

The contemporary post-colonial novel in English

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*We do return and leave and return again, criss-crossing the Atlantic;
but whichever side we are on, the dream is always on the other side.
(Pauline Melville: Shape-Shifter, 1991)*

ABSTRACT. A wide range of post-colonial novels has been published during the 1990s and the first years of the 21st century. A selection of recently-published novels in English by Coetzee, Gordimer, Melville, Naipaul, Melville, Phillips, Roy and Rushdie, all postcolonial writers from South Africa, India and the Caribbean, and their principal issues are presented to the reader. The diaspora and transculturation themes are foremost in these novels and may open discussions for further and deeper research.

Key words: postcolonial writers; narrative; diaspora; transculturation; disruption.

RESUMO. Romances pós-coloniais contemporâneos em língua inglesa. Vários romances pós-coloniais foram publicados na década de 1990 e nos primeiros anos do século 21. Foram selecionados alguns romances recém-publicados em inglês escritos por Coetzee, Gordimer, Melville, Naipaul, Melville, Phillips, Roy e Rushdie, oriundos da África do Sul, da Índia e do Caribe e nessa pesquisa são indicados alguns de seus temas e problemas. A diáspora e a transculturação se destacam e podem abrir espaço para uma pesquisa mais aprofundada.

Palavras-chave: escritores pós-coloniais; narrativa; diáspora; transculturação; subversão.

Introduction

Post-colonial studies have been with us for the last forty years and at present they are foremost in any program of Literature in English. Perhaps the most interesting thing is that the current literature in English is heavily relying on the literature coming from post-colonial *topis* and post-colonial writers living in British ex-colonies or living in Britain or the United States but were born and bred in colonized countries. The paper will not touch on British authors and novels with postcolonial themes, such as Marina Warner's *Indigo* and Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*. It's aim is to give a bird's eye view of the contemporary novel in English published from 1990-2003 and written by postcolonials. Needless to say, it will neither comprise all the novels published nor most of them. Only a few, which in the author's judgment have made great repercussions in the literary world, were selected. The paper is not intended to be an in-depth analysis of the novels themselves, of postcolonial themes or of the reaction of Third World literature in English against metropolitan fiction writing. The paper tries to give a summary of some novels written by the best post-colonial writers, pinpointing the themes represented, with special reference to the diaspora and transculturation. India, South Africa and the Caribbean are represented in the

context of their history, their literary state-of-art and the novels specifically focused. The aim is to whet the reader's curiosity and interest so that the novels under analysis could be better known and studied, whilst their themes given more attention and emphasis.

Diaspora and transculturation

Diaspora (Gk. δια = apart; σπειρειν = scatter) is the generally violent and compulsory migration of peoples from their homeland to other regions. As a central event in colonization, the diaspora may involve millions of people who voluntarily displaced themselves from Europe and Asia to work chiefly in the United States, Canada, Africa, Australia and South America. It may also mean the enforced dislocation of millions of Amerindians and Africans, as slaves, to the plantations of Central and South America and the south of the United States. These two great areas, with their ever-increasing demand of labour, were developed as plantation colonies to furnish foodstuffs and raw material for the metropolitan populations. Actually, during more than three hundred years the economy of the Americas was exclusively based on the work of slaves brought from West Africa.

The severing of people from their homeland, their

culture and language causes loss of identity followed by a deep effort to appropriate, transform and merge local cultures with their own traditional ones. Descendants of the diaspora develop their own distinctive cultures, although they preserve and extend the originary cultures. These hybrid cultures question the myth of the European pure culture and check the idealization of nativism and the mandatory return to pre-colonial cultures. "When I was growing up in the 1940s and 1950s as a child in Kingston, I was surrounded by the signs, the music and the rhythms of this Africa of the diaspora, which only existed as a result of a long and discontinuous series of transformations" (Hall, 1990, p. 231).

A recent diasporic phenomenon is the "settlement" of thousands of ex-colonial subjects to the former colonizing country. Actually France has substantial populations of Algerians, Tunisians and Central Africans while the United Kingdom harbours thousands from East and West African countries and from the Caribbean (Bhabha, 1998; Ashcroft *et al.* 1998; Young, 2001).

The notion of place is the interactive convergence of language, history, spatiality and environment in the experience of colonized peoples. Colonization disrupts the colonized subject's sense of place. On the one hand, for the colonial, enslaved and diaspora subject, it is impossible to leave "home" while it is almost impossible to remain untouched by the new "home". Further, in most cases, identity and an actual place have been totally severed and all attempts to identify oneself with the original location have generally resulted in frustration and more displacement. On the other hand, a diaspora person may allocate its fragmented identity not to a physical place but to its family, community, religion (Ashcroft, 2001). Another alternative is the recovering of the "homeland" and the end of the diaspora, which may occur twofold. In the first case, Afro-American ex-slaves settled in Liberia in 1847 and had the "illusion" that they were returning home; in the second case, political independence in many ex-colonies, at least theoretically, returned the homeland and the land to native Africans. South Africa is a typical example of the latter case. In both cases, the term *home* is actually highly problematic with an experience of a double displacement, a deeper feeling of homelessness and a reproduction of vitiated European colonizing mores by Europeanized natives practiced against the lower classes strata.

Coined by Fernando Ortiz in 1978 with Afro-Cuban culture in mind and assimilated in literary studies by Angel Rama in the 80s, *transculturation* denotes the reciprocal influences of modes of representation and cultural practices of various kinds in colonies and metropolises. Postcolonial theory has always insisted on the simultaneous fabrication of the

Other and the other. Thus it is interesting to analyze the dynamics of the self-representation of the colonial subaltern and his/her resistance. Since cultural material is constantly transmitted by the dominant to colonized groups, the latter are independent to select, absorb and use some of it. Pratt raises some very important questions on transculturation. How are imperial representations received and appropriated by the periphery? How does transculturation occur from the periphery to the metropolis? How does the periphery determine the metropolis?

Transculturation is a phenomenon of *contact zones*, or rather, "social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination - like colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out across the globe today" (Pratt, 1992, p. 4). It is therefore in contact zones that people who are geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish relationships, frequently associated with coercion, inequality and conflicts. These contacts between colonized and colonizers are seen in terms of co-presence, interaction, understandings and practices within hierarchized systems of dominance.

At the time of the European invasion and settlement of America the conquest was rhetoricized and highly celebrated. Later on, the strategies of common Europeans in the tropics were different and contrasting. They were seemingly innocent people who were just traveling and looking at things. Since they covertly asserted European hegemony, Pratt calls the practice *anti-conquest*. They may be either celebratory, or documentary or even allegorical instances of an existential nature. Further, somehow in the contact zone there exists an *autoethnography* by which "colonized subjects undertake to represent themselves in ways that engage with the colonizer's own terms" (Pratt, 1992, p. 7). Whereas abundant ethnographic texts are extant by which Europeans represent to themselves the colonial object, autoethnographic texts are made by colonized subjects on a dialogic stance with their colonizers. Therefore, autoethnographic representations are really the story of the colonized from their own positions and retell their story of subjugation and resistance. Autoethnographic documents need not be written texts. In fact, more frequently they are the updating of ancient mythologies within the tradition of subaltern people or the reinterpretation of past events still encountered in people's memory (Pratt, 1992; Walter, 2003).

India

A brief history

The millenary history of India was interrupted in the second millennium of our era by traders from various European nations, mainly Venetians, and, in a special way, in the 15th century with the arrival of Portuguese traders by sea. Other Europeans were soon to follow suit, especially the English. Although the East India Company was chartered by Queen Elizabeth I in 1600 to trade in spices and textiles, British rule in India actually became effective as from 1757 with Clive's victory at Plassey and the gradual introduction and establishment of British rules, customs and language among the Hindus. Many Europeans scholars went to India to master the languages and learn the ancient culture with its art and customs. However, in 1858 the East India Company was abolished and India came under tighter British control. Queen Victoria became the Empress of India and a massive effort was made to instruct the Hindus in British and European culture.

Macaulay's "Minute on Education" was the ideology that underpinned not only the British occupation of India but especially the education upheaval in the 19th century. "We must at present do our best to form a class of interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals and in intellect" (O'Reilly, p. 17). The aim was the creation of an English-educated elite class which would be critical to Hindu customs (caste system, child brides, suttee) and a writer class, writing in English, which would bridge European and Hindu literary styles.

Hindu reaction to British rule began to escalate in the late 19th century and the first two decades of the 20th were extremely critical for the formation of colonial resentment. The 1885-Indian Congress went unheeded by the British government, Hindu scholars who had earned their degrees in the traditional universities of England were put aside and politicians were excluded from vital decisions on the destiny of their country. Strikes were forbidden and anti-imperialist literature was made illegal. On the 13th April 1919 at Amritsar, Punjab, the British dispersed a peaceful demonstration killing 379 people and wounding 1200. The great struggle for independence started at this historical junction, with Gandhi (1869-1948) working the way to full independence through his political and spiritual ideals of non-violence and passive resistance. He knew the dangerous path he was treading especially with a nation composed of Hindus and Muslims, each group vying for power and dominance. India finally became independent in 1947, but Gandhi was assassinated in Delhi on January 1948. At the same time West and East Pakistan (now Pakistan and Bangladesh) were created for the Muslim community with some thirteen million people fleeing from India to these two states

immediately afterwards.

Not everybody agreed with the particular philosophy of Gandhi. Jawaharlal Nehru (1880-1964), prime minister in 1947, was highly critical of these policies and stood for a modern and industrialized India. Although an emergent nation, India has been harassed by poverty and frauds. Indira Gandhi (1917-1984), accused of election frauds, imposed martial law, jailed her opponents and censored the newspapers. These measures wrought havoc in the ideals of democracy and the inclusion of all Hindus. India's nuclear power and material progress have not been accompanied by decrease in poverty or peace with their Muslim neighbour Pakistan.

Pre- and post-independence literature in India

Mulk Raj Anand (1905-), Raja Rao (1909-) and R.K. Narayan (1906-) are the best known and perhaps the most influential novel writers in the first half of 20th century India, or rather, during the immediate pre- and post-Independence period. Whilst Anand in his novels (*Untouchable*, 1935; *Coolie*, 1936; *Two Leaves and a Bud*, 1937; *The Village*, 1939; *Across the Black Waters*, 1940; *The Sword and the Sickle*, 1942; *The Big Heart*, 1945) deals with injustice, exclusion, underprivileged landless peasants, race relationships, the opposition between rural and urban India, and distinguishes himself by using various style forms from the fable, parable and folk tale, written with ruthless realism (Benson and Conolly, 1994), Raja Rao is perhaps the first Hindu writer to appropriate English in the post-colonial novel, coupled to local thematics, legendary history and Sanskrit literary style. In *Kanthapura* (1938), *The Serpent and the Rope* (1960), *The Cat and Shakespeare* (1965) and *The Chessmaster and his Moves* (1988), Rao focuses on the freedom struggle, the exploitations of day workers, the relationship between India and Europe. He has not only broken new ground in the Indian novel written in English but has also Indianized the novel. "The telling has not been easy" writes Rao in the introduction to his first novel, "One has to convey in a language that is not one's own the spirit that is one's own. One has to convey the various shades and omissions of a certain thought-movement that looks maltreated in a foreign language. [...] We cannot write like the English. We should not. [...] Our method of expression has therefore to be a dialect which will sometimes prove to be as distinctive or colourful as the Irish and the American. [...] The tempo of Indian life must be infused into our English expression".

Rasipuram Krishnaswami Narayan is probably the most well-known among Indian post-colonial writers in English. Narayan's novels (*Swami and Friends*,

1935; *The Bachelor of Arts*, 1937; *The Dark Room*, 1938; *The English Teacher*, 1945) deal with life in a fictional village of Malgudi, woman's liberation, and India's patriarchal nightmare. Narayan's literary work was undertaken during the nationalist period of the 1930s and the violence and corruption of the post-Independence period. His best achievement is the Indianization of the English language, or rather, he made the language capable of conveying experience in the colonizer's language, while highly critical of the British educational policy.

Salman Rushdie's *The Moor's Last Sigh* (1995)

Salman Rushdie (1947-) was born in Bombay to Muslim parents, but sent to England in 1961 for his education. He has taken a degree in History from Cambridge University and has written *Grimus* (1975), *Midnight's Children* (1981), *Shame* (1983), *The Satanic Verses* (1989) and *The Moor's Last Sigh* (1995). The novels of Salman Rushdie deal with the representation of India (even though his boyhood was spent in Pakistan to where his family migrated after the partition) as seen by an exile. Actually Rushdie's novels, deeply immersed in rootlessness, try to recreate the past and analyze the uncertainty of the migrant. Magic realism, transculturation and hybridity emphasize the historical importance of Hindu mythology and the pluralistic nature of Indian society.

The Moor's Last Sigh (Muhammad XI, the last Sultan of Andalusia, gave the last *sigh* in 1492 when he ended the 700-year-old Islamic domination of Spain) deals with modern India. Hailing from Bombay, the narrator, Moraes Zogoiby, nicknamed the Moor because of his descent from Muhammad, travels from the east to Spain in 1992 to discover Andalusia. Moraes is descendant from the da Gama family and specifically from Francisco da Gama, a spice exporter in Cochin (Kerala). The colonial and religious minded Epifania, Francisco's wife, utters a curse that will blight the life of the future Moraes. Francisco and Epifania's son, Camoens, following the teachings of Nehru, would like a united India "above religion because secular, above class because socialist, above caste because enlightened" (Rushdie, 1996, p. 51). Before his death in 1939 he has a vision of the future of India: the country will immerse in violence and ethnical conflicts.

Aurora, Camoens's daughter, unofficially marries Abraham Zogoiby, a Jewish clerk and villain, and Moraes, their son, is raised "neither as a Catholic nor as a Jew [...] a jewholic-anonymous" (Rushdie, 1996, p. 104). When Abraham leaves Cochin and settles in Bombay he adventures on extremely lucrative activities, such as supplying girls to the city's brothels, smuggling heroin, speculating in property, trafficking in arms and eventually in nuclear

weapons. On the other hand, Aurora is a painter who sees her children through her art. She tries to paint a fantasy *topos* called Mooristan, a place where "worlds collide, flow in and out of one another, and washofy away [...] One universe, one dimension, one country, one dream, bumpo'ing into another, or being under, or on top of. Call it Palimpsestine" (Rushdie, 1996, p. 408). Or rather, old Andalusia is painted over modern India: the present reality is overlaid with the picture of a mythic hybrid nation. India is depicted as a fatal Promised Land. Aurora's painting turns out to be a prophecy for India, or rather, "her larger, prophetic, even Cassandran fears for the nation". The painting called *The Moor's Last Sigh* shows Moraes "lost in limbo like a wandering shade: a portrait of a soul in Hell".

Cursed by his grandmothers, Moraes has a club-like right hand and he ages twice as fast as other human beings. His sexual initiation is received from a governess and he has the gift of story-telling. However, he falls under the spell of the evil mistress Uma Sarasvati, who develops a rivalry against Aurora. Moraes is expelled from home and lands in jail accused of poisoning Uma. When he is released from prison Moraes joins the Bombay underworld in the pay of Raman Fielding, a Hindu paramilitary leader.

Camoens, Moraes's grandfather, had foreseen that the Hindu population, living in the villages, will be a menace to town dwellers, especially ethnic minorities. "In the city we are for secular India but the village is for Ram... In the end I am afraid the villagers will march on the cities and people like us will have to lock our doors and there will come a Battering Ram". Such prophecy was fulfilled in Moraes's lifetime when the Babri mosque was battered down by Hindus. It is Aurora the only person who has the strength to confront the dark forces at work in India but dies when she dances during the elephant-headed god Ganesha procession and a show of Hindu-fundamentalist triumphalism.

In the meantime Fielding, closely linked to the Bombay underworld, leads the Hindu movement "against unions [...] against working women, in favour of sati, against poverty and in favour of wealth [...] against 'immigrants' to the city [...] against the corruption of the Congress [Party] and for 'direct action', by which he meant paramilitary activity in support of his political aims". He aims at a theocracy in which "one particular variant of Hinduism would rule".

The rivalry between Abraham's and Fielding's underworlds comes to a head and Fielding is murdered. Although Moraes goes to Andalusia (to identify himself with Muhammad XI, or Abu-Abd-Allah, or Boabdil, in the Spanish corruption of his name) to escape the barbarism that ensues, he

encounters another evil in the person of Vasco Miranda, a painter from Goa and a rival to Aurora. Miranda has stolen Aurora's Moor painting and Moraes reclaims them for his mother. Miranda imprisons him in his house until he writes his story. In prison he meets the Japanese picture restorer Aoi Uë (a belated character in the story) who is murdered and Moraes escapes. Moraes ends his story since he is at present psychologically 72 years old, ready to die, although physically he is 36 years old.

In the last chapters Moraes palimpsests himself, rather unconvincingly, as Dante, Luther and Jesus. The Alhambra in Granada is a "monument to a lost possibility [...] a testament [...] to that most profound of our needs [...] for putting an end to frontiers, for the dropping of boundaries of the self". The kind of hybridity and transculturation that Rushdie is representing is extremely provocative. Similar to the Portuguese conquest of India, the 700-year Arab domination on the Iberian Peninsula produced a healthy hybridity of culture, language and people. Moreover, the Hindu and Moslem intolerance in India is as dramatically lethal as the Christian intolerance in Spain, culminating in the Inquisition, forced baptism and the final expulsion of Moslems in 1492. Granada, sighed for by the last Muslim king Boabdil, and Bombay, sighed for by Moraes, are the two cities that would have produced healthy hybridity and transculturation if intolerance had not prevailed. In fact, Moraes, attaching himself to his mother, slips to his "mother India who loved and betrayed and ate and destroyed and again loved her children, and with whom the children's passionate conjoining and eternal quarrel stretched long beyond the grave". The essential similarity of all men and all peoples is the rational basis for transculturation. Man, he writes, should be "like an anatomy illustration from *Encyclopaedia Britannica* [...] set free from the otherwise inescapable jails of colour, race and clan", without bias and intolerance, and in all sincerity. And Rushdie verbally portrays the past and the future of India ("the great swarm of being itself") chiefly through the dark paintings of Aurora: Moraes as the Muslim Boabdil in Spain and the mythology and history of India.

The novel's architecture is structured by a dynastic prelude in Cochin, Moraes's life in Bombay and the palimpsesting in Spain. The middle section is filled with "episodes" with certain characters (for example, the young businessman Adam) being introduced without any introduction and without any deep-woven roles, and slipping away just as fast. This is perhaps due to an intermingling of the Western novel (or anti-novel) and the Hindu Panchatantra, contained self-contained narratives. *The Moor's Last Sigh* actually manifests hybridity and multiculturalism that are textually inherent to the

story proposed, in which one literary tradition renews the other.

Although certain post-modern traits may be found in the novel, the problem of Moraes's "authenticity", within the context of deconstruction, sounds false. In prison Moraes asks himself whether he is on the wrong page of his own book; consequently, on a textual plane he can be insincere when he says that he is trapped within "colour, caste, sect" and longs for an authentic life outside them. Further, the importance he gives to history (the history of the Moors in Spain and especially the story of Boabdil, and the history of the Jewish community in India) deletes the post-modern stance.

In *The Moor's Last Sigh* Rushdie (autobiographically, perhaps) wants to show the problem of identity in the modern world. The notion of Indianness and the identity of the Indian are highly contested. The author himself is an Indian of Muslim origin who lives in Europe and the United States (especially after Khomeini's *fatwa*) and who writes about India. Whereas in *Midnight's Children*, the hero cries "Why, alone of all the more-than-five-hundred-million, should I have to bear the burden of history?", Moraes says "I [want] to be Clark Kent, not any kind of Superman", with its corollary "I find that I'm a Jew". This implies notions of identity, solidarity with excluded minorities and interracial relationship.

Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997)

Suzanna Arundhati Roy was born on the 24th November 1961, the child of a difficult marriage between a Christian woman from Kerala and a Bengali Hindu tea planter. Arundhati spent her crucial childhood years in backward Aymanam. There, her mother Mary Roy (later a well-known social activist) ran an informal school named Corpus Christi where Arundhati developed her literary and intellectual abilities unconstrained by the set rules of formal education. Most of the atmosphere of *The God of Small Things* (Roy, 1997) is based on her experiences of what it was like to grow up in Kerala where Christianity, Hinduism, Marxism and Islam live together and rub each other down. At sixteen Roy left home and lived on her own in a squatter's colony in Delhi. She was married for four years to an architecture student Gerald de Cunha but they both quit college. Arundhati Roy's debut novel was launched on the 4th April 1997 in Delhi and won the Booker Prize in London, on the 14th October 1997, India's 50th anniversary of independence from Britain. In fact, she became the first non-expatriate Indian author and the first Indian woman to win the Booker Prize. After she had settled in New Delhi, critics attacked the supposed anti-Communism in *The God of Small Things* and Arundhati began to take up a number of big political issues and publish a number

of books on political subjects such as nuclear weapons, equal rights, terrorism, and war. It would appear that Arundhati is beginning to carve out a position for herself as a campaigning political journalist. No other novel has been published since then.

While Rushdie deals with the narrative of the country grounded in mythology and history, Roy's novel portrays the "little" tragedies that surround a Kerala family inserted within the political climate of the state where the Communist Party is strong and the state is well known for its relative freedom for women. The novel, a tale on their loss of innocence, is written from the point of view of the fraternal ("two-egg") two twins, Estha and his sister Rahel, and tells their story and that of their mother Ammu, a Syrian Christian. Ammu, divorced from her husband (the twin's father is simply nicknamed "Baba" but never named), returns to the home of her parents. The story centers on events surrounding the visit and death by drowning of the twins' English half-cousin, a nine year old girl named Sophie, daughter of their Uncle Chacko and Margaret Kochamma. The visit overlaps with a love affair between Ammu and the family's carpenter, Velutha, a member of the Untouchable caste. The story begins in 1969, 23 years before when the drowning and the marital infidelity occur. Ammu is banished from home and dies alone at the age of 31. Rahel is expelled from school and marries an American, Larry McCaslin, and soon leaves him. The novel ends as Rahel returns to her family home in India and to Estha, where there is some hope that their love for each other and memories recollected from a distance will heal their deep wounds.

The nature of laws and the breaking of rules are the chief items and involve the position of women in society, the treatment of the pariahs and the experience of children at the hands of adults. The novel questions the items above but also analyzes sexual abuse and incest. Similar to Rushdie, Roy deals also with hybridity and the contradictions it may engender: the Anglophile Chacko, the twins' uncle, hails from a Syrian Christian family and dabbles with Marxism, while the communist Pillai, politically adherent to equality and inclusion, refuses to help Velutha Paapen (an untouchable around whom much of the action revolves) because of his caste. Although he is a dedicated member of the Marxist Party, his Untouchable status makes other party members dislike him, and so local party leader K.N.M. Pillai would be more politically successful without him.

When Velutha has an affair with Ammu, he breaks an ancient taboo and incurs the wrath of Ammu's family and the Kerala police. He breaks the rigid social rules of the caste system and, therefore,

the authorities must punish him. Roy describes the policemen's violent actions as being done out of fear. The division between the Touchables and Untouchables is so ingrained in Kerala society that Velutha is seen as nonhuman.

The novel is rich with Indian family relationships, social custom and mores, politics, and the most universal of human emotions and behavior. It is a suspenseful and tragic mystery, a love story, and an exposition of the paradoxes that exist in an ancient land whose history was forever altered by its British colonizers. In magical and poetic language, the novel paints a vivid picture of life in a small rural Indian town, the thoughts and feelings of the two small children, and the complexity and hypocrisy of the adults in their world. It is also a poignant lesson in the destructive power of the caste system, and moral and political bigotry in general.

The narrative structure is skillful, weaving back and forth from the present to the past, foretelling without revealing future events. In this sense, it might be analogous to reconstructing an illness from a chaotic patient narrative. The reader is alert to signals but is not immediately sure what they signify, and is drawn to return to earlier sections as the story unfolds, in order to derive full meaning from all of its parts.

The author's style is both poetic and whimsical. The larger story contains many smaller ones that stand alone as small gems of observation and insight. The perspective of childhood, of imagination and inventiveness, of incomplete understanding, fear, dependence, assertion of independence, vulnerability, comradeship, competitive jealousy, and wonderment is beautifully rendered.

Africa

A brief history

The African continent comprises 53 countries created by European colonialists and over 800 different ethnic groups, each with their own language, culture and history. British colonialism in Africa took different forms and native peoples reacted to it differently. In Muslim Northern Nigeria the British authorities extracted taxes through the pre-existing native hierarchies and the impact on cultural was less conflicting than in the Ibo East Nigeria. In this case the British government imposed a system of puppet "warrant chiefs" which was opposite to the community-based Ibo political structures. Consequently, Ibo community life and culture were deeply undermined by colonialism as Achebe's novel *Things Fall Apart* reveals.

The almost four hundred years of European slave incursions, especially on the west coast of Africa, was disastrous for culture. More disastrous still was the

Scramble for Africa after the 1885 Berlin Conference in which the European powers decided to divide the continent among themselves. Resistance by Ashantis, Zulus and Matabele and other peoples was not enough to ward off the preying European and domination was widespread by the turn of the 20th century. Only Ethiopia and Liberia were not under European control. Europe began to have invested interests in cheap and forced labour for the furnishing of cotton, palm-oil, gold and diamonds to the metropolises and a vast market for its goods (clothes and tools) and services (road building).

European attitudes towards Africans were highly biased. Racial superiority, biological theories of evolution and underdevelopment, and depreciation of African history and civilization were extremely harmful and only produced biased colonial behaviour and empire-building. Missionaries had a part in this cultural damage and loss of identity. The United Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, The Church Missionary Society and the Roman Propaganda Fidei claimed European superiority and lacked basic knowledge on the cultures of the people they were trying to convert. In European eyes, African religions were immersed in witchcraft and superstition. Moreover, missionaries and empire-building went hand in hand. Schools, the obligation to pay taxes, the precepts of humility and obedience played a great part in forming the African elite, while the process of denigrating African culture, especially customs and hierarchies which bounded the communities together, disrupted community tribal life (Canêdo, 1985; Pennycock, 1998; Wesseling, 1998).

Post-colonial African writing

Post-colonial African writing comprises a strong reaction against negative stereotypes constructed during the colonial period. African writers had to dismantle myths of African inferiority, assert African cultures, combat the apartheid regime in South Africa and criticize corruption in Kenya and Nigeria. The Nigerians Amos Tutuola, Cyprian Ekwensi, Chinua Achebe, Ben Okri and Wole Soyinka, Kenyan Ngugi wa Thiong'o, and Zimbabwean Tsitsi Dangarembga are extremely popular and have gained international recognition. South African literature in English has occupied itself with the highly political issue of the infamous all-embracing apartheid system. Alan Paton, Athol Fugard, Nadine Gordimer and J.M. Coetzee gained their best reputation worldwide because of their stand against apartheid. Life in an increasingly violent and repressive country is at the heart of their novels. They do not even shun the problem of the white writer in such a situation.

The 1994 elections bringing the ANC to power and establishing black majority rule in South Africa created a Post-apartheid South Africa, a nation of

opportunity for people of all races and the need for truth about the past and for reconciliation. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (1995-1998), with power to grant amnesty to accused parties, investigated human right violations, reparation for victims and provided a forum in which perpetrators of abuses could express regret and remorse. Literature is this period deals with transculturation and the possibility of positive change.

Nadine Gordimer's *The Pickup* (2001)

Nadine Gordimer (1923-), the 1991 Nobel Prize for Literature, published her first novel *The Lying Days* in 1953. It was followed by *A World of Strangers* (1958), *Occasion for Loving* (1963), *The Late Bourgeois World* (1966), *The Conservationist* (1974), *Burger's Daughter* (1979), *July's People* (1981), *A Sport of Nature* (1987) and *My Son's Story* (1990) deal with the corrosive effects of racism, the growing disillusion with liberalism, and commitment to action against apartheid.

The novel *The Pickup* (Gordimer, 2001) seems to be an inverted development to a story in Gordimer's 1991 collection *Jump*. The terrorist activity of a young Arab student is counterbalanced in *The Pickup* (2001) by the marrying of Julie Summers, a well-off South African girl, to Ibrahim Ibn Musa, or Abdu, an illegal Arab immigrant, and their living in a squalid corner of his poor country. Julie Summers, 29 years old, is a white South African. Rich, young and liberal, she accidentally meets a foreign mechanic who helps her when her car breaks down in downtown 'Johannesburg'. Abdu, an Arab from an oil-less country in the Middle East, is an illegal immigrant who had already been in Europe doing odd jobs for a living. He is anxious to go to one of the wealthy Western countries and be a legal immigrant.

In the context of post-apartheid South Africa, Julie and Abdu start an affair. There is, however, a wide chasm between them. Julie sees people in terms of race and class; he dislikes the young mixed community with their rowdy and naïve meetings. On the other hand, Julie hates her banker father and the unethical values he stands for. He and his like shun the foreigner and his misfortunes. Her family refuses to help the young Arab to acquire legal documents and, as expected, his deportation is mandatory. Instead of abandoning him, Julie buys two tickets and she prepares to leave her comfortable life and accompany him to his poor country. He suspects that either Julie is sexually enthralled by him or she is playing some unknown game. Even though she knows that he doesn't really love her, they hurriedly marry so that she may be admitted into his family when they arrive in the desert place. Needless to say, sex is paramount for both; since he is extremely vulnerable and boyish, these qualities touch her

immensely; on the other hand, Abdu finds in her the maternal protection he needs. She is, after all, tired of South Africa, with its poverty, exploitation, wealth, exclusion and wretchedness.

When Julie and Abdu arrive in the deportee Abdu's paternal home, she observes the shabby family she now belongs to. While Julie settles down under the watchful eyes of her mother-in-law, Abdu tries to obtain an entrance permit to any First World country. For Abdu the entrance permit is the magic gate of bliss, even though he has a degree from a rather insignificant Arab university, a functional proficiency in English and a wish to drop his Arab identity and assume a First World one, allegedly better and satisfying. In his conversations with friends, they discuss the situation of their country, democracy, corrupt government and the establishment of modernity in their country without being overwhelmed by it. Abdu is not eager on these items and he thinks that if he gets involved in politics he will be doomed to stay in a backward country for the rest of his life.

After several futile attempts (Australia, Canada and Sweden refuse him admittance) the United States concede him two visas and he plans to settle with his wife in California. Unexpectedly Julie refuses to follow him. She says that she prefers to remain with Ibrahim's family in the Arab country where she has been living for the last months. She has found her home. Abdu's family doesn't understand why he is so anxious to go abroad. Undoubtedly they want all the Western commodities but they would like to remain in their small world and would prefer not being involved with the West and its materialist and rationalist civilization.

Although as a woman Julie's status is low, she adapts herself reasonably well and relatively quickly to Abdu's family and the Arab way of life. She does the house chores, gives English lessons to children, studies the Koran and lives the life of a good daughter-in-law. The text witnesses that Julie starts to understand what it means to be part of an extended family and the value of Islamic mores and behaviour. It seems that the desert, close to her home, enters into her spirit and is her inspiration. This unexceptional young woman trusts her impulses and finds herself by humbling herself. Dismissed by the confused and conflicted young man Abdu as Western romanticism, the desert is both a symbol of Julie's turning her back to the materialistic allurements of the Western world and her confrontation with death. It is she who, of all the characters, grows from experience. Actually, the allurements of the false gods of the West is overwhelming: South Africa, represented by Julie's father and the other bankers, pays tribute to market economy and to capital; Ibrahim is mesmerized by the West; his father and some of the other citizens of

the squalid Arab country are involved in international money laundering operations.

Although Gordimer's *The Pickup* may not be her best novel, there is no doubt that it touches on the important issue of the "new" society in post-apartheid Africa. The homelessness of the white Julie in her own country and the trivial life she leads represent the growing dissatisfaction of Europeanized young people, conditioned to consumer modes grafted on an overwhelmingly black country where poverty and class struggle have been endemically introduced by colonizers. On the other hand, there is the plight of an illegal immigrant who shuns his poverty-stricken, albeit culturally rich, country and yearns to immerge himself in a consumer society, poor in culture and in community-building. The courageous decision of the South African girl and her integration in a poor Arab country are instances of a reverse diaspora and of transculturation absorbed in her personality, represented by the desert theme.

Disgrace (1999) by John Maxwell Coetzee

An acclaimed novelist and literary critic, J. M. Coetzee (1940-) has been Professor of English at the University of Cape Town and is now living in Australia. In 2003 he won the Nobel Prize for Literature. His novels *Dusklands* (1974), *In the Heart of the Country* (1977), *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980), *Life and Times of Michael K* (1983), *Foe* (1986), *Age of Iron* (1990), *The Master of Petersburg* (1994), *Disgrace* (1999), *The Lives of Animals* (1999), *Youth* (2000) and *Elizabeth Costello* (2003) are post-modern in ethos, very different from other South African novels. They deal with a critique of colonialism and its effects and the historical and ethical restraints on white writers.

In 1999 J.M. Coetzee (1940-) publishes *Disgrace* and wins for the second time the *Booker Prize* and the *Commonwealth Writers Prize*. However, the African National Congress (ANC) and the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC) react harshly against the representation of post-apartheid South Africa in the narrative. It has been alleged that the novel gives a negative picture of the country due to its powerful stereotyping of racism perpetuated by the white man and involving a process of degradation and destruction (apud McDonald, 2002). Feminists have also detected a high degree of machismo and objectifying feminine representations (Boehmer, 2002).

The fabula in *Disgrace* is simple and treacherous. In the wake of the post-apartheid period in South Africa 52-year-old David Lurie, professor of communication at the fictional Technology University in Cape Town, lectures to students who lack basic classical and Biblical substrates required to understand the literary works. Twice divorced he

keeps a venue with a Negro prostitute, Soraya, and then sexually allures a Negro course student, called Melanie. Although the latter case is strictly speaking not a case of sexual violence, Melanie files a report for harassment to the University authorities. A committee of professors is called and Lurie refuses to make a public confession. He is forced to retire and for the time being goes to the farm of Lucy, his lesbian daughter, in Salem, Eastern Cape. She earns her living keeping a dog kennel and sells vegetables on the weekend. Her new neighbor is Petrus, a Negro helper, who is anxious to consolidate his recently acquired status of land owner. In the neighborhood there is also a dog clinic where Bev Shaw practices euthanasia on old and ill dogs. However, the quiet country life comes abruptly to an end when three young negroes force their way into Lucy's house, kill the dogs, put David on fire and violate the woman. Although Lucy is aware that one of the young men is Pollux, a relative of Petrus, the latter is reluctant to do anything in her favor and against the criminal. To David's great surprise, Lucy does not file a complaint to the police on the event. When she finds herself pregnant, she transfers her land ownership to Petrus and becomes his third wife. David distances himself from his daughter and dedicates more to work in the dog clinic. The story ends when David practices euthanasia on his favorite stray dog.

Does *Disgrace* reveal racist and sexist attitudes which are still extant in post-apartheid South Africa even when we have a reversal of the diaspora? Do sexual violence and female passivity reveal the long stretch that South Africa still has to go so that a non-racist and a non-sexist democracy may survive? Does Ethics-minded Coetzee reveal a bias against South Africa when he depicts the modern South African Negroes as sexually-prone hooligans and thieves, and when he focuses on white people forced to submit themselves to the policy reversal by which the Negro diaspora was disrupted? Do not the deeds committed by the three young men reproduce the stereotypes of non-reaction and passivity in the face of masculine violence? If the consolidation of democracy in South Africa has brought about the reevaluation of the natives, the possibility of community building and the end of the horrible diaspora perpetuated by Europeans during four hundred years, why is disruption still depicted in Coetzee's novel in post-apartheid South Africa?

In *Disgrace* Lucy suffers terrible injustice and violence on her small farm where David seeks refuge after his retirement. Taking into consideration the post-apartheid transition in South Africa, Lucy lives ambiguously: on one hand, there is the idyllic life in the country; on the other hand, there is a deeply repressed patriarchy in her Negro neighbors against whom she protects herself with weapons and dogs.

These precautions are worthless when the three young Negroes invade her home and sexually violate her. David reflects that there may be undertones of vengeance for wrongs done, especially invasion of property by Europeans and the dispersing of whole African populations during colonial times and even in recent years. "It happens every day, every minute, he tells himself, in every quarter of the country. Count yourself lucky to have escaped with your life" (Coetzee, 2000, p. 98). In fact, the forced possession of the white female is the *non plus ultra* condition feared by the racist colonizers in South Africa, but practiced by the latter on the land and on female Negroes.

Lucy's reactions are silence and the giving up of her own body and her own property to the Negro Petrus. However, the sexual crime should be seen in the context of David's adventures in Cape Town. David's almost rape of his student, Melanie, is very similar to Lucy's rape: both aggressors go scot-free and both go off without any admittance of blame or repentance. The only important difference is that the black Melanie overcomes shame and becomes an amateur actress, whereas Lucy gives all to Petrus. "'How humiliating,' he says finally. 'Such high hopes, and to end like this'" (Coetzee, 2000, p. 205). In these two episodes there is the colonial stereotype prerogative of right on "the body of the woman" (Coetzee, 2000, p. 110), represented in colonial and post-colonial novels. Similar to the colonizer who feels it is his right to choose any women within his ken, David lacks the least comprehension of pain that the native women and the colonized land suffered with the invasion by Europeans. In Lucy's case, the inverse painful situation, object of male derision, reveals the colonial history. "'It was history speaking through them [...] A history of wrong. Think of it that way, if it helps. It may have seemed personal, but it wasn't. It came down from the ancestors'" (Coetzee, 2000, 156).

Why does Lucy seem to assimilate the colonized female stereotype through passivity, silence and the giving up of herself? There is no 'religious' answer since she is agnostic on the possibility of a "higher life" (Coetzee, 2000, p. 74, 78-9). Perhaps Lucy's reason to keep silence and live like a dog lies in the Greek idea of *pharmakós* and to live in peace and begin life from scratch. "'Yes, I agree, it is humiliating. But perhaps that is a good point to start from again. Perhaps that is what I must learn to accept. To start at ground level. With nothing. Not with nothing but. With nothing. No cards, no weapons, no property, no rights, no dignity'" (Coetzee, 2000, p. 205).

Marais (2000) says that in Coetzee's novels ethics subvert politics, or rather, Coetzee suggests that Lucy (up to a few years before she belonged to the

dominant and oppressor class) exposes herself to the other (the oppressed class represented by the Negro Petrus, only some weeks before an employee and a *bywoner*) that she desires but is beyond her possibilities. Ethical responsibility emerges in the wake of the new South African political situation. Boehmer (2002) analyzes Lucy's position specifically. Gang-raped Lucy accepts her subordinate condition and frees herself from personal attitudes and past politics by her acceptance of suffering. Without any other alternatives, she physically accepts the burden of wrongs committed in the past by white colonizers and oppressors. She carries in her own body the stereotyped doubly-silenced woman.

Although Lucy does not deny the terrifying experience she was forced to endure, it seems that she feels that a new Lucy has begun to emerge at precisely this moment. Analogically to the new life she is bearing, Lucy is experiencing another birth – a political one. After her answers to David's questions when he is appalled on the news that she is pregnant, she continues: "Do you think I hate children? Should I choose against the child because of who its father is?" (Coetzee, 2000, p. 198). This positive answer reveals her facing a politically new life, requested by the new South African situation. In fact, it seems that Lucy is aware that the white man ought to experience exactly the same events that the Negro historically passed through between the 15th and the 20th century. This boils down to a suggestion that the Europeans and their descendants should have the same experience of strangeness in the country which is ethnically not theirs. If the white man wants to continue living in Africa, he should feel as one robbed of his land and his property ("Tell him I give up the land."); ask the Negro's protection ("Say I accept his [Petrus's] protection"); accept rules alien to those brought by Europeans, especially those dealing with sexual behavior and marriage ("If he wants me to be known as his third wife, so be it. As his concubine, ditto"); as a subaltern ("A *bywoner*") (Coetzee, 2000, p. 204).

The way chosen by Lucy, starting from nothing and with nothing (especially with no rights) is equivalent to the way the Negroes began their "new life" in the Americas or how the white man would have lived in Africa if he had not triggered the arrogant and dominant method of colonization. Perhaps this is the meaning of Lucy's subjectifying discourse mentioned above. Lucy's decision thus inserts itself in the long history of exploitation and deceit to which the African people and land were subjected. It is a confession of colonialism with all its atrocities; a confession that does not bring any grace with it. According to Coetzee (1992), confession is an item in a set comprising transgression, confession,

penance and absolution. The last item closes the penitential cycle. In Lucy's secular confession there is only a permanent revelation of truth, or rather, it puts the subject in shame and in need for more explanations. Lucy's subjectification consists of the new-found courage by which the white colonizer returns to the crossing point between the European and the Negro and follows the historical path as someone who is ready to experience all the vicissitudes of the colonized and the subaltern. Expiation or grace will not be conceded since the shame of colonization will always be present to the subject. There is no guarantee that the European will live in peace or even be welcome in the country which he has violated. The African returns from his diaspora and the European initiates his diaspora in a foreign land.

We have thus come a whole circle to the position of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission whose aim was to forgive rather than to judge and seek vengeance. Lucy's subjectifying attitude is deeper still since it braces the great South African Negro community and subverts the endemic violence in the country. Through her secular confession as "debtor", she does not blur the appropriation of land by the European neither the historical Negro revenge and retaliation plot (Coetzee, 2001). The reading of these episodes by Lucy indicates her sensibility to reestablish the parameter of reconciliation through which a new era may start. It seems that Coetzee wants to show in a subtle way that Lucy's decision, traditionally inherent to feminine non-emancipation, is the path to peace by which the former white colonizer may collaborate in the social and political restructuring of South Africa. It is only when the former colonizer experiences, on his own accord, the colonial past as an *object*, does he regress to the level of the African and begin his reconciliation as desired by the TRC and by the new South African situation.

The Caribbean

A brief history

The Caribbean is an archipelago stretching between the north eastern coast of South America including part of the South American landmass, now called Guyana, and the south eastern part of the United States in the North Atlantic Ocean. Arawaks and Caribs, the original inhabitants of the Caribbean, no longer inhabit the islands, although traces of their culture, races and languages may still be found. Although it has been naively narrated that European colonization in the Caribbean and in South American Guyana definitely suppressed and eradicated all native Arawak, Macusi and Carib peoples and their cultural representations (Melatti 1972; Ashcroft *et al.* 1991), this statement needs revision since

Amerindians figure in the mythologies extant in the region and they are producers of extended Caribbean oral and written literature.

When indigenous labor was wiped out in the latter half of the 16th century, African slaves supplied the sugar plantations with hands for the accumulation of white men's wealth and their metropolises. Since Jamaica came under British rule in 1655, the white Caribbean society started to be built on the oppression and the exploitation of Africans. The slave trade was the largest forced migration (estimates reveal that more than 11.5 millions crossed the Atlantic) and diaspora in the world, with its profound dehumanization of the human subjects. Although the abolition of slavery in the Caribbean occurred in 1830s, the basic structure of property on the islands remained the same: while the Negroes remained poor and excluded from the benefits of a more advanced society, indentured laborers, technically free, from China and India were brought to work under practically the former conditions.

Guyana, the only English-speaking country in South America, became independent from Britain in 1966. Guyana became a crown colony in 1815 and produced sugarcane for the metropolis. With eighty percent of its population living in the coast region, the country harbors the descendants of slaves and of indentured laborers, mainly from India, introduced in the country after the abolition of slavery (1837). Amerindians and Euro-Amerindians, amounting to about 16%, live in the forests and the savannahs on the south and southwestern border with Brazil. The country's population is a mixture of nationalities comprising Amerindians, Black Africans, Portuguese, Brazilians, East Indians and Europeans, with a lot of intermarriage (Benson and Conolly, 1994).

Caribbean post-colonial literature

In the 1930s and 1940s the colonial literature of the Caribbean was challenged by various authors who identified themselves with the descendants of the ex-slaves. Writing in the context of the anti-colonial feeling of the period, Trinidadian C.L.R. James (1901-1989) revealed in *Triumph* (1929), *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint l'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (1938) and the novel *Minty Alley* (1936) the plight of black people in the slums and the difficulties of the working class. Jamaican V.S. Reid (1913-1987) reviewed in his novel *New Day* (1949) the saga of a peasant family and represented the struggle of the people of Jamaica from the Morant Bay uprising against the British (1865) to the 1944 Constitution. On the other hand, female writers such as Una Marson (1905-1965) and Louise Bennett (1919-) have emerged as internationally renowned poets with their adoption of the oral tradition expressed in Creole English and

abundant in folk elements.

Although many writers hailing from the Caribbean (such as Jean Rhys, Jamaica Kincaid, Pauline Melville, Caryl Phillips) have migrated to Britain, the United State and Canada, the St Lucian Derek Walcott (1930-), Nobel Prize for Literature in 1992, and Barbadian Kamau Brathwaite (1930-) are still working in the Caribbean and deal, albeit in diverse ways, with the African-Caribbean cultural elements ingrained in the people. On the other hand, Guyanan Wilson Harris, Pauline Melville and Mark McWatt are partly Amerindians. In fact, Amerindian culture has yet to be restored, published and represented in fiction. A tremendous task lies ahead for those interested in the matter due to the difficulty in locating material, lack of serious debates between Amerindians and the Academy, the ideology gap and a narrow canon. Dabydeen (1996) states that even if the Amerindians are the most invisible of West Indian peoples, their future will bring the acknowledgement that West Indian peoples are not merely creatures of Britain, forged by British cultural values and by the cultural values and practices that survived British colonization (Donnell and Welsh, 1996).

Half a Life (2002) by V.S. Naipaul

Vidiadhar Surajprasad Naipaul (1932-) was born in Trinidad, educated at Oxford University and has lived in England ever since. He has been a controversial figure: some praise him for postcolonial themes in his works (he is 2001 Nobel Prize for Literature) and others condemn him for his unsympathetic response to the politics of emergent countries. He is the author of *The Mystic Masseur* (1957), *The Suffrage of Elvira* (1958), *Miguel Street* (1959), *A House for Mr Biswas* (1961), *The Mimic Men* (1967), *Guerrillas* (1975), *A Bend in the River* (1979) and many short stories, such as *A Flag on the Island* (1967) and *In a Free State* (1971).

Half a life (Naipaul, 2002) is set first in post-independence India, at the politically protected court of the Maharaja, later in London, then in pre-independence Mozambique, and briefly, Berlin. It combines traditional Naipaul themes such as cultural alienation, the concept of a national literature, the definition of 'ourselves', and the many ways in which colonized people hide from themselves, with an unusual narrative structure. Exile, homelessness, displacement and how post-colonials manage that displacement form the tension in the story. A related theme to that of displacement is that of failure, both on a personal and on a political level. Besides other techniques (little stories by Ana, stories about Willie's false background, Willie's early stories, the story of Mozambique and others), the text may be

roughly divided into Chandran's flashback narrative to his son Willie and Willie's flashback narrative to Sarojini, his sister, in Berlin.

Naipaul's novel takes its remote clue from an episode of spiritual experience mentioned in W. Somerset Maugham's *The Razor's Edge* (1944), *A Writer's Notebook* (1949) and *Points of View* (1958). The British author visited India in 1938 and met Indian spirituality through Maharshi, a Madras man who had retreated to a life of silence, self-mortification, and prayer. Significantly *The Razor's Edge* tells the story of the American Larry Darrell who stays in an ashram and learns the value of detachment from guru Shri Ganesha. When Darrell returns to Illinois he practises "calmness, forbearance, compassion, selflessness and continence" while driving a taxi. "It's a mistake to think that those holy men of India lead useless lives," he says. "They are a shining light in the darkness." This is the starting point of Naipaul's novel *Half a Life*, a rewriting of Maugham's *The Razor's Edge*, which seeks to answer the reason of self-denial in religious practice not only in India but worldwide.

Naipaul first gives a materialistic account of the evolution of Indian mysticism. Due to Mongol, Muslim and British colonialism the priestly caste lost its traditional revenues from the temples. This led to poverty, depression and more poverty, to the point of almost extinction of the caste. A hit was concocted in which fasting and a general denial of the appetites were raised to the level of admiration, mysticism and veneration. Individual success and hard work were thus scorned and fatalism and self-sacrifice achieved recognition of value and tribute.

Chandran, a 19th century Brahmin, disrupts the system, saves money and employs himself as a clerk in the maharajah's palace in the capital town of the state. Chandran's son follows the example within the civil service and the Chandrans do not depend anymore on self-sacrifice and fasting. They have found a way out of the traditional vicious circle. In the 1930s Chandran's grandson, also called Chandran, follows Gandhi and India's struggle against imperialism with its boycott on the universities and burns his English literature books. When Gandhi declared the viciousness of the caste system, Chandran marries an ugly, uneducated and low-caste dark-skin girl. Working in the maharajah's tax office he commits small thefts which he maliciously calls acts of civil disobedience. When Chandran is exposed, he protects himself from "persecution" and takes refuge in a temple. From this moment he is mute and starts practicing self-denial. He transforms himself into a local hero and people visit him and bring him offerings. "In the beginning I felt I had trapped myself. But very soon I found that the role fitted. I became easier and easier with it, and

I understood one day that, through a series of accidents, tossed as in a dream from one unlikely situation to another, acting always on the spur of the moment, wishing only to reject the sterility of our life, with no clear view of what was to flow, I had fallen into ancestral ways".

The fictional gullible Somerset Maugham believes in Chandran and never questions the Indian's stance of deceit and hypocrisy. "Are you happy?" Maugham asks the holy man. Chandran wily writes: "Within my silence I feel quite free. That is happiness." The publication of a book by Maugham brings Chandran to international fame and his story is repeatedly that of a successful civil servant transformed into a monk immersed in a life of prayer and self-denial. Actually Chandran believes his own lies and thinks that a spiritual entity is guiding him to repudiate the world and, at the same time, prosper. In fact, he follows the sly tradition of the Brahmins and thus makes a living without having the trouble to work. Under the guise of a false heroism Chandran practises his hypocrisy which actually reveals mediocrity, cowardness and poverty of spirit. Although professing Gandhism, Chandran acts anti-Gandhi-like, since he gives up so little and is deeply immersed in selfishness.

Chandran's first-born son, called William Somerset Chandran (or Willie), goes to a Christian school run by Canadians. After some time he states his vocation to be a Christian missionary and longs to adopt Canadian citizenship. In his reveries he imagines himself a Canadian young man with all the facilities that a First World country provides for its citizens. However, William becomes aware of the imperialist stance of the missionaries and leaves school. In the meantime, Chandran writes to Maugham and to other foreign friends so that William might earn a scholarship in England. Although Maugham's answer was particularly evasive as were also the others', the 20-year-old William manages to receive his college scholarship and in 1956 he arrives in London. In the city immigrants from the ex-British colonies are numerous and rowdy, while young white men seek Negroes for thrashing. As he had done in India during caste rioting, William hides in his college rooms. He even learns the difference between free sexual activity and mandatory sexual satisfaction in the Western world and Indian sexuality, arranged marriages and lack of seduction. The difference astounds him and almost makes him psychologically impotent. William has "no idea of what he wanted to do, except to get away from what he knew, and yet with very little idea of what lay outside what he knew".

Lies, suspicion and self-deception is the stuff the charlatan Chandran and his son William are made of since they are incapable of imagining anyone unlike themselves. Their selfishness and poverty of spirit are

their hallmark. Chandran is incapable of understanding the literature he is supposed to study not only because it is irrelevant to him but because he fails to have any idea of a good education. He does not burn his books from a healthy anti-colonialist position but because he doesn't want to learn and know anything. Similarly, William puts the blame of his ignorance and blank-mindedness on his backward mother and the inheritance she transmitted. He doesn't acknowledge his lack of knowledge and education. However, his cunningness is so thorough that he fabricates a different India and a different family background: his mother hails from an ancient Christian community; his father was the son of a courtier. This re-fabrication and re-structuring of his personality and his life give him a sense of power.

William perceives that "sacrifice" (rather, selfish sacrifice) reveals the ideology that produced him and his father. William knows that he has been given up by his father ("The boy will poison what remains of my life. I must get him far away from here") who, in his turn, calls this "self-sacrifice", but actually it boils down to wealth. Really, under the guise of self-sacrifice and denial, not loving the other, doing the least possible and not striving for self-improvement abound.

In London William tries a hand at writing: his style and contents are the product of Hemingway's telegraphic writing, Hollywood scripts, Indian settings and London background. "It was easier, with these borrowed stories far outside his own experience, and with these characters far outside himself, to be truer to his feelings than it had been with his cautious, half-hidden parables at school". For some time William is absorbed in writing. Suddenly he stops and refuses to write fiction again.

The book containing twenty-six stories is published but results in complete failure. Only Ana Correia, an heiress of a Mozambican plantation, of Portuguese descent but really from Mozambique, praises the book. They meet and on the spur of the moment William decides to go to Africa with Ana. William's sojourn in Africa from 1959 to 1977, involving the second half of *Half a Life*, is a collection of events of colonial life portraying the last years of Portuguese rule. Naipaul's narrative now develops in Africa, already featured in *In a Free State* (1971) and *A Bend in the River* (1979) and by Conrad's influence with his *Heart of Darkness*. In fact, the novel turns towards a travelogue-cum-novel. The creole Ana is inserted into a type of "caste" society, ranging from European-born Portuguese, through Africanized Portuguese (creoles) and mestizos to Negroes. The couple's life is occupied by visits to their farmer neighbours and trips to the town for supplies. He appreciates colonial life with its opportunities for sexual varieties and its no-worry

attitude even when the guerrillas close in to shake off Portuguese rule. Naipaul gives the reader an interesting reading of imperialism, colonialism and slavery in East Africa where one does not need be a white person to be a settler and where Europeans, Arabs and Indians are wholly Africanized.

However, William's African experience is highly sexual. He visits African children prostitutes and then turns over to Graça who reveals to him the brutality of sex and of sexual fulfilment in which he exults. "How terrible it would have been if [...] I had died without knowing this depth of satisfaction, this other person that I had just discovered within myself." And he deplores the fact that "my poor father and mother who had known nothing like this moment." When the Portuguese troops retire to their homeland and the guerrillas move in, Willie is tired of the African adventure and moves to Germany.

Half a Life is the story of the progress of a man from a loveless beginning to a solitary end that may turn out to be not a true end. The experiences that mark his progress are sexual in nature. The women with whom he has them figure as objects of desire, repugnance, or fascination - sometimes all three - reported on with a mercilessly unclouded eye. The text reveals the nature of the spiritual journey Willie is engaged on, and to measuring his distance from a way of life - represented, if only ironically, by his father - that treats denial of desire as the road to enlightenment.

***The Ventriloquist's Tale* (1997) by Pauline Melville**

Pauline Melville was born in Guyana in 1948, daughter of a British mother and a Guyanese father of mixed race. To date she has published two books of short stories, *Shape-shifter* (1990) and *The Migration of Ghosts* (1998), and a novel, *The Ventriloquist's Tale* (1997). The latter won the Whitbread First Novel Award in 1998. As a little girl and teenager Melville witnessed the complicated social problems of a nation locked in a desperate struggle to modernize and overcome its colonial past. She has been a comedian, cigarette girl, a teacher and an actress. Similar to many Guyanese and West Indian writers, Melville emigrated to and lives in London.

At first sight *The Ventriloquist's Tale* seems to dabble in the literary genre of magic realism and would be included together with the classical works by Garcia Marquez and Borges, or with the innovators Angela Carter, Salman Rushdie and Arundhati Roy. The novel, however, brings out the nightmare of European colonialism and its 20th century fallout as experienced by the McKinnon family in the Rupununi hinterlands of Guyana. Seething with the Amerindian Wapisiana mythology in contact with European culture, it approaches Achebe's classical *Things Fall Apart* and reveals the

transculturation theme and the force of myth surviving facts.

The novel consists of a Prologue and an Epilogue, in which the prankish Macunaima styles himself the narrator of the McKinnon's tale, and of three parts in between. The novel opens in the backlands of present-day Guyana where Chofy McKinnon, of Amerindian and Scottish descent, is a small-time farmer and cattle-herder from the village of Moco-Moco at the foot of the Kanaku mountains. Faced with economic and marital problems, Chofy decides to travel to Georgetown in an effort to find temporary work, get some distance from his wife Marietta and take Aunt Wifreda for an overdue eye operation. In Georgetown he is invited to meet Rosa Mendelson, a British scholar researching into writer Evelyn Waugh and his visit to colonial Guyana back in 1933 which resulted in *Ninety-Two Days* and the short story *The Man who liked Dickens*. Waugh had spent some days with the McKinnons in the interior and Rosa, instigated by a one-time schoolteacher, Nancy Freeman, now living in London, hopes that Chofy will put her in touch with the older members of the family who may remember him. Rosa's visit to the Rupununi region never occurs since she and Chofy began to have an eye for each other. It seems that Chofy forgot his aim in Georgetown and a love affair between 'buck' and an English academic female scholar begins.

Melville immediately devises an analepsis and takes the reader back in the beginning of the 20th century with the arrival of Chofy's Scottish grandfather in the interior of Guyana. The 'freethinker' Alexander McKinnon marries two sisters, Maba and Zuna, has ten sons and daughters (among whom are Danny, Beatrice, Wifreda, Alice and Alfred, Chofy's father), and is particularly interested in certain scientific agricultural innovations and in photography (especially the 1919 solar eclipse). In 1905 the Jesuit Fr. Napier appears on the scene, intent on converting the McKinnons and other Wapisiana and Macusi Indians to the Catholic faith. In the 1930s Evelyn Waugh visits the place after Danny and Beatrice have had an incestuous affair. Alexander McKinnon charges Fr. Napier to look for the couple and bring them home. The incestuous couple are separated and segregated from the rest of the family not perhaps because of the inherent wrongness but for the eerie way it replicates an ancient Wapisiana myth involving the solar eclipse. Beatrice ends up in snow-ridden Canada and marries Horace Sands, while Danny marries a Brazilian wife called Sylvana. Their son Sonny simply vanishes. However, before going away, Beatrice becomes a *kanaima*, or avenger, and poisons Fr. Napier. The Jesuit priest raves in the savannah and has to be transferred to an asylum in Georgetown and finally

repatriated to a Jesuit convent in Scotland.

Rosa's visit to the Rupununi and her meeting with Aunt Wifreda fail because of the arrival of Marietta to Georgetown with Chofy's son Bla-Bla injured in an American oil prospect in the Rupununi. The son dies and the reconciled Chofy returns to the hinterland, to his wife and daily chores. Rosa goes back to England to write her thesis "Evelyn Waugh - A post-colonial Perspective" (Melville, 1999).

Rosa Mendelson's visit to Guyana deals with Evelyn Waugh's visit to the Rupununi in 1933 as fictionally recorded by the schoolteacher Nancy Freeman in London and by old Aunt Wilfreda. The latter has also kept the writer's copy of *Dombey and Son* all these years. Waugh, the European, possessor of the written word, is depicted as lecturing to the Amerindian whom, the Englishman remained unaware of, was an expert in orature. Waugh is represented as more interested in canonical fiction with its presumed superior stance than listening to the real stories and the mythologies that subjectify colonized people. Contrastingly McKinnon's encounter is highly allusive to the European gone native, or rather, his rejection of a European-styled life and his determination to keep the best distance between him and Europeanized civilization. McKinnon is characterized by his attempts at interventions into nature and her ways. For the Wapisiana people these experiments are not approved since they mean that "something was wrong with the order of things". The Amerindians think that change is "an illusion behind which lay the unchanging reality of dream and myth" and, contrary to Western thought, they look for "the mask behind the face" (Melville, 1999, p. 99). The anxiety to have change is a hindrance to see life as it is. If the natives deride his efforts at innovations, he cannot understand the underlying mysteries, fears and traditions of the people into whom he marries.

In spite of McKinnon's open-minded view of the world, Danny and Beatrice's incest gives him the shock of his life. Since no reassuring Amerindian mythology on the sun and moon eclipse is ingrained in his unconscious, he cannot absorb the fact. His roaming onto stark nature helps his decision. "McKinnon knew that he would leave the savannahs, that he did not belong" (Melville, 1999, p. 210), even though he has spent more than twenty-five years as an Amerindian. After providing for his family and for Beatrice in Canada, he takes with him four Wapisiana Amerindians to the Wembley's Great Exposition. They return to South America and report he has gone to Scotland and married there. Maba and Zuna merely remark that they are satisfied they have had him when he was young.

The seemingly radical transculturation between the Scotsman and the Amerindian people is an

ambivalent factor. While extreme change seems to be impossible for the European since he lacks the vital mythological sub-layer of the natives and limits himself to mere cosmetic transformations, in the opinion of the colonizers this means loss of distinctness and identity. Lighting fire as an Amerindian and letting his cattle roam without any supervision do not delete the ingrained 'scientific' stance of experimentation and his trial-and-error attitudes. McKinnon's children are ridiculed because of this fact, in spite of all his 'buck' transformations. The Scotsman's absolute aversion to incest, contrary to the natives' relative shunning towards such a relationship, is the straw that breaks the camel's back. On the other hand, his closest allies, wives, father-in-law, children and friends, experience superficial changes too. While the natives appropriate themselves with useful tools he brings from 'civilization', they are totally impermeable to his culture. Their life view remains unaltered.

It is interesting to note that the gone-native McKinnon and Waronawa Amerindians seem to maintain a subject-subject relationship, without any hierarchization, stratification of culture or power politics. Deep transculturation does not occur in the hybrid, represented by the children and grandchildren with more contact with 'civilization'. They are still steeped in mythology and ancient mores. As aunt Wifreda experiences the replacement of blackness by light when approaching the Rupununi, the natives may have "difficulty focusing, but [they] could see" (Melville, 1999, p. 348).

Transculturation may be analyzed according to the hybrid's acceptance or refusal of transformation in special cases of momentous upheavals in the environment. The episode of McKinnon's children at the nuns' convent in Georgetown and of Danny's stay in Queenstown during three years is significantly given in just one chapter. Immediately the girls feel the constraints of the contact zone: wearing shoes, cleanliness, stereotyping by skin color, Western school subject-matters and social manners have to mould the girls into modern citizens and abolish definitely the Amerindian character. Led by Beatrice, the girls establish linguistic and dream strategies to neutralize Westernizing influence and maintain their Wapisiana identity. Whereas contact with 'civilization' fails to de-characterize the girls, contact with the tropical environment make the Irish sister Fidelia go native in her own way. Heavy drinking and irresponsible action with some inmates bring her closer to the natives which, in the Western view, smack of lack of character. Consequently she has to be constantly moved. No loss of identity occurs in the hybrids. "As soon as they reached Annai and saw the sprawling, golden landscape of the savannahs, Beatrice's heart lifted ... They were overjoyed to be

back. Beatrice leaned over the side of the cart to feel the breeze on her face ... [Danny's] eyes shone with the pleasure of being home" (Melville, 1999, p. 156-8). Western mores are metaphorically shed off when the girls discard their shoes and put on cotton dresses and Danny fishes, hunts and whittles his arrows. Life on the savannahs is just the same.

The worldview of Jesuit father Napier is of empire. As a member of the universal church he arrives in Guyana to conquer and to do so quickly. The triumphal arrival of Fr Napier and the bishop at a place called Zariwa with band, photographs, speeches and crowds of naked Amerindians witnesses that the Jesuit is not prepared to listen but to evangelize and convert. In fact, he comes to lecture. In spite of McKinnon's religious indifference, the natives' religiosity, the great distances and difficulties of traveling, Fr Napier manages to make progress in the conversion of the Macusi, Wai-Wai and Wapisiana tribes. The imperial stance seems to be ingrained in his consciousness: he changes the name of the mission 'headquarters' from Zariwa to St. Ignatius; he takes for granted that everybody understands what he is taking about when he mentions Christian doctrine and the sacraments; he expects that all appreciate Mozart's sonatas; he even forces a small altar boy to climb Mount Roraima so that the priest may celebrate Mass on its top; he tries to repeat the feat on Bottle Mountain; he moves up and down the Guyana hinterland which he considers his realm where he can rear Christ's fold. Consequently, a moment's thought to the Amerindians' rich mythology, experience and worldview is never given. Although at the surface many become Catholics, their Amerindian heritage remains intact. The narrator presents the natives' vision of the priest: "Everyone else in the room, except McKinnon who was just amused, watched with a sort of horror as, before their eyes, the priest turned into a giant, buzzing, savannah grasshopper" (Melville, 1999, p. 119).

The struggle between the priest and the witchdoctor Koko Lupi and the defeat (madness and retirement) of the former should be seen not in the context of Beatrice's personal revenge on Fr Napier but as the tribes' reaction against empire. The priest's ideology embodies the absolute superiority of the Catholic religion and Western mode of thought and the sheer nonsense of the natives' myths and beliefs. "He tries to strike the sun out of the sky. Him with his dead god on a stick. He thinks he can stand between the sun and the moon. Give him this [the poisonous beans] and leave the rest to the sun. The sun will finish him off" (Melville, 1999, p. 240). It is at the apex of success and after feeling self-satisfied at his achievements in a sort of "homoeotericism of the colonial paradigm" (Suleri, 1992, p.198), that the 'empire' crumbles. The mental deterioration that

follows, culminating in the destruction by fire of the chapels he himself has built and in his stripping himself naked in the savannah, is associated with a disrapture in masculinity which has always been linked with patriarchy and colonialism. The colonizer's position with its displaying and self gazing, seen from the very beginning when he thought of martyrdom and heroism, has already been encroached upon by a suppressed pederasty. However, the final shutting in absolute silence is ambiguous, since another priest is already on the mission ministering to the Amerindians. Colonialism is not so easily vanquished.

A transcultural stance in the novel is the encounter between English academic Rosa Mendelson and Amerindian cattle herder Chofy McKinnon, grandson of the original McKinnon in the Guyana backlands. The orderly, methodical and rational scholar is disrupted by Chofy's unexpectedness and spontaneity. Their encounters at the Mynheer Nicklaus Lodge and on a rather bawdy journey to Pakuri are sufficient to change at least the smooth rhythm of her life. "Her actions were normally those of a slow, thoughtful woman whose progress through life was methodical and thorough. She exercised caution in her dealings with the world. What had happened?" (Melville, 1999, p. 76) No hierarchization occurs and a subject-subject encounter becomes normal since the female is not objectified territory. Actually this contrasts with the attitude of English anthropologist Michael Wormoal and his aloof and untouchable racist attitude. For the scholar, the Amerindians' lack of 'Western knowledge' tells their capitulation over their territory. Hierarchization is so deep that the anthropologist only pays lips service to wishing to discuss things with the flesh and blood Amerindian Chofy.

The text is fraught with stereotype transcultural impressions foreigners experience when they arrive in Guyana. One Guyanese musician tells Rosa that in that country she has to surrender to the unexpected, while the wife of the Canadian High Commissioner has a frightful list of complaints headed by the general remark that nothing works. "I find it excruciatingly dull in this part of the world. Nothing appears to happen here. What do you find to do?" reportedly said Evelyn Waugh. Worlding of the natives seethes with laziness, good-for-nothingness, sex, heavy drinking, dancing, just talking. However, the South American Indian narrator counterpoints such ideas with the picture of a day filled with fishing and hunting for food, preparing tools, sowing, harvesting, herding cattle, scraping deer and cow hides, washing clothes and kitchen wares, weeding, planting, harvesting and cooking cassava, preparing farine, whittling knives and arrows, carving on flat stones, keeping fowls and tending livestock, fencing,

building or mending small thatched houses and stores, collecting cashew nuts, gutting fish, skinning deer or labba (wild pig), cutting lumber, preparing shingles for roof tops, planting corn, plantain and pumpkin. Division of labor is the norm, children are taught by experience and all have to do his or her daily chores. Chofy has difficulties to distinguish between work and leisure since all activity is simultaneously work and play, whereas, contrary to European opinion, idleness is non-existent (Coetzee, 1988).

Different from colonial society ridden with laws to keep the natives subdued, the Wapisiana Amerindians have no written law. McKinnon "was impressed by the Indians' ability to keep order without government" (Melville, 1999, p. 267). The narrative is filled with instances of cooperation, especially in cases of disaster, which underlies the Amerindian way of life. In fact, the subjectivity experienced by Amerindians in pre-Colombian times has been disrupted by the invasion of the land, the subsequent objectification of the natives and the eradication of their culture. Melville's text shows that Wapisiana Amerindians keep much of their identity through mythology. Although the novel deals with 20th century Guyana, myth still gives meaning to their life. Danny's grandmother narrates the creation of the Amerindian woman and the beginning of the Wapisiana-Macusi people. The myth shows the climatic adaptation and survival of the "reddy-bronze colour" woman in the savannahs as contrasted to the white and black one. Due to his hybridity, Danny immediately curses the Europeans, including his father. When Fr Napier asks McKinnon about the possibility of Maba and Zuna being baptized, the Scotsman tells him the Wapisiana myth of the flood in which his wives believe. The story gives the Amerindians a glimpse of their beginnings, from which a "betrayal to their origins" through baptism would be incomprehensible. The loss of immortality and the physical corruption of the flesh, the myth equivalent to the Biblical Garden of Eden and the Fall, are transmitted to the youngsters by Shibi-din. Equivalent to the Biblical labour, it explains and foregrounds the difficult life the Amerindian faces in the savannahs.

The meaning of the eclipse by the inhabitants of the Rupununi as impending disaster may be surmised in the encroaching annihilation of the Amerindian culture. Contact and transculturation have always been the hallmark of colonial encounters. There is a constant reference to the coming and going of coastlanders, Brazilians and foreigners in the savannahs occupied by the Wapisiana and Macusi Indians. Even though they have resisted foreign intrusion for hundreds of years, imperceptibly they are receiving Western influence through language and

technological novelties which will slowly push their culture into the background to enhance Western priorities.

It is strange how Amerindians still preserve their culture and mythology so late in the 20th century. Perhaps the narrator Macunaima's prankish discourse is a clue. On one hand, there is the disastrous transformation of Beatrice in her Canadian home. "She barely had time to remember that other love which had flowed always under the grind of daily life; a sweet underground river that sometimes broke through to the surface and made its music, but mainly stayed hidden, so that she only carried the echoes of its song" (Melville, 1999, p. 293). On the other hand, the metonymy of the oil people hovers over the narrative in such a way that it sharpens the inexorable advance of 'Western civilization'. The death of Bla-Bla by mines placed by Americans ("foreign occupation") may be a cautionary advice on the vanishing of the Amerindian civilization. However, the anti-conquest of the foreigners produces counter-discourses in the subject natives for the maintenance of their own identity.

On a metafictional level the ventriloquist's tale edges on the ambiguous, since, up to a point, it is a mediated representation of the Amerindian. This does not mean that the tale is not autoethnographic, but that it depends on previous accounts that have already been textualized. Besides the tales of fantasy in Raleigh's account and the stiffness in Waugh's story, Melville's text also comes through the English translation of *Macunaima* (1928), whose story originated from the Amerindian myth discussed by Theodor Koch-Grünberg. Since the salient point is that *Macunaima* deals with identity, it is precisely this element that vitally concerns the native tribes of Guyana (Murray, 2000). It is very probable that native resistance will win the day by strategies of language and mythology.

***Crossing the River* (1993) and *A Distant Shore* (2003)
by Caryl Phillips**

Caryl Phillips was born in 1958 in St Kitts and was taken to England on that same year. He studied at Leeds and Oxford and has spent a teaching career in Sweden, Poland, India, Australia, and currently in the United States (Barnard College, Columbia University, New York). Travel essays, such as *The European Tribe* (1987) and *The Atlantic Sound* (2000), deal respectively with racism and the slave trade. His novels, all focusing on the African diaspora and the effects of dislocation, are *The Final Passage* (1985), *A State of Independence* (1986), *Higher Ground* (1989), *Cambridge* (1991), *Crossing the River* (1993), *The Nature of Blood* (1997) and *A Distant Shore* (2003).

Crossing the River comprises a prologue, four

great narratives of different eras in African-American history and diaspora and an epilogue, spanning in all over 250 years. The prologue narrates the harrowing experience of an African father in 18th century Africa who sold his two sons and a daughter, Nash, Martha and Travis, into slavery. "A desperate foolishness. The crops failed. I sold my children" (Phillips, 1994, p. 1). The reader follows the "lives" of these children in the first, second and fourth narratives. In the first narrative, called "The Pagan Coast", Nash Williams, a former slave, the property of plantation owner and do-gooder Edward Williams, is repatriated to Africa in 1834 as a Christian missionary. In Liberia he desperately tries to convert his African brethren but the pull of the native calling is too strong. The rootlessness and his lack of belonging caused by the dual identity, the weather, the language and the hard living conditions in Africa make Nash feel as a stranger in his ancestors' land. Nash experiences a cultural shock in Africa: whereas Africa doesn't recognize him as a son, America doesn't acknowledge him as a free person. Gradually he leaves the Christian tenets and returns to polygamy and animistic worshiping. When Edward Williams goes to Africa to meet the long lost Nash, he realizes his mistake. "Perhaps, thought Edward, this business of encouraging men to engage with a past and a history that are truly not their own is, after all, ill-judged" (Phillips, 1994, p. 52).

The second narrative, called "West" involves Martha, "the proud girl". Her story deals with the pre- and post-Civil War period (1861-64) and the abolition of slavery in the United States (1865). Martha Randolph is going west, to California, to begin a new life after the horrible experience of slave-life. "War came and war went and, almost unnoticed the Union topples [...] I was free now, but it was difficult to tell what difference being free was making to my life" (Phillips, 1994, p. 84). Martha experiences the psychological damage caused by the breaking down of the family, constantly menaced by selling, hiring and killing of its members. Martha's family has been destroyed twice: first when her family was broken up by the sale by auction of her daughter Eliza Mae and her husband Lucas; then, by the murder of her new husband. After running away from the Hoffman's house, Martha goes to Dodge to start a new life with another Negro called Chester. Chester, however, is murdered by white men and she is "assaulted by loneliness and drifting into middle age without a family" (Phillips, 1994, p. 79), dying on the way to what she was thinking would bring her happiness. "All her belongings dangled in a bundle that she held in one hand. She no longer possessed either a husband or a daughter, but her memory of her loss was clear" (Phillips, 1994, p. 78).

The third narrative "Crossing the River" is the

1752 log book of Captain James Hamilton and his letters to his wife. *The Duke of York* sails from Liverpool to the Windward Coast of Africa to buy slaves and take them to the United States. Glimpses of the slave trade, with its rebellions, oscillation of prices, bartering, killing of worthless slaves, flogging, tortures, indiscipline of crew, list of other slave ships and their captains, and the unstable trade, expose the infamous commerce in human flesh and the personality fragmentation of victims and victimizers. It is a chronicle narrating the steady accumulation of human livestock slowed down by prices and death.

The historical context of "Somewhere in England" is World War II, which "marked the end of the European (white) expansion that began in the fifteenth century with the slave trade and the appropriation of the land and bodies of Africans and Asians. Now suddenly [...] all that was over, and peoples, especially European people, were forced to redefine themselves in a world without divine rights, without colonies, without natives" (Bennett, 1993, p. 368-9). Joyce, a white married English woman falls in love with a black U.S. serviceman called Travis and dreams of a home for both. The reader expects to find the life history of Travis, the third child sold into slavery. However, the author narrates the unhappy and uneventful life of Joyce from 1936 to 1963 and only in the April 1943 entry the name of Travis is mentioned as Joyce's lover and father of her son Greer. Travis's identity cannot be that of his 19th century namesake since it is impossible that an African child sold into slavery in the 19th century becomes an American soldier in the II World War. Travis is killed in France and Greer is adopted by another family, with a reencounter between mother and son some twenty years afterwards.

The Epilogue is a world wide vision of the African who sold his children. Temporal and spatial considerations are now nil and human experience of the Negro in Brazil, Santo Domingo, the United States, Trinidad, with his culture, his music, his dances and his multi-varied language resound in the memory and in the life of African descendants, the countless and nameless members of contemporary diaspora.

Phillips does not create historical accounts of the past but rather uses History as a backdrop against which private narratives unfold and develop a tension between History and her/his-stories. The monolithic master narratives, closed and homogeneous, are counteracted by human experience with its diversity, richness and complexity. For instance, Phillips's "Acknowledgements" ("I have employed many sources in the preparation of this novel, but would like to express my particular obligations to John Newton's eighteenth-century Journal of a Slave Trader, which furnished me with invaluable research

material for Part III") and the explanatory subtitle ("Journal of a voyage intended by God's permission in the Duke of York, snow, from Liverpool to the Windward Coast of Africa, etc., commenced the 24th August 1752") are typical master narratives which, together with inhuman comments ("Thursday 25th March At daylight saw a longboat on shore. She came abroad at 9 a.m., brought with her 5 slaves, 2 fine boys, and 3 old women *whom I instructed them to dispose of*", Phillips, 1994, p. 113, my italics), are disrupted by letters home showing at the same time certain sensitiveness and tension. "My dearest [...] this trade and a keen faith cannot reside in one breast, one heart can surely not contain the warring passions of both love and hatred" (Phillips, 1994, p. 119). These meta-narratives question the validity of the historical master narratives and make the novel part and parcel to the post-modern condition.

Phillip portrays and enhances the diaspora through fragmentation at the textual and thematic levels. The past is remembered in a fragmentary way, characters live fragmentary lives and the stories are developed by the interlacing of fragments. This "chaotic" fictional world with all its indeterminacy is left to the reader to sort out the gaps, silences and absences. Whereas in "The Pagan Coast" techniques such as flashback, harrowing and unreceived letters create a deep sense of rootlessness and loss of identity, "West", with its intermingling of a fragmentary past and present, both dehumanizing, brings about the damage slavery brought in the family. Perhaps it is the memory of loss that haunts the fragmented Martha and her disrupted family. Even the straightforward log book of Capt. Hamilton depicts the fragmented conscience of the cruel slave trader. Nevertheless, the most fragmentary and perplexing section is "Somewhere in England". Joyce's life before and after the war, mingled with Travis's, is depicted not in a linear narrative but rather in continuous chaotic forward-backward shifts which shows the unstableness of homelessness universal in African diaspora people.

The fictional story which underpins and subverts the historical events is a powerful ruse in Phillips to engage himself in the theories of postmodernism. Dodge, the former frontier town on the Santa Fe Trail, is deconstructed and reconstructed. It might have been the haven for the free Martha and Chester. However, Phillips transforms the historical Dodge and, as all postcolonial writers, seeks "to recast [its] history as a redefinable present rather than an irrevocable interpreted past" (Tiffin, 1993, p. 176). In other words, the "historical icon" expands and connotes present day racism, police racial bias, helpless conditions of Negroes and their exclusion from society.

The non-linear narrative of *Crossing the River*

abounds in different voices with the removal of the dominant voice to the margin and the collective voices converging on the centre. This post-modern narrative strategy furnishes a collective meaning to the novel not only in that the voices of Nash's African father, Edward William, Nash, Martha, James Hamilton and Joyce are extant but, particularly, because of the universal denotation it adopts with regard to slavery and Negro diaspora. Further, its nonlinearity disrupts, to a certain extent, a fixed sequence, clear beginnings and endings, the time and space range it presupposes and the concept of wholeness. Such disruption implies a disintegration of meaning too. Actually, "lamenting the 'loss of meaning' in postmodernity boils down to mourning the fact that knowledge is no longer principally [linear] narrative" (Lyotard, 1998, p. 49).

A Distant Shore is another displacement story. It is the story of Dorothy Jones, a white English woman in her mid-fifties, a divorced retired music teacher, and of Solomon, an African in his early thirties, an illegal immigrant in England, hailing from a war-torn African country. Dorothy and Solomon live in a new housing estate, called Stoneleigh, on the outskirts of the northern English town of Weston. Formerly Solomon was a soldier who escaped the horrors of war in Africa but arrives in a country rife with bias against Negroes and foreigners. "They do not know who I am", he thinks naively. Solomon works as a night watchman who, in spite of racial slurs, volunteers to drive the elderly to medical appointments. In fact, Solomon meets Dorothy on one of these trips to a clinic.

After Solomon's tragic death by racist thugs, the novel gives a wide flashback to mid-century England and Dorothy's childhood and maturing. The daughter of a working-class father and an unprotective mother, Dorothy has had a troubled childhood, a tensed marriage with a higher class banker and a divorce. Aware of her sister Sheila's lesbian liaison with Maria and the latter's betrayal, she refuses her friendship and later on loses her to cancer. A guilty complex and her divorce lead to several highly unsatisfactorily affairs with married men such as bookseller Mahmood and teacher Geoff Waverley. Due to the latter's repercussions, she loses her job and is forced to retire. On the other hand, Solomon, whose real name is Gabriel, escapes by means of bribes the savagery of his native country where he witnessed the murder of his family. "While the others continue to laugh and taunt his father, Smokin' Joe casually pulls the trigger and the skull explodes. Small pieces of brain fly in all directions, and Gabriel's mother and two sisters begin to scream. [...] Gabriel is used to the sound of gunfire. The brutality is familiar to him. He looks on without emotion for he knows what is to come" (Phillips,

2003, p. 75). Nevertheless, he survives a perilous journey and is experiencing an undignified exile.

The meeting of the white woman and the black man brings a last chance of redemption for both since it is perhaps the only uncompromising relationship that either has ever experienced. Their hidden "insignificant" lives and their connections are laid bare, even though their relationship is built on unspoken assumptions, mutual respect and distant admiration. Although they are neither intimate nor do they know each other well, outside prejudice and violence destroy their lives. Dorothy's life passes from disappointment to disappointment, loneliness and encroaching madness. When Dorothy is close to her tragic end, she receives a visit from her former husband who had abandoned her for a younger girl, and declares that abandonment is the natural condition of the human being. "Abandonment is a state that is not alien to man. That throughout the ages people have voluntarily or involuntarily left behind people in their lives and gone on to higher and better things. There is nothing unusual about this" (Phillips, 2003, p. 208). Loneliness seems to be the most harrowing experience that Dorothy and Solomon feel most acutely. The African veteran grasps this fact when he is in a police van and gazes outside: "It is strange, but nobody is looking at anybody else, and it would appear that not only are these people all strangers to one another, but they seem determined to make sure that this situation will remain unchanged" (Phillips, 2003, p. 144).

A Distant Shore is divided into five parts: Part One is Dorothy's homodiegetic narrative telling the reader her past history and her present state of mind after her messy divorce, her liaisons, her high expectations when she makes an acquaintance with Solomon and the deep frustration on Solomon's murder. Part Two is a third person narrative on the African Gabriel Bartholomew (probably from Ruanda) in an English prison cell with flashbacks on his life in the war-striven country, his enrolment as a soldier, his frustrated ethics stance in war, the murder of his parents and sisters, his flight to Europe, the help he receives from a social worker Katherine and a migration lawyer and his final release from prison. The Third Part is a third person narrative continuing Dorothy's story. Dorothy's childhood, her rowdy marriage with Brian, her attempts to be appraised by married men and her disappointment with such liaisons, the harassment charges by Geoff Waverley and her decision for early retirement and finally her deep frustration on her sister Sheila's death, even though the two were never intimate. Part Four returns to an autodiegetic Solomon riding on a truck to a new home in northern England. Mike, the driver, introduces him to a family where he feels safe. They are extremely mindful of his woes and, most

important, they are not biased against blacks as the rest of the town is. Although Solomon receives threats and is lampooned by simple people, he feels Dorothy's approach and comprehension as extremely healthy and humane. However, juvenile thugs murder him because of racial prejudice. In Part Five the narrative consists of Dorothy's stream-of-consciousness while she is in a home recovering from bouts of madness. Solomon's murder and consequently her abandonment constitute the camel's hair that shatters her personality and her life.

A Distant Shore contains Phillips's themes on race, displacement and rootlessness, with their related issues of migration, asylum, exile, bereavement, betrayal, abandonment, homelessness, sexual abuse, class and racism. It is a harrowing representation of a modern African within the context of the diaspora in Britain. Surprisingly, his homelessness, abandonment and victimization are equivalent to those experienced by an English-born woman in her own country.

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