and thinkers in the ... small, Western-style, Western-trained, group of writers and thinkers who mediate the trade in cultural commodities of world capitalism at the periphery.⁶³

Postcolonialism could also be defined as a mode of reading which has three tasks of interpretation as John McLeod posits:

Reading texts produced by writers from countries with a history of colonialism, primarily those texts concerned with the workings and legacy of colonialism in either the past or the present.

Reading texts produced by those that have migrated from countries with a history of colonialism, or those descended from migrant families, which deal in the main with diaspora experience and its many consequences.

In the light of theories of colonial discourses, re-reading texts produced during colonialism; both those that directly address the experiences of Empire, and those that seem not to.⁶⁴

John McLeod holds a globally critical view on postcolonialism because he considers it as a “premature celebration of an unfulfilled historical

⁶² Arif Dirlik, “The Postcolonial Aura: Third World Criticism in the Age of Global Capitalism” in *Critical Inquiry* 20-2 (1994): 328-356. <http://postcolonial>, accessed September 24, 2010.

⁶³ Kwame Anthony Appiah, “Is the *Post-* in *Post* modernism the *Post-* in *Post* colonial?” in *Critical Inquiry* 17 (1991): 336-357.

⁶⁴ John McLeod, *Beginning Postcolonialism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 33.