Neither East Nor West: 
From Orientalism to Postcoloniality

*Kerstin W. Shands*

Postcoloniality is a condition requiring a cure, and the passage to that cure involves a return to buried memories of colonial trauma. (Rukmini Bhaya Nair xi)

When the Saudi Arabian author, Rajaa Alsanea, published her novel *Banat Al-Riyadh* (*Girls of Riyadh*), she did not expect it to be of interest outside the Arabic-speaking world. In the Author’s Note to the English translation (2007) she explains that:

> It seemed to me, and to many other Saudis, that the Western world still perceives us either romantically, as the land of Arabian Nights and the land where bearded sheikhs sit in their tents surrounded by their beautiful harem women, or politically, as the land that gave birth to Bin Laden and other terrorists, the land where women are dressed in black from head to toe and where every house has its own oil well in the backyard! Therefore, I knew it would be very hard, maybe impossible, to change this cliché. (vii)

Are Alsanea and many other Saudis right when they say that the old orientalist clichés and stereotypes are still with us in the twenty-first century? Have decades of migration, globalization (and postcolonial theory) had no impact on orientalist world views? Are latent and manifest forms of orientalism still with us in this era of postcoloniality, underpinning and justifying new imperialist pursuits leading to new formations of ‘us’ and ‘them’? These questions, among many others, were raised at an international conference held at Södertörn University College in Stockholm in 2006. The present anthology consists of papers presented at that conference.

The ‘orientalism’ in the conference title refers, of course, to Edward Said’s study *Orientalism*, the now classic work in which Said examined European discourses on the ‘Orient,’ “that semi-mythical construct which

---

1 *Banat Al-Riyadh* was first published in Arabic in 2005. Contrary to Alsanea’s expectations, she has “captured a vast constituency” and become “a bestselling author, the only chick-lit from the Arab world, and as such she has become a sort of spokeswoman for 21st-century Saudi women” (Thomas 14).
since Napoleon’s invasion of Egypt in the late 18th century has been made and remade countless times” (Said 2003). Even though some orientalist accounts were admiring and even romanticizing, the orient was usually described as less developed, civilized, and rational, as a negative mirror image reflecting the self-described positivities of the occident. Said showed how the alluring and appalling image of the Orient was used to underpin and legitimize European imperialist and colonialist undertakings. Orientalist discourses built on binary oppositions contrasting the ‘typical’ features of East and West, dichotomies that were unequal in praising the West as more ‘progressive’ while viewing the Orient as static, non-progressive, or even backward. In sharp contrast to the supposedly rational and straightforward West, the East was painted in irrational and mysterious hues. Conscious or unconscious, the image of the Orient was a fantasy filtered through Western fears and desires. The Orient was as much an imaginary as a real territory, while Orientalism, well-intentioned or not, was a discourse serving imperialist and colonialist aims.

In the pre-postcolonial days of orientalist study, scholars were proud to call themselves orientalists, and the very term—the Orient—was associated with magic. In her 1993 preface to the Swedish translation of Edward Said’s Orientalism, Sigrid Kahle writes that in her youth, the Orient was revered as the cradle of civilization, and it was a place to which Kahle herself ardently wished to travel. In Sweden, the interest in the Middle East increased in the 1920s, in particular when a Swedish Orient Society was formed in 1924 with the aim of encouraging trade in the Middle East. For Kahle, to be an orientalist meant nurturing a wish to transcend boundaries, to see Europe from a much larger perspective, not so much to search for differences between peoples as to see what we share as human beings. However, according to Kahle, nobody today dares define themselves as orientalists since the word has acquired negative connotations (7).

Indeed, from a postcolonial perspective, it seems to be as reprehensible to be an orientalist as to be an imperialist. Not surprisingly, Rudyard Kipling tends to be exposed as the arch-colonialist par excellence, and his lines from “The Ballad of East and West” (1889), *OH, East is East and West is West, and never the twain shall meet,*” are quoted on all kinds of occasions as proof of a permanently unbridgeable gap (to the point that it has become, as Gayatri Spivak puts it, “an old slogan” [1995 xxiv]), even though the poem continues: “Till Earth and Sky stand presently at God’s great Judgement Seat; / But there is neither East nor West, Border, nor Breed, nor Birth, / When two strong men stand face to face, tho’ they come from the ends of the earth!” Gender biases aside, then, there is an imagined future time of equality when East and West will meet, when boundaries of birth, rank, and geography will dissolve, and equals will stand “face to face.” Surprisingly,
Kipling’s ‘arch-colonialist’ poem seems to suggest that East and West are self-deconstructing mental constructs.²

So where are we now? Have we reached the stage when not only men but (strong) women, too, “coming from the ends of the earth,” can stand “face to face” and proclaim that “there is neither East nor West”? Or are we still rehearsing the first line of Kipling’s poem only, unwittingly reinforcing the idea that East is permanently East and West is forever West? Twenty-five years after the publication of Orientalism, Edward Said writes that although he might wish that the “general understanding of the Middle East, the Arabs and Islam in the US has improved,” he finds that it has not. To the contrary, it is “quite common to hear high officials in Washington and elsewhere speak of changing the map of the Middle East, as if ancient societies and myriad peoples can be shaken up like so many peanuts in a jar.” Said concludes that the ‘us-them’ binaries are still sadly in place and that “without a well-organized sense that the people over there were not like ‘us’ and didn’t appreciate ‘our’ values—the very core of traditional orientalist dogma—there would be no war [in Iraq]” (Said 2003).

To say that nothing has changed is as fallacious as it is condescending, but change is slow.³ In the new global landscapes in Europe, a multiculturalist celebration ranging from a quiet acceptance to a zealous celebration of difference is often held up as a solution to the conflicting us-them dichotomies arising in the wake of decolonization, migration, diaspora, and globalization. Some would see multiculturalism not so much as a positive principle as an unavoidable way forward even on pragmatic and economic levels. In two books in which he has used the term, the ‘creative class’ (The Rise of the Creative Class, The Flight of the Creative Class), Richard Florida has discussed the shift from industrial and information economies to what he calls a creative economy, the basic requirements for which are not only innovative technology and talented individuals but also, and primarily, a society that cultivates an open and tolerant attitude toward minorities, immigrants, and homosexuals. The more we study these questions, the more we realize how important the ‘tolerance factor’ is for success in the creative economy, according to Richard Florida. Ranked at the top of Florida’s TTT Index, Sweden may seem like a forward-looking country infused with ‘creative tolerance,’ a place where postcolonial theoretical concepts have less relevance.

² Bart J. Moore-Gilbert’s conclusion in Kipling and “Orientalism,” a study in which he “explore[s] Kipling’s relationship to the characteristic discourses of Anglo-Indian culture” is that “[f]or all the doubt and unease in his writing, Kipling, typically, is trapped by the political realities out of which ‘Orientalism’ emerged” (1986 1, 198).
³ As concerns South Africa, to take one example, Achmat Dangor, the head of the Nelson Mandela Foundation, asserts in an interview in The Cape Times that “what seems to be missing is a consciousness by the government and the people that we are not going to overcome all our problems in a short time” (Adams 11).
But Swedish society is marked by ethnocentricity and Eurocentricity, and Swedish visions and practice of multiculturalism need to be scrutinized.4

At the same time, celebrations of alterity can end up re-exoticizing and re-objectifying ‘other’ people and products, concealing and reproducing imperialist power and prestige even in the process of criticizing it. Looking at postcolonial studies from a sociological perspective, Graham Huggan observes in the *Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins* (2001) that “academic concepts like postcolonialism” may be “turned . . . into watchwords for the fashionable study of cultural otherness.” As postcolonial critics we may unwittingly contribute to a “global commodification of cultural difference,” a process in which the postcolonial literature and culture we may wish to promote become cultural commodities that are part and parcel of a “booming ‘alterity industry’ that [postcolonial studies] at once serves and resists.” Since there may thus be “varying degrees of complicity between local oppositional discourses and the global late-capitalist system in which these discourses circulate and are contained,” Huggan finds it useful to make a distinction between ‘postcoloniality’ and ‘postcolonialism’ (vii).

While postcolonialism is a term that has been used primarily in discussions of the geographical areas of the former colonies of the British, French, German, and Portuguese empires, today, the term has turned out to have relevance in a much wider context. At least three-quarters of the world’s population has been affected by colonialism and its aftermath. In their influential *The Empire Writes Back*, Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffith, and Helen Tiffin argue that any culture affected by colonization can be seen as part of a postcolonial geography, which would mean that the United States could be included among postcolonial countries (1, 2), something other critics have regarded with more skepticism. Øyunn Hestetun, for example, makes the important distinction in “The American Postcolonial and the Ethics of Cross-Cultural Reading” in *Identities and Masks: Colonial and Postcolonial Studies* (2001), that while post-independence American literature “declaring cultural independence from the former colonial center” could be seen as postcolonial, “the trope of ‘writing back’ to the imperial center . . . can hardly be regarded as significant” in “mainstream twentieth-century literature.” On the other hand, for “writings generally referred to as minority ethnic, and immigrant literatures,” Hestetun continues, a postcolonial perspective *can* be useful since “for the contemporary American context it makes more sense to relocate and rename the center of power so as to speak about internal colonialism and Euramerican dominance.” Hestetun (following Vijay Mishra and Bob Hope as well as Arif Dirlik), rightfully warns against an all-inclusive

---

4 Christian Catomeris has suggested that in Sweden, the immigrant has been made into the ‘other’ against which ‘real’ Swedishness can be formed, a process in which the media have played a not inconsiderable part. See Christian Catomeris, “‘Svartmuskiga bandittyper’—svenskarna och det mörka häret,” in *Orientalism på Svenska* (“Orientalism in Swedish”) ed. Moa Matthis (Stockholm: Ordfront, 2005), 20-55.
postcolonial perspective where “the literatures of settler populations are put into the same category as the literatures of colonized peoples” (2001 21).

‘Postcoloniality’ is not located at the opposite end of a temporal spectrum beginning with colonialist conquest. As John McLeod has pointed out, “‘postcolonialism’ is not the same as ‘after colonialism’, as if colonial values are no longer to be reckoned with. It does not define a radically new historical era, nor does it herald a brave new world where all the ills of the colonial past have been cured” (33). Rather, as this anthology suggests, postcoloniality is a time period and condition marked by the challenges of difficult change and complicated continuity within an unpredictable mix of pre-, anti-, post-, and neo-colonial elements. Postcoloniality might be defined as a time and mindset occurring after the historical time of colonialism, a time when the colonial, decolonizing, and postcolonial processes and effects can be expressed and examined in literary and political narratives. Bart Moore-Gilbert’s definition remains a useful point of departure, perceiving postcolonialism as a ‘reading practice’ related to a multi-dimensional continuum of past and present colonialist- and imperialist-inflected power relations and “understood as preoccupied principally with analysis of cultural forms which mediate, challenge or reflect upon the relations of domination and subordination—economic, cultural and political—between (and often within) nations, races or cultures, which characteristically have their roots in the history of modern European colonialism and imperialism and which, equally characteristically, continue to be apparent in the present era of neo-colonialism” (1997 12).

Whereas postcolonialism has been developing and diversifying in several ways, something our conference and anthology testify to, it has also institutionalized itself and established new hierarchies, part of which is the development of what postcolonial scholars have called the ‘high theory’ of works by Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak, and Homi Bhabha. In her introduction to the 2005 edition of Colonialism/Postcolonialism, Ania Loomba asks what meaning the term ‘postcolonial’ has today. On the one hand, she writes, postcolonial critics are accused of being esoteric; on the other hand, they supposedly do not understand the complexity of contemporary global politics. Postcolonialism is deemed to be too radical, and then again, it is not radical enough. In this case, how valid or useful are ‘postcolonialism’ and ‘postcoloniality’ as terms? Is postcolonialism on its way to becoming limiting and old-fashioned? Is it, like feminism, moving towards making itself obsolete? Rukmini Bhaya Nair’s response in Lying on the Postcolonial Couch (2002) would be a resounding yes: “Postcoloniality awaits consignment to oblivion” (xi). Similarly, colonialism itself, as Stefan Jonsson has argued, is a project that has to remain a half-measure: if the ‘civilizing mission’ had been completely successful, the Empire would very quickly have lost its raison d’être (340, my trans).
Although ‘postcolonialism’ and ‘postcoloniality,’ as Graham Huggan explains, are “inextricably interconnected,” the first-mentioned refers to “localized agencies of resistance” and the second “to a global condition of cross-cultural symbolic exchange” (ix). Postcolonialism may be seen as “an anticolonial intellectualism that reads and valorises the signs of social struggle in the faultlines of literary and cultural texts,” an intellectualism that resides within “and is bound up with postcoloniality” (6). Most importantly, for Huggan, “ostensibly anti-colonial writers/thinkers are all working, some of them conspicuously, within the neocolonial context of global commodity culture” (7).5 Other critics, such as Arif Dirlik and Kwame Anthony Appiah, have to some extent conflated postcoloniality and postcolonialism, Dirlik arguing that postcoloniality is “appealing because it disguises the power relations that shape a seemingly shapeless world and contributes to a conceptualization of that world that both consolidates and subverts possibilities of resistance” (584), and Kwame Anthony Appiah, similarly, arguing that “[p]ostcoloniality is the condition of what we might ungenerously call a comprador intelligencia” (qtd. in Dirlik 584). “Postcolonial studies,” writes Graham Huggan, “it could be argued, has capitalized on its perceived marginality while helping turn marginality itself into a valuable intellectual commodity” (viii). Aijaz Ahmad goes even further in his imploding critique of postcolonialism, arguing that in the end “everyone gets the privilege, sooner or later, of being colonizer, colonized and postcolonial—sometimes all at once” (qtd. in Huggan 2).

While being aware of the limitations as well as the institutionalization of postcolonial studies, the papers in this anthology show that a postcolonial perspective is still useful. As Ania Loomba concludes in Colonialism/Postcolonialism, postcolonial studies, with all its limitations, has managed to place European imperialism in relief. Furthermore, despite the institutionalization and the self-seeking, commodifying, commercializing, and neo-colonializing forces, the field of postcolonial studies, as Graham Huggan rightfully observes, “has provided a catalyst for some of the most exciting intellectual work to be seen today” (1). Perhaps, as Ato Quayson puts it in Postcolonialism: Theory, Practice or Process? (2000), postcolonial studies concerns not so much a series of events as a process of multiple origin—not only in the experience of colonialism but in all kinds of progressive or radical challenges in Western society and discourse. Recognizing that

5 Postcoloniality, then, “is a value-regulating mechanism within the global late-capitalist system of commodity exchange,” according to Huggan, who argues that “in the overwhelmingly commercial context of late twentieth-century commodity culture, postcolonialism and its rhetoric of resistance have themselves become consumer products” (6), because “[p]ostcoloniality’s regime of value is implicitly assimilative and market-driven: it regulates the value-equivalence of putatively marginal products in the global marketplace. Postcolonialism, by contrast, implies a politics of value that stands in obvious opposition to global processes of commodification” (6).
the effects of colonialism are by no means eliminated or eradicated, and quoting Peter Childs’ and Patrick Williams’ argument that ‘postcolonialism’ is ‘an anticipatory discourse, recognizing that the condition which it names does not yet exist’ but is one we are moving towards, Ato Quayson suggests that postcolonialism can be “perceived as a process of postcolonializing” (9). Even though he underlines that postcolonialism may have its limitations in throwing very different cultures and countries together under the same rubric (such as Brazil and Nigeria), he argues that it is still a useful theoretical perspective in emphasizing “the notion of the centrality of colonialism for understanding the formation of the contemporary world” (10). Postcolonialism can then “be seen as a project to correct imbalances in the world” (11). For the time being, then, postcolonialism and feminism can be seen as still viable concepts addressing conditions that are constantly changing and evolving.

Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri suggested in *Empire* (2000) that societies everywhere are interpenetrated by global forces as “the nation-state has less and less power to regulate these flows and impose its authority over the economy” at the same time as there is a “new global form of sovereignty” that Hardt and Negri call “Empire,” “composed of a series of national and supranational organisms united under a single logic of rule” (xi-xii) and “characterized fundamentally by a lack of boundaries” (xiv). Despite the globalizing forces, one of the main tasks of postcolonialism may be to provincialize Europe, as the title of Dipesh Chakrabarty’s book *Provincializing Europe* suggests. Firstly, provincializing Europe would mean recognizing and dealing with anti-western and occidentalist perspectives. According to Ian Buruma and Avishai Margalit in *Occidentalism: The West in the Eyes of Its Enemies* (2004), “East’s fantasies and assumptions about the West have not really been explored. What do we know of oriental or occidental stereotypes of the West? How do we understand the dehumanized picture of the West that emerges, making the West into a ‘machine society’ marked by ‘sterile Western rationality’”? Occidentalism is perhaps more often focused on America than on Europe, perceiving “Westernism” as a corrupting influence that undermines spiritual and cultural values. The West, in this view, is intolerably rootless and crassly commercial, with the Western mind capable of achieving goals but less good at finding the right ways of getting there.6 Buruma and Margalit write that:

The attack on the West is among other things an attack on the mind of the West. The mind of the West is often portrayed by Occidentals as a kind of higher idiocy. To be equipped with the mind of the West is like being an idiot savant, mentally defective but with a special gift for making arithmetic calcu-

---

6 Even someone as celebrated in the west as Dalai Lama has made critical statements about the West. In an interview in 2006 he stated that people in the West “have become too self-absorbed” (17). “The West is now quite weak,” he said, “it can’t cope with adversity and has little compassion for others” (Thomson 20).
lations. It is a mind without a soul, efficient, like a calculator, but hopeless at doing what is humanly important. The mind of the West is capable of great economic success, to be sure, and of developing and promoting advanced technology, but cannot grasp the higher things in life, for it lacks spirituality and understanding of human suffering. (75)

Secondly, provincializing Europe would include confronting what Menakshi Mukherjee (1996) has seen as an anti- or postcolonial over-reliance on European conceptual frameworks to formulate anti-colonial responses. Thirdly, a provincialization of Europe would involve the realization that, as Elleke Boehmer puts it, “what is frequently ignored in postcolonial criticism is the difficulty or otherness of the postcolonial text: the implications for us as readers of its possibly untranslatable cultural specificity” (238). According to Sam Durrant in Postcolonial Narrative and the Work of Mourning: J.M. Coetzee, Wilson Harris, and Toni Morrison (2004), this is what postcolonial writers such as Coetzee, Harris, and Morrison do: “Instead of seeking, like Orpheus, to wrench the other into the light of day, to render her fully present, they teach us how to remember the other’s irretrievable difference” (14). Postcolonial critics need to pay renewed attention to the otherness of the other. Arguing that a “post-imperial critical discourse [like orientalist scholarship] can be presumptuously all-embracing or totalizing in its responses to the various and the mysterious in other cultures” and that “from the point of view of its own assumed cultural centrality, the discourse takes what it needs for its own theoretical purposes, and disregards what is seen as incomprehensible,” Boehmer also points out that “[i]t is widely taken for granted that post-imperial cultural diversity is not only comparable across regions, but is all more or less equally transparent and accessible to a European or North American reader”: so that “different historical worlds of meaning can be exposed to one another merely by a leap of imaginative empathy” (240, 238-39).

In the field of literature and literary studies, leaps of imaginative empathy are, of course, tremendously important. Literature is a space where inner and outer worlds can be imagined with empathy and where inner and outer experiences of those worlds can be articulated in narratives ranging from the reassuringly realist to the formally sophisticated and defamiliarizingly innovative. Literature is a place where subjective and collective truths can be voiced, where a restorative re-imagining and re-inventing can take place, and where elusive and complex issues of deep significance to us as human beings can be explored without the need to prove points, empirically or quantitatively. Postcolonial theory and criticism is a counterpart in responsive dia-

---

\[7\] As Graham Huggan puts it: “Postcolonialism might thus be said to exist within the hybrid spaces opened up by cultural translation; it attests not to the transparency or accessibility of different cultural representations but, on the contrary, to the incommensurability—the untranslatability—of culture itself” (26).
logue with postcolonial literature. As Robert Young has expressed it so well, postcolonial theory is distinguished by the value and attention it gives to the personal and the subjective, which is why . . . its institutional origins were often located in literature departments which provided the solitary space within academic institutions where subjective forms of knowledge were taken seriously. Before postcolonialism, for example, there were plenty of histories of colonialism. But such histories rarely considered the ways in which colonialism was experienced, or analysed, by those who suffered its effects. (Young 2001)

Postcolonial literature in English is important because it enables us to listen to and participate in a cross-cultural and multi-voiced dialogue. Introducing new aesthetic norms and modes of appraisal and challenging notions of English exclusiveness, postcolonial writers are laying bare submerged histories, bringing minority interests and ethnic diversities to the forefront, and reconfiguring cultural forms and ways of life previously relegated to the periphery. Although English is now the lingua franca of the globalized republic of the privileged, having been adopted by powerful interest groups within the mass media, popular culture, advertising, and information technology, postcolonial literature may well expand the scope of English and turn it into a less imperialistic global lingua franca by embracing and responding to literary contributions from culturally diverse areas.

Along with an attention to representation and narration comes a focus on language, both as regards the role of indigenous languages and debates of mono- versus multilingualism. “One of the main features of imperial oppression is control over language,” according to Ashcroft, Tiffins and Griffith (7), who suggest that English must develop and diversify and let other ‘eng-lishes’ depict postcolonial experiences in new ways. Chinua Achebe’s Things Fall Apart (1958) is an interesting case in point: looking back on his creation of a new language, Achebe says in an interview in 2007: “I knew I couldn’t write like Dickens or Conrad. My story would not accept that. So you had to make an English that was new. Whether it was going to work or not, I couldn’t tell” (Pilkington 5). A renewed attention to language is important, and if we remember that a majority of the population in some African countries cannot read or write, the practical work of civic organizations to promote literacy must be regarded as an urgent matter. Moreover, with India as an example, Rukmini Bhaya Nair reminds us in Lying on the Postcolonial Couch: The Idea of Indifference (2002) that there is a gender aspect to literacy:

Women’s roles in the narrative of postcoloniality have been characteristically divided. Less than half the women on the subcontinent are literate, and India is one of the few countries in the world where, as a result of enforced malnutrition, female infanticide, and dowry abuse, there is a significant gender im-
A focus on translation is crucial, too. Critics such as Tejaswini Niranjana and Gayatri Spivak have pointed to the dangers of conventional notions of translation with particular regard to the translation of Third World literature into English, Niranjana reminding us that, far from being just “an interlingual process,” “[t]ranslation as a practice shapes, and takes shape within, the asymmetrical relations of power that operate under colonialism” (8, 2). When Raoul J Granqvist in his paper on translation for this anthology (“Translation as an Emancipatory Act?”) looks back upon the “pre-postcolonial” English department, wittily described as “an isolated enclave of prescribed modalities, standards, canons, and area-dependent normalcy, down to scrupulous apprehensions about British parliamentary procedures and the distribution of vowel stress,” he finds that English departments in Scandinavia have in fact moved away from a “neo-colonial exclusivity” in recent decades. The teaching and translating of English has undergone a dramatic development, from the linguistic imperialism imposing on all learners a “received pronunciation,” and from translation as a “politics of transference” where “language meets language” to translation as a more interactive form of communication that goes beyond the purely linguistic to embrace a much larger cultural framework that includes politics and economics as well as “indigenous voices speaking many dialects,” making it “an embedded translation.” Giving a striking example of translation as metaphor (as in John Donne’s “Elegy XIX. To his Mistris Going to Bed”), Granqvist’s illuminating and challenging paper also discusses Swedish translations and deconstructive re-writings of Joseph Conrad’s Heart of Darkness. Suggesting that culture itself is translation, Raoul Granqvist sees translation as an act of “metonymic cross-writing.”

In The World, the Text, the Critic (1991), Edward Said writes about how theory travels in a “circulation of ideas” that occurs because of “unconscious influences, creative borrowing, or wholesale appropriation,” a movement that “is both a fact of life and a usefully enabling condition of intellectual activity,” because, as Said puts it, “what is critical consciousness at bottom if not an unstoppable predilection for alternatives?” (1991 226). Pointing to the circulation of ideas flowing from Lukacs to Goldmann and to Raymond Williams and to the dissemination of the ideas of Foucault, Said sees stages of assimilation, adaptation, and transformation in a circulation that easily and insidiously lends itself to rigidification, cultural dogma, and new institution-alizing walls that “[dull] the consciousness, convincing it that once insurgent theory is still insurgent, lively, responsive to history” (1991 247). Still, the risk of rigidification should not make us shy away from theory. Instead, in Said’s view, we “should look at the circulation and solidification of ideas...
and theory with scepticism and faith and “preserve some modest (perhaps shrinking) belief in noncoercive human community” (1991 247).

In a paper on “Excursions into the Literary Territories of the Other,” Øyunn Hestetun explores travelling tropes as applied to literatures promoted and read globally, with particular regard to the new literary and conceptual worlds opened up for readers. While Hestetun’s point of departure is Native American literature, her discussion of encounters with “textual Others” can be fruitfully applied also to other indigenous or postcolonial literature. Hestetun’s paper raises a number of questions that are as difficult as they are urgent regarding readers’ and critics’ (and literature teachers’) ways of approaching “the textual territories of the Other.” Chiasmatically claiming that just “as literary texts are culturally produced, they also—in their own ways—produce culture,” Hestetun’s questions take on an ethical dimension in her suggestion that not only responsive, but also responsible, readings are called for. Drawing on Paul Ricœur’s hermeneutic perspective, on Althusser’s and Jameson’s (political) unconscious, and on Louis Owen’s request for a mind-changing Native American literature, Hestetun’s paper, on the one hand, strongly urges us to avoid textual idealism: we need to ask ourselves “to what extent [our reading could] be construed as a (neo-colonialist) project that might ultimately serve to reaffirm and consolidate preconceived ideas.” On the other hand, Hestetun suggests that, if we take on the challenge of venturing into the literary territories of the Other towards conceptual horizons “where we might be encouraged to do some radical rethinking of the world we inhabit,” literature can indeed be transformative.

It has been said that the past is another country, a place where touring can be enlightening in painful or positive ways. As Rukmini Bhaya Nair puts it: “Postcoloniality is a condition requiring a cure, and the passage to that cure involves a return to buried memories of colonial trauma” (xi). Similarly, in Postcolonial Narrative and the Work of Mourning, Sam Durrant claims that “postcolonial narrative presents itself as a mode of mourning, as a way of consciously working through history”; indeed, “[t]he idea of narrative as a form of communal address takes on a particular resonance for the writer who attempts to bear witness to histories of exclusion” (11, 13). Mariangela Palladino’s paper on Toni Morrison’s Beloved (1987) focuses on Morrison’s insistence on a conscious engagement with the past, even when this is painful. Even though Morrison has said of her novel that “the characters don’t want to remember, I don’t want to remember, black people don’t want to remember, white people won’t want to remember,” her novel shows how the failure to remember leaves us disempowered. Positing Beloved as a Christ figure, Palladino suggests that Morrison points to the betrayal of the collective memory “implicit in the postmodernist isolation of the Holocaust as the single defining moment that horribly illuminates the bankruptcy of the Enlightenment project” and argues that Morrison, “fusing an (inverted) version of the Christian tradition with the narrative of African-American history
... problematizes our notions of the resources of Postcolonialism.” Morrison’s use of Christological imagery has so far remained unexplored, according to Palladino, who, drawing also on flower imagery and numerology, uncovers correspondences that suggest that “as a sacrificed black, female Christ, Beloved becomes a focus for Morrison’s concern with redemption through memory.” Palladino’s paper shows how postcolonialism challenges postmodernist ideas of the ‘end of history.’

“The word diaspora suggests a line between two places—somehow a permanent displacement, always travelling and never fully feeling as though you have arrived,” as Gina Wisker puts it in Key Concepts of Postcolonial Literature (2007 92). A paper on “Power Transformations of the Gendered Subject in Three Stories from Jhumpa Lahiri’s Interpreter of Maladies” by Karin Möller discusses a short story collection by Jhumpa Lahiri, a writer of Indian descent who has grown up in America. Linked to the Indo-American diaspora, the short stories in Interpreter of Maladies originally had a subtitle: “Stories of Bengal, Boston and Beyond,” and they have been oxymoronically regarded (by Ketu H. Katruk) as “ethno-global.” Intrigued by the “beyond” of the original subtitle, Karin Möller proposes that it “is meant to denote not only geographical extension but also the troubled complexity of a particular nexus of space and time in post-colonial, postmodern time.” There is a narrative coherence to the stories in Interpreter of Maladies as well as a recurrence of themes and motifs. Looking at the development of three female protagonists, in particular (two of them indigenous Indians and one an Indo-American), and focusing on the transformations that occur, Möller finds that “[r]epresentations of female agency (or lack thereof) in these stories provides a basis for how we could understand some of the factors that have been instrumental in clearing the road to an ethno-global ‘beyond.’”

Three female characters are also in focus in Rose Bloem’s paper, “The Spectre of the Other in Charlotte Brontë’s Jane Eyre, Jean Rhys’ Wide Sargasso Sea, and Nadine Gordimer’s A Sport of Nature,” novels that, according to Bloem, deal with a threatening ‘female otherness’ that ranges from the enigmatic to the demonic. In The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination, Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar (1979) charted new feminist territory in their systematic search for “the threat of the hag, the monster, the witch, the madwoman” that, according to them, has been present in five centuries of literature and that “still lurks behind the compliant paragon of women’s stories,” a figure that is essential to understand since “women writers are both identifying with and revising the self-definitions patriarchal culture has imposed on them” and since “it is usually because she is in some sense imbued with interiority that the witch-monster-mad-woman becomes so crucial an avatar of the writer’s own self” (79). The ‘witch-monster-mad-woman’ is celebrated in Madwoman in the Attic in the sense that, as Gilbert and Gubar put it, “from a female point of view the monster woman is simply a woman who seeks the
power of self-articulation” (79). In Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*, it is Bertha Mason, Rochester’s mad wife, who is the demonic Other. For Gilbert and Gubar, she is the ‘madwoman in the attic,’ Jane’s avatar who does what Jane herself secretly dreams of doing, such as express her fury and be “violent and self-assertive” (359, 363). In this Anglo-American feminist reading, Bertha becomes “Jane’s truest and darkest double” (360). Bringing in a colonial aspect, postcolonial critics have added another angle to the analysis, Gina Wisker, for example, proposing that “[b]y demonising Bertha, the Creole heiress, as a madwoman who nearly brings down Rochester’s home and is a threat to Jane, she replays the ways in which colonial history was silent about the origins of British wealth” (160).8 Further, in *Confluences: Postcolonialism, African American Literary Studies, and the Black Atlantic*, John Cullen Gruesser argues that *Wide Sargasso Sea* is not only a rewriting of *Jane Eyre*, but “a postcolonial and feminist re-vision on Othello,” because *Othello* “concerns such matters as empire, colonization, slavery, race relations, miscegenation, and the male desire to control the female, and these are precisely the subjects addressed by Rhys in her novel” (32). Not only does Gruesser perceive striking similarities in terms of plot, he argues that “in each text a character from the mother country gains the trust of a colonized subject and uses this trust to destroy the Other’s sense of him- or herself” (33).9 It is Gruesser’s contention that “[r]eading the novel primarily in relation to a single canonical text, that is, *Jane Eyre*, as postcolonial critics up to now have done, has made it difficult for them to account adequately for the racial theme” in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Linking the constellation of Victorian views of race and gender in *Jane Eyre* (1847) to fears of and fantasies about a demonized and depraved colonial Other who does not and cannot speak for herself, not only to the reversal (through the voice of a creole Other) in the writing-back-to-the-empire narrative in Jean Rhys’ *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966), but also to a third novel, Nadine Gordimer’s *A Sport of Nature* (1987), Rose Bloem adds the racial perspective to the discussion called for by Gruesser. Gordimer’s female protagonist is regarded as a ‘sport of nature’ because of her refusal to comply with the racist norms of white South Africa. While it is in this ‘deviant’ Otherness that she resembles the protagonists of Brontë’s and Rhys’ novels, there is a difference in Gordimer’s “postcolonial depiction of the female Other” in that the protagonist renames herself and

---

8 Wisker argues that “[g]iven her historical location, Bertha cannot achieve selfhood and awareness but must emerge a victim of cultural disempowerment. However, the rewritten narrative, Rhys’ version of *Jane Eyre*, gives an insider exploration of Antoinette/Bertha’s view, one view produced by colonised peoples, literally enabling readers to re-read history and cultural expression through the lens of the marginalised, disempowered, maddened and silenced Other” (160, 161).

9 Although, as Gruesser points out, “[a]s a colonized Other deceived by someone from the metropolitan center, Antoinette resembles Othello; however, as a wife falsely accused of betraying, and then unjustly destroyed by, the man she married, her fate reenacts Desdemona’s” (36).
“deliberately creates a new perception of self.” In doing so, she becomes a part of a future-oriented, non-racist, new South Africa.

If America could be said to evince varieties of internal colonialism, South Africa has suffered from a double colonialism, one external, stemming from colonial conquest in the nineteenth century and the other internal and related to apartheid. Many South African writers have drawn upon this history of double colonialism and apartheid, among them J. M. Coetzee, Zakes Mda, Zoë Wicomb, Mandla Langa, Lewis Nkosi, Elleke Boehmer, Jeanne Goosen, Jo-Anne Richards, and Pamela Jooste. Contemporary South Africa continues to be haunted by the past. In a paper called “The Fantasia and the Post-Apartheid Imagination: History and Narration in André Brink’s Devil’s Valley,” Osita Ezeliora explores the writings of one of the most prolific writers from South Africa, Andre Brink. Brink has published a great number of scholarly and creative works since the fall of official apartheid. Some of the novels published since 1994 are: Imaginings of Sand (1996), Devil’s Valley (1998), The Other Side of Silence (2002), Before I Forget (2004), and Praying Mantis (2005). In a number of essays, Andre Brink has called for a ‘re-invention’, ‘re-visiting’, or ‘re-imagining’ of history in the representation of post-apartheid South Africa. In focus in Ezeliora’s paper is the kind of the magical, fantastical narrative mode used by Brink in Devil’s Valley. Following Stephen Slemon, Ezeliora suggests that this kind of magic realism can be regarded as a postcolonial genre. Both realist and supernatural, Devil’s Valley delves into the abysmal verticalities of racial and gendered repression in a fictional reconfiguration of South African historiographies. Ezeliora explores the Brinkian aesthetic from the point of view of the fantastical narrative mode and suggests that as a representational strategy, this narrative form, featuring many postmodernist aspects of irony and formal textual play, is a significant manifestation of the novelistic appropriation of colonial and apartheid spaces in South Africa’s post-apartheid fiction in English.

If South Africa has suffered a double colonization, this could also be said of India. Who depicts the lives of the Others of the Others, those who are marginalized by the marginalized? Among the many Indian writers who have attempted to do so is Mahasweta Devi, whose strong social conscience and commitment to the welfare of the tribal community, the Harijans and the wretched, have made her into one of the most prominent contemporary women writers writing in India today. Born in 1926 into a family of writers and culture workers, Mahasweta Devi, who, according to Gayatri Spivak (who has translated some of her work), mixes the high-literary style of older Bengali literature with tribal language, has come to be regarded as one of India’s most radical writers. In Bengali newspapers and journals, she has
written articles in support of tribals and their rights.\textsuperscript{10} “I am wary of the West,” Mahasweta Devi says in an interview with Gayatri Spivak. She underlines that “[t]he tribal population of India is about one-sixth of the total population of the country” and yet the tribals in India have not been part of decolonization, even though “they have paid the price” (ix, xi). Proposing in “Frames of Marginalisation in Mahasweta Devi’s Outcast: Four Stories” in this anthology that Mahasweta Devi’s stories can be read as “the voiced articulations of the tribal ‘Others,’” Debasish Chattopadhyay suggests that Mahasweta Devi’s “voice does not simply ventriloquise the plight of those at the edges of civilization, but goes deeper to analyze and reflect upon how the power structures that engender marginalization are replicated in the texture of the society of the marginalized.” Outcast: Four Short Stories deals with the fate of four women characters who, belonging to the ‘Other’ world, are doubly marginalized and looked down upon even by those who are usually regarded as marginalized in Indian society.

Postcolonial criticism often detects and deconstructs the binary opposites inherent in power relations such as other-self, margin-center, and colonizer-colonized. In a discussion of colonial Indian fiction, Debendra K. Dash and Dipti R. Pattanaik, analyzing the nineteenth-century Oriya novel, Six Acres and a Third (Chha Mana Atha Guntha) by Fakirmohan Senapati, do find such binaries operating, but with a surprising narrative detachment. Since Fakirmohan Senapati was a colonial subject, Dash and Pattanaik ask, “why does [he] create a narrator who is so ubiquitous within the narrative yet so elusive when one tries to locate his real sympathies?” When Fakirmohan Senapati was born in 1843, the costal districts of Orissa had been occupied by the British for forty years, and British imperialism had brought immense changes in social structures and world views by the time he began publishing. His ‘literary activism’ was a response to the imposition of colonial administrative and cultural structures on a tradition-bound society, according to Dash and Pattanaik, who assert that Fakirmohan’s response, like that of many disempowered colonized subjects, was ambiguous. At the same time as he realized how British habits, tastes, culture, developmental ideology and world views were corroding the existing, tried-out mores of the natives, he saw how colonial rule brought order into a society on the verge of disorder. Unlike many Hindu nationalist writers or the champions of the colonial rule of the period who either imagined the recovery of a Hindu arcadia by eliminating the Muslim and Christian (British) aberrations or openly welcomed the developmental models introduced by the colonial administration, Dash and Pattanaik conclude that Fakirmohan did not see the world in terms of conventional binary oppositions. While ridiculing the arrogance of the

\textsuperscript{10} She says: “Wherever there is exploitation, I report it immediately. I write directly to the pertinent ministerial department. . . . I think a creative writer should have a social conscience. I have a duty toward society” (Devi xvi).
‘civilising mission,’ he also pointed to the superstitions, vulgarity, and meanness of internecine local conflicts. Fakirmohan Senapati reserved his most acidic observations not for the colonizer whose behaviour was, after all, fairly predictable, but for the growing compradore class and the hangers-on, all of whom were all too easily co-opted by the colonizer.

An important part of postcolonial literary criticism and theory has been the questioning of the established canon of English literature, even though, as Homi Bhabha has put it, “[t]he canonical ‘center’ may, indeed, be most interesting for its elusiveness, most compelling as an enigma of authority” (xi). The canon of English literature has been inextricably bound up with the Empire, and its world views and notions of power and domination have involved a derogation of indigenous peoples that has often been racist in nature. Even celebrated classics such as Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* and Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* have been criticized for their demeaning depictions of the Other. Chinua Achebe’s scathing critique of the racism in Conrad’s novel, for example, is well-known. The canon of English literature has ranked ‘Other’ literatures below itself. Commonwealth literature, for example, as John McLeod writes, “was really a sub-set of canonical English literature, evaluated in terms derived from the conventional study of English that stressed the values of timelessness and universality” (14). Canonization, of course, continues apace through critics’ selection and celebrations, or rejections, of new publications. Looking at the canonization of postcolonial literature, Sarah Brouillette argues in *Postcolonial Writers in the Global Literary Marketplace* (2007) that “several things characterize the postcolonial literature that achieves the greatest success in the current market: it is relatively ‘sophisticated’ or ‘complex’ and often anti-realist; it is politically liberal and suspicious of nationalism; it uses a language of exile, hybridity, and ‘mongrel’ subjectivity” (61). Literary prizes play an important role in the process of selection and canonization, a prominent example being the Man Booker Prize, awarded to outstanding fiction since the end of the 1960s. The prestige and promotion of and ambiguous role of the Booker prize has been scrutinized by postcolonial scholars and the “discrepancy . . . between the Booker’s postcolonial winner and the company’s high colonial background in the Caribbean sugar trade” has been noted (Huggan xii).

Indian literature, important in the English-speaking literary world for a long time, seems to have been particularly favored by the Booker Prize, something that has led scholars to wonder if this pre-eminence could be seen as linked more to a superficial, commercialized attraction to the exotic than a sincere wish to learn about ‘Other’ cultures. Indeed, as Amit Ray points out in his paper in this anthology on “‘Indianness’ and Contemporary Cosmopolitan Fictions: Of Bookers and ‘Spice’ and Everything Nice,” the Booker Prize “bears the name of a European multinational that owes its existence to colonial domination and is, arguably, still guilty of neo-imperial practices.” Why, then, the “disproportionate emphasis on India” among the authors
nominated and selected for the Booker Prize (among them Salman Rushdie and Arundhati Roy)? Analyzing the intricate interrelationships between literature, cultural fields and institutions, on the one hand, and capitalist production and consumption, on the other, and comparing the initial patterns of selection of the Booker Prize to that of the early Nobel Prize, Amit Ray, in disagreement with Aijiz Ahmad’s argument that the commercial success of postcolonial literature undermines its political (anti-colonial) message, suggests that “[i]f we read the act of consuming ‘Otherness’ in literature as a venture in Western narcissism, we risk negating the materiality of those representations” and thereby, possibly, losing touch with “the moments when ‘otherness’ comes to the fore in the established metropolitan institutions of Literary production” that “can allow for an increasingly nuanced historiography of the consolidating, centralizing, conflicted and impossible project of rationally ordering and narrating a human life-world.”

Issues of identity, such as the effects on identity of racial and gender discrimination, of dislocation and relocation, of exile and homecoming, are prominent themes in postcolonial fiction. One chapter in this anthology, “Identity Crisis in V.S. Naipaul’s A House for Mr. Biswas” by Kumar Parag, finds that the crisis of identity in postcolonial societies often seems to be more important than any other question. In the Caribbean context this issue has been acute. While the social identities of people are rooted in their culture, one’s identity at an individual level is formed by personal dreams and achievements. In order to achieve a sense of completeness it is necessary to fuse individual and social consciousness, something that is even more difficult in a colonial society like Trinidad. V.S. Naipaul, a diasporic writer who received the Nobel Prize for literature in 2001, is a product of this very society. One of his critically acclaimed works is A House for Mr. Biswas (1961), a novel depicting East Indians’ struggle to find a foothold in the New World. On several levels, the novel is a fictive version of Naipaul’s family history. The protagonist, Mohun Biswas, tries to overcome the limitations imposed on him by putting up a relentless struggle against the forces that aim to suppress his individuality. The manifest theme is the identity crisis, but on another level the cultural clashes within and the gradual disintegration of the East Indian community forms the major preoccupation. According to Parag, Mr. Biswas’ house is “a central, unifying and integrating metaphor [representing] a search for emancipation from dependence.” Although Naipaul’s novel has an autobiographical motif, in a deeper sense it succeeds in transcending the individual self by universalizing issues of alienation and rootlessness in a postcolonial world. Parag’s paper is an attempt to analyse the problems of identity crisis, displacement, and disintegration as well as the effects of colonialism on the culture and psyche of the colonized.

The role of the media in representations of local and global contexts is another increasingly important area in postcolonial studies. Today, the media is a major component in definitions and descriptions of culture, and our un-
derstanding of the role of the media is crucial for an understanding of power and domination. For example, the media can elevate some values and positions by positive coverage while eliminating others by denying them voice. In Denmark in 2006, the role and rights of the media and the representation of ethnic and religious groups in European news were widely discussed following the ill-advised publishing in *Jyllands-Posten* of what has subsequently been known as the ‘Mohammed cartoons.’ “Nothing in history has threatened Muslims like the Western media,” writes Akbar S. Ahmed in *Postmodernism and Islam: Predicament and Promise* (1992 223). Ahmed asserts that “Muslim parents blanch at the modern Western media” “because of their malignity and hostility towards Islam” (243). Taking Indian media as a case study, one of the papers in this anthology, “Globalization, Muslims, and the Indian Media” by Mirza Asmer Beg, argues that Muslims in India are disadvantaged when it comes to opportunities to articulate views about their own realities. Instead, their experiences and world views are reported through hostile and distorting filters. One consequence of this is that peace-loving Muslims become unjustly conflated with the very small minority who are rather more fanatic than they are religious. Muslim men are regarded as the oppressors of women who, in turn, are stereotyped as victimized, imprisoned, and enslaved. As to the supposedly ‘medieval’ and misogynist Islamic laws, Mirza Asmer Beg suggests that they be compared to the misogynist views espoused by some Hindu priests and some orthodox rabbis. Furthermore, the concept of divorce in Islam is often distorted in the media, according to Mirza Asmer Beg, whose paper goes on to analyze contemporary images and stereotypes of Muslims and Islam in the Indian media as they occur in reports on the number of Muslims in the Indian army, Muslim oppositions to a Uniform Civil Code, and Hindu and Muslim population growth.

Racism in Europe, as Masoud Kamali has pointed out, has always had links to religion. This was the case with twentieth-century anti-semitism, and this is also the case in the twenty-first century, although today, Muslims tend to be the main target of hostilities (12). While religion and the sacred have not been prominent matters in postcolonial studies until recently, they are now important items on the postcolonial agenda. One reason for the post-

---


12 This is evident in many new titles in religious studies from a postcolonial perspective. In their Introduction to *Postcolonialism, Feminism, and Religious Discourse* (New York: Routledge, 2002), for example, Laura E. Donaldson and Kwok Pui-lan, editors, write that while issues concerning religion and colonialism have been addressed in postcolonial studies, “[t]he interactions among colonialism, gender, and religion constitute some of the most sig-
colonial resistance to religion is no doubt the methods used by Christians in their so-called civilizing missions. Christianity has been used as a colonizing tool, something that is eloquently depicted in Chinua Achebe’s novel, *Things Fall Apart*. In contrast, postcolonialism has been secular, at times Marxist and at times nationalist, but rarely spiritual in impulse. While spirituality has been a conspicuous characteristic of new age thinking for decades, it is now becoming a more central feature in postcolonial studies. Postcolonialism, in other words, may be in the process not only of provincializing Europe but also of desecularizing itself, something that is not without pitfalls since the very terms ‘religion’ and ‘sacred’ are problematically imbued with western presuppositions.

Throughout history, the links between religious world views and the worldly exertion of power have been multiple and intricate, something that recent studies in religion have shown, and a postcolonial approach wishing to include voices hitherto submerged under Eurocentric political and religious rule has become more prevalent. But, just as the celebration of marginality may involve a commodification of literary and cultural products stemming from the postcolonial peripheries, and just as the exotic, as Graham Huggan (following Stephen Foster) has suggested, can be seen as a “symbolic system, domesticating the foreign,” “a control mechanism of cultural translation,” a “political as much as an aesthetic practice,” and, as such, “a highly effective instrument of imperial power,” Huggan has suggested that “[t]he exoticist rhetoric of fetishised otherness and sympathetic identification masks the inequality of the power relations without which the discourse could not function” (13, 14). In her well-known essay, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” (1988), Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak argues that postcolonial studies paradoxically risks perpetuating a neocolonial exploitation of the economically and politically dispossessed in the very gesture of speaking for these groups. A paper by David Thurfjell in the present volume, “Is the Islamist Voice Subaltern?” positing the Islamic voice as subaltern, contends that sociological explanations for religiosity given by scholars of religion sometimes actually impose the epistemic violence that Spivak discusses in her article. As Thurfjell emphasizes, the ambition to let the Other speak is far from easy to live up to. Thurfjell’s paper suggests that Islamism is “one of many responses to the colonial and post-colonial situations in the so-called Muslim world” today and that the radical Islamist movement, although perhaps not the most obvious, might be the most challenging example of a ‘subaltern’ voice in the postcolonial world, and that the Islamist movement has,

---

13 Writing about India, Ismail S. Talib points out in *The Language of Postcolonial Literatures: An Introduction* (2002) that “English literary education in India . . . was a way of imparting hidden quasi-Christian religious values to Indians” (11).
in fact, succeeded in ‘provincializing’ Europe by “providing an alternative center of moral, political and ontological focus among its adherents.”

According to another paper in this anthology, “Minority Concerns: Female Scholars at the Cultural Intersection,” Islamic studies in the West have been male-dominated. What light could a gender perspective shed on understandings of the reception in the West of Islamic and Arabic literature, culture, and spirituality? This question is posed in Saad A. Albazei’s paper, in which he points to the enthusiastic scholarship on Arabic culture by western scholars such as Dorothee Melitski and Maria Rosa Menochal, on the one hand, and, on the other, female scholars from the Arab world exploring Western literature and culture—Hoda El-Sadda, Rana Kabbani, and Hessa al-Ghader being stellar examples. Looking at the work of these scholars, Albazei discerns two “generations” among the western scholars who in their scholarly methodologies and political approaches mark a transition from Orientalism to postcoloniality, the first generation working in a philological and erudite tradition aiming for objectivity, and the second more involved in contemporary theory and resistance politics. Possibly, it has been easier for women scholars who have experienced subordinate and alienated positions themselves to be drawn to and sympathize with cultures that have been seen as alien and inferior, and to be able to recognize that, just as women’s contributions to literature and culture have been dismissed and disrespected, the greatness of the Arabo-Islamic culture and its importance for the development of Western civilization has gone uncelebrated and unsung. The Arab and Muslim women scholars discussed in Albazei’s paper are Occidentals in the sense that their work focuses on Western literature and culture, but not in terms of placing it in contentious opposition to Arabo-Islamic literature and culture. The sympathetic scholarly and intercultural criss-crossings explored in Saad A. Albazei’s paper are much needed in today’s increasingly polarized world.

In this context, it is appropriate to remind ourselves of the purposes and consequences of different forms of knowledge production. In “Orientalism 25 Years Later,” Edward Said suggests that, on the one hand, “there is a difference between knowledge of other peoples and other times that is the result of understanding, compassion, careful study and analysis for their own sakes, and on the other hand knowledge that is part of an overall campaign of self-affirmation.” Said points to the “profound difference between the will to understand for purposes of co-existence and enlargement of horizons, and the will to dominate for the purposes of control” (Said 2003). Fittingly, the final paper in this anthology is charting a challenging pedagogic move in the direction of a “democratic epistemology”: Elias Schwieler’s “Reading The English Patient: Teaching and Difference” explores Sri Lankan-Canadian writer Michael Ondaatje’s novel from the perspective of a postcolonial pedagogics considering the didactic implications of teaching this novel. Building on Foucault’s notion of heterotopia and Carl Schmitt’s The Con-
cept of the Political, Schwieler analyzes the eponymous character and the indeterminate and heterotopical metaphor of the desert in the novel in terms of sameness and difference and suggests that the desert in *The English Patient* could be compared with the teaching situation, “where learning means to colonize knowledge, to circumscribe it, and determine it, to map it as an untouched desert, according to an ideology reminiscent of, if not colonialism, then at least of Orientalism.” Just as Øyunn Hestetun (in her paper for this anthology) makes a plea for a responsive *and* responsible reading, Elias Schwieler, calling for a “responsible knowledge,” examines the relationships between teaching, knowledge and colonialism and asks us to question our structures of teaching. How can concerns about history, (national) identity, and the sovereignty of nation states be incorporated into the teaching of textual analysis? Schwieler goes on to explore how the figure of the desert functions as a critical questioning of history, identity, and the sovereignty of nation states in *The English Patient*. Since Almásy, the English patient, “speaks by not speaking of/to/as the subaltern,” Schwieler finds that Ondaatje’s novel “gives voice to the excluded,” something that can be seen as part of a “foundation of a democratic epistemology.”

Highlighting responsive and responsible reading practices, postcolonial forms of magic realism, democratic epistemology, demonized Others, the Others of the Others, critical insiders and subaltern voices, metonymic cross-writing and cultural criss-crossings—to mention but a few of the many concerns and foci of the papers, scholars in this anthology engage with issues of empowerment and disempowerment, tensions between modernity and tradition, and ideas of development and progress as connected to understandings of race, gender, caste, subalternity, and religion. Relying upon different methodologies and theoretical terminologies and paying implicit or explicit critical attention to the field of postcolonial studies itself, the papers in this anthology deal with a wide variety of colonial and postcolonial fictional and non-fictional sources and texts. Imaginative empathy (to come back to Boehmer’s phrase) may not take us far enough, but, along with a recognition of the contradictions and conflicts of diversity, it may be a valid point of departure for an anthology that, wishing to avoid homogenizing, depoliticizing, and neo-orientalizing approaches, would like to welcome a sympathetic scholarly intermingling across borders and disciplines of study.

Stellenbosch, South Africa, July 2007

---

14 In *The Chutnification of History: Salman Rushdie, Michael Ondaatje, Bharati Mukherjee and the Postcolonial Debate*, Mita Banerjee has suggested that Almásy, the English patient, is like a “space of oblivion”—“the faceless patient is everything and nothing, everyone and no one at the same time. As an empty space to be filled, he is, like the desert, a void onto which the personality of the watcher is projected, at the same time, however, he evades all attempts on the part of other to contain him, to fix him into language” (152).
Works Cited

Adams, Sheena. “His Political Astuteness is Eclipsed by Fame: Madiba’s True Leg-


Ahmed, Akbar S. Postmodernism and Islam: Predicament and Promise. London: 


Appiah, Kwame Anthony. In My Father’s House: Africa in the Philosophy of Cul-

Ahmed, Akbar S. Postmodernism and Islam: Predicament and Promise. London: 

Bhabha, Homi K. The Location of Culture. 1994. With a new preface by the author.


Bourouma, Ian, and Avishai Margalit. Occidentalism: The West in the Eyes of Its Ene-

Brouillette, Sarah. Postcolonial Writers in the Global Literary Marketplace. New 


Çayir, Kenan. Islamic Literature in Contemporary Turkey. New York: Palgrave 


Catomeris, Christian. “‘Svartmuskiga bandittyper’—svenskarna och det mörka 
häret.” In Orientalism på svenska. Ed. Moa Matthis. Stockholm: Ordfront, 


Devi, Mahasweta. Imaginary Maps: Three Stories by Mahasweta Devi. Trans. Intro-
duction. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. New York and London: Routledge, 

1995.

Dirlik, Arif. “The Postcolonial Aura: Third World Criticism in the Age of Global 


Donaldson, Laura E., and Kwok Pui-lan. Postcolonialism, Feminism, and Religious 


Durrant, Sam. Postcolonial Narrative and the Work of Mourning: J.M. Coetzee, 

Wilson Harris, and Toni Morrison. New York: State U of New York P, 

2004.


Gilbert, Sandra M., and Susan Gubar. The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman 

Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination. New Haven and 


