

C.L. Innes



The Cambridge **Introduction** to
Postcolonial Literatures
in English

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*The Cambridge Introduction to
Postcolonial Literatures in English*

The past century has witnessed an extraordinary flowering of fiction, poetry and drama from countries previously colonised by Britain, an output which has changed the map of English literature. This introduction, from a leading figure in the field, explores a wide range of Anglophone postcolonial writing from Africa, Australia, the Caribbean, India, Ireland and Britain. Lyn Innes compares the ways in which authors shape communal identities and interrogate the values and representations of peoples in newly independent nations. Placing its emphasis on literary rather than theoretical texts, this book offers detailed discussion of many internationally renowned authors, including Chinua Achebe, James Joyce, Les Murray, Salman Rushdie and Derek Walcott. It also includes historical surveys of the main countries discussed, a glossary, and biographical notes on major authors. Lyn Innes provides a rich and subtle guide to an array of authors and texts from a wide range of sites.

C. L. Innes is Emeritus Professor of Postcolonial Literatures at the University of Kent. She is the author of, among other books, *A History of Black and Asian Writing in Britain* (Cambridge, 2002).

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Preface

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

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

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

Be not afeard; the isle is full of noises,
Sounds and sweet airs, that delight and hurt not.
Sometimes a thousand twanging instruments
Will hum about mine ears; and sometimes voices³

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Chapter 1

Introduction: situating the postcolonial

Over the past half-century, postcolonial literatures and postcolonial studies¹ have gained the attention of more and more readers and scholars throughout the world. Writers as diverse as Chinua Achebe and Wole Soyinka from Nigeria, Salman Rushdie and Arundhati Roy from India, Derek Walcott from the Caribbean, Seamus Heaney from Ireland, Margaret Atwood and Michael Ondaatje from Canada, Peter Carey and Patrick White from Australia, and J. M. Coetzee and Nadine Gordimer from South Africa have been prominent when major literary awards such as the Booker Prize or the Nobel Prize have been announced, and their works now appear on numerous school and university syllabuses. Concurrently, their writing has provided the nourishment for a variety of postcolonial theories concerning the nature of such works, approaches to reading them, and their significance for reading and understanding other literary, philosophical and historical works. Indeed, the production of introductions to postcolonial theory has become a major industry.² However, this book seeks to focus on the literary texts rather than the theories, and to give a general sense of the issues and choices which inform the writing and reading of those texts. It will discuss the ways in which these issues have changed over the decades, involving questions of genre, form and language, as well as social and political concerns; it will also discuss how these texts may be read and responded to in different contexts.

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

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

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

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

nineteenth century an area governed by the British and subject to its statutes. In both Ireland and India, the British sought to establish an intermediate class of English-speaking people who could act as interpreters, teachers and lower-grade civil servants, and so provide support for British cultural, military and economic domination. Similar policies were followed in African colonies such as Ghana and Nigeria after the allocation of these territories to Britain at the Berlin Conference in 1884.⁴

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

From Commonwealth to postcolonial literary studies

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

tertiary institutions, most often in the ‘First World,’ relate to the ways in which their work is produced and received.²⁴

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Chapter 2

Postcolonial issues in performance

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

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

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