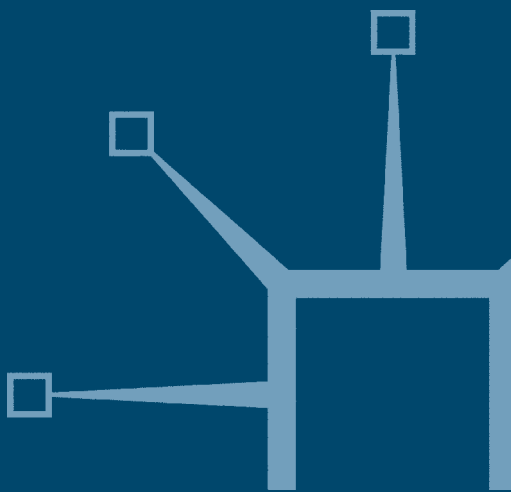
palgrave
macmillan

Postcolonial Studies and the Literary

Theory, Interpretation and the Novel

Eli Park Sorensen



Postcolonial Studies and the Literary

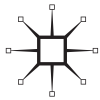
This page intentionally left blank

Postcolonial Studies and the Literary

Theory, Interpretation and the Novel

Eli Park Sorensen

palgrave
macmillan



First published 2010 by
PALGRAVE MACMILLAN

Palgrave Macmillan in the UK is an imprint of Macmillan Publishers Limited, registered in England, company number 785998, of Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire RG21 6XS.

Palgrave Macmillan in the US is a division of St Martin's Press LLC, 175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010.

Palgrave Macmillan is the global academic imprint of the above companies and has companies and representatives throughout the world.

Palgrave® and Macmillan® are registered trademarks in the United States, the United Kingdom, Europe and other countries.

ISBN 978–0–230–25262–2 hardback

This book is printed on paper suitable for recycling and made from fully managed and sustained forest sources. Logging, pulping and manufacturing processes are expected to conform to the environmental regulations of the country of origin.

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Sorensen, Eli Park, 1979–
Postcolonial studies and the literary : theory, interpretation and the novel / Eli Park Sorensen.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 978–0–230–25262–2
1. Commonwealth fiction (English)—History and criticism. 2. Postcolonialism in literature. 3. Literature—Philosophy. 4. Criticism. 5. Sembène, Ousmane, 1923–2007. 6. Coetzee, J. M., 1940– 7. Mistry, Rohinton, 1952– I. Title.
PR9084.S65 2010
820.9'358—dc22

2010007411

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1
19 18 17 16 15 14 13 12 11 10

Printed and bound in Great Britain by
CPI Antony Rowe, Chippenham and Eastbourne

For Hee-Sook and Saerom

This page intentionally left blank

Contents

Acknowledgements

The research for this book began in 2004, and I am grateful for the invaluable help I received from Professor Celia Britton, FBA, whose sharp intellect and vast experience I benefited from immensely. My gratitude goes to Professor Nicholas Harrison for thorough and elaborate comments on my manuscript. I would also like to thank Professor Derek Attridge, FBA, Dr Pamela Thurschwell and Professor Timothy Mathews who commented on earlier drafts.

A shorter version of Chapter 1 of this book was published as 'Postcolonial Melancholia' in *Paragraph* 30:2 (2007); an edited version of Chapter 3 was published as 'Novelistic Interpretation: The Travelling Theory of Georg Lukács's *Theory of the Novel*' in *Journal of Narrative Theory* 39:1 (2009); a shorter version of Chapter 4 was published as 'Form and Temporality in Ousmane Sembène's *Xala*' in *Research in African Literatures* 41:2 (2006); parts of Chapter 5 were published as 'Arcades of Foreignness: J. M. Coetzee's *Foe*' in *Peer English* 2 (2007); and finally a portion of Chapter 6 was published as 'Excess and Design in Rohinton Mistry's *A Fine Balance*' in *NOVEL* 41:2–3 (2008). I am grateful to the editors for permission to republish the aforementioned parts.

Introduction

Until recently, thinking about aesthetics, literariness and literary form within the field of postcolonial studies would have seemed hopelessly reactionary and contradictory. This book analyses some of the reasons for this aversion, while suggesting that postcolonial studies needs to return to a discussion of the literary – above all because literary texts still occupy a central role within the discipline. Literary texts have played a key role in the development of many of the field's political imperatives, and my book begins with a discussion of some of the typical ways in which literary texts have been used to sustain and support the distinctiveness of a postcolonial framework. One of my arguments is that the relationship between the dimension of postcolonial literariness and postcolonial studies as an academic discipline involves a potential but also a risk; it involves a potential insofar as both parts may enrich each other, but also the risk that one part may become radically undermined by the other.

The discipline of postcolonial studies has contributed in important ways to the rethinking of how we understand the notion of literariness today. A widely accepted notion among many postcolonial critics today is that literary texts are valuable, not so much for their literary qualities, but rather their depiction of representative minority experience and formulations of strategies of resistance. But even if many postcolonial critics today categorically dismiss the dimension of the literary, I argue that one often finds a tacit set of aesthetic values and norms at work in readings of postcolonial texts that legitimise ways in which postcolonial critics *use* literary texts. I refer to this underlying set of aesthetic values as 'the modernist ethos', which more specifically designates the formulaic acceptance of a 'correspondence' between a vocabulary of political concepts and modernist aesthetic techniques, such as, for example, excessive formal disruptions, meta-fictive strategies and complex language games.

I argue that this formula often involves an uncritical 'leap', which translates the literary dimension into a corresponding vocabulary of political concepts and imperatives in a regulative and simplifying way. This formula has contributed to what I see as the institutionalisation of contemporary postcolonial studies. The modernist ethos, dominating postcolonial literary criticism today (that is, poststructuralist-, postmodernist-, and

Marxist-oriented versions of postcolonial literary criticism), involves an interpretational problematic; it involves a loss of distance in relation to certain literary texts that are selected, canonised and seen as representative of the political claims that the field of postcolonial studies makes, but selected only insofar as they correspond to, and thus support and legitimise, these claims. As such, much postcolonial literature is typically read in a dogmatic and prescriptive way, while the discipline has increasingly become homogenised. In one sense, this development can be seen as a sign of success; today the field of postcolonial studies occupies an authoritative position of power, no longer situated along the margins of literary studies but at its centre. In another sense, this development is a sign of failure – a failure which, I argue, becomes evident in the relation between postcolonial studies and literary texts.

As a consequence of institutionalisation, leading critics have in recent years observed an emergent sense of 'melancholia' in the field; a melancholic awareness of the loss of an identity that is genuinely critical and radical. I link this notion of loss to the field's regulative and prescriptive use of literary texts. Contemporary postcolonial melancholia can thus be interpreted as an awareness of the problematic way in which postcolonial literary texts have been used as a legitimising device, a critical construction. What is lost in this critical construction, I argue, is the specificity of the literary.

My argument is inspired by what I see as a recent movement in postcolonial studies, namely the return to a focus on literariness and literary form. This movement includes works such as Gayatri Spivak's *Death of a Discipline* (2003), Deepika Bahri's *Native Intelligence* (2003), Nicholas Harrison's *Postcolonial Criticism* (2003), Derek Attridge's *The Singularity of Literature* (2004) and *J. M. Coetzee: The Ethics of Reading* (2004), Neil Lazarus's 'The Politics of Postcolonial Modernism' (2005), and Nicholas Brown's *Utopian Generations* (2005). These works offer vital arguments for a renewed focus on the importance of literary form within postcolonial studies. My argument differs from these works in the sense that I do not see the role of the postcolonial literary dimension as being neglected; rather, I argue that it operates tacitly, legitimising a correspondence between certain literary strategies and certain political imperatives (what I refer to as the modernist ethos). The potential danger inherent in these recent works – attempting to trace postcolonial melancholia while at the same time calling for a renewed attention toward the literary dimension – is that they may possibly repeat, albeit no longer *tacitly* but *explicitly*, what I see as institutionalised formulas that legitimise certain correspondences between modernist literary

techniques and a vocabulary of political concepts. What is required, I argue, is a widening of the literary and political codifications operating either tacitly or explicitly in contemporary postcolonial studies. That is to say, it is vital to develop a critical perspective that is broad enough to include literary forms not necessarily corresponding to the modernist ethos, and thus not necessarily corresponding, in an 'agreeable' way, to the dominating socio-political dogmas promoted by postcolonial studies – literary forms such as realism, which has often been misread and caricatured by many postcolonial critics.

Attempting to develop such a critical perspective, not in an exhaustive way but as a tentative suggestion for a possible future direction of postcolonial studies, I revisit some aspects of the trajectory of Georg Lukács's works, from the early *The Theory of the Novel* (published in 1920) to his realist writings from the thirties. The aim of this book is not a revision of Lukács's work as such (thus, for example, my book is not a wholehearted defence of Lukács), but rather a pragmatic attempt to re-activate some of the theoretical concerns that occupied Lukács throughout his career within the context of postcoloniality, and with the distinct aim of foregrounding some of the theoretical impasses in postcolonial theory (rather than in Lukács's oeuvre); my use of Lukács should be seen as an attempt to approach, with a specific eye to the needs of postcoloniality, an *alternative* notion of the literary which – for reasons that I will discuss at length – has been neglected in much postcolonial literary criticism.

In *The Theory of the Novel*, Lukács identifies what I see as a utopian-interpretive realist *ideal* in the novelistic form; according to the early Lukács, novelistic form consists of a sequence of events or parts that are always-already interpreted as being *in relation* to each other (even if a given relation may be interpreted as a non-relation), and which in sum form a narrative totality; the parts or events remain, however, only abstractly related to each other or, indeed, *interpreted* as being related, and as such they form an *ironic* totality. Through the construction of this ironic totality, the utopian-interpretive realist ideal *works through* relations, codifications and constellations, generating what Lukács sees as a glimpse of epic truth, which is also a point at which interpretation as such ceases, that is, where every part is truthfully and organically determined by the whole (albeit a point which can only be glimpsed, not reached).

In the later Lukács's realist writings from the thirties, *The Threory of the Novel*'s realist ideal is repeated, but notably in a circumscribed way – not so much an *ideal* as an extra-literary, dogmatic *norm*.

This trajectory serves as a useful comparative background against which one may observe and analyse some of the problems characterising the contemporary field of postcolonial studies, which, after its idealistic beginning, has become increasingly dogmatic. Returning to the literary in postcolonial studies, I argue, may draw significant inspiration from the trajectory of Lukács's work, both as an implicit warning against the dangers of institutionalisation, *and* as a revaluation of the importance of the literary, as a utopian-interpretive realist ideal.

In the last three chapters, I provide readings of three postcolonial novels, each using a different literary modality, through which I develop my critique of some of the problematics and limitations in postcolonial studies, while drawing on Lukács's notion of the utopian-interpretive realist ideal in an attempt to move beyond what I have referred to as the modernist ethos in postcolonial studies. The first novel I discuss is Ousmane Sembène's *Xala* (1973), which I read as a text that attempts to explore disjointed levels which can only be reconnected negatively, through the symbolic figure of the xala (meaning the curse of impotence). The novelistic dynamic of *Xala* brings together different narrative constellations, mutually cancelling each other out, in an effort to expose the absence of an adequate, representative form; an absence that reverberates as the haunting spectacle of Senegalese post-independence history itself. In Chapter 5, I turn to J. M. Coetzee's *Foe* (1986), one of the most read and discussed texts in postcolonial studies. The chapter focuses on postcolonial modernism and canonisation, which I critically investigate through a discussion of the question of the literary within a postcolonial perspective. I argue that *Foe* is a novel that explores the limits of literary representation, but also a novel that to some extent avoids taking interpretive risks. *Foe* has often been read as an example of postcolonial 'writing back to the centre', and I discuss the implications of such a reading, arguing that to categorise the novel as a strategy of 'writing back' may also lead to a limited appreciation of the text's literary dimension. In the final chapter of the book, I focus more specifically on what can be seen as an 'orthodox' realist postcolonial text, namely Rohinton Mistry's *A Fine Balance*. Mistry's novel offers a micro-cosmos of the complex and intricate relationship between individual characters and larger, historical-political forces and dynamics. I argue that Mistry's text attempts to *work through* and *establish* connections between elements which, in themselves, are apparently meaningless or enigmatic – a work which precisely is achieved through the novel's *realist* dynamic. Mistry's realist form provides an interpretational schematic that enables the reader to develop a sense of how

the coordinates of history are experienced at various levels within a postcolonial context.

My book should first and foremost be seen as a critical investigation of some of the limits and dangers of the contemporary academic field of postcolonial studies, as well as an attempt to formulate a possible future direction by focusing on literariness. Returning to the literary, I argue, may lead to an alternative appreciation of the more *constructive* aspects at stake in the literary work – rather than merely focusing on literature's deconstructive qualities – while at the same time illuminating and clarifying some of the interests, stakes and claims involved in the complex relationship between a given theoretical framework and literary texts.

Part I

This page intentionally left blank

1
The Melancholia of Postcolonial Studies

> The forms of the artistic genres are not arbitrary. On the contrary, they grow out of the concrete determinacy of the particular social and historical conditions.[1]

> The most profoundly social aspect of literature is its form, as the young Lukács once insolently put it (before he grew up, and forgot).[2]

Literary form and postcolonial studies

Hardly anyone today takes the relationship between the 'forms of artistic genres' and 'particular social and historical conditions' as seriously as Georg Lukács apparently did. Nowadays it has become common to view the study of literary form with suspicion – as a de-historicising, and therefore problematic, activity. 'Form', W. J. T. Mitchell writes, 'seems at best to belong to the merely instrumental sphere of means.' That the concept of form seems anachronistic is in part due to what Mitchell observes as the 'emergence of a committed scholarship, one that sees the work of art (like culture, society, and politics) as a constructed entity, an arbitrary assemblage of parts, and not as an organic form governed by inner necessities' (322). If there is little interest in literary form within contemporary literary debates, this is *particularly* the case in postcolonial studies. As postcolonial studies from an overall point of view has tended to focus its energies around formulations of radical critiques of discourses of power,[3] it is perhaps not surprising that very few postcolonial literary analyses have engaged with an actual postcolonial poetics of literature, in which literary *form*, and not just certain isolated formal aspects, is prioritised.

The general suspicion with which a concept like literary form has been regarded within the discipline of postcolonial literary criticism is closely linked to considerations of the undoubtedly precarious combination of social concerns and artistic norms which, at an initial glance, forms the *raison d'être* of many of the so-called postcolonial novelists, burdened by a political demand of aesthetic 'liberation in the name of generations of the downtrodden' (Benjamin, *Illuminations*: 251). Faced with the overwhelming task of voicing the history of the oppressed, it may appear not only as a superfluous luxury for writers, critics and readers to dwell on aspects such as literary form and the specificity of literature, but equally troublesome as well in an ethical sense; to argue for the importance of the formal dimension of a literary work as such has sometimes been accused of constituting a smokescreen for ideological positions reinforcing Eurocentric notions.

These accusations have contributed valuable reflections to the debate about the function and importance of modes of aesthetic representativity. In the hugely influential study *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient* from 1978 – one of the founding texts in the field of postcolonial studies – Edward Said demonstrates how the institutions of western aesthetics, and literary texts in particular, in some cases helped to sustain an ideologically distorted mode of representing cultural otherness. From another perspective, Gauri Viswanathan has in the book *Masks of Conquest: Literary Study and British Rule in India* (1990) illustrated ways in which 'the discipline of English came into its own in an age of colonialism' (2), and furthermore how English literature played a crucial role in supporting and developing an imperialist ideological discourse. As John Beverley sums up:

> Literature provided the British with a way of negotiating the contradictions internal to their own project between Parliament, the missionaries, and the East India Company, between the colonial administration and the Indian elites in their various caste and sectarian configurations, and between these elites in turn (who above their ethnic and religious differences could share through English literature a common model of cultural excellence and ethical superiority) and the Indian subaltern classes. What allowed it to play this mediating function in the colonies was precisely its *distance* as a 'modern', secularized, cultural practice from religious dogma and traditional cultures. (Beverley: 26–27)

The interrogation of canonical literature's complicity with imperialist ideology forms an important perspective in postcolonial literary

criticism. Simultaneously, the field has had a considerable impact on the development and critical reception of new literatures from former colonies. Indeed, following up on both Said's and Viswanathan's arguments, Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin – in their equally hugely influential book *The Empire Writes Back* (2002) – suggest that it is precisely the emergence of postcolonial literatures that has urged the field of literary studies to interrogate 'the canonical nature and unquestioned status of the works of the English literary tradition and the values they incorporated' (4). Although the process of demystifying a Eurocentric literary tradition cannot of course solely be attributed to the rise of postcoloniality, *The Empire Writes Back* points to a potential of the literary text, which to some extent is similar to what Jameson has seen as the 'different ratio of the political to the personal' (Jameson, 'Third-World': 69); whereas the political dimension in many contemporary western novels is like a 'pistol shot in the middle of a concert' (Stendhal, quoted in 'Third-World': 69), Jameson argues, the 'third-world' text's clearly marked emphasis on a politicised mode of representation demands a rethinking of what is usually discussed and valorised as literary qualities.

This process of rethinking literary values seems, however, to many postcolonial critics largely to be a closed chapter by now. After the virulent attacks on the traditional humanist notions of the aesthetic and the literary, it has become something of a taboo to raise aesthetic-formal concerns that go beyond those already formulated within postcolonial studies. Literary departments may still be leading the field of postcolonial studies, but the *literary*, as John Brenkman argues, seems to have become 'little more than the buzzword of those English department sentimentalists who proudly, defiantly announce their love of literature' (116). Few would disagree – as Helen Tiffin points out – that '[We] no longer subscribe to the belief that a literary text can be isolated from the contexts out of which it was produced, or from the historical conditions of its production' ('Commonwealth': 26). For many postcolonial critics, Tiffin continues, this means that to study literary form as one's primary purpose reinforces 'imperialist politics implicit in the "universalist" claims of European literary criticism' (26). Arun Mukherjee formulates a typical view when she argues that to focus on form may lead to a Eurocentric perspective, comparing (often unfavourably) western and non-western texts, which leaves 'no time for dealing with the specificity of … [non-western] texts' ('Vocabulary': 346). Such an approach would not only depoliticise those texts, but also, as Tiffin argues, render 'them derivative or subsidiary' ('Commonwealth': 28).

Given the field's strong disciplinary affiliations with a number of other theoretical discourses, the marginalisation of a focus on the literary in postcolonial studies shares certain similarities with concerns raised in, for example, feminism and Marxism. Tracing the marginal position of aesthetics in Marxist criticism, Michèle Barrett argues: 'It is not that Marxism has failed to develop a tradition of work on aesthetics but rather that such concerns are currently out of fashion and, indeed, are often seen as politically reprehensible' (697). The influence of ideological concerns has been one reason, Barrett argues, for the neglect and limitations of aesthetic inquiries. Another, and to some extent related, reason is the dominance of structuralism, poststructuralism and deconstruction, that is, critical perspectives emphasising 'the text's internal powers of meaning construction' as well as 'the multiplicity of readings available in consumption' (699). This dominance has, however, also introduced what Barrett sees as a 'principled relativism of the aesthetic' (701), which is dangerous because it leaves out 'a range of important questions connected with cultural and aesthetic *experience*' (699), such as for example what is experienced as subversive, and for what particular reasons. To put it in a crude way – should a popular work of art be deemed as equally subversive as, say, a Rembrandt and, if so, should they be deemed as equals in terms of value? What is needed in Marxist criticism, Barrett argues, is 'to engage with the widely held belief that one work is "better" than another and produce convincing arguments either about why this is not so or about what it is based upon' (701). Otherwise, she warns, the aesthetic is too easily reduced to an ideologically prescriptive set of evaluative codes.

There are a number of symptomatic overlaps between Barrett's critique of the marginalised dimension of the aesthetic within the field of Marxist criticism, and the equally marginalised dimension of the literary within the field of postcolonial studies. The tendency to ignore questions of the specificity of literature in postcolonial literary criticism has produced a large amount of analyses and interpretations of literature that function as pretexts for discussing extra-literary phenomena, that is, using literature in an instrumental way 'as a means to broad cultural conclusions' (Levine: 5), such as representational strategies of minority experience as well as figures of historical and national consciousness – and which possibly, as Terry Eagleton polemically has remarked, have come close to resembling a 'good old-fashioned content analysis' ('Gaudy Supermarket': 4). Although one may object that there is an important distinction between the content analysis of postcolonial literary criticism and earlier forms of humanist-impressionistic literary

criticism, Eagleton's comment touches upon an important, yet largely neglected, issue.

At the same time, it is important to clarify here that it is far from the case that aesthetic-literary concerns have played no relevance within the field of postcolonial studies. A closer investigation of aesthetic-literary concerns, I argue, would implicitly raise a series of important questions, such as what literary aspects are valued, directly or indirectly, in terms of the objectives of the postcolonial, and which objectives would have influence on this process of value-coding.[4] Alison Donnell has observed:

> Although postcolonial scholarship developed in opposition to prescriptive modes of thought, the consolidation and institutionalization of its works would seem to have generated in some respects an unhelpful homogenization of political intent and a stifling consensus of 'good' practice. (101)

Some of these aspects involve predictable canonisations of 'resistant subjects and rebellious discourses' (101), that is, 'a preference for perfect political credentials' (102), followed by a neglect of writers whose works are not disengaged from colonial culture in an explicitly self-conscious way; this situation, Donnell argues, 'not only condemns writers to dismal and oppressed self-defining narratives but burdens readers with a baggage of unresolved cultural sensitivities, and critics with a tireless round of congratulations and careful critiques' (102). If, as many postcolonial critics argue, the aesthetic in its narrow definition no longer plays any determining role in relation to the subversive qualities of postcolonial literary texts (or non-subversive qualities in relation to canonical texts), would an *aesthetically* 'conventional' text be regarded as equally valuable in relation to the postcolonial *political* imperatives? According to Martina Michel, the texts being most often canonised as representative of postcoloniality 'tend to be texts that satisfy Western (post-modern) criteria of evaluation. They are experimental, make extensive use of irony, resist closure, question traditional boundaries, employ intertextual strategies' (85). A brief glance through many contemporary postcolonial literary analyses would confirm this argument, which furthermore demonstrates that aesthetic-literary concerns and standards still play a vital role, and that, for example, realism is indeed not as highly valued as magical realism; while this or that author is being praised for employing specific textual strategies that allegedly are subversive or representative within a postcolonial situation, other

more conventional authors are often being ignored, and thus implicitly deemed less representative of the postcolonial.[5]

The modernist ethos

To investigate deeper how aesthetic-literary concerns have played a vital, albeit ambiguous, role in postcolonial studies, I want to focus on what Martina Michel has seen as the preference for a particular kind of literary work. However, whereas Michel refers to what she sees as the dominance of postmodernist criteria, I will refer to this preference as the 'modernist ethos'. In my formulation of this notion, I follow some of the critical arguments that Raymond Williams, in the posthumously published work *The Politics of Modernism: Against the New Conformists*, has directed toward the politics of modernism – what he sees as a paradigm that is hegemonic in its organising principles, and which has monopolised literary, technical effects that are claimed to be subversive and transgressive. Equally, I follow in part Aijaz Ahmad's critique of the 'canonical status of modernism' (*In Theory*: 124) as a legislative paradigm monopolising a 'correct' version of the postcolonial text that raises canonised questions, while marginalising or excluding 'texts which do not ask those particular questions in any foregrounded manner' (124).[6] As will become clearer during the course of my argument, I am using the adjective 'modernist' rather than 'postmodernist' (although the way it is used suggests a number of overlaps) primarily because I want to include *both* postmodernist- and poststructuralist-oriented postcolonial criticism, *and* Marxist-materialist-oriented versions of the postcolonial perspective, two positions often formulated as oppositions, but nonetheless both inspired by many of the practices and assumptions developed within modernist discourse.

Modernist discourse is a notoriously large and confusing category, encompassing much of what has generally come to pass for 'serious literature' in the twentieth century – from avant-garde, postmodernism and even realism.[7] By 'modernist ethos' – as distinct from modernist discourse – I refer to the *fetishisation* of characteristically modernist literary techniques (such as linguistic self-consciousness and formal disruption), as these are seen as the equivalents to specific political values of postcolonial imperatives *as such*. However, I am *not* criticising self-reflective modernist textuality in itself, but rather the uncritical *fetishisation* of this practice within a postcolonial perspective. Thus, my notion of the modernist ethos does not include an acceptance of Fredric Jameson's claim that postmodernism is a commodified version of what was once modernist

avant-garde – that is, the thesis that postmodernism is modernism but 'integrated into commodity production' (*Postmodernism*: 4). Nor does the modernist ethos refer to the notion – particularly dominant among anti-formalists – that, as John Marx formulates it, 'the more complex the language, the narrower its social impact' (8).

The modernist ethos thus designates a deliberately broad notion that I will return to at various points in the following, and which I will use to describe what I see as a characteristic ambiguity within postcolonial literary criticism. This ambiguity can be illuminated in the following way; in the light of what Martina Michel has listed as characteristic traits of contemporary texts (such as 'experimental', 'ironic', 'open-ended' and 'intertextual') that are seen as representative of postcoloniality, postcolonial texts that do not show these traits in any foregrounded manner come across as conventional and outmoded.[8] Insofar as these texts *have* been discussed as positive examples of postcoloniality, I would argue, postcolonial critics have tended to ignore questions of form, style, and rhetoric altogether (thus avoiding seeing these texts as outmoded from a formal point of view),[9] while instead focusing on extra-literary matters. Influenced negatively by a modernist ethos, postcolonial critics have thus tended to be suspicious of a focus on literary form regarding so-called conventional texts. Simultaneously with this tendency, one finds in postcolonial criticism a more positive influence of the modernist ethos at work in connection with experimental texts which in *formal* ways formulate subversive strategies of resistance. 'Form', however, is perhaps not the most frequently used word any more, as John Carlos Rowe has pointed out: today 'form' seems to connote 'a transcendental essence', thus implying 'certain undesirable *metaphysical* and *ontological* associations from Plato to Kant' (25). What has happened, Rowe argues, is that form has been exchanged with 'structure' (or 'text' in the post-structuralist sense), which, as W. J. T. Mitchell has observed, emphasises 'the artificial, constructed character of cultural forms and defuses the idealist and organicist overtones that surround the concept of form' (321). In this sense, one could argue that although extra-literary aspects have tended to dominate critical analyses, textual-literary aspects have equally been addressed in postcolonial studies. However, I agree here with John Brenkman who observes that the contemporary discourse of gender/race/class criticism suffers from a 'loss of form' precisely because it has tended to focus on the literary text's 'network of signifiers in search of its purported representation', while primarily identifying 'social contents and political context' (120). One could see this 'loss of form' as particularly evident in the kind of postcolonial criticism which apparently *does*

engage with formal aspects of the literary text – performing what I see as a 'tacit', allegorising leap, and by which I refer to the uncritical *assumption* that a set of politically subversive concepts corresponds to formal disruption, meta-fictive strategies and labyrinths of narrative structures.[10]

These two approaches to literary texts embody what I see as an ambiguity in much postcolonial literary criticism or what one could see as a kind of schizophrenia; that is, a textual approach to allegedly 'experimental' works – and a thematic, content-based approach to so-called 'conventional' texts,[11] which, as Benita Parry observes, are often 'deemed uncongenial to metropolitan taste', and therefore typically remain 'un-translated and largely un-discussed within the academies' ('Directions': 71–72). Characteristic for both approaches is what I see as a tacit consensus about literary politics, a consensus which more concretely is expressed through either a *neglect* of form, or a *prescriptive* and *pre-critical* notion of literary form; in both approaches, the literary is typically decoded according to a set of extra-literary criteria.

To illuminate this problematic further, I briefly want to use Marxism again as a comparative background. Discussing the revalorised status of modernism within the field of Marxism, Franco Moretti notes a certain loss of distance between Marxist interpretative theories (Marxist criticism inspired by, for example, Bakhtin's work, Russian Formalism and deconstruction) and their favoured ('experimental' or 'open') literary texts, both belonging to what he sees as a modernist paradigm, and thus together producing a kind of hermeneutical blindness, or an 'interpretive vicious circle' ('Indecision': 339). Within this perspective, Moretti argues, Marxism has come close to resembling an 'Apology for Modernism'. Whereas for Adorno and Benjamin, 'open' or 'fragmented' texts were associated 'with melancholy, pain, defenselessness, and loss of hope', such texts would today 'suggest the far more exhilarating concepts of semantic freedom, detotalization, and productive heterogeneity' (339). What troubles Moretti, however, is that the indeterminacy, plurality, irony and ambiguity of modernist texts are often seen as 'valuable *as such*, not as a starting point from which to move toward a definite choice' (340–341). By focusing on the absence of a movement toward a 'definitive choice', Moretti points toward the effects of this 'interpretive vicious circle', namely what he calls the *spell of indecision*. The dominant view that 'modernist literature is subversive of the modern bourgeois worldview' (339) appears to Moretti as an unconvincing argument:

> There is no doubt that 'open' texts contradict and subvert organicistic beliefs, but it remains to be seen whether, as is now widely and

> uncritically assumed, in the past century the hegemonic frame of mind has not in fact abandoned organicism and replaced it with openness and irony. (339)

The foregrounding of indecision as a literary quality or value in its own right is to Moretti ultimately an expression of the 'complicity between modernist irony and indifference to history' (343).

Turning to the field of postcolonial literary criticism, Moretti's reflections correspond to what I referred to earlier as a 'leap' in many analyses of postcolonial texts – the automatic equation of modernist techniques with political radicalism. The direct implications of this leap are partly reflected in the remarkably narrow list of postcolonial canonical works, that is, works being discussed, studied and taught in postcolonial courses – of which, as Neil Lazarus polemically has argued, the example *par excellence* must be Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*: 'I am tempted to overstate the case, for purposes of illustration, and declare that there is in a strict sense only one author in the postcolonial literary canon. That author is Salman Rushdie' ('Postcolonial Modernism': 424). That many postcolonial critics continuously reread and repeat their points about this novel, rich in stylistic and formal inventions, together with a handful of other recurring works, seems to exemplify the discrepancy, or perhaps even to some extent incompatibility, between many of the norms within the field of postcolonial studies, and a large part of what can be labelled as postcolonial literature.[12]

Postcolonial critics who eschew an engagement with literary form or structure, on the other hand, tend to prefer a novel like Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. Both Achebe and Rushdie's novels seem to fulfil a set of generalised expectations, either negatively or positively influenced by a modernist ethos, of what constitutes radical postcolonial values as conveyed through literary texts. To elaborate on Lazarus's 'overstatement', I argue that insofar as postcolonial critics emphasise *formal* or *rhetorical* aspects as literary values, these values are to a large extent decoded in 'prescriptive' terms, such as allegorical tropes of modes of resistance, subversion and emancipation, whereas insofar as critics stress more thematic and sociological aspects of literary texts, there is a tendency to decode literary values in more 'descriptive' terms, that is, terms such as authenticity and representativity. I put the words 'prescriptive' and 'descriptive' in quotation marks as they should not be understood as absolute, distinctive procedures, but rather as indications of the parameters of extra-literary values underlying both perspectives.[13]

The postcolonial perspective

In an editorial to an issue of the journal *Postcolonial Studies*, Amanda MacDonald presents a series of questions directed toward the critical perspective of postcolonial studies: 'Does postcolonial studies really know, in a methodologically and/or theoretically sustained manner, why it matters to pay attention to particular representations or to representation as a category of phenomenon?' – and, a little later: 'Does it understand the relationship between sign-system effects and the effects of power that it describes? Has it sufficiently refined its taxonomy of powers? Has it overlooked some types of potency in its preoccupation with Power?' (254). MacDonald's questions characteristically evoke an aspect which I believe has always formed a fundamental part of the discipline; a sustained process of introspection, self-scrutiny and self-criticism. Although one may object that self-criticism is an integrated part of *any* contemporary critical theory intervening in the discursive field of knowledge, postcolonial criticism seems to define itself – or situate itself from the outset – as an imperative, constantly demanding a *rethinking*, as Homi Bhabha phrases it in *The Location of Culture*: 'The postcolonial perspective forces us to rethink the profound limitations of a consensual and collusive "liberal" sense of cultural community … The very language of cultural community needs to be rethought from a postcolonial perspective' (251). In Bhabha's view, the 'postcolonial' designates first of all, from an overall point of view, a constitutive critique of static, binary conceptualisations of hegemonic cultural paradigms. It is a critique which thus necessarily must imply a constantly renewed self-critique.

Self-reflexivity and self-critique may, however, also be seen as an expression of a paralysing paranoia within postcolonial studies, a field anxious not to reproduce imperialist ideologies and new orientalisms.[14] Rey Chow has, within the context of ethnographic studies, criticised the tendency to constantly call 'for the necessity of discursive self-reflexivity … since such a call only confirms, once again, what was long ago established by Hegel as the distinguishing trait of Western Man, his capacity for being aware of himself' (179–180). While self-reflexivity may be a necessary component within any contemporary radical perspective, there is a tendency to see it as a value *in itself*, similar to Moretti's critique of 'indecision' as a literary value in its own right – that is, valuable according to uncertain parameters measuring what is allegedly subversive and transgressive. As such, to argue for self-reflexivity may to a certain extent be seen as *legitimising*, in an instrumental, habitual and uncritical way, the complex and ambiguous task of producing a radical

counter-paradigm of knowledge, the sustained attempt to identify a functional critical perspective, anxious to avoid overlooking any 'types of potency', to use Amanda MacDonald's phrase.

These reservations thus demand a further investigation of the legitimising strategies of postcolonial studies. In a discussion of the geographical implications underlying much postcolonial theory, John K. Noyes asks:

> If the postcolonial turn involves the unsettling of a certain critical tradition in the (primarily American) academies of higher education by insisting on the experience of the rest of the world, a world condemned to the ghostlike existence of the speechless, then for intellectuals working far from the center of tradition a number of obvious questions arise: what does this shift in perspective mean for the rest of the world? If the first world intellectual needs to imagine a perspective outside the first world in order to articulate the aporia of traditional theory, how does this position relate to the third world intellectual? Is postcolonialism a mask for the perpetuation of intellectual imperialism? (352)

Echoing some of the accusations which, in particular, Aijaz Ahmad has directed toward the theoretical discourses of Said and Jameson, Noyes raises a number of important aspects that are located at the centre of what one may call the self-reflexive identity-formation of postcolonial studies. One of these aspects, as implied in the quotation above, is the vital debate in postcolonial studies about its links with western theoretical formations such as post-structuralism, postmodernism and Marxism. There is no doubt that these 'isms' have provided the field of postcolonial studies with some of its most important theoretical concepts, but – as Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin write in *The Empire Writes Back* – to appropriate western theories also involves a series of dangers,

> the most threatening of which is the tendency to reincorporate post-colonial culture into a new internationalist and universalist paradigm. This incorporative practice is shared by both the apparently apolitical and ahistorical theories of poststructuralism and the socio-cultural and determinist theories based in contemporary Marxist thought. (154)

In the attempt to avoid the clear-cut binary model of the oppressor versus the oppressed, Deepika Bahri argues that 'an incipient discourse

may be permitted some conceptual licence and flexibility in using conflicting models'; at the same time, Bahri continues, 'the failure to theorize scrupulously its own contradictions may … limit its potential' ('Coming to Terms': 152). In other words, because the field of postcolonial studies is a relatively new academic discipline, its use of conflicting models can in Bahri's view be excused as long as it continues to be *self-reflexive*.

Homi Bhabha's work, most notably perhaps, represents a self-reflexive position which emphasises both the *historical* and the *political* dimensions of a poststructuralist and postmodernist perspective, in the attempt to counter discourses of Eurocentric, essentialist and universalist thinking. While interrogating structures of referentiality and constructions of subjectivities and identities, Bhabha concedes that post-structuralism and postmodernism confined within their narrow European outlook have limited importance as such. Their 'actual' radical potential is only activated from a postcolonial perspective:

> [T]he postcolonial prerogative seeks to affirm and extend a new collaborative dimension, both within the margins of the nation-space and across boundaries between nations and peoples. My use of poststructuralist theory emerges from this postcolonial contramodernity. I attempt to represent a certain defeat, or even an impossibility, of the 'West' in its authorization of the 'idea' of colonization. Driven by the subaltern history of the margins of modernity – rather than by the failures of logocentrism – I have tried … to revise the known, to rename the postmodern from the position of the postcolonial. (*Location*: 251–252)

This perspective, however, has led to certain concerns among other 'third-world' theorists, subscribing to a more materialist perspective, such as Arif Dirlik, who considers Bhabha 'a master of political mystification and theoretical obfuscation, of a reduction of social and political problems to psychological ones, and of the substitution of poststructuralist linguistic manipulation for historical and social explanation' (333n). Not only is Bhabha's position, according to Dirlik, more or less complicit with the hegemonic structures of western epistemology – the discipline of postcolonial studies as a whole is repetitive and irrelevant since its underlying premises, 'such as the repudiation of post-Enlightenment metanarratives, were enunciated first in poststructuralist thinking and the various postmodernisms that it has informed' (336). That is to say, the underlying premises of postcolonial studies, in Dirlik's view, are

basically variations of the postmodernist perspective – a phenomenon of global capitalism – which means that the field is unable to transgress its Eurocentric borders.[15] The outcome, then, is a theoretical discourse producing *exclusions* rather than *inclusions*; ideological distortion and reification rather than actual hybridity or in-betweenness; a postmodernist game in disguise playfully mimicking a radical political perspective, while diverting attention away from its uneasy relations to the larger context of global capitalism by fetishising otherness in order to maintain a privileged position at the centre of metropolitan discourse.[16]

While Arif Dirlik believes that the postcolonial prerogative is so heavily informed by western modes of thought that it is incapable of constituting a genuine critique, Robert Young has argued, with Jacques Derrida and others as examples, that it is impossible to discuss the origins of poststructuralist thinking without simultaneously referring to the political implications of colonialism and cultural otherness:

> Those who reject contemporary postcolonial theory in the name of the 'Third World' on the grounds of it being western, however, are themselves in doing so negating the very input of the Third World, starting with Derrida, disavowing therefore the very non-European work which their critique professes to advocate. (*Postcolonialism*: 413)

Although both Dirlik and Young probably overstate their cases, each position can be seen as constituting opposite ends of an axis along which most claims for an alleged radicalism are produced within the field of postcolonial studies, and along which one may also locate expressions of what I have seen as the schizophrenic relation to the dimension of the literary. In itself, the literary seems to occupy a marginal role within such perspectives represented by, for example, Young and Dirlik, but its *relational* function – the way in which it is treated by different postcolonial theoretical approaches – constitutes an important symptomatic that directs us toward the point where its *potential* may play a vital role in connection with some of the field's current blind spots and impasses.

Ever since the beginning of postcolonial studies, one of the major disciplinary challenges has consisted in answering the basic, self-reflexive question of what the 'postcolonial' might or might not imply, its imperatives, achievements, limits, legitimisation, complicity, departures, deviations, digressions, inconsistencies and so forth;[17] a tendency, one may add, which seems to have become even more pertinent 'at a time when the field is becoming rapidly entrenched in the academy as

a discipline, and postcolonial theory begins to assume, incrementally, larger proportions' (Bahri, 'Coming to Terms': 139). These two aspects, growing institutional power and an excessive emphasis on self-critique and self-reflexivity, I argue, can be seen as proportionally linked,[18] not only to each other in a mutually authorising construction, but also intimately linked to the literary.

Melancholic self-reflections

In the introductory chapter to a collection of critical essays discussing contemporary postcolonial issues, Kalpana Seshadri-Crooks notes that the discipline seems to have reached a stage of 'melancholia induced paradoxically by its new-found authority and incorporation into institutions of higher learning'. Contemporary postcolonial melancholia, Seshadri-Crooks continues, relates to a series of problems, such as

> postcolonial scholars' apprehension that institutionalizing the critique of imperialism may render it conciliatory … their criteria for political self-legitimation (i.e., the impossibility of representing the Third World as an anti-imperialist constituency, especially in the face of the retreat of socialism) and their peculiar immobility as an effective oppositional force for curricular change within (American and British) academies. (3)[19]

In other words, at a time when postcolonial studies is enjoying wide academic success and popularity, there is a mounting sense among practising critics that the discipline has become 'stereotyped as an acceptable form of academic radicalism' (17). One of the reasons underlying this development is what Seshadri-Crooks identifies as 'an inadequately enunciated notion of the margin' (4), that is, a margin which is different from multiculturalism's notion of a spatial, subject-positioned margin.[20] The uncritical and homogenising conflation of postcolonial studies and multiculturalism has led among postcolonial critics to what Seshadri-Crooks designates as a 'turf war', induced by an 'anxiety over the loss of the margin that results in the redrawing of lines and a struggle over the margin itself' (18). Postcolonial critics, Seshadri-Crooks argues, have been eager to recuperate the 'dislocated and authoritative *critical position*', desperately looking for radicalism *as such*, and thus in effect fetishising and reifying the 'margin as the site of struggle for the outermost limit'. Opposed to this undifferentiated notion of the margin, Seshadri-Crooks proposes a notion of postcolonial marginality 'not so much as

that which is external to the power structure, but rather its constitutive outside, an intimate alterity that marks the limit of power' (13). To Seshadri-Crooks, this negative, ironic and contingent dimension of marginality – as the incommensurable and irreducible remainder, the 'unthought', nonrecuperable otherness, or 'the residue of representation' (13) – must constitute the foundation of postcolonial 'materialist critiques of power and how that power or ideology seeks to interpellate subjects within a discourse as subordinate and without agency' (19).

One of the characteristic aspects of postcolonial studies as a theoretical field throughout its relatively brief span of history has been its amorphousness or shapelessness. And it is exactly this undefinability which to Seshadri-Crooks permits it 'to be simultaneously self-critical and oppositional' (19), since it prevents the discipline from reaching a stagnant and self-complacent level of homogeneity. The continuation of this differentiated margin of postcolonial criticality and oppositionality is however only sustained through what Seshadri-Crooks sees as a *constant* rehearsal of the 'conditions for the production of its own discourse' (18); a 'relentless self-scrutiny'; a 'refusal to stay still, to define itself or defend itself' (19).

The dimension of 'consciousness-raising' is, according to Michael Denning, 'a virtue when it means a genuinely reflective sense of one's own being, one's own situation in the world, and one's own impact on others', thus forming an integral part of the 'emergence of any social movement of subaltern peoples' (126). As such, institutional and methodological self-criticism and oppositionality have, as I suggested earlier, always been an integrated part of postcolonial studies as an academic field. It is true that the danger of institutionalisation, which haunts the contemporary field of postcolonial studies in the age of global commodification, would seem to demand even more pronounced calls for self-criticality; but at the same time it may equally be relevant to see this demand *in itself* as something that has become an empty and self-congratulating gesture – a theoretical short-circuit or impasse – playing a vital role in the development of contemporary melancholia. In other words, while the dimension of self-criticism or self-reflexivity seems to constitute a necessary disciplinary manoeuvre in postcolonial studies, it may simultaneously be conceived as a symptom of a certain methodological narcissism which legitimises, institutionally, an increasingly prescriptive framework that dogmatically maintains its position as *the critical position* in academia.

Seshadri-Crooks' critical essay constitutes in many ways an important theoretical symptom; while she accurately addresses some of the most

serious contemporary theoretical problems in the field, her own proposal of a radicalised notion of a postcolonial margin nevertheless relies on an equally fetishising idea of self-reflexivity, as the ultimately redemptive horizon of postcolonial criticality. But insofar as the excessive accentuations on self-criticality and self-reflexivity have become automatic, self-legitimising, disciplinary markers of an increasingly institutionalised and dogmatic methodological outlook – as an expression of a paralysing paranoia concerning the reproduction of imperialist ideologies and new orientalism – there is one important area, I believe, in which this melancholic problematic is noticeable in a very explicit way.

Postcolonial studies and literature

This is more specifically the area in between postcolonial studies as a theoretical and academic field and postcolonial literary texts.[21] Since there have been very few attempts to recuperate an aesthetic-formal approach to literary texts in postcolonial studies, one of the peculiar things about postcolonial criticism is, as Peter Hallward has observed,

> how *little* it has to say about its own 'home' discipline, about literature proper. Having long since absorbed the boundary-blurring lessons of deconstruction, many postcolonial literary critics seem embarrassed by what remains of their disciplinary affiliation. Most postcolonial readings are brief, often insubstantial, sometimes simply anecdotal. Only rarely do such readings engage with a text 'on its own terms'. (334–335)[22]

Hallward's comment is a serious indictment against the impetus of postcolonial studies, albeit also a very ambiguous one, since it raises the question as to what extent the dimension of the literary, *as literary*, that is, 'on its own terms', is supposed to play a role in a field which, according to Robert Young, has 'achieved a revolution in aesthetics and the aesthetic criteria of the literary, just at a moment when "the literary" was most under attack as an outdated category', since it is 'now valued as much for its depiction of representative minority experience as for its aesthetic qualities' ('Editorial': 7).[23]

In a world after the so-called 'revolution', the occurrence of melancholia as a symptom in postcolonial studies may be linked to the current status of the literary, given the fact that literature still occupies a substantial part of postcoloniality's objects of study, yet for reasons that are highly ambiguous.[24] As I noted earlier, postcolonial literary

criticism seems to be characterised by what one may see as a kind of schizophrenia; the literary constitutes a *problematic* within postcolonial studies – a problematic to which the discipline has responded either through an unbalanced emphasis on allegedly radical textual modalities, or by ignoring literary form entirely. Simultaneously, and particularly in relation to the former kind of response, there has been a tendency in postcolonial studies to *repress* or *demonise* more conventional modes of writing apparently not distanced enough from imperialist ideology in a self-conscious way, such as realism, insofar as this kind of literature has been discussed *as* realism or realist form, and not treated as historical documents, that is, figures of the extra-literary.

Schizophrenia is thus one of the characteristics of contemporary postcolonial criticism that most distinctly expresses the ambiguous position occupied by the literary – an ambiguity related to the problematic of institutionalisation as well as a certain repetitiveness and predictability in many postcolonial literary analyses: 'To read across postcolonial literary studies,' Neil Lazarus polemically argues, 'is to find, to an extraordinary degree, the same questions asked, the same methods, techniques, and conventions used, the same concepts mobilized, the same conclusions drawn' ('Postcolonial Modernism': 424) – that is, aspects confined to a narrow political and thematic framework consisting of 'representations of colonialism, nationhood, postcoloniality, the typology of rulers, their powers, corruption, and so forth' (Ahmad, *In Theory*: 124).[25] In a similar vein, Deepika Bahri talks about 'a web of professional practices that include publishing, book reviews, syllabus exchange, conferences' which produces 'a pattern of privileging texts more readily responsive to "authorized" questions and pedagogic imperatives' (*Native Intelligence*: 10).[26]

After having 'revolutionised' the field of literary aesthetics through critical and politically consciousness-raising readings of texts previously situated comfortably within narrow, local frameworks,[27] postcolonial studies is haunted by an atmosphere of melancholia that may be seen as an ambiguous expression of both disciplinary success and failure. Success, in the sense that an elaborate notion of the literary after the so-called postcolonial aesthetic 'revolution' has been radically transformed; but also has failure, implying that the contemporary field of postcolonial studies lost its identity as a critical margin – that it has become something dangerously close to representing, in Huggan's words, 'a sales tag for the international commodity culture' ('Postcolonial Exotic': 24).

'Postcolonial discourse,' Fawsia Afzal-Khan observes, 'will always be productively split between the assertion of its political convictions and

the critique of those very convictions' (24). Insofar as the radicalism of the political imperatives of postcolonial studies is constantly measured against the margins of this discontinuity, what seems to be one of the problematic consequences is that the *reinforcement* of this split – a reinforcement vital to the field as a critical, consciousness-raising discourse under increasing institutional pressure – has led to a displacement of the focus of postcolonial studies; a focus displaced *from* its object proper, the literary text, *to* its own figures of self-representation and self-critique, as a field distinct from other, related fields.

In *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present*, Spivak argues that

> the promise of justice must attend not only to the seduction of power, but also to the anguish that knowledge must suppress difference as well as différance, that a fully just world is impossible, forever deferred and different from our projections, the undecidable in the face of which we must risk the decision that we can hear the other. (199)

Insofar as we take this 'promise of justice' as one of the underlying constituents of the postcolonial political imperative, postcolonial literary analyses are confronted with the task of registering the otherness as conveyed in and through the literary. It is, however, possible, I believe, that the literary interpretative framework of postcolonial criticism, its 'incessant, self-reflexive analysis' (Afzal-Khan: 24), may to a certain extent ward off the risk or potency involved in the task of *reading* literary texts, which thus perhaps rather appear in the form of the 'already-read'.[28] I want to argue that a certain act of 'illegitimate', 'concealed', or even 'borrowed' legitimisation takes place within much postcolonial criticism, frequently consisting of a vocabulary of 'the hybrid, the interstitial, the intercultural, the in-between, the indeterminate, the counter-hegemonic, the contingent', that is, 'attempts to evoke that which no concept can "capture"' (Hallward: xi). The sustained attempt to constitute itself conceptually as the discipline no one can 'capture' may also be seen as a process of legitimising itself as the (authoritatively de-legitimising) discipline capturing or representing that margin which no concept can 'capture'. One may see this tautological self-authorisation, which is paradoxically exposed in the relationship to the literary, as an expression of postcolonial studies' contentious location in between cultural meta-languages of knowledge.[29]

It is in this way that the excessive self-critique, which in an obligatory way seems to authorise many postcolonial analyses of literary works,

is intimately related to the aspect I stressed earlier, namely the lack of attention to the specificity of literature in much postcolonial literary criticism. The literary text, 'on its own terms', across the spectrum of different modes, thus seems to imply a relationship involving an uncanny risk; a risk to which postcolonial literary criticism has responded in a schizophrenic way, either by ignoring this risk through an emphasis on the extra-literary dimension of the literary work or through an emphasis on excessively self-conscious modes of literary expressions that correspond to the radical figures of the postcolonial political imperatives.

Here, I believe, we seem to arrive at the centre of what one may see as the dilemma of much postcolonial literary criticism, a dilemma which equally constitutes its potential; I am arguing that postcolonial studies, legitimising its methodological strategies through a self-critical practice of rereading (or a reading otherwise) the figures of the marginal, to some extent can be seen as a discourse producing a 'promise of justice' that mainly functions as a rhetorical manoeuvre concealing its theoretical blind spots. To 'occupy a blind spot,' Shoshana Felman writes – albeit in a different context – 'is not only to be blind, but in particular to be blind to one's own blindness; it is to be unaware of the fact that one occupies a spot within the very blindness one seeks to demystify' (199).[30] What one may see as anxiously concealed defence mechanisms (that is, the excessive self-critique) implemented to prevent falling into this hazardous trap, I argue, are revealed through what Hallward saw as the insubstantiality of many postcolonial literary analyses. One may thus argue that the radicalism of a large part of the canonised postcolonial theoretical vocabulary, with which the postcolonial critic 'answers' the demands of the literary text, is established at the price of the neutralisation of literary singularity, the reduction of critical responses to the 'brief, often insubstantial, sometimes simply anecdotal' – as answers answering *for* the text, whose figures thus become answerable to the particular figures of the postcolonial vocabulary.[31]

What Franco Moretti designates as the 'loss of distance' in modern criticism, and what Neil Lazarus conceives as a certain sameness in postcolonial literary analyses, can be seen as similar to the seamlessness of the correspondence between an explicitly self-conscious postcolonial literary modality on the one hand, and on the other hand the dominating vocabulary of much postcolonial literary criticism. Moreover, this seamlessness can thus be seen as contributing to the process of what Seshadri-Crooks viewed as the consolidation of an institutionalised, blunted and reified standard of radicalism – that is, a loss of a differentiated, critical margin.

It is in this sense that the literary may thus constitute an important resource simultaneously informing postcoloniality. Postcoloniality's relationship to the literary, I would argue, may in part be seen as epitomising, in all its heterogeneity and complexity, both in a figurative and a literal sense, the uncanny modus operandi of the postcolonial perspective. The literary can be conceived as the potential revelation of the uncanny blind spot of postcolonial studies, that which should have remained secret;[32] the literary may be seen as representing the (im)possible or uncanny resource of the postcolonial perspective, indicating on the one hand that which *supports* the postcolonial perspective, and on the other hand indicating that which necessarily must remain *unreadable* in postcolonial criticism (that is, the literary 'on its own terms'). The literary text may in this sense be seen as the uncanny doppelganger of the postcolonial perspective – at one and the same time endowing postcolonial studies with the possibility of responding to otherness, but also exposing the field to a risk, namely the dissolution of its disciplinary boundaries, and hence the dissolution of its identity as an independent academic discourse.

The melancholia of postcolonial studies

Here I want to return to Seshadri-Crooks' reflections on the melancholia of contemporary postcolonial studies; what remains somewhat undertheorised and displaced in Seshadri-Crooks' in other respects balanced overview of the impasses in postcolonial discourse seems to be the possibility of conceiving the literary *as* the margin, 'the residue of representation', instead of the emphasis on a literature *of* the margin. The 'relentless self-scrutiny', the fear of becoming a petrified, homogeneous critical authority, and so on, which has always been a trademark of postcolonial studies as an academic discipline, may be seen, as Seshadri-Crooks argues – and undoubtedly many other postcolonial scholars will agree with her – as a continual attempt to preserve the margin, its distinct position of otherness, always under threat: 'The postcolonial margin must be acknowledged as incommensurable and nonrecuperable' (13).

But I want to open the possibility of reading this trademark rather differently, by turning to Freud's essay on 'Mourning and Melancholia' from 1915. Freud sees the condition of melancholia as belonging to the group of manic-depressive psychoses, specified by its neurotic narcissism. One of the preconditions for the possibility of melancholia occurring at some later stage is the narcissistic choice of object; another is ambivalence, that is, the love-hate relationship to the object.

Melancholia is triggered by the loss of the object, or the feeling of disappointment at being let down by the object: 'melancholia is in some way related to an object-loss which is withdrawn from consciousness, in contradistinction to mourning, in which there is nothing about the loss that is unconscious' (245). The libido is redrawn to the realm of the ego, which in effect leads to the ego-libido's attempt to identify with the object, that is, an attempt to restore the lost object within the ego. Freud writes:

> On the one hand, a strong fixation to the loved object must have been present; on the other hand, in contradiction to this, the object-cathexis must have had little power of resistance … The narcissistic identification with the object then becomes a substitute for the erotic cathexis, the result of which is that in spite of the conflict with the loved person the love-relation need not be given up. (249)

This substitution, as Freud notes a few lines later, is equally an important mechanism in schizophrenia; it represents 'a *regression* from one type of object-choice to original narcissism … The ego wants to incorporate this object into itself, and, in accordance with the oral or cannibalistic phase of libidinal development in which it is, it wants to do so by devouring it' (249–250).

The identification of the ego with its lost object at the same time empties its libidinal energy: 'In mourning it is the world which has become poor and empty; in melancholia it is the ego itself' (246). Trapped within this contaminating or haunting condition of emptiness (that is, haunted by an absent object it can never quite *devour*, that is, *become* or *replace* through identification), the objectified ego develops a pathological distortion of self-understanding. The ego becomes the ghostly object of a helpless self-critique,[33] which however, as Freud notes, is not primarily directed toward the melancholic self, but rather toward the lost object with which the ego identifies, thus resentfully 'revenging' him- or herself on the missing object. 'The complex of melancholia,' Freud writes, 'behaves like an open wound' (253), a schizophrenic revenge which at the same time implies a sadistic satisfaction:

> The self-tormenting in melancholia, which is without doubt enjoyable, signifies, just like the corresponding phenomenon in obsessional neurosis, a satisfaction of trends of sadism and hate which relate to an object, and which have been turned round upon the subject's own self. (251)

Nourished by a sadistic, revengeful, yet fundamentally self-deluding and impoverishing *fantasy* of the 'restored' object, the melancholic ego must at the same time prevent, exclude or repress the possibility of the object *actually* returning, since this return would lead to an *uncanny* complication, and ultimately destabilisation, of the pleasure-giving process of substitution; the melancholic ego would in that case become the ghostly other of its own fantasy. The melancholic fantasy thus to some extent acts as a mechanism of repression or exclusion.[34]

From this brief outline, one may draw a connection between Seshadri-Crooks' description of a relentlessly self-scrutinising discipline haunted by melancholia, and Freud's thoughts on the process of a ghostly, cannibalistic identification, characteristic of the melancholic ego. As I stressed earlier, the discipline of postcolonial studies has always been, and still is, closely tied to literary and aesthetic modes of representativity – a relationship, as we saw earlier, of ambivalence. Seshadri-Crooks notes that: 'Unlike other area studies, postcolonial studies has no identifiable object' (19), which in the Freudian perspective can be seen as both true and untrue at the same time – similar to the way in which the melancholic ego sadistically criticises him- or herself *as* the other, that is, as the restored object. The 'amorphousness' of postcolonial studies, that which 'permits it to be simultaneously self-critical and oppositional' (19), has in itself become a fetish, a displaced libidinal energy, diverting attention from the object which *must* not be identified, in order to allow the discipline's critical drive to remain within a process of constant self-correction. The lack of an identifiable object, the 'amorphousness', can thus be seen as constituting postcoloniality's own fetishised object, or the attempt to restore the lost object within its own discourse as its own discourse – the 'incommensurable and nonrecuperable' (13) dimension of otherness, that which simultaneously constitutes, but rarely is permitted the status of, the literary. The melancholic self-scrutiny of postcolonial studies, the self-correction, the sustained attempt to preserve within itself its object, as its object, may suggest that postcolonial literary texts have never quite managed to live up to the expectations of postcolonial studies—as 'faulty' or 'outmoded' relics, waiting to be converted to the radicalism that postcolonial criticism will enunciate on their behalf, 'revenging' the failures that the literary may represent.[35]

The continued, albeit ambiguous, centrality of literary texts within the field of postcolonial studies would however seem to suggest that the contemporary melancholia is perhaps rather triggered by the reverse – the dawning, melancholic awareness within much postcolonial criticism of

its own failure, to never quite have been able to live up to the critical potential that the literary contains, the constitutive site of negative, contingent marginality; that it has never quite been able to *replace* it, to *identify* with it, to speak *as* the literary, despite all the attempts to silence it, to speak *for* it, to translate it into its own vocabulary. The current melancholia of postcolonial literary criticism is thus an expression of what one may see as the uncanny return of the literary, no longer trapped within a narrow, local framework, but *as* the negative, homeless, borderless and contingent dimension of marginality which Seshadri-Crooks identifies as the critical postcolonial margin. 'Notwithstanding all the legalistic efforts of literary criticism, literature remains,' Spivak observes, 'the singular and unverifiable margin' (*Postcolonial Reason*: 175).

Melancholia follows as a consequence of what Seshadri-Crooks sees as the danger of postcolonial studies, being institutionalised academically, gaining power as *the* authoritative, critical position, or the position of the *Über-Ich* – one that definitively eliminates the illusion of identifying an authentic margin, however much it flagellates itself critically, that is, schizophrenically 'revenges' itself on its deceitful, distrustful object, the objectless object, which keeps resurrecting itself *as* otherness, or *as* the literary. The literary thus, as I have argued, can be seen as representing an important problematic in postcolonial studies, registering the dialectic of institutional power and excessive self-critique as a process of legitimising the loss of a margin; it represents a risk, transgressing the discursive boundaries, but also a potential to move beyond the cul-de-sac of cultural incommensurability.

2
Returning to the Literary

Can the literary speak?

Among the responses to postcolonial melancholia today we find a renewed interest in aesthetics and literariness. This chapter will elaborate detailed discussions of some of these critical works returning to the literary, in order to clarify where my argument is situated, and where it takes a different path. As will become clearer in the following, one of the problems emerging from these new attempts to rethink the literary within the context of cultural and postcolonial studies is that they largely base their critical concerns on aesthetic-formal paradigms which to some extent fail to reach beyond what I earlier referred to as the modernist ethos, in part because literary form – (the *literary* as distinct from the *extra-literary*) – is largely conceived as quite simply meaning modernist aesthetic technique. Part of what I call the modernist ethos should thus be seen as an attempt to identify some of the monopolising constraints of a conception of the literary, and the implications these limits may exert on an attempt to formulate a renewed importance of the literary in postcolonial studies. Overall, what I want to explore in this chapter is the extent to which recent arguments for a return to the literary from a postcolonial perspective may involve another form of melancholia, not so much the *symptom* of as much as a critical *response* to disciplinary institutionalisation; a response which nonetheless still maintains a narrow value-codification of the aesthetic that corresponds to, and thus legitimises, a canonised postcolonial vocabulary.

A direct case for a renewed debate about the specificity of the literary and aesthetic dimension in postcolonial texts is offered in Gayatri Spivak's *Death of a Discipline*, a book consisting of three revised pieces of her Wellek Library Lectures, originally delivered in 2000.[1] Representing

in some ways a conspicuous departure in her career,[2] Spivak outlines what seems to her to be the major objectives for literary studies at the beginning of the twenty-first century. The simple fact that Spivak, at this particular point in her career, takes up an institution like Comparative Literature, in order to promote (or rather save) some of its potentials, like the care for language, idiom, style, form and the advanced techniques of reading texts closely in the original language, despite being a discipline 'out of joint with the times' (*Death*: xii), deserves a few comments, I believe; in the following I will go through some aspects of Spivak's earlier critical occupations as a prelude to my discussion of *Death of a Discipline*.

Few postcolonial critics have taken up the question of the voice of otherness with more painstaking persistence than Gayatri Spivak. In her perhaps most famous essay, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' from 1988, Spivak ends her critique of certain versions of representational strategies within French post-structuralism (Deleuze and Foucault) with the gloomy conclusion that colonised subalterns are silenced through essentialised subject-positions, and hence possess no voice of their own. This early essay's emphasis on the problematic representational positioning of the margin of subalternity, shares certain – melancholic – similarities with *Death of a Discipline*, although in the latter work the emphasis is not so much on the *subject* as much as on the problematic representational positioning of the *literary* in postcolonial studies. The differences between 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' and *Death of a Discipline* do not demonstrate some major, radical changes in the trajectory of Spivak's career, but rather illustrate the development of a critical response to some of the problems that have emerged in the wake of postcolonial studies' rise to fame over the last few decades.[3]

In an essay from 1991 on Coetzee and Defoe, Spivak discusses the prominence of postcolonial studies, and what she sees as the dangers of commodifying the margin in (US) literary studies. The way in which non-western literature is being used by literary scholars, Spivak argues, often lacks specialist knowledge:

> [W]e tend to leave untouched the politics of the specialists of the margin – the area studies, anthropology, and the like. Third World studies … become so diluted that all linguistic specificity or scholarly depth in the study of culture is often ignored. Indeed, works in poor English translation or works written in English or the European languages in the recently decolonized areas of the globe or written by people of so-called ethnic origin in First World space are beginning

> to constitute something called 'Third World literature'. Within this arena of tertiary education in literature, the upwardly mobile exmarginal, *justifiably* searching for validation, can help commodify marginality. Sometimes, with the best of intentions and in the name of convenience, an institutionalized double-standard tends to get established: one standard of preparation and testing for our own kind and quite another for the rest of the world. ('Theory': 154)

One of the possible implications of this potential commodification of marginality through a differentiating double standard is according to Spivak that 'we are becoming complicitous in the perpetration of a new orientalism' ('Poststructuralism': 222), insofar as we maintain a non-specialised approach to Third World literature, as raw material 'packaged for transnational consumption' ('Alterity': 276). Elsewhere, Spivak has argued that postcolonial studies in the worst scenario may

> allow the indigenous elite from other countries to claim marginality without *any developed* doctoral-level sense of the problematic of decolonized space and without any method of proper verification within the discipline … If this study is forever contained within English (or other metropolitan literatures), without expansion into fully developed transnational culture studies, colonial and postcolonial discourse studies can also construct a canon of 'Third World Literature (in translation)' that may lead to a 'new orientalism'. ('Teaching Machine': 277)

One example of a literary modality being canonised as Third World literature is, according to Spivak, magical realism. Criticising the tendency to see magical realism as the 'right Third World Style', Spivak argues that critics are fetishising the mode of production of literary discourse with the consequence 'that the declared rupture of "decolonization" boringly repeats the rhythms of colonization with the consolidation of recognizable styles' ('Poststructuralism': 223). Seen as 'the trademark of third world literary production' ('Teaching Machine': 277), the genre of magical realism thus fixates a stereotypical discourse of marginality which does not acknowledge the fact that not all postcolonial writers 'show their awareness of being in a minority, being marginal'; Spivak even goes on to draw lines between those critics studying only 'writers who write in the consciousness of marginality and christen them "Third World"' ('Poststructuralism': 223), and the reproduction and reinforcement of a Eurocentric logic.

This initial formulation of the problems involved in the process of canonising postcolonial literature provides us with an illuminating perspective of Spivak's attempt to construct what she names a radical postcolonial pedagogy of 'auto-critique'. Spivak's auto-critique follows the figure of the paralogy, which – as Lyotard formulates it – signifies 'a move … played in the pragmatics of knowledge' (*The Postmodern Condition*: 61). The figure of the paralogy, in this particular sense, supplements another figure frequently used in the Spivakian vocabulary – 'catachresis' – which designates something that does not signify or refer in a 'proper' way, and which to Spivak involves the emancipatory possibility of reclaiming or reformulating a constellation of meaning which, to begin with, has been misrepresented within a given hegemonic discourse. Spivak's paralogic and catachrestic auto-critique does not seek to produce positive knowledge as such, but rather to recode 'the over-determined play of cultural value' ('Poststructuralism': 231).[4] As a critique constituting itself as the catachrestic process of recoding, a site of struggle over conventional values and concepts, Spivak delineates what she sees as the potential of the postcolonial perspective – to 'renegotiate some of the deceptive "banality"' (234) characterising non-western cultural productions in the eyes of a western audience.

What I want to stress in particular through these quotations is an objection to the aspect which Spivak describes as a 'silencing' of nuances and real differences, occurring in effortless acts of cultural interactions and translations.[5] In the essay 'A Literary Representation of the Subaltern', Spivak claims that the argument that '"Much third world fiction is still caught in realism" (whereas the international literatures of the First World have graduated into language games) is a predictable generalization. This is often the result of a lack of acquaintance with the language of the original' (267). Although the mode of realism is equally devalued in Spivak's deconstructive-postcolonial discourse, her objection indicates to some extent *why* it is necessary to pay greater attention to formal aspects, whether viewed as innovative, experimental or 'merely' realist. Spivak's objection also implies another, perhaps even more uncanny, aspect – namely the inability within Spivak's own theoretical discourse to *read* the textual modality of realism. As I will go on to argue, the notion of realism as a literary form may constitute one of the most interesting dimensions to investigate from a formal point of view, partly because it seems to occupy a problematic across the different theoretical formations within the field of postcolonial studies; a blind spot which is either ignored *as* realist form at the expense of being read as an unproblematic, mimetic-naïve representation of

the extra-literary, or problematised as being formally complicit with hegemonic structures of power – or, as in Spivak's case, rejected as being a 'bad' translation.

Whereas Spivak's deconstructive perspective does not allow her to develop a more elaborate conception of the importance of realism, one could argue that there is a link between her categorical *rejection* of a nuanced engagement with this particular literary mode of representation, and what she sees as radical literary strategies. In Spivak's view, the figures of the literary, as an 'event' characterised by way of 'working differently' from other allegorical formations, may explore the catachrestical limits of subject-positions and formations of marginality, while renegotiating the master-tropes of hegemonic discourse. Having thus framed the potential of the literary, Spivak goes on to argue that the postcolonial literary text

> works in bits and pieces, with something like a relationship with the postmodern habit of citing without authority. With a pedagogy that sees this as the mark of the fragmented postcolonial mode, the allegory can offer a persistent parabasis to the development of any continuous ethno-cultural narrative *or* of a continuous re-inscription. ('Poststructuralism': 231)

By 'persistent parabasis', Spivak refers to irony in the Demanian sense,[6] and which in her postcolonial discourse designates the 'sustained interruption from a source relating "otherwise" (*allegorein* = speaking otherwise) to the continuous unfolding of the main system of meaning' (*Postcolonial Reason*: 430). In Spivak's pedagogy of auto-critique, the act of reading literature becomes a site of renegotiating culture. At times she refers to the literary as 'literature as such' (176), as 'a figure that provides an experience of the impossible' (428), and as a 'singular and unverifiable margin' which can be traced along the contours of the 'allegorical master-tropes of global discourse' (175). What these formulations also suggest is that the literary becomes a kind of projective screen – a *mirror text* through which Spivak's deconstructive-postcolonial perspective identifies and frames its margins, and, as such, legitimises itself as an authoritative agency that reads, and hence 'speaks', the (im)-possible margin.[7] As an ambiguous, (im)-possible margin, constantly generating new (postcolonialised) readings, the literary provides the *stage* for the postcolonial imperative of reading-otherwise. By responding to (that is to say, by 'reading otherwise') the literary – as-permanent-parabasis – Spivak's version of the postcolonial perspective at the same time involves an excessive and

transgressive *misreading*, one that in a sense attempts to *mimic* (and hence borrow) the catachrestic and parabolic force of the literary.

Literature at the threshold

Spivak's deconstructive-postcolonial perspective is, however, also one that to a certain extent defers an actual reading of the literary, 'literature as such', while instead using the literary to provide a stage on which she unfolds her own paralogic and catachrestic auto-critique. Trapped within an increasingly homogenised and authoritative discourse of the margin – while seemingly no longer capable of 'renegotiating the deceptive banality' of the postcolonial literary text – the contemporary postcolonial perspective simultaneously seems to have lost its identity as the catachrestic recoding of systems of representation; a theoretical field in which the distinctive boundaries and objectives have become blurred, and in which allegedly *radical* gestures to an uncomfortable degree seem to follow a logic of institutionalised predictability.[8]

Although remaining within the general framework of her catachrestic critique, Spivak's return to the discipline of Comparative Literature can possibly be seen as an attempt to balance her previous emphasis on strategies of disruption and misreading, with a counter-emphasis on reading closely the value of the *literal*, the 'object' itself:

> Anyone who believes that a literary education should still be sponsored by universities must allow that one must learn to read. And to learn to read is to learn to dis-figure the undecidable figure into a responsible literality, again and again. (*Death*: 71–72)[9]

Spivak's return to the literally literary can be seen as an attempt to restore the field's distinctive identity via a process of *distinguishing* the figures of the literary, thus avoiding yet another production of a commodified notion of marginality where the literary cannot 'speak' or 'perform' the genuinely radical postcolonial imperative.

In *Death of a Discipline*, Spivak is interested in combining Area Studies and Comparative Literature, arguing that whereas the former possesses an expert knowledge of foreign cultures, it is still embedded in anachronistic discourses that were constructed during the Cold War; Comparative Literature, on the other hand, lacks an actual 'interdisciplinarity', isolated within a Eurocentric framework. But Comparative Literature is also characterised by a sophisticated treatment of form and language, a treatment that in Spivak's view may potentially retain

the cultural specificity of a text. Such sophistication, Spivak argues, is absent in much of the current cultural and postcolonial criticism, 'tied to plot summary masquerading as analysis of representation, and character analysis by a precritical model of motivation or an unearned psychoanalytic vocabulary' (19). To maintain their ability to identify and preserve the specificity of a culturally different text, Spivak argues that postcolonial studies and cultural studies must refine their skills by incorporating some of the techniques and methodologies from the fields of Comparative Literature and Area Studies.

In order to preserve the specificity of a culturally different text, Spivak argues, the postcolonial critic must avoid having a set of pre-shaped, instrumental and generalising notions, whereby all literatures coming from the 'Third World' are read as sociological evidences for 'class' or 'nationalism'. Launching what she calls a 'new comparative literature' (*Death of a Discipline*: xii), which practises both a thorough care for language *and* demonstrates expert knowledge of radically different cultural discourses, Spivak outlines a literary approach that potentially takes into account all the 'countless indigenous languages in the world that were programmed to vanish when the maps were made' (15), as well as preserving the cultural specificity of notions like nationalism, identity, modernity and class, while observing that they may be 'in play in many different ways' (66).

Central to Spivak's new comparative literature is a notion of the literary 'as training the imagination – the great inbuilt instrument of othering' (13). Borrowing from Derrida, Spivak employs the concept 'teleopoiesis', which combines 'imaginative making' with 'tele' (meaning 'distant').[10] Teleopoiesis, Spivak argues, involves the possibility of metaphorically crossing borders into foreign territory, rather than appropriating or accommodating the other in our own conceptual framework; thus reminding us that 'we are ourselves *Fremdsprächig*, "foreign speakers"' (22). In other words, teleopoiesis involves the imaginative process of putting ourselves at risk, turning the familiar into the foreign, the canny into the uncanny; and hence to move beyond static, fixed cultural boundaries in order to immerse ourselves in the strangeness and the constructedness of our own world.[11]

Much postcolonial work, however, Spivak points out, suffers from what she calls a 'failure of teleopoiesis' (50). Failure here refers to the domestication, and hence commodification, of the other. Spivak identifies the cause of this failure as the lack of attention to the specificity of language and form. This is ultimately the reason why she finds it necessary to recuperate some of the 'old skills' of studying literature; to recuperate

a sensitivity and attention towards linguistic singularity – so as to allow the difference and heterogeneity of the foreign text to come into play. Spivak's new comparative literature involves a reading strategy that emphasises the notion of metaphorically or imaginatively crossing borders – teleopoiesis – not in order to incorporate otherness, but rather to preserve the specificity of the other through the reconfiguration or defamiliarisation of our own cultural discourse.[12]

Tracing the margin through Spivak's numerous writings, from the marginalised positioning of the subaltern voice as proposed in 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' to the investigation of the marginal positioning of the postcolonial literary in *Death of a Discipline*, suggests two registers for situating otherness which, although they must be seen as intimately related, cannot be collapsed into one single formation. The literary – as teleopoiesis or as a relational process of measuring, and thus *preserving*, cultural-conceptual differences by way of an imaginative work – constitutes the utopian possibility of overcoming the danger of eradicating nuances and specificities of otherness in the global market. Consequently, the *loss* of the teleopoietic dimension of the literary signals the commodification of the margin – and, hence, the loss of the possibility of hearing the voice of the other within our own conceptual framework. The trajectory of Spivak's work, from early essays such as 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' to the later work *Death of a Discipline*, tells us something important about the trajectory of postcolonial studies as a whole. *Death of a Discipline* sets out a new direction in postcolonial studies, recognising that the loss of a genuinely critical margin is intimately connected with the lack of attention given to the literary dimension of the postcolonial text, and that to solve this problematic implies a return to some of the old skills of studying literature.

Literary otherness

In part due to its limited length and form (a series of revised lectures), *Death of a Discipline* leaves, however, a number of questions open. To pursue these questions further, I want to turn to Derek Attridge's *The Singularity of Literature*, in which he offers a more elaborate poetics of literary otherness – similar to, but more coherently argued than, Spivak's new comparative literature. Like Spivak, Attridge's starting point is a critique of an instrumental, pre-critical approach to literary works. Instrumental approaches to literature, that is, seeing literature as a means to reach certain socio-political conclusions, have undoubtedly been valuable in terms of measuring literary texts' inscription

in ideological and historical frameworks; but such approaches have equally failed to provide an account of the specific processes that constitute the actual implications, potentials and, ultimately, *importance* of the literary work.

But how do we, more concretely, manage on the one hand to argue for the importance of the specificity of literature and a return to a discussion of literary form, while on the other hand avoiding subscribing to another version of a transcendental, autonomous and universal idea of literature's distinction? One of the distinctive qualities of literature, Attridge argues, is that any attempt to define the borderline dividing the 'literary' and the 'non-literary' is bound to fail, and 'this is a *necessary* failure, one by which literature as a cultural practice has been continuously constituted' (*Singularity*: 1). Instead of arguing for an essential quality within the literary work – that is, conceiving the literary work as a unity having stable borders framing an always-identical content – Attridge believes that the concept of literature must be understood as a process of border-crossing and non-conformity.[13] This dynamic concept of literature correlates with Attridge's notion of 'culture', embodying

> a complex matrix of habits, cognitive models, representations, beliefs, expectations, prejudices, and preferences that operate intellectually, emotionally, and physically to produce a sense of at least relative continuity, coherence, and significance out of the manifold events of human living. (21)

From this general epistemic matrix, a unique configuration of experience is formed at the individual level – what Attridge calls 'idioculture': 'Idioculture is the name for the totality of the cultural codes constituting a subject, at a given time, as an overdetermined, self-contradictory system' (22), which, however, never exhausts one's *singular* individuality. 'Singularity', in Attridge's sense, designates that aspect which can never wholly be generalised, theorised or explained according to any existing set of norms.[14] Rather, singularity is always designating something other than what constitutes one's idioculture; to respond to one's singularity is at the same time to respond to otherness, the idioculture's other, that is, the alterity of one's self. Attridge writes: 'I am always, in a way, other to myself. It is this instability and inconsistency, these internal and external pressures and blind spots, this self-dividedness, that constitute the conditions for the emergence of the other' (25). Otherness occupies that dimension which a culture, and hence idioculture, at a given time

and place, cannot accept insofar as it wants to keep its norms and values unchanged.[15]

However, a subject never responds to otherness directly, but only to 'the remolding of the self that brings the other into being as, necessarily, no longer entirely other' (24). To Attridge, this is where creative works, including literature, become important. The literary text exposes the reader to otherness through its *formal* innovativeness, its *singularity*; by offering a 'hitherto unperceived relationship, a different way of handling materials, a new method of production' (25), the literary text exposes the tensions, contradictions and blind spots of a given cultural discourse – and hence unveils otherness to the reader. The specificity of literature is thus, according to Attridge, not something static, but rather an '*event* of mental and emotional restructuring' (28), which is never wholly accommodated or domesticated within an existing culture; rather, the readerly experience of the uncanny, defamiliarising force of literature involves an act of fundamental, cultural change.

The politics of form

Derek Attridge's attempt to rethink the relations between the significance of literary form and the ethics of otherness, emphasising formal inventiveness, newness and originality, constitutes a sophisticated contemporary argument for a return to an idea of the specificity of literature. In Attridge's view, the formal dimension of a literary work, forming and performing meaning, allows us to interact with otherness and alterity: 'Otherness,' Attridge argues, 'is at stake in every literary text, and in a particular conspicuous way in the text that disrupts the illusions of linguistic immediacy and instrumentality' ('Literary Form': 249).

If one should point to a problem within this perspective, as well as within Spivak's approach in *Death of a Discipline* (and which of course in another sense may also be seen as their theories' strength), it is the favouring of certain literary techniques and modalities – a problem which, as we have seen, Franco Moretti designates as the 'loss of distance' between a given interpretive theory and certain literary texts.[16] Attridge shows, however, great awareness of this problematic. In an essay on literary form and J. M. Coetzee's *Age of Iron*, Attridge comments on his emphasis on formal-linguistic inventiveness and originality:

> This may sound like a devaluation of the realist tradition, but it is a critique only of a certain way of reading that tradition – a reading, it is true, which realist authors often invited, but not one that is

> inevitable. To respond in full responsibility to the act of a realist work is to respond to its unique staging of meaning, and therefore to its otherness. It could even be said that the realist work is more, not less, demanding than the modernist work, in that its otherness is often disguised, and requires an even more scrupulous responsiveness. ('Literary Form': 262n)

To Attridge's credit, his theory does not implicitly operate with a simultaneous debunking of more conventional modalities, such as realism, in relation to which an allegedly more sophisticated aesthetic strategy is supposed to possess the upper hand. However, this latter aspect – the radicalisation of modernist techniques which is followed by an implicit critique of realism – is nonetheless a characteristic manoeuvre in postcolonial critical works which recently have stressed the dangers of institutionalisation within the field of postcolonial studies while simultaneously arguing for a renewed attention to the figures of the literary.

To illuminate this problematic more specifically, I want to discuss in detail some aspects of Neil Lazarus's essay 'The Politics of Postcolonial Modernism', in which he explores and criticises, but also perhaps to some extent unwittingly confirms, the implications of the current theoretical impasse concerning literary texts. Lazarus wants to rethink the dimension of postcolonial aesthetic resistance, as a way of avoiding what he sees as the imminent threat of the (postmodernist) commodification of postcolonial studies. To explain some of the interrelated formations of the postcolonial theoretical framework (such as the hierarchical mechanisms of selection, exclusion, and the idea of a 'corresponding' postcolonial literature), Lazarus refers to the canonising process of modernism as criticised by Raymond Williams in the book *The Politics of Modernism*. As an aesthetic paradigm, Williams argued, modernism became so powerful and widespread as the 'universal' and 'definitive' mode of cultural expression that all other modes which did not correspond to the paradigm of modernism were displaced as 'pre*modern* and disparaged as such, as relics, mere anachronisms, forms whose time had definitively come and gone' ('Postcolonial Modernism': 429). Lazarus compares this distorting process of monopolisation to the field of contemporary postcolonial criticism, constructing 'a certain limited optic on the world, a selective tradition [which] has been imagined as a universal' (432).[17]

However, while Lazarus endorses Williams's *analysis* of the devastating institutionalising effects of modernism as a legitimate, explanatory model of what is going on in the contemporary field of postcolonial

studies, he disagrees with Williams's choice of modernism as the object of critique. In fact, Lazarus insists on

> the *ongoing* criticality of modernist literary practice. I am interested in work by contemporary writers (including 'postcolonial' ones), which is (still), arguably, illuminated by recognizably modernist protocols and procedures … we cannot proceed without a theory responsive simultaneously to the notional indispensability and the practical achievement of what, basing myself on Adorno's investigation of the 'Kafka-effect' … I will call 'disconsolation' in and through literature. (431)

Lazarus's literature of 'disconsolation' is a distinctly modernist mode of writing that comes after the malaise of institutionalisation, and which apparently still contains revolutionary potential. As an example of this kind of literature, Lazarus refers to Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians*, which shares a number of formal and stylistic affinities with Kafka's writings:

> *Disconsolation* is the project of this writing, its deepest aesthetic (hence indirectly social) aspiration. I do not believe that this project has been exhausted over the course of the past fifty years, either as a result of the recuperation of modernism in academic discourse or as a result of more far-reaching changes in the social order. (432)

The literary practice of disconsolation is a mode of writing that involves all the trademarks of high modernism, a style of fragmentation, parataxis, irony, alienation, discontinuity and disruption – epitomised, as Lazarus points out, in Kafka's works. Although admitting that the Kafka-effect no longer exists, Lazarus goes on to say: 'We can readily concede that in today's world, what would have seemed ugly [e.g. a Kafkaesque universe] now seems realistic. But to say this is not to say that what is thus represented is no longer disturbing or disquieting or unnerving' (430). What I want to stress here is the expression 'thus represented'; following Lazarus, no one is shocked by Kafka today because his works have become institutionalised – 'thus represented' – and this is seemingly why we need a theory (Lazarus's theory) to de-reify (the once-shocking and revolutionary potential of) Kafka's novels – and Kafkaesque novels like Coetzee's – so that they may once again be able to induce in the reader the Kafka-effect (which to begin with, one may assume, needed no 'theory' to de-reify its potential).

'Disconsolation', in Lazarus's view, is only to be found in literature that 'resists the accomodationism of what has been canonized as modernism

and that does what at least some modernist work has done from the outset; namely, says 'no'; refuses integration, resolution, consolation, comfort; protests and criticizes' (431). Thus represented, one may argue that even when *this* kind of resistant literature indeed has not quite resisted institutionalisation (Kafka's works, for example), it seems to leave the literary in a curious state of helplessness; as something that is unable to speak for itself, unable to unleash its critical potential on its own, had it not been for Lazarus's theory, which on the other hand is 'legitimised' precisely in being an attempt to *rescue* the revolutionary potential of modernism which, we are told, has not '[been] exhausted over the course of the past fifty years' (432).

The monopolisation of the literary

Lazarus's attempt to rethink the critical dimension of the postcolonial aesthetic, not only in this particular essay but throughout his works,[18] crystallises, perhaps to an even greater extent than Spivak and Attridge, the complicated process of coming to terms with what Graham Huggan has called the 'field's unresolved attempt to reconcile political activism and cultural critique' (*Postcolonial Exotic*: 261). Although Lazarus offers a scathing attack on certain aspects of the contemporary field of postcolonial studies, his aim is to *sustain* a critical perspective (in contrast to, say, Ahmad, whose outright rejection of postcolonialism may, at times, resemble Lazarus's), a perspective which *resists*.

The emphasis on 'oppositionality' (against totalitarianism and other forms of oppressive discourses) is why Lazarus identifies *modernism* (in the Adornian sense) as *the* radical postcolonial aesthetic modality per se. And yet, if 'there is only the shortest of distances between 'In the Penal Colony' and Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians* (431),[19] Lazarus's comparison seems to raise the question as to why we should develop a theory responsive to the un-consoling effects of the Kafkaesque, a theory capable of registering the Kafka-effect in literatures apparently *not* resisting the accomodationism to which they are exposed in the institutionalised version of postcolonial studies, uncomfortably similar to the monopolising process of the modernist paradigm. It could be argued that Lazarus's poetics involve a theoretical short-circuit, namely the foregrounding of *resistance* as the ultimate common denominator between his version of postcolonialism and modernist literary techniques – a foregrounding which is much more explicit and pronounced than in, for example, Spivak's postcolonial perspective. The strength of Lazarus's perspective is a more concrete, and concretely

politicised, poetics, whereas the disadvantage is a possible limitation of the potential of the literary.

What I am interested in here, in particular, is the underlying *justification* that supports Lazarus's poetics of disconsolation, which I see as connected to an overall desire for *legitimisation*. The modernist preference permeating Lazarus's analysis of postcolonial literary studies constitutes what initially could be seen as a melancholic attempt to *recuperate* a radical notion of the literary from its institutionalised and commodified context. However, this recuperative attempt may at the same time also be seen as yet another way of *limiting* the potential of the literary, so as to support Lazarus's radical perspective; a perspective *in need* of a particular version of the literary that demonstrates the *difference* between institutionalised (postmodernist/poststructuralist) postcolonialism, and Lazarus's Marxist-modernist postcolonialism.

The institutionalised version of postcolonialism relies, according to Lazarus, on a series of dogmatic assumptions, such as

> a constitutive anti-Marxism; an undifferentiating disavowal of all forms of nationalism and a corresponding exaltation of migrancy, liminality, hybridity, and multiculturality; a hostility toward 'holistic forms of social explanation' (toward totality and systematic analysis); an aversion to dialectics; and a refusal of an antagonistic or struggle-based model of politics. (423)[20]

Naming the most emblematic representative of this version of postcolonialism – Homi Bhabha[21] – Lazarus argues that 'most writers simply do not write from the perspective that Bhabha spells out for us' (433), and lists various authors whose works differ in a number of ways from Bhabha's perspective. This may be true, but at the same time one could pose the question of how many writers write from the perspective that Lazarus spells out for us. The problem is that although Lazarus insightfully points out some of the blind spots in much postcolonial literary criticism, his own alternative remains strategically limited within an aesthetic framework that fails to reach beyond those blind spots.[22] Lazarus justifies his postcolonial perspective as *different* from Homi Bhabha's 'exaltation of migrancy, liminality, hybridity, and multiculturality', on the basis of a value-paradigm of modernist-radical aesthetic norms that are seen as *corresponding* to a radical political agenda. However, this justification, I would argue, is not radically different from Bhabha's exaltation of *his* political agenda supported by a set of anti-realist aesthetic norms that are seen as corresponding to a radical

politics. To clarify, this is not to say that Bhabha's and Lazarus's *political* agendas are identical, but rather to say that their political agendas are both supported by what I have called the modernist ethos.

Whereas Lazarus explicitly wants to draw attention to the radicalism of a modernist aesthetic, the modernist ethos operates less explicitly in Bhabha's discourse, and more ambiguously, primarily because Bhabha's concerns are, from an overall perspective, not actually related to literary texts' aesthetic-singular qualities, but rather to their textual politics. One reason, I think, that Lazarus focuses on the *aesthetic* dimension, as a site of resistance, is in part because his overall aim is to criticise the dominating poststructuralist-inflected position in postcolonial studies (of which Bhabha is perhaps the main representative), which precisely has *neglected* an explicit attention toward the aesthetic. One could argue that in Lazarus's perspective the aesthetic is defined in terms of a radical modernist value which also tacitly (even if never explicitly) devalues other modalities, such as realism (as being radical in an aesthetic sense);[23] in Bhabha's perspective the aesthetic is much less pronounced as a radical value – albeit still recognisably anti-realist – while on the other hand there is a more explicit devaluation of realism. What Lazarus's explicit aesthetic focus does not recognise, even if it attempts to dissociate itself from that of Bhabha's perspective, is that by failing to think radically beyond the tacit aesthetic paradigm which operates in the latter's discourse, he merely reinforces this monopolising value-codification, albeit in an *explicit* way – a monopolisation that in part has led to the institutionalisation of postcolonial literary criticism (which, to begin with, was Lazarus's main object of critique).

Neil Lazarus's poetics of disconsolation is an attack on Bhabha's poststructuralist-oriented postcolonial perspective via an attempt to recuperate the notion of a radical aesthetics; however, what is to some extent implied in Lazarus's attempt, focusing solely on the potential of modernist literary form, is also the tacit acceptance of realism as being a compromised postcolonial literary form. The way in which Lazarus attempts to dissociate his perspective from Bhabha's – in and through literary texts – reveals, despite his argument's many compelling insights, a conspicuous aesthetic blindness. It is an *aesthetic* blindness in the sense that he misrecognises what has been one of the determining factors in the institutionalisation of the literary in postcolonial literary criticism; while Lazarus identifies postmodernism as being the cause, suggesting Adornian modernism in its place, he fails to see that both paradigms, in aesthetic terms, have led to the preference for a particular kind of literariness, one that creates an equivalence between anti-realist

literary strategies and a set of radical political concepts. What this blind acceptance of the monopolisation of literary potential also means for Lazarus's theory is that despite his fierce critique of Bhabha's hostility toward holistic explanatory frameworks, his own position proves perhaps less of an actual aesthetic alternative than it might appear; from an *aesthetic* point of view, one could even argue that the two positions merge.[24]

Realism as straw man

In the following, I want to explore some of the underlying reasons for what seems to be a widespread inability among many postcolonial critics to read, in an aesthetically sensitive way, the mode of realism today.[25] Bruce Robbins has wondered 'why it is that the construction of an argument in our discipline so often relies on using "naïve realism" as a negative or scapegoat term that a given author, text, period, or genre can be shown to rise sophisticatedly and self-consciously above' ('Modernism': 27). There is, I believe, an element of self-legitimisation, a formulaic way of evoking criticality or radicalism per reflex, embedded in this sort of argumentation which dominates much postcolonial criticism today. Insofar as realism still is a popular and widely used literary choice for many postcolonial writers, it seems that we have arrived at an unsatisfactory situation, in which we are unable to *read* critically – that is to say, without condemning or dismissing – literary realism from a postcolonial perspective.[26]

Gayatri Spivak, as we saw earlier, argued for example that insofar as critics read non-western texts as realist, this was often due to 'a lack of acquaintance with the language of the original' (*In Other Worlds*: 267), which may of course be a valid point, but simultaneously leaves a number of questions open regarding the possibility of finding any aesthetic or formal significance in the mode of realism. Within this context, one might modify Peter Hallward's comment that postcolonial literary criticism has surprisingly little to say 'about literature proper' (334–335) to point out how surprisingly little it has to say about *literary realism*. 'Why,' asks David Carter in the article 'Tasteless Subjects: Postcolonial Literary Criticism, Realism and the Subject of Taste', 'is realism not to its taste?' (294). Carter argues that although postcolonial literary criticism indeed *can* talk about realism, it is equally the case that realism is rarely *seen* as realism but rather as something else, such as colonial romance or fantasy. As a field constituting itself as coming *after* bourgeois institutions of aestheticism, such as liberal-humanist or

universalist criticism, postcolonial studies nevertheless, Carter believes, operates with a powerful aesthetics 'which cannot be named, which is a tasteless subject in the circles where postcolonialism is spoken' (292). Interrogating the framework of this silently operating postcolonial aesthetic, Carter notes a number of discriminating restraints, embodied in an ideal of preferred literary modalities, allegedly being textually subversive and transgressive. Postcolonial criticism performs the task of identifying and describing these textual operations of transgression and subversion, thus implicitly outlining a normative ethics of how to become an 'ideal' postcolonial reader, using the unspoken, underlying aesthetic paradigm of modernist and postmodernist textual modalities as confirmatory emancipatory politics – whose significance becomes all the more illuminating through a simultaneous demonization of realism. Realism, within this construction, in which textual radicalism automatically is seen as equivalent to political radicalism, is thus reduced to a mode of production which, as Carter observes, does not seem to 'provide the same pay-offs for the same amount of investment' (296).

Postcolonial realism – as understood by some of the dominant theorists in the literary field – constitutes a problem because it apparently promotes the naïve illusion of an unmediated, and thus 'authentic' or 'original' (re)presentation of the experience of otherness, whereas in fact it promotes false consciousness, hiding the ideological underpinnings of an imperialist discourse. 'Realism,' Harry E. Shaw woefully notes, 'has become not a form that can tell us about life in the modern world, but a form that can tell us nothing useful, and doesn't even know it' (3). The main thrust of this anti-realist position goes like this: since 'meaning' is not established via an assumed referential function of words as such, but via the *differential* relations between words within a particular system, the idea of a textual discourse referring mimetically to some external, extra-linguistic, socio-historical reality is untenable. And because the realist text apparently wants its readers to *believe* in a pre-given, truthful structure of reality, by referring to it in terms of a one-to-one correspondence – a kind of mechanical or expressive causality in the Althusserian sense – the realist text is seen as naturalising and reinforcing an ideologically compromised discourse. But as Shaw rhetorically asks: 'Should we assume that, unless a novel gives primary attention to metafictional maneuvering, it is disguising something?' (8). In the tradition of expressive realism, there is arguably a mimetic desire for illusionism and closeness to reality, or what one could see as a desire for truthful depiction of reality, although this is only one among many definitions of realism, which, as I will attempt to make clear in the

next chapter, is perhaps less helpful in terms of an exploration of the potential of realism within a postcolonial context. What I am criticising here is the automatic assumption that expressive realism is the *only* conception of realism.

On the basis of this homogenised conception of realism, anti-realists have typically defined the *literary* as a process self-consciously deconstructing its own linguistic structures, that is, a process which is formulated precisely as a *critique* of realism. In *The Political Unconscious*, Jameson refers to what he calls 'ideologies of the text', arguing that many post-Saussurean theories

> construct a straw man or inessential term – variously called the 'readerly' or the 'realistic' or the 'referential' text – over against which the essential term – the 'writerly' or modernist or 'open' text, *écriture* or textual productivity – is defined and with which it is seen as a decisive break. (2)[27]

The post-Saussurean basis on which, for example, Homi Bhabha implicitly positions his argument against realism[28] – that is, that realism necessarily (and illusorily) insists on a natural, referential correspondence between reality and literary signs – captures only in a very restricted sense the potential of literary realism. As Shaw, for example, has argued, there seems to be no particular reason why we should assume that

> any realist theory of language must deny the existence of linguistic 'arbitrariness' … Indeed, there are the best possible grounds for believing that if language didn't possess an element of arbitrariness, it would be useless for the realist enterprise, or any other. Because realism is centrally interested in social relations and the ways societies move through time, it couldn't possibly make do with a language that limited itself to the task of sticking labels on things. (56)

Literary realism is not necessarily incompatible with a post-Saussurean philosophy of language; nor is realism, I would argue, necessarily complicit with certain capitalist or Eurocentric ideologies *per se*, to the extent that many postcolonial critics insist.[29] Criticising Catherine Belsey's poststructuralist attack on realism (in the book *Critical Practice*), Shaw argues that she overrates the significance of linguistic referentiality:

> … it's made to seem that all kinds of important issues have been settled *in advance* if we decide that reliable reference is or is not

> possible … Reference is always associated with other linguistic means in its dealings with the world; it acts as one component of many packages … the notion that there could be a 'referential language', or even that language could approach a state of more or less pure referentiality, is misleading. When we refer to something, the important work remains to be done. Reference is the beginning, not the end, of a process that may or may not eventuate in knowledge of the various worlds in which we live. (58–59)[30]

Undoubtedly there are moments during the encounter with a realist text when we 'forget' that we are reading a *text* and that we are dealing with *language* (and the fallacies of linguistic representation). But this 'illusionism' is not only, or even specifically, something which can be said to characterise the mode of realism, and it cannot simply be seen as bad faith or ideology. There are different and complex reasons underlying the functions of a given modality's assumed illusionism, and in the realist text, as I will go on to show in the following chapters, these functions cannot be reduced to 'the single aim of escaping or seeming to escape mediation' (50).

The inability to think beyond the monopolisation of what I refer to as the modernist ethos is within a feminist context attacked by Rita Felski, who in the book *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics* criticises what she sees as the myth of a revolutionary modernist aesthetics, arguing that while realism tends to *dominate* feminist writings, most critics have been eager to promote the argument that experimental art provides 'the necessary corollary to a progressive politics through its subversion of existing structures of representation which are taken over unquestioned into the realist text' (156). According to Felski, the allegedly revolutionary and subversive potential of experimental inventions is questionable, and in any case short-lived. The shock-effects of the avant-garde experiments, Felski observes, eventually become 'venerated exhibits in the museum' (159), while simultaneously raising the stakes to ever more mystifying, exotic, detached and isolated gestures of outbidding aesthetic expressions. This fetishisation of experimental form within literary criticism has in Felski's view led to an unsatisfactory situation where whole industries within academia are occupied with 'the exegesis of modern art, which acquires an enigmatic aura that can be deciphered only by the expert' (158), while the consequences of this development merely echo 'the fetishization of novelty and fashion which is the hallmark of a capitalist consumer culture built upon constant innovation and instant obsolescence' (160). Felski's, perhaps in the end slightly crude,

critique of the ideology of modernism as a discourse that has distorted the sense of what is *actually* being written and used outside academia raises a number of important issues in connection with an attempt to investigate postcolonial aesthetic categories; her actual aesthetic considerations nevertheless remain frozen within a familiar rhetoric of political radicalism – the *repoliticisation* of the aesthetic sphere – which does not address the *aesthetic* specificity of realism sufficiently (such as, for example, Derek Attridge does in relation to the modernist text). Felski's unwillingness to think beyond this familiar rhetoric is, I believe, partly due to the fact that the traditional notion of realism, in an aesthetic sense, has been tied so closely to nineteenth-century bourgeois and imperialist aspirations, that insofar as realism *has* been defended in recent critical scholarship, this has primarily happened via a focus on its *socio-political* dimension, as a mode of *political* resistance.

There would be a number of historical reasons to support the importance of this perspective, such as, for example, the need for a functional-didactic literature in a given socio-political, postcolonial context, but it would simultaneously leave a number of important questions unanswered with regard to realism's formal-aesthetic potential, as distinct from the aesthetic potential of modernist texts. By re-politicising the notion of realism as a force of resistance, one could argue that such critics commit an error similar to what Fredric Jameson has seen as the 'distinction between cultural texts that are social and political and those that are not' (*Political Unconscious*: 4) by revaluing the political at the expense of the aesthetic and, in this sense, *maintaining* that distinction. Jameson, having bourgeois aestheticism in mind, argues that this error is a symptom of 'the reification and privatization of contemporary life', because such a 'distinction reconfirms that structural, experiential, and conceptual gap between the public and the private, between the social and the psychological, or the political and the poetic' (4), which is the hallmark of late-capitalist society. While one may agree with Jameson's categorical statement 'that there is nothing that is not social and historical – indeed, that everything is "in the last analysis" political' (5), the solution is, I am arguing, not to revalorise (in order to defend) the notion of realism by repoliticising it, since this would only reinforce the very distinction which Jameson, in the first place, saw as a symptom of commodification.[31]

There is a need to question and interrogate the modernist ethos within postcolonial studies, not merely because the construction of realism in this model is highly reductive and simplifying, but also because the *need* to configure realism as a scapegoat in itself is revealing. What I have been alluding to so far is that the aesthetic regime tacitly

operating within the dominant postcolonial perspective – constructing a reductive way of reading realist modality – can be seen as a symptom of issues which are intimately related to the dimension of the literary as it functions within postcolonial studies. That is to say, I am arguing that realism, in Jameson's words, 'marks the spot where something painful is buried' (*Ideologies*, vol. II: 118).

Critical fictions

In the essay 'The Object of Post-Criticism', Gregory Ulmer develops a thesis regarding the problematic, and often blurred, relationship between text and criticism within the discourse of post-structuralism – or what he calls post-criticism. Ulmer argues that this relationship can be seen as the symptom of a 'crisis' of representation, which echoes the crisis of representation that apparently took place at the beginning of the twentieth century, that is, the paradigm shift from mimetic realism to modernism and avant-garde aesthetics: 'Criticism now is being transformed in the same way that literature and the arts were transformed by the avant-garde movements in the early decades of this century' (83).[32] Post-criticism, Ulmer argues, parasitically mimics many of the techniques of the avant-garde, such as collage, allegory and montage, because it is ultimately faced with epistemological problematics of a similar kind, albeit problematics not emerging so much from the relationship between the world and the text as much as between text and text.

Ulmer's thesis about the relationship between *criticism* and *literature* opens up a perspective that may illuminate the way in which we are to understand this relationship within a postcolonial context, albeit in a slightly different sense. The field of postcolonial studies has always been eager to mark itself off from earlier – Eurocentric and imperialist – discourses, and literary texts have played a key role in this process of differentiation.[33] I want to suggest that what Ulmer sees as a displaced or deferred 'crisis of representation' (initially emerging as an aesthetic response to the problematic of mimetic realism and subsequently as a critical response to the literary or aesthetic text), may be re-appropriated and re-applied within the context of postcolonial studies – and more specifically in connection with the dominance of a postcolonial vocabulary mimicking techniques of anti-representational modalities; *not* because it suffers from a (second) crisis of representation, but rather the opposite – because it *desires* a crisis of representation. We need to follow the trace of this desire more thoroughly, I believe, because it is intimately related to institutionalisation and melancholia.

To Freud, the melancholic process is ambivalent not only because the lost object (real or imaginary) is difficult to determine – the loss has been withdrawn from consciousness – but also because the process is *pleasurable* as well as *painful* (in the sense that the melancholic ego narcissistically internalises the energy of his or her libido within the ego, and in that way identifying as well as becoming unified with the lost object). The melancholic ego regresses to an infantile, oral or cannibalistic phase of the libido stage, 'devouring' the lost object as a way of preserving it as an ego-ideal. There seems to be an act of faithfulness involved in the melancholic process – the pathological insistence on preserving, at all costs, the lost object, which we do not find in the process of mourning; in the latter case, the subject mourns his or her loss as a way of coming to terms with its permanent absence, an absence which the melancholic subject categorically denies by restoring an image of the lost object, as an object of self-identification. Yet there is another aspect to this process of recuperation which makes the melancholic process even more ambivalent. At one point, Freud observes that in the melancholic process of mourning 'there is a loss of a more ideal kind', that is, the object *as such* may not in fact be lost but may have 'been lost as an object of love' ('Mourning': 245) – hence the ambivalent love-hate relationship to the phantom object.

This definition of melancholia raises, however, the question as to whether melancholic loss in fact can be described as loss at all. Freud writes:

> Melancholia … borrows some of its features from mourning, and the others from the process of regression from narcissistic object-choice to narcissism. It is on the one hand, like mourning, a reaction to the real loss of a loved object; but over and above this, it is marked by a determinant which is absent in normal mourning or which, if it is present, transforms the latter into pathological mourning. (250)

What is this melancholic 'determinant which is absent in normal mourning'? To say that it is the process of regression from narcissistic object-choice to narcissism seems only to point at the *effects*, rather than what actually determines or causes the process of melancholia as such; and if we take the reaction to the real loss of a loved object as the cause, then melancholia does indeed appear as a pathological development of mourning, which, however, would only send us back to the problems that Freud detected in the beginning of his essay, namely that in melancholia, as in contrast to mourning, 'one cannot see clearly what it is that

has been lost' (245). The 'determinant', which is absent in mourning, must be present in melancholia, but in a way that is not clear – that is, one may see it as an 'absent cause', a cause that remains on an unconscious level. But an object-loss that is unconscious, which remains an unknown factor in Freud's theory, also seems to raise the question as to whether one from an overall perspective can see melancholia as a 'pathological' development of mourning – as a pathological response to 'real loss' – at all. It also seems to open up the possibility of seeing the *effects*, the process of regression from narcissistic object-choice to narcissism, as in fact *preceding* the cause, the reaction to real loss.

Giorgio Agamben has explored this possible reading, arguing that 'melancholia offers the paradox of an intention to mourn that precedes and anticipates the loss of the object'. Within this perspective, the purpose of melancholia would be to

> make viable an appropriation in a situation in which none is really possible. From this point of view, melancholy would be not so much the regressive reaction to the loss of the love object as the imaginative capacity to make an unobtainable object appear as if lost. If the libido behaves *as if* a loss had occurred although *nothing* has in fact been lost, this is because the libido stages a simulation where what cannot be lost because it has never been possessed appears as lost, and what could never be possessed because it had never perhaps existed may be appropriated insofar as it is lost. (20)

The melancholic ego, in Agamben's interpretation, may appropriate a real, but unattainable object, by rendering it as lost; what is lost is not the object as such, but rather its unattainableness, by which the melancholic ego can *claim* and *possess* it in a phantasmagorical sense – that is, only insofar as it remains lost. The melancholic ego, Slavoj Žižek argues, confuses lack with loss: 'insofar as the object-cause of desire is originally, in a constitutive way, lacking, melancholy interprets this lack as a loss, as if the lacking object was once possessed and then lost' ('Melancholy': 659–660). Obscured in this manoeuvre is the original lack of the object, by which the melancholic ego can elevate it to an absolute ideal which, albeit lost, is possessed and preserved precisely because it is conceived as lost. 'For this reason,' Žižek writes, 'melancholy is not simply the attachment to the lost object but the attachment to the very original gesture of its loss' (660). What fascinates the melancholic is not the restoration of the object as such, but rather the *loss* of the object; as lost, the object, along with its attributed qualities,

is melancholically (that is, in a phantasmagorical sense) restored and retained in a 'legitimate' way. When the melancholic refuses to accomplish the work of mourning, the very opposite happens: 'a faked spectacle of the excessive, superfluous mourning for an object even before this object is lost' (661).

If one connects these supplementary thoughts on melancholia to my earlier discussion of the mounting sense of the loss of a radical identity in the field of contemporary postcolonial studies, and which I saw as the symptom of a loss of the ability to read the literary on its own terms – another dimension of the melancholic process occurs. This other dimension is not so much related to an actual object-loss as related to what can be seen as a 'translation' of an initial lack (into loss), a lack that is covered precisely via a process of pseudo-mourning (that is, melancholia in Agamben's and Žižek's sense), which *precedes* and *anticipates* an actual object-loss, whereby this desired object can be fixated, possessed and reclaimed. In this chapter, I have focused on recent critical works voicing, on the one hand, dissatisfaction with the field's increasingly institutionalised and homogenised critical identity, as reflected in repetitive, narrow and predictable readings of postcolonial texts and, on the other, calls for a greater attention to aesthetics and literariness (as a solution to the impasse of institutionalisation). These recent works constitute important attempts to reframe a renewed attention toward literary form within postcolonial studies; however, my argument is that the literary has precisely not been *absent* in a strict sense in postcolonial criticism, but rather that it has operated tacitly, as a *critical fiction* regulating and legitimising certain correspondences between particular aesthetic strategies and particular political imperatives (that is, what I have referred to as the modernist ethos). The critical codification of the dimension of the literary, as I argued, must be seen in relation to an ideologically coded desire for legitimisation (that is, the tautological, interpretive mechanism by which selected literary texts are read and canonised only insofar as they confirm the claims of the postcolonial). What I see as the excessive amount of self-criticism and constant calls for self-interrogation in much contemporary postcolonial criticism may be seen as legitimising acts that are to be confirmed and reinforced precisely via the phantasmagorical or melancholic construction of the figures of the literary (that is, self-consciously and self-critically postcolonial and textual modalities).

It follows here that there is a danger implied in recent critical attempts to trace postcolonial melancholia while at the same time calling for a renewed focus on the aesthetic dimension – insofar as these attempts

merely repeat, albeit no longer *tacitly* but *manifestly*, an institutionalised regime of values whereby equivalences or homologies between particular aesthetic strategies and particular political imperatives are uncritically established. Within this phantasmagorical construction, the allegedly radical identity of postcolonial studies continues to be exemplified and verified via the literary text – albeit in a *manifestly* aesthetic way; a literary text chosen and canonised as being representative of the postcolonial imperative only insofar as this text in turn *exemplifies* a dominant postcolonial vocabulary – and in that way *legitimising* this vocabulary in a tautological, interpretive circle.

The *symptom* of melancholia – the suspicion that the field of postcolonial studies has not avoided commodifying otherness in the global market – has produced calls for renewed attention toward the figures of the literary. My argument is that this symptom is related to the complex relationship between postcolonial studies as an academic field on the one hand, and an ideologically constructed notion of the literary on the other; a relationship which to some extent is reinforced, albeit in a manifest way, through recent works of postcolonial criticism, as we have seen. In this sense, recent postcolonial critical works calling for a greater attention to the aesthetic dimension merely make explicit a critical construction which has already been operating tacitly in the field – and thus further reinforce some of the causes of institutionalisation.

What is absent in this critical construction, indeed what has been lacking from the very beginning (and what is translated into a notion of 'loss' in recent postcolonial critical works), is not so much a *notion* of the literary, but rather the *literary as such*; that is, the literary 'on its own terms'. In this sense, melancholia suggests that the object of study – the literary (as the figure of the repressed) – has returned in an unrecognisable and uncomfortable way as a symptom of institutionalisation, homogenisation, predictability and dogmatism. And it is in *response* to this emergent figure of the 'return of the repressed' – the literary 'on its own terms', as an uncanny figure threatening the institutionalised authority of postcolonial studies – that I want to situate this other dimension of melancholia (the attempt to translate lack into loss). It is a dimension which works in correspondence with the first dimension of melancholia (as a symptom of the loss of criticality), one that *actively* or *manifestly* attempts to reclaim or reconstruct the dimension of the literary as it operated tacitly, as a critical fiction, within previous modes of postcolonial criticism. This other dimension of melancholia is one that is similar to Agamben's and Žižek's interpretations of melancholia, suggesting that the mourning of the loss of the literary in a melancholic

way is also a way of reclaiming a phantasmagorical notion of the literary for the purpose of legitimisation. Melancholic calls for a renewed attention to the dimension of the literary can be seen as pre-emptive *responses* that play a vital role in what I see as a defensive strategy, a way of protecting the contemporary field of postcolonial studies from a mounting anxiety about being exposed or revealed as an impotent fiction; a way of warding off the suspicion that the field's insights, claims and imperatives are merely so many critical constructions.

To sum up, I am arguing that the emergence of melancholia is first of all to be seen as a symptom of the loss of criticality, which in part is due to the homogenised and institutionalised ways through which the literary has been treated; in another, and accompanying, sense, the emergence of melancholia must also be seen as a *pre-emptive* response to the danger that the literary poses, not in its constructed form but as the singular, unverifiable margin. That is to say, as a strategy of containing the danger of the uncanny otherness of the literary, as well as a way of *reclaiming* or *reconstructing* a phantasmagorical notion of the literary that responds to the particular commitments and imperatives of the field. In this latter sense, postcolonial melancholia can be seen as the emergent suspicion that political radicalism – promised by the field's canonised textual modalities – has not been achieved or sustained, and that the field's preference for subversive and experimental literary techniques may possibly have played a crucial part of global commodification.[34] It is, however, at the same time important to stress that this suspicion is articulated through the ambiguous form of *melancholia*, that is, a form which can be read, indeed *must* be read, both as a symptom as well as a pre-emptive response – as two mutually complementary processes. Melancholia, as a pre-emptive strategy, mourning the *loss* of a politically radical identity, is also a way of reclaiming or reconstructing it, which would also imply that the 'loss' here must be seen as a 'positivisation' of an initial lack, an absence, which thus is repressed yet again – a deliberate misrecognition which represses the fact that what is melancholically substituted, reclaimed, recuperated or reconstructed is at the same time the very cause of the loss in the first place; the loss of the literary and the loss of a critical framework through which the literary emerges.

3
Utopian-Interpretive Trajectories

Utopian trajectories

In the previous chapter, I discussed some of the melancholic premises of contemporary postcolonial criticism, and the way in which the literary often has been used to legitimise an increasingly institutionalised discipline. I criticised what I saw as the *seamlessness* between certain canonised forms of literary modalities and prescriptive formulas of postcolonial resistance, mutually confirming each other. However, my argument was *not* that one should ignore what have now become canonised postcolonial textual forms, and instead change the focus towards marginalised forms of representation. Rather, what I have been alluding to so far is the possibility of reading the literary – literariness as it emerges on both sides of the realist/anti-realist-constellation – *without* authoritatively having to refer to a dominant, prescriptive postcolonial vocabulary (which by implication means *without* recourse to what I have seen as the ideologically constructed notion of the literary operating in many postcolonial literary analyses).

This leaves us, of course, with the task of proposing an alternative perspective, along the lines suggested above, which somehow avoids falling into the pitfalls I have examined so far. What I will be suggesting in the following is that to 'distance' the postcolonial literary text from its institutionalised reception may become a way of transferring authority *from* the postcolonial theoretical context *back* to the literary text itself; back to a notion of the literary text as fundamentally performing a singular, independent act of formal *interpretation*, both in an aesthetic as well as a political sense. And it is precisely here that I see a renewed potential of realism within a postcolonial perspective – a potential that is not rigorously tied to a particular historical period, but rather one

that embodies a literary *ideal*, which manifests itself, at different levels within different textual modalities, as a *utopian-interpretive* trajectory.

To frame this utopian-interpretive dimension of the literary within a postcolonial context, I want to spend some time going through Nicholas Brown's arguments about postcolonial literariness in the book *Utopian Generations: The Political Horizon of Twentieth-Century Literature* (2005). Brown focuses on the typical tendency to fetishise a postcolonial literary text's *content*, arguing that the tendency to treat postcolonial literature as 'raw material' for conclusions about socio-ethnographic aspects constitutes a blindness *which is ideologically coded*: 'it is not merely a blindness but a refusal of the properly eidaesthetic project of postcolonial literature, a refusal to recognize its appropriation of the problem of the absolute, understood explicitly … as the social totality' (21).

The notion of the 'eidaesthetic project' is one that Brown develops with reference to Jean-Luc Nancy and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe's reading of German romanticism in the work *L'Absolu littéraire* from 1978 (translated as *The Literary Absolute: The Theory of Literature in German Romanticism*).[1] In their view, the eidaesthetic constitutes the 'birth' of the literary in its modern sense. Brown specifies that the eidaesthetic project embodies a utopian or 'sublime' impulse which philosophically attempts to resolve 'antinomies whose origin lies outside philosophy', bearing the 'responsibility for overcoming contradictions produced by capitalism itself' (14).[2]

According to Brown, the literary, striving for the sublime, reaches a provisional culmination in modernist aesthetics, which also signals the first moment of *failure* – a moment when Georg Lukács is able to translate the (Kantian) antinomies of the modern world into distinctly Marxian terms. To overcome the antinomies of the modern world, Brown continues, 'requires the capacity to recognize that the sublime object is conceptually totalizable' (17). However, what is ultimately at stake in the modernist sublime, Brown argues (following, in part, Lukács), is an absolute reversal; aesthetic utopia within the modernist paradigm only becomes possible via an aestheticisation of the antinomies, which means that the 'totality to which modernism promises access is a mystification'. Hence, Brown writes, modernism becomes 'antagonistic to politics as such' (20).

Tracing this bifurcation of the aesthetic and the political, from romanticism to modernism, Brown goes on to suggest that post-colonial literature marks a 'third revolutionary moment' (20), which is a literature 'in precisely the romantico-modern sense: postcolonial

literature bears a specific ontological burden that differentiates it … from other art forms in formerly colonized countries' (21).[3] If the postcolonial literary text continues the 'project of the eidaesthetic', Brown argues that what is fundamentally different in postcolonial literature 'is its refusal or evacuation of the whole problem, central to modernism, of the thing-in-itself: the evacuation, that is, of the whole structure of the sublime' (22). Postcolonial literature continues the eidaesthetic project, that is, continues to search for the (absent) totality of meaning, albeit from a fundamentally different position within the global order than modernism. However, this postcolonial utopian project, Brown observes, must not be seen as a positive ideal or vision, but on the contrary as a negative principle, as a lack, a contradiction within 'the actually existing social totality whose presence hints at an as yet unimaginable future' (22), that is, a future which can be represented only as a lack within the global order. And although the utopian impulse eventually weakens and disappears in later stages of postcolonial literature,[4] it reappears, according to Brown, 'with the emergence of theory' (24). Brown's theoretical trajectory reaches its culmination with the identification of *theory* as the 'true' contemporary inheritor of the eidaesthetic project (and in particular the 'self-conscious' version of *theory* – namely postcolonial theory).

A reversal seems to have taken place here, from the romantic notion of the literary absolute to *theory* in the age of postcoloniality; if the eidaesthetic attempt to recover the sublime has migrated to *theory*, it also means that *theory* itself becomes *dependent* on literature as its 'self-conscious' other (similar to literature's dependence on theory) – insofar as it wants to avoid becoming 'a mere demand and ultimately an appeal to force' (28). This is, according to Brown, ultimately why we need to go back to literary texts. That much postcolonial theory has *not* avoided the danger of becoming 'a mere demand and ultimately an appeal to force' is thus due to its reductive reading of postcolonial texts, as raw material or a repository of ethnographic cultural difference. Moreover, this failure is a symptom of the field's refusal to engage more specifically with the problem of the absolute or the social totality. And finally, this 'flattening' of the postcolonial text is also to blame for the lack of attention toward the eidaesthetic-utopian impulse, as it emerges in between the bifurcation of the interpretive hermeneutics of *theory* and the literary text.

For all its original insights, Brown's theoretical argument nevertheless does not escape what I have seen as the haunting condition of melancholia in postcolonial studies, precisely because melancholia *also* includes

the kind of 'pre-emptive response' which informs Brown's theoretical framework. What allows Brown's theoretical framework to appear as a legitimate attempt to construct a 'strategic map of the totality' (22) can be seen as his own discourse's ideologically coded desire for the *separation* from the literary. If Brown too readily accepts the failure of the postcolonial text, and its utopian-political possibilities, he also melancholically mourns its 'absence', in a way that generates critical and ideological legitimacy to postcolonial theory as *the* inheritor and legislator of the eidaesthetic project. That is to say, if Brown's theoretical perspective recuperates the eidaesthetic project, as a way of restoring a critical, postcolonial margin, it also mourns the lack of it *in* postcolonial literature – a melancholic process which, as I argued earlier, precisely can be seen as the cause of melancholia in postcolonial studies *in the first place*.

Postcolonial melancholia, I argued, must be understood as both the symptom of the loss of an actual dimension of the literary in postcolonial studies, while at the same time constituting the field's pre-emptive response, which prevents the emergence of this symptom from posing a critical threat, and which furthermore allows postcolonial theory to 'reclaim' a constructed notion of the literary (a construction which involves the translation of lack into a notion of loss), as a legitimising device.

The secret of the form

Nicholas Brown's theoretical outline of the eidaesthetic project provides us with a set of issues through which we may recuperate a utopian-interpretive dimension of the postcolonial literary text, *as* a literary text, while also tracing, directly and indirectly, the problems this recuperation may raise in terms of specific disciplinary, hermeneutic concerns. In the following I want to explore this line of inquiry further, but with a specific focus on the 'workings' of *form*. This exploration should be seen as a prelude to the argument that I will pursue in more concrete details afterwards – that we need to distance the postcolonial literary text from its institutionalised reception, precisely in order to transfer authority back to the literary text itself.

To clarify this process, we may turn to *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, in which Slavoj Žižek links Marx's analysis of the commodity form, as a symptom of the fetishisation of the social-human relations in capitalist society, with Freud's notion of the symptom in the dream analysis. At a basic level, Žižek argues, 'there is a fundamental homology between the interpretative procedure of Marx and Freud – more precisely between their analysis of commodity and of dreams' (11). Freud and Marx both

develop *interpretative strategies*, which attempt to avoid the 'fetishistic fascination of the "content" supposedly hidden behind the form'; what must be revealed or unveiled through analysis is not some kernel of the content which is hidden by the form, whether this form is embodied in the dream or the commodity, but rather the secret of the form *as such*. Dream-interpretation, for example, as Freud points out, is not about revealing some 'hidden kernel' of the manifest content, but rather about investigating the process by which latent dream-thoughts have assumed a particular form, that is, *why* they were 'transposed into the form of a dream' (11) in the first place. Insofar as we try to unveil the 'secret of the dream' *behind* the manifest text, Žižek argues, we are bound to be disappointed, because 'all we find is some entirely "normal" – albeit usually unpleasant – thought … definitely not "unconscious"' (12). What is still not explained is, according to Žižek, 'simply its form, the process by means of which the hidden meaning disguised itself in such a form' (15).

With commodities, Žižek argues, the same issue is ultimately at stake; it is not a question of finding some assumed hidden kernel of the commodity – such as its value as determined by the work spent in the production – 'but to explain why work assumed the form of the value of a commodity, why it can affirm its social character only in the commodity-form of its product' (11). In the Marxian analysis of the commodity, one must remove its *Schein* or appearance, 'according to which the value of a commodity depends on pure hazard' (14). That is to say, one must attempt to grasp the dynamic *implicit* in the commodity-form as such. Insofar as the meaning or value of the commodity is not determined accidentally or hazardously, it is not enough to merely *unmask* its secret, because this would suggest that the secret of the commodity is something that is 'concealed', and which can be 'uncovered' by the right methods; the *real* secret is '*the secret of this form itself*' (15). This is why the commodity form remains enigmatic; we are fascinated by the secret, believing it to be something hidden 'beneath' the content, while overlooking the work of the form itself. Žižek's readings of Freud's dream interpretation and Marx's commodity analysis point at the pivotal notion of a hermeneutical principle oriented toward the workings of the form itself; an inherent interpretive mechanism at work *at the level of form*, which the hermeneutical practice must recuperate or re-translate.

Since what must be recuperated or re-translated is the balancing process of reflexivity (theory) and representativity (poetry) – to follow Nancy's and Lacoue-Labarthe's notion of the literary absolute – the

workings of criticism constitute a particularly dangerous and unstable process (as Brown's outline demonstrates, directly and indirectly). It goes without saying that it is vital to avoid *displacing* this balance, whereby the dimension of reflexiveness becomes correlated with principles located *outside* that of the literary form itself, thus rendering the dimension of literariness as one being primarily of representativity. The institutionalisation of postcolonial studies is an issue that is intimately related to this problematic; that is to say, the 'success' of postcolonial literary criticism is to some extent achieved at the expense of a *displacement* of the balance between reflexiveness and representativity, vital to a hermeneutical practice that is able to recuperate the utopian potential of the literary, as an interpretive activity at work *at the level of form*.

What I want to explore in the following is another framework which may guide us toward this utopian potential, one that attempts to steer clear of the dangers such as those I outlined hitherto. More concretely, I am proposing a return to the eidaesthetic project of the literary as interpreted in Georg Lukács's oeuvre. In the following, I will focus on Lukács's early work *The Theory of the Novel*, which was first published in book form in 1920, and subsequently move on to the later Lukács's Marxist-realist theory, in order to trace what I see as both a contradictory and to some extent obvious development of a formal-representational dynamic, which I want to resituate within the context of postcoloniality.

The main reason for this return to Lukács is first of all to recuperate a notion of a literary utopian-interpretive dimension at work at the level of *form*. Secondly, this return should furthermore indicate ways in which we may formulate an alternative notion of literary *realism*, as a modality that maintains a formal balance between reflexiveness and representativity, while preventing either of those two dimensions in becoming autonomous discourses.[5] And thirdly, Lukács's development toward an increasingly dogmatic and institutionalised notion of a realist ideal (the Balzacian nineteenth-century novel form as the exemplary mode of literature) exposes, in a negative sense, how the literary (seen as an independent hermeneutical practice) may become extracted into a set of prescriptive, extra-literary *norms*, even if these norms closely resemble the formal work of the literary text; while one may sympathise with many of the underlying reasons for the later Lukács's rigorous conception of realism,[6] the problem here is that the *balancing act*, as that which endows the literary text with its utopian potential, has been eliminated.[7] What is valued in this displaced process is precisely *not* the utopian potential, but rather the adaptation of the literary into a static

and dogmatic, extra-literary framework that is in need of accreditation (and which the literary text may provide) in order to achieve its own legitimate balance – a balancing act that becomes petrified and static, that is, a *lost* balance; in comparison, I would argue, the atmosphere of melancholia in the field of contemporary postcolonial studies can in this sense be seen as the sign of a loss of an actual balancing act.

Lukács's theory of the novel I: *The Theory of the Novel*

The opening chapter of *The Theory of the Novel* is characterised by a strikingly extravagant mixture of pathos and lyricism, nostalgically evoking a golden image of an a-historical, epic past age, which in a crude way is contrasted to a disenchanted and rationalised modernity, whose essence and meaning are absent and which can only be mapped through the ironic comparison with an idealised lost age. Lukács's fallen world of modernity embodies the age of 'transcendental homelessness' (*Theory*: 41) in which the first historically significant genre appears in the form of the novel, carrying out the paradoxical task of representing an *unrepresentable* world.

The main difference between the epic and the novel is, according to Lukács, *history*. The novel becomes 'the epic of an age in which the extensive totality of life is no longer directly given, in which the immanence of meaning in life has become a problem, yet which still thinks in terms of totality' (56). As the paradigmatic genre of modernity, the novel strives for an epic, rounded and truthful totality that, however, can 'be systematised only in abstract terms' (70). The novel form, Lukács claims, constructs an abstract 'postulate'; namely, the idealistic possibility of reconciliation or resolution of the subject-object antinomy – the conflict between the 'problematic individual' and the 'contingent world' (78). But this abstract postulate is a pseudo-solution, a short-circuit with no epistemological truth-value, because far from reconciling the subject and the object, it separates them even further. The unrepresentability of the age of modernity – or what Lukács calls the 'fragility of the world' – can be regulated through certain abstract or formal laws, but it cannot be eliminated as such; rather, 'this fragility will appear in the novel as unprocessed raw material' (72), which also means that the regulative laws or structures of the novel remain wholly abstract and inorganic.

This is the melancholic dynamic of the novel, an epic intention that remains abstract or reified. As a whole, the novel accentuates the *gap* or *distance* separating its abstract, inner form (the regulative laws of

the novelistic medium) from its concrete content, what Lukács refers to as the 'outward form' or the 'problematic subjectivity', that is, the biographical life of an individual in search of his or her 'inner essence'.[8] Far from finding an answer to this search (which would mean reconciliation), the subject is instead left to confront the *impossibility* of finding a truthful answer to his or her quest. That is to say, the concrete, narrative embodiment of the abstract postulate – as the biographical project of the protagonist (in search of meaning) – at the same time implies the withdrawal of any reconciling intentions.

And yet, Lukács argues, the very form-giving ethos of the novel, its formulation of regulative laws and structures, is also what ultimately constitutes the possibility of constructing an aesthetically truthful response to modernity *in the first place*. The novel's abstractness, its epic intentions, becomes a *form* 'as a result of the abstraction seeing through itself; the immanence of meaning required by the form is attained precisely when the author goes all the way, ruthlessly, towards exposing its absence' (72). Emerging as an aesthetic response to an historical paradigm in which a natural-organic totality can no longer be grasped,[9] the novel form is confronted with the fragility of a world *in need of interpretation* (in order to be grasped as meaningful). To avoid becoming fundamentally inauthentic (an untrue interpretation or abstraction), the novel's form-giving ethos must in turn be 'objectified' or, formulated differently, confronted with the impossibility of achieving its goal (which is to render the world truthfully through its regulative laws) – a confrontation which Lukács designates as the 'abstraction seeing through itself' that reveals the absence of an absolute truth in its aesthetic regime. The novel form, in other words, must represent events that belong to a causal-determining order to which we can have no access, while at the same time showing that this task – or 'ethic', as Lukács calls it – is fundamentally an interpretive-reflexive act without proper legitimacy or transcendent authority. While other aesthetic genres, Lukács argues (referring to historical genres preceding the novel), are predetermined *formally*, since 'a balance between the constituent elements' (72) of their formal laws is already settled in advance (by strict generic rules), the novel form is precisely an ethic of *form-giving*. Lukács calls this form-giving a 'fluctuating yet firm balance between becoming and being' (73). The novel form is not a grid or a predefined schematic, but an active *process*, a working-through.[10] This is also why Lukács refers to the novel as the most 'hazardous genre', and 'only half an art'. As a process, this does not mean that the novel's ethic of form-giving must be foregrounded at the level of content, but on the

contrary, that it must remain as the 'regulative, hidden nature of the effective binding and forming ideas' (73). The ethic of form-giving must remain 'indefinable and unformulable' (74), as Lukács puts it, in order to become 'objectified' or 'corrected' by its content, thus achieving what he sees as the ultimate goal of the novel – the 'equilibrium' (74) of formal laws and the representation of life. In other words, the more *indefinable* and *unformulable* these laws are constructed, the more easily they can become harmonised and integrated in an 'organic' way (albeit only in a conceptual sense, not *truly* organically) with the outer form, the content.

It is against this background that Lukács can claim in the first part of *The Theory of the Novel* that the overall formal principle of the novel, which ties the abstract and the concrete together into one perspective without becoming reconciled, is irony. Irony, Lukács writes,

> is the self-correction of the world's fragility: inadequate relations can transform themselves into a fanciful yet well-ordered round of misunderstandings and cross-purposes, within which everything is seen as many-sided, within which things appear as isolated and yet connected, as full of value and yet totally devoid of it, as abstract fragments and as concrete autonomous life, as flowering and as decaying, as the infliction of suffering and as suffering itself. (75)

The totalising intentions of the novel shape an inner form that postulates an abstract ideal of subject-object reconciliation (or the overcoming of the radical split between the formal laws of the novel and its content), which is concretised through the narrative of a problematic subjectivity that ironically undermines this abstract ideal. Lukács claims that through this constellation or dynamic, an 'objectivity' and 'self-correction' is achieved, which reveals, measures and foregrounds, in a negative or ironic sense, the difference between meaning and life.

'Art,' Lukács writes, is demonic in the sense that it 'says "And yet!" to life. The creation of forms is the most profound confirmation of the existence of a dissonance' (72). The demonic revolt – the radical freedom in a world without any transcendental, divine authorities (the aesthetic-ironic 'And yet' which Lukács identifies as the 'centre' of the novel form) is at a fundamental level a revolt against the loss of sense, the reification of reality, and the gap between life and meaning emerging as a consequence of the loss of a sense of totality. The radical, anarchic force of irony, as the highest form of freedom in a godless world, generates a new life (if only in a purely conceptual, non-organic sense), between the relatively

independent 'parts and their attachment to the whole' (75), which must be 'abolished again and again' (76).

Lukács, however, is aware of the radical danger of irony, its spiralling and unstoppable reflective force that threatens even the relatively modest formal intentions of the novel. Novelistic irony, according to Lukács, operates in two inter-related ways; at the level of the form (as we have seen above) and in connection with what Lukács calls the 'creative subjectivity', *above* the form (or *outside* the form, a meta-formal awareness), which he refers to as 'the ultimate unifying principle' (84). This principle, as it is conceived in the first part of *The Theory of the Novel*, is not quite as solid and unifying as its name may suggest, but rather designates a different kind of irony or threatening negativity; namely, the self-consciousness of fictitiousness itself – the power of imagining and representing an alternative world that stands in a differential or antithetical relationship to the outside world.

What is ultimately at stake in connection with the ironic force of the 'creative subjectivity' is the question of truthfulness of the novelistic discourse, the gap between idea and reality. Lukács argues that this kind of irony generates a melancholic 'need for reflexion' (85) at the level of form-giving itself. One could also see this 'need for reflexion' as similar to what Edward Said has seen as the ever-present danger within the discourse of the fiction: 'how the novel is always subject to a comparison with reality and thereby found to be illusion' (*Beginnings*: 84). The 'need for reflexion' is the novel's 'deepest melancholy' (*Theory*: 85) because it signals an awareness of the loss of any possibilities of creating a natural-organic totality – hence the need for interpretation or reflexivity, which, as Lukács notes, is profoundly inartistic. The need for reflexion is, in other words, the self-critical and disenchanting awareness of the novel's inability to overcome the conventionality of its laws, the inadequacy of its illusionary techniques – a destabilising, meta-fictive awareness which threatens even the 'negative truth' produced by the first kind of irony (operating at the level of form). As such, the need for reflexion is a 'balancing device' in the sense that it

> makes form-giving possible and it rounds off the form, but the very manner in which it does so points eloquently at the sacrifice that has had to be made, at the paradise lost forever, sought and never found. This vain search and then the resignation with which it is abandoned make the circle that completes the form. (85)

The more the novel's epic project attempts to manifest itself as 'normative', the more it must prescribe still stricter aesthetic laws for itself.

Yet at the same time, this dynamic also implies that the need for reflexion becomes ever more urgent because the 'creative subjectivity', or the 'unifying principle', increasingly becomes aware of the difference between its abstract postulate, its idea, and the outward reality.

In the second part of *The Theory of the Novel*, Lukács introduces what seems to be a new element that somewhat disturbs the argument about irony which he presents in the first part; namely, temporality.[11] Temporality (or *durée* in the Bergsonian sense) is an ambiguous concept in *The Theory*, since at first sight it seems to intertwine with the forces of irony, but later becomes *affirmative* – a 'positive' justification of the demonic revolt. In the struggle against the widening gap between idea and reality, Lukács claims, the novel produces 'experiences of time which are authentically epic because they give rise to action and stem from action: the experiences of hope and memory' (124).

Why does Lukács, at this late stage in his theory, introduce the reconciliatory and affirmative concept of temporality, and how does it relate to his previous argument which emphasised the almost diametrically opposite stance? Whereas Paul de Man praises Lukács for having eliminated organicism via irony in the first part of *The Theory*, he remarks disappointedly that it 'has reentered the picture in the guise of time' in the work's second part: 'Time in this essay acts as a substitute for the organic continuity which Lukács seems unable to do without' ('Georg Lukács's *Theory*': 58). It is, however, questionable whether Lukács in the first part understands irony to eliminate the organic *as such* – that is, as its primary goal – or whether he perhaps implies that the two ironic forces, operating at different levels in the novel, together constitute an opening toward the possibility of experiencing immediacy, though not an altogether organic experience. In this sense, the novel form constitutes a discontinuous, compositional form whose epistemologically illegitimate insights (in an age of transcendental homelessness) are objectified or balanced by the constant dangers of excessive irony and spiralling, out-of-control meta-reflections, exposing the fictitiousness, the tenuousness and the unnaturalness of its claims.

In contrast to the epic, Lukács argues, the relatively independent parts of the novel 'must have a strict compositional and architectural significance' (*Theory*: 76).[12] No part is justified by its mere presence; each must play its part in a highly regulated and prescriptive structure in order to become a totality. And yet, this prescriptive architectonic structure still remains abstract and wholly ironic.[13] This is where Lukács inserts time as a formal device, which brings to life the abstract and ironic totality of the novel, turning it into 'a concrete and organic continuum'

(125) that integrates the actions and meaning of human lives within a context. As a linear and continuous force, generating the experience of anticipation and retrospection within the novel's composed order, time eventually dissolves and smoothes out the cracks, accidents, dissonances and tensions produced by irony, uniting the novel's rudimentary and irruptive form in an organic way: it 'rubs the sharp edges off each heterogeneous fragment and establishes a relationship – albeit an irrational and inexpressible one – between them' (125).[14]

If the novel form, in contrast to the epic, must 'have a strict compositional and architectural significance' in order to become a signifying totality and if time is to be seen as that formal device which eventually dissolves the 'abstractness' of the novel's strict compositionality, how may we understand this process in more concrete hermeneutical terms? Here we may specify further what Lukács's ideas of compositionality and time imply, at least at one level, via the concept of 'narrative causality'.

This concept has been widely criticised in contemporary criticism, not least by poststructuralists who have argued that the cause-effect constellation is basically an illusion which can always be reversed. Jon-K. Adams argues that what prevents us from recognising 'causality as an underlying principle of narrative is the general attitude that replaces the experience of events with the descriptions of them' (150). Causality as such is not part of our experience, Adams argues: we do not experience a 'cause' as such, but only *infer* an experienced event to be the cause of another event, an event which then becomes the effect of that particular event-inferred-to-be-a-cause. To describe an event as a 'cause' – to infer that an event is the determining cause of another event – is to interpret it as such, to identify, in a 'representational fallacy', the experienced event as the cause itself. This is not to say that experience has nothing to do with causality. Quite the contrary, to experience something, Adams argues (following Kant), is at the same time to assume some general law of causality. This assumption need not necessarily be true per se, since we may believe that a particular event is a cause causing another event, even when that belief may turn out to be unfounded, yet the point is that without such an assumption, we would not be able to believe in the first place. If causality is a concept which only emerges discursively, narrative causality cannot be a mere reflection or imitation of the world, but instead 'an understanding or explanation of that world' (151).

How does causality function in narrative more concretely? Narrative, Adams argues, 'is retrodictive': 'Rather than predicting what will occur

under certain conditions, narrative describes what has occurred under certain conditions and, in so doing, provides a causal explanation by establishing those conditions and the events that are bound to them' (152). Narrative thus posits a finite or strict compositional structure (whether linear, circular or fragmented) which *in advance* has implied or pre-interpreted a particular causal-determining relationship between events, without thereby identifying causes or effects for them *as such* in an absolute and truthful way. This notion of narrative causality resembles Lukács's outline of the 'strict, compositional and architectural significance' of the narrative framework. That novelistic totality remains abstract and ironic precisely because its narrative structure (of events inferred to be causally related) *cannot* guarantee any truthfulness as such; thus it instead generates a 'negative truth', as well as, more worryingly, a 'need for reflexion'. Yet, as we have seen, this only constitutes the first step in Lukács's theory. If the 'narrator links past events together to form a narrative by making inferences based on the assumption that the events are related by some principle, a principle that we tend to call the law of causality' (Adams: 153) – the construction of, in Lukács's sense, a 'strict, compositional and architectural significance' – the principle of *time* must be seen as the narrative structure's own, counter-ironic, or 'organic' response to irony. The principle of time thus generates a *correction* of the ironic self-correction of the narrative's structure of selected events (presumed to be causally related), a negation of the negation, which, though of an equally ironic nature, is precisely an irony directed toward the ironic force itself:

> Time brings order into the chaos of men's lives and gives it the semblance of a spontaneously flowering, organic entity; characters having no apparent meaning appear, establish relations with one another, break them off, disappear again without any meaning having been revealed. (*Theory*: 125)

In other words, a novelistic narrative consists, according to Lukács, of a sequence of events that are already interpreted as being somehow related to one another (even if this relation is construed as a non-relation) and that together form a totality. The parts or events remain, nonetheless, related to each other only abstractly; only *interpreted* as being related, they are not organically or naturally interconnected (as in the epic) and, as such, cannot form a truthful totality, merely an ironic totality. Time, as the 'corrupting principle' (122–123), is in some way an 'effect' of the causal structure, the causal structure being that which

confers meaning to the novel's content or events as they are temporally unfolded. However, it is an effect which 'corrects' the self-correction of the causal structure, in that time struggles against the ironic subversion of the novel's abstract-interpretive formalism, even if this struggle ultimately fails:

> Time is the fullness of life, although the fullness of time is the self-abolition of life and, with it, of time itself. The positive thing, the affirmation which the very form of the novel expresses no matter how inconsolably sad its content may be, is not only that distant meaning which dawns with a mild radiance on the far side of the search and the failure to find, but also the fullness of life which is revealed precisely through the manifold failures of the struggle and search. (123)

Through the dialectical powers of irony and temporality, the novel form generates a glimpse of the epic dream of the sublime, the absolute truth, which is also the point of non-interpretation – the point at which every part is truthfully and organically determined by the whole. It is at this stage that the novel can provide us with a sense of the 'great organic life complex – a nation or a family' (67). In the novel, Lukács writes, 'Everything that happens may be meaningless, fragmentary and sad, but it is always irradiated by hope or memory' (126). Time is the novel form's principle of life, which counters the ironic exposure of the inadequacies of the novel's abstract structure – its reflexive and non-organic framework of meaning – by establishing unauthorised, 'indefinable and unformulable' relations and connections. In that particular sense, time generates *experiences*, however meaningless, fragmentary or unpleasant (experiences not causally determined already, but open-ended and available to 'immediate' experience). Time, as we saw earlier, 'rubs the sharp edges off each heterogeneous fragment and establishes a relationship – albeit an irrational and inexpressible one – between them' (125). As such, time sets the course toward an alternative form of experience, an opening which is made possible, and only as such, precisely because it constitutes an ironic counter-force responding to the irony produced through the abstract schematic of narrative causality.[15] The representational ideal becomes the novel that 'appears to be least composed' (124) – that is, a *realist* ideal which basically translates, and thus de-reifies, the abstract insight of the irony into a concrete, organic experience: 'the novel seeks, by giving form, to uncover and construct the concealed totality of life' (60).[16]

Realism in Lukács's early work is to be conceived as precisely the attempt to *imitate an earlier, absent form* (the totality of the Homeric epos), an attempt that necessarily fails and yet through that failure, opens up a utopian-interpretive trajectory. Realism, as the formal ideal which appears to be *least* composed, and which in the end can never transcend its own compositionality, is a modality which, according to Lukács, strives for the dissolution of its formal dimension (that is, strives for an invisible, organic or natural form which demands no interpretation). The realist modality is thus one that designates a process of 'working-through', a process struggling to eliminate the possibility of authoritative interpretations operating *outside* the totality of the novel form (because the totality of the novel form already must have legitimised, and hence interpreted, the signifying relations between its particular parts). This representational ideal is the closest we get to an actual reconciliation of the subject and the object in *The Theory*:

> The subject's return home to itself is to be found in this experience, just as the anticipation of this return and the desire for it lie at the root of the experience of hope. It is this return home that, in retrospect, completes everything that was begun, interrupted and allowed to fall by the way – completes it and turns it into rounded action. (128)

Lukács argues that the composition of the novel is 'a paradoxical fusion of heterogeneous and discrete components into an organic whole which is then abolished over and over again' (84). The novel form interprets or infers relations between heterogeneous events, as causally connected, and thus *works through* its material in order to *produce* meaning, while also, simultaneously, showing that these relations 'are abstractly pure and formal' (84). And it is through this process that the novel form is able to open up a utopian trajectory, striving toward a point of immediacy, of epic insight: a point where the need for interpretation ceases.

Lukács's theory of the novel II: realism

'The later development of Lukács's theories on the novel' ('Georg Lukács's *Theory*': 59), Paul de Man writes, thinking of Lukács's 'later dogmatic commitment to realism' (55), 'should be traced back to the reified idea of temporality that is so clearly in evidence at the end of *Theory of the Novel*' (59). There are some interesting *temporal* replacements, transferences and displacements between the theoretical

dynamic of *The Theory* and Lukács's realist writings of the thirties and onwards. In *The Theory*, the novel, as a form striving for a lost epic ideal, is seen as the historically 'adequate' aesthetic response to an age of transcendental homelessness. In Lukács's later realist writings, the 'epic' dimension is now more or less coinciding with the bygone art of Balzac's realist technique, which, after the ill-fated year of 1848,[17] has been replaced by reified aesthetic forms of consciousness, like naturalist descriptive techniques. 'Description,' writes Lukács, 'becomes the dominant mode in composition in a period in which, for social reasons, the sense of what is primary in epic construction has been lost. Description is the writer's substitute for the epic significance that has been lost' (*Writer and Critic*: 127).

David Carroll has argued that Lukács's later works seem more historically concrete because

> (1) the abstract typology used to classify the novel in *The Theory* is replaced with a dialectical (really evolutionary) historical model, (2) more 'concrete' historical details are given in the analysis of specific novels, and (3) the motive force of history is apparently located 'within' history in the class struggle rather than in some idealist realm dominating history from the 'outside'. (221)

But, crucially, Carroll argues, Lukács continues to rely fundamentally on the same a-historical representational ideal, as it appears in between the two a-historical dimensions of memory and hope (the lost utopian past and the utopian future). History and Lukács's concept of the novel, both as it is conceived in *The Theory* and in his later theories of literary realism, will eventually cease when the broken totality has been restored; that is, when the socialist revolution achieves its ultimate goal, the classless society.

Lukács's realist theory is, similarly to *The Theory*, one that is centred on a cognitive or epistemological perspective that involves two functions; the destruction of the reified capitalist reality and the reconstruction or recovering of the actual underlying structures of reality. Since capitalist reality is heterogeneous, reifying and alienating, it is necessary, according to the later Lukács, that art must render reality in a more intensified, condensed and rounded form, one ultimately more meaningful, coherent, sensuous and *recognisable*. In order to provide this insight, the realist novel must first of all be convincing or, in other words, *realistic* or *typical*.[18] It must convey a sense of totality that is truly objective and organic in an *epic* sense.[19] From the raw, confusing

and incoherent elements of reality, the realist author is supposed to *select* the *determining* causes and forces in order to construct a narrative perspective which hierarchically organises the selected elements of reality into a rounded, closed whole, where all the parts mimetically and ornamentally correlate with this whole. Within this perspective, the synthesised totality of Lukács's realist novel presupposes, before the narrative perspective can be established, an end goal which teleologically conditions or anticipates the unfolding events in the form of a retrospective insight, one that potentially offers the revelation of the total meaning of the narrative after the story has been told. The realist novel must fundamentally narrate from a point *after* the events, when the story already has finished, by which it can become *narratable* as a meaningful form of experience. All of this also points toward the ultimate Balzacian dimension of Lukács's realist novel, namely the omniscient narrator who, while remaining discrete and invisible, constitutes the transcendental centre of the novel along which the dynamic of the narrative events is developed.

Lukács's critical realism becomes the adequate modality of the novel, an adequacy which is conceived more or less in *prescriptive* terms: 'Realism … is not some sort of middle way between false objectivity and false subjectivity, but on the contrary the true, solution-bringing third way' (*European Realism*: 6).[20] After the knotty and strenuously labyrinthine argumentation in *The Theory*, one is struck by the aggressive and assertive impatience of Lukács's direct formulations on critical realism, almost to the extent that one overlooks its resemblance to the phantasmagorical function of the epic in *The Theory*, now de-contextualised and crudely inserted within the revolutionary ethos of the Marxist Lukács.

This resemblance is nevertheless important to accentuate if we are to understand what has been seen as the later Lukács's regressive and nostalgic tendencies: 'Be like Balzac – only up-to-date,' Bertolt Brecht (76) commented sarcastically, while, like Adorno,[21] criticising Lukács for having produced an a-historical literary theory based on nineteenth-century bourgeois realism. But this argument is, however, also reductive, since although it is true that the *formal* aspects of his realist theory more or less correspond to Balzacian techniques, Lukács uses these aesthetic means in order to accentuate and contrast an objective capitalist reality that is conceived as crucially *different* from the world of Balzac; in other words, Lukács re-employs *The Theory*'s representational dynamic in order to explore and expose, negatively, the fundamental gap separating contemporary society from a previous one. As with *The Theory*, Lukács's realist theory is thus a poetics of displacement, building on

the idea that an older literary form which originated in more 'rounded' circumstances in a different age becomes a displaced and negative image that reveals the historical dimension of the contemporary reified society. Balzac's rounded novel form is, according to Lukács, originally the result of an aesthetic response that 'organically' emerges from its socio-historical circumstances; since these socio-historical circumstances have radically changed in Lukács's own time, his realist theory is not so much a nostalgic return to an earlier aesthetic mode, but rather an attempt, through this previous idealised, harmonic and rounded aesthetic mode, to displace and re-interpret an already interpreted and mediated (or reified) appearance of reality.

What seems to happen in between *The Theory* and the realist writings is an attempt to transfer the authority of the novel's utopian-interpretive dimension to a point *beyond* its abstract postulate, as a way of *historicising* its eidaesthetic project in a concrete, political sense.[22] *The Theory*'s novel is conceived as a displaced form, coming *after* the epic, melancholically reflecting and interpreting the difference or gap that separates it *historically* from a harmonious ideal remembered and anticipated. As such, *The Theory*'s novel creates a correspondence between the historical discourse of reality and the utopian ideal which remains unattainable in its full epic scope. The novel does so, as we have seen, through an arduous dialectical trajectory which produces a negative, or abstract-fictive, truth; and it is only through this trajectory, *at work at the level of form*, that a possible utopian-redemptive glimpse of totality is created. In Lukács's 'later dogmatic commitment to realism', the novel's utopian-interpretive potential is reified, I would argue, paradoxically in an attempt to *de-reify* it – to bridge the passage from abstract formulation to practical realisation. That Lukács moves toward ever more dogmatic and institutionalised formulations of aesthetic redemption does not reflect so much a *betrayal* by the late Lukács of his earlier position (as Adorno thinks) but, on the contrary, an attempt by Lukács to stay *faithful* to the utopian-redemptive dimension, although crucially in an historical and political sense. Lukács's later realist theory attempts to de-reify and historicise *The Theory*'s abstract postulate, but also becomes the immature attempt to *end* the significance of the novelistic utopian-interpretive process at work at the level of form. What is fundamentally displaced or eliminated in Lukács's later theories of realism is the arduous, *implicit* formal work that so characteristically shapes the ambiguous dialectic of the novel in *The Theory*. The later Lukács's theories of realism designate the immature attempt to find a home, identified as the true, socialist state, which becomes the crude re-contextualisation of

the image of *The Theory*'s Homeric harmony. From this transcendental home, the later Lukácsian realist norm is supposed to evoke the experience of the by now lost or displaced sense of a dynamic, meaningful totality that once framed the historically 'adequate' realisms of Balzac and the pre-1848 writers (together with an eclectic handful of post-1848 writers) – the *Aufhebung* or synthesis of the phenomenal appearance of capitalist reality.

In *The Theory*, the novel is seen as an adequate form that responds to the historical problematic of modernity in which representation is no longer possible because the sense of totality is lost. In Lukács's theories of realism, the contemporary novel is now seen not so much as an historical response to the problematic of unrepresentatibility, of the aesthetic, revolting impulse 'And yet!' which has been quashed or at least radically weakened by the ironic force of capitalist reification, forces that prevent any 'organic' or 'direct' correspondence between aesthetic expressions and the dynamic of society, even at a formal level. Despite the obvious pessimism of *The Theory*, and the apparent Marxist optimism, as some critics would have it, in his later works, I would argue that the world view which forms the basis of Lukács's theories of realism from the 1930s and onwards ultimately contains a more despairing epistemology, whereby the contemporary society constitutes a simulacrum that has made representation all too imaginable but in a fundamentally reified way. This also means that the possibility of a direct relation between aesthetic form and the given conditions of reality is actively *repressed* by the commodifying powers of capitalism, and it is for this reason one may see Lukács's literary theory becoming increasingly dogmatic and prescriptive.[23] In his theories of realism, the balance between the historical discourse of reality and the a-historical, fictive representational ideal is broken because the latter, fundamentally still the same as in *The Theory*, becomes the prescriptive norm by which any 'serious' author must narrate. Lukács displaces the implicit utopian-interpretive dimension – which constitutes an integral part of the novelistic dynamic as conceived in *The Theory*, its ironic point of transcendence and authority – to a point *outside* the novel, namely the prescriptive, Lukácsian realist norm that re-employs the representational ideal of *The Theory*, though in a crucially 'decapitated' way; as a search that is not so much about finding, interpreting or imagining as about confirming or affirming an historically conditioned norm.

In the development from *The Theory* to Lukács's realist theory, the utopian-interpretive dimension becomes increasingly reified, paradoxically through the attempt to de-reify it, that is to say, to make

it an historically conditioned norm legislated by the critical authority possessed by Lukács. This trajectory is thus similar to the one outlined by Nicholas Brown, and what he (following Jameson) sees as the emergence of critical theory, which takes over the eidaesthetic project, yet which at the same time becomes problematic precisely to the extent that it, in the same way as in Lukács's theories of realism, is always in danger of becoming dogmatic and prescriptive. What the early Lukács sees as the 'deepest melancholy' of the novel – its utopian-interpretive desire – is also the utopian longing toward the representation, and ultimately restoration, of a meaningful totality, toward meaning in its full essence as such. Melancholy, in Lukács's sense, *is* interpretation (a symptom as well as a pre-emptive response), but not so much interpretation as an end goal, as a striving toward the point of its own superfluity, dissolution – its own negationing; the novel's utopian-interpretive dimension works at the level of the form (as a formal *working-through* of a dialectic trajectory of subversion, ironic self-correction, and temporal reconfirmation), producing glimpses of immediate or non-interpreted experience. The realist ideal, as formulated in *The Theory*, is a fundamentally *melancholic* process; the realist aesthetic attempts to overcome the mourned loss – to reconstruct meaning within the age of modernity, an age which is precisely characterised by its loss of absolute meaning (or the absence of any possibilities of recovering meaning in a complete, truthful way).

Lukács's later realist theory is an attempt to stay *faithful* to his early notion of realism, which paradoxically leads him to become *unfaithful* to it; his later realist theory demonstrates that when the novelistic utopian-interpretive dimension is displaced to a set of authoritative norms *outside* the novel form itself, melancholic recuperation is always going to be haunted by dogmatism – a recuperation not so much for the sake of an eidaesthetic project, but rather for the sake of confirming the legitimacy of a politicised discourse of extra-literary norms.

History, postcoloniality and literary form

Lukács's development toward an ever more prescriptive and dogmatic position echoes a specific problematic that many postcolonial writers confronted in the aftermath of the independence era, namely the *concretisation* of a utopian ideal. What often became the 'historically conditioned norm' in early postcolonial novels was the politicisation and nationalisation of the concept of culture as a unifying social force, which, as Pheng Cheah points out, to some extent explains 'the remarkable

affinity between decolonizing and radical postcolonial nationalism and the novelistic genre' (239). As a vital component in the development of organic nation-formation, many of the postcolonial novels emerging in the early phase of decolonisation embodied the teleological and causal predicament – the gradual but certain progression toward the end goal, utopia or self-actualisation – of the nation itself.[24] However, Cheah observes that 'once the initial euphoria of independence had subsided in the late 1960s and the early 1970s, there was a gradual tightening of control over the economic and political spheres by an indigenous bourgeois elite, often in collaboration with transnational capital' (244–245), which meant that the imaginary-progressive project of the fulfilment of an historically conditioned norm increasingly came under severe pressure.

This failure of the postcolonial literary-eidaesthetic project is, as we have seen, intimately connected to the emergence of postcolonial *theory*, and thus related to postcolonial *melancholia* – the failure of postcolonial theory (as the 'inheritor' of the eidaesthetic project) to melancholically *absorb* or *imitate* the literary eidaesthetic project. And it is precisely in connection with the field's own melancholic pre-emptive response to this failure that we should locate the postcolonial relevance of Lukács's theoretical framework.

Contemporary melancholia represents, as we have seen, on the one hand a symptom of commodification while on the other designating a pre-emptive response to this symptom. It indicates furthermore that the tacit, underlying aesthetic value-paradigm has played an active part in the commodification of the dimension of the literary. Lukács's novelistic theory, as formulated in *The Theory of the Novel*, can be seen as one that attempts to identify the workings of what Žižek saw as the Marxian-Freudian hermeneutical perspective – the secret of the form itself – *as* the characteristic dynamic of the novel form itself. This notion also opens up the possibility of conceiving the literary as a de-commodifying, utopian-interpretive potential. At the same time, the trajectory of Lukács – from the early work to his realist writings of the 1930s and onwards – contains an unintentional warning (that is, the dogmatism of the later Lukács – the reason for which he has subsequently been most criticised), against the dangers of displacing this hermeneutical perspective to a point *outside* the form itself (that is, as a set of prescriptive, critical norms that the literary text must 'confirm'). Postcolonial melancholia suggests that the hermeneutical perspective has indeed been displaced in postcolonial literary criticism, and that to move beyond this impasse we need to (re-)turn to the literary text itself.

Part II

This page intentionally left blank

4
Form and Temporality in Ousmane Sembène's *Xala*

The problematic of imitativeness

In the previous three chapters, I argued for the necessity of expanding the field's aesthetic and political codifications, which more specifically involved developing a critical perspective broad enough to take into account literary strategies not necessarily corresponding to a dominating postcolonial vocabulary. Returning to some issues in Georg Lukács's reflections on realism, I outlined the contours of a critical approach that attempted to avoid ending up as yet another essentialising genre definition of realism – which would merely have changed the emphasis of the antagonistic relationship between realism and anti-realism in contemporary critical theory. Rather, the critical approach I have been proposing would not only involve the possibility of (re)reading the aesthetic potential of distinctly *realist* postcolonial texts, but also postcolonial texts that are not in a typical sense deemed realist texts, yet which contain elements of what one could call a 'realist impulse'.

On the basis of these theoretical concerns, I find it most appropriate to focus on three *formally* very different postcolonial texts – less in order to *illustrate* or *confirm* the validity of my theoretical arguments in a dogmatic way (which to some extent would repeat what I have hitherto been criticising much of the existing postcolonial criticism for doing), but more specifically to illustrate the *potential* of paying meticulous attention to the realist impulse in postcolonial texts, coming from a variety of different contexts, historically, socially and culturally; and, hence, in an indirect way, illustrate what I see as some of the inadequacies, limitations and blind spots of contemporary postcolonial criticism.

In developing such a perspective, it goes without saying that while the three texts I have chosen – Sembène's *Xala*, J. M. Coetzee's *Foe*

and Rohinton Mistry's *A Fine Balance* – take us around a number of postcolonial literary problems, it is far from being a representative or comprehensive selection, nor should it be understood as such. But I have deliberately chosen to focus on depth, rather than width, partly because this book's theoretical concerns guide us in that direction, and partly because I believe that what may be lost in terms of a broader outlook might be gained by carefully engaging with the literary problematics of individual texts.

In the book *Misplaced Ideas*, the Brazilian critic Roberto Schwarz outlines a problematic which, in specific ways, has played a major role in many different postcolonial countries: 'We Brazilians,' Schwarz's book begins, 'constantly experience the artificial, inauthentic and imitative nature of our cultural life' (1). Schwarz's argument, although formulated specifically in connection with the history of Brazilian colonialism, has had a particular resonance in many former colonial countries, not only in Latin America, but throughout the non-western world. It is the feeling of living in an unreal society, not one's own, but imitated from another discursive reality, a society whose meaning and purpose are determined by forces apparently coming from the outside, from some alien influence; the feeling of being an inferior copy of western socio-cultural paradigms, or what one may initially call the problematic of imitativeness within postcolonial discourse.

At a historical and sociological level, the problematic of imitativeness first of all relates to the traumatic history of colonialism and its after-effects. In the immediate aftermath of independence, one of the central projects for many postcolonial states was to assert critical difference from imperial centres; the need for an indigenous, authentic culture had a profound impact on the formulation of a national identity, which not only could work as a bulwark against global imperialism, but also establish homogeneity of differences that had, in many cases, been arbitrarily unified during the colonial phase. Nationalism, as a binary, cultural-political and ideological strategy, was often fuelled by the idea that among the greatest cultural concerns during the transitional phase of decolonisation was the development of an autonomous identity which had been, and still was under the threat of being, eradicated by foreign influence – the search for a legitimate, radical beginning of a proper, and properly independent, nation.

However, due to the increased awareness of the limits of nationalism, one characteristic phase of the development of many postcolonial literary traditions was the emergence of what Simon Gikandi designates 'literature of disillusionment' (378), or what Robert Fraser has

called 'narratives of internal dissent' (8). The cultural explorations of indigenous forms of identity in the post-independence era often led to disillusionment with the limitations of nationalism as an ideology of liberation, and the idea of the nation as a unifying process. Narratives of disillusionment raised concerns about the increased difficulties of distinguishing between real nationalist liberation ideology, which played an important part in many struggles of decolonisation, and mere spectacles of nationalist resistance, which legitimised neo-colonialism and continued modes of exploitation and oppression after independence. National literatures of disillusionment, Gikandi argues, were 'propelled by the belief that African countries had entered a neo-colonial phase, one in which colonial structures and institutions continued their gigantic hold on the new states wearing the ideological masks of blackness and modernity' (378–379).[1]

Often it was the national middle class, thriving under colonialism, which took over power at the end of the colonial era – an underdeveloped class, as Frantz Fanon points out in the pivotal work *The Wretched of the Earth* from 1961, because it imitated and identified with a contemporary western bourgeois class which was already in decline, that is, fundamentally lacking the dynamic, ambitious pioneer spirit characteristic of the first historical stage of a typical bourgeois class. Unable to live up to its historical role, the native national bourgeoisie in many cases became an 'empty shell, a crude and fragile travesty of what it might have been' (119), playing what Fanon calls the 'cheap-jack's function', the 'Western bourgeoisie's business agent' (122).

Intermediary dreams

Ousmane Sembène's short novel *Xala*, which first appeared in 1973 and the following year was turned into a successful film (made by Sembène himself),[2] touches upon many of these issues in a distinct way; indeed, it has often been read as the classic novelistic formulation of the scenario that Fanon, and other intellectuals, warned against – that in many cases it was the native middle class which took over the country after the end of colonisation, and that this class according to Fanon was underdeveloped because it imitated a contemporary western bourgeois class in decline.[3]

Ousmane Sembène was born in Senegal in 1923, and is generally regarded as one of the most important Francophone authors in Africa.[4] In contrast to many other African writers, Sembène did not come from the middle class, but from the working class, and the issue of class

consciousness plays a role in all of his works. Sembène debuted as a writer in the 1950s with some shorter texts, like *Le Docker noir* (1956) and *O Pays, mon beau peuple!* (1957), but it was not until the publication of the social realist novel *Les Bouts de bois de Dieu* in 1960 that he achieved critical acclaim; it is the novel for which he probably remains best known. Sembène's writings, films and social activities have often provoked anger and sometimes led to censorship, particularly during the regime of Léopold Sédar Senghor, Senegal's first president. In 1959, Senegal had joined the French Sudan to form the federation of Mali, and it became independent from France on 20 June 1960, a year of liberation for most of France's African colonies. In August the same year, however, Senegal separated from the federation, after which Senghor was elected as the first president of Senegal (his presidency lasted until 1980). If Sembène's earlier focus primarily had been centred around the proletarian organisation against foreign influence, the novels produced in the aftermath of independence dealt more specifically with the practices of the new nation and the political problems that followed in the postcolonial era – a focus which is particularly emphasised in, for example, *Xala*.

Xala begins with a group of Senegalese 'businessmen' celebrating the first ever governmental election of one of its members as 'president of the chamber of commerce and industry' in the nation's short history.[5] Originally, these businessmen – leading representatives of the native bourgeois class of Senegal – have come together from different sectors of the industry in order to 'combat the invasion of foreign interests' (1). Their declared goal, we are told, is to 'gain control of their country's economy' (1), to 'achieve economic independence' (2). The election of one of their members as the 'president of the chamber of commerce and industry' seemingly marks an important milestone in that direction. However, the quotation marks framing the words 'businessmen' and 'Businessmen's group', as well as the satiric comments inserted by the anonymous narrator, indicate that 'this memorable day' (2) is tinged with irony.[6]

Much emphasis in the novel is put on the businessmen's apparent wealth and power – expensive cars, European suits, large houses, distinguished titles and pompous rhetoric – yet the very reason for their joining forces was originally that they *lacked* real power and wealth. And while the businessmen subsequently have obtained a 'foothold in the wholesale trade' (1), they nonetheless remain excluded from having any real influence on the market. Hotels, restaurants, banks and car companies are still largely in the hands of foreigners. The election of one

of their members to the presidency of 'the Chamber of commerce and industry' may induce renewed hope of economic independence, but in actuality the presidency is without any real power; as such, the event merely illuminates the gap or incommensurability between the *appearance* and the *reality* of their situation. Further adding to this sense of a gap between appearance and reality are the numerous variations of the motif of the 'intermediary'; almost every character in the novel is situated in between someone, or something – for example, the president, who tells El Hadji that he is 'only an arbitrator' (77); or the 'toubab' [white person] representing 'Automobile Credit', who says that he is 'only a messenger' (88); or indeed all of the 'pompous' businessmen whom the narrator designates as 'nothing more than middlemen' (55).[7]

The gap between appearance and reality is no more evident than in the hapless unravelling of El Hadji's life, an unravelling which ruthlessly exposes the extent of the businessmen's powerlessness, the hollowness of their actions, as well as their hypocrisy – the businessmen's *unwillingness* to combat foreign interests, which, as we heard, was their original goal. This unwillingness is due to the fact that the *credit*, allowing them to maintain a pompous lifestyle, still largely flows from foreign hands. Anything that taints their patriotic, but hypocritical, appearance is swiftly being dealt with, for example when El Hadji's financial excesses threaten the businessmen's credibility; to restore the trust that has been damaged, El Hadji must be dissociated from them – expelled and sacrificed.

Expulsion is not an uncommon thing within the group: 'He [El Hadji] knew very well that he was being threatened by them. He himself had behaved in the same way towards one of their number whom they had wanted to expel on a previous occasion' (78). When the turn comes to El Hadji, a striking constellation emerges; lambasting his colleagues, El Hadji's speech is for the first and only time during the entire novel *truthful*. And yet, at the same time it is a speech that becomes the culmination of his hypocrisy. 'What are we,' he shouts to his colleagues, 'Mere agents, less than petty traders! We merely redistribute. Redistribute the remains the big men deign to leave us. Are we businessmen? I say no! Just clodhoppers' (83).[8] The objectivity of the speech's truthfulness is of course thoroughly undermined by the fact that the speaker, once a revolutionary in the past, has long ago lost all possibilities of uttering such a truth with any credibility – any authority at all – as one of El Hadji's colleagues plainly points out: 'We aren't at the theatre. You're up to your neck in muck and you preach revolution to us. You should have thought of all that *before*' (84; emphasis added).

This is an example of how *Xala* frames the problematic of truthfulness – apparently emerging only in negative form, at a time when it has become indistinguishable from, or even identical to, the ultimate form of fiction. El Hadji reiterates the *original* purpose of the group – to gain control of the banks, insurance companies, factories, businesses, wholesale trade, cinemas, bookshops and hotels – but only when he has nothing left to lose.

That the reiteration of the original purpose of the businessmen's group – to gain economic independence – in this particular context has become the ultimate form of *fiction* shows, at one level, how the consequences of truth have been neutralised, precisely because truth no longer seems to have any legitimate bearer or agent; no legitimate *form* in which it can be genuinely articulated. That El Hadji should have thought about criticising the group *before* his financial downfall, insofar as it should have sounded *genuine*, also exposes a temporal problematic. In *Xala*, the notion of a 'before' signifies something unsettled – a dimension which cannot be translated properly into the narrative of the present. It is as if the past constitutes a dimension haunting a neurotically amnesiac present; a past to which the present is *indebted*, and which it cannot *afford* to remember as long as it attempts to maintain its appearance – except when the appearance of the present begins to crack. The unravelling life of El Hadji represents such a crack; but while his defence speech constitutes a rare moment of truth, it is a truth embodied, framed, double-exposed and satirised through an utterly hypocritical agent, an agent that undermines the possibility of reconciling the repressed, forgotten past with the appearance of the present.

Incomplete fusions

Xala weaves together a frantic narrative plot, spanning from the celebration of the presidential election to the beggars' humiliation of El Hadji. Occasionally the plot is punctured by digressive references to some of the characters' past. We hear that El Hadji once was a primary school teacher, and that he was involved in trade-union activities, fighting actively against the foreign colonisers. Moreover, we learn that because of his involvement in radical activities El Hadji lost his job and subsequently embarked on a career as a corrupt businessman. In the world of business, El Hadji made a number of connections with foreign investors and, in the aftermath of Senegal's independence, rose to become an important and well-known citizen in Dakar *because* of these connections. Paid by overseas investors, as well as being a corrupt

board member of local companies, we are told that El Hadji 'played his various roles well but, although the law was fooled, everyone knew what was really happening' (3). In other words, the character of El Hadji comes across as a particularly striking emblem of the hypocrisy and corruption of the post-independence middle class, still reaping the benefits of the colonial system. As the novel suggests, El Hadji is the embodiment of a social contradiction; a 'synthesis of two cultures: business had drawn him into the European middle class after a feudal African education. Like his peers, he made skilful use of his dual background, for their fusion was not complete' (4).[9]

As a consequence of the incomplete fusion of El Hadji's character, the world we encounter in *Xala* seems equally to be incomplete. El Hadji's import-export shop, 'which he referred to as his "office"' (55), is in fact a large warehouse, full of 'flies, cockroaches and geckos' (26), 'rented from a Lebanese or a Syrian' (55), in which 'He had made a den for himself in a corner, calling it his "office". He had furnished it with metal cupboards that had slots labelled with the months and the years' (56). While the description of El Hadji's business is tinged with irony, another ironic contrast emerges during the elaborate descriptions of the three villas owned by El Hadji's wives. The villas are all located in expensive, urban areas, screened off and protected from the misery and poverty of the rest of the city, of which we hear very little (except only marginally), thus isolating El Hadji's world from the surrounding realities – the beggars, and the ongoing oppression. Adja Awa Astou's villa is protected by 'officers of the peace'; a 'well kept bougainvillea hedge surrounded the house, and the wrought-iron front door bore an enamel plaque inscribed with the words "Villa Adja Awa Astou"' (11). Oumi N'Doye's villa is 'identical with the first's except for the hedge. Trees provided shade at the front' (14). Money, prestige and fashion seem to be Oumi N'Doye's main occupation, yet the novel also evokes a sense of her desperate situation, unloved and undesired, ageing, becoming increasingly superfluous. When El Hadji runs out of money, she immediately leaves him, moving back to the poverty of her family, but adapting successfully to a freer, more outgoing life. The third wife, N'Gone, also comes from a poor background; her villa, 'which was of recent construction, stood outside the more heavily populated residential area in a new suburb intended for people of means' (17). When El Hadji's business collapses, N'Gone and her family empty their villa, like Oumi empties hers, whereas the beggars vandalise Adja's villa. None of the villas provide a permanent sense of 'home', a space of safety and stability.

The two main events in the beginning of the novel – the celebration of the presidential election and the spectacular wedding[10] – initially suggest occasions marking development and progression, but in fact they designate the opposite. The celebration of the presidential election does explicitly *not* mean more power or more independence to the local bourgeoisie, quite the contrary.[11] And the wedding does not lead to marital bliss or reproduction, but to social tragedy and impotence. While El Hadji, and the characters surrounding him, may celebrate specific events that evoke promises of progress and development, these events merely mark illusory and wholly empty gestures covering – temporarily – a world in which there is nothing to celebrate at all.

The descriptive, yet laconic and distanced, voice of the narrator evokes an atmosphere of an impersonal space; a space dressed in faked spectacles and inauthentic gestures, but lacking any real human dynamics. The physical architecture in *Xala* remains framed, at times literally by quotation marks; it is an architecture robbed of real progression and development – as if time, in these surroundings, has been archived indefinitely in the metal cupboards with slots labelling months and years that give El Hadji's corner an 'office-like' appearance. It is a commodified world in which the question pervading all situations, scenes, actions and gestures circles around capital and money, creating a repetitive, static atmosphere. People echo each other – for example Mactar, Adja's son, who asks: 'Father, can you give me some money for school?' (13). A little later, Mariem, Oumi's daughter, asks: 'Father, can you give me some money?' (15). Because of his wealth, N'Gone marries El Hadji, who in return lavishes her with expensive gifts, as 'proofs of love' (4); and all the marabouts, as the novel patiently records, are handsomely paid. El Hadji repeatedly, and one-dimensionally, pays his way through the world to get what he wants – to satisfy his desire, to demonstrate wealth, to win forgiveness, or merely get peace. Everyone wants something from El Hadji: 'Assailed on all sides, El Hadji made promises. To have some peace he gave them money' (61).

In a world in which everyone is busy scheming and plotting, the narrative plot of *Xala* is unable to produce a sense of human dynamics. This is despite the fact that the plot eagerly attempts to *compensate* for the lack of real action – through the narrativisation of a gradually escalating string of frenzied and frantic scenes or tableaux. However, the plot nonetheless remains a string of scenes between which no real narrative causality can be formed; scenes which merely suspend purposeful action, and hence real connectivity in El Hadji's life.

The lack of connectivity in El Hadji's life is symbolically illustrated through the depiction of the relations between the families; Awa and

Oumi have only met a few times, despite the fact that they have been married to the same man for many years; in the mini-bus, the kids settle themselves in segregated rows; Rama refuses to allow Oumi's kids move to their villa after El Hadji has gone bankrupt; and when El Hadji has no money left, the families split up.

Connections are established in a strikingly *mechanical* way. Much of the novel's action consists of El Hadji driving around in his car; from family to family, to business, and to visit marabouts. Cars in the novel constitute an ironic symbol of power and love. Showing his 'love' and 'devotion', El Hadji gives his new wife 'a two-seater car with a white ribbon tied in a bow like an Easter egg' (11). When he regrets the marriage, El Hadji reflects that 'to drop her after all he had spent seemed intolerable. There was the car' (26). Yay Bineta, the arch-schemer in the novel, does not trust El Hadji's intentions and hides the 'key and the licence for the car under her cloth' (30). Yet the car also becomes a shelter for El Hadji, a private space where he can allow himself to feel helpless and desperate (which he is not allowed in public or in front of his family). If much of the narrative dynamic is symbolically invested in the motif of the car, the irony is that this dynamic is one that is borrowed; El Hadji's car is in reality owned by foreigners. When El Hadji eventually goes bankrupt, they seize the car – and hence the dynamic of El Hadji's world itself.

The narrative plot of *Xala* is characterised by frequent, albeit indefinite, temporal markers, such as 'three days later' or 'two or three days previously'. Through these uncertain temporal markers, the plot inches its way ahead until all of a sudden we are told that El Hadji's employees have not been paid 'for more than two months' (76); and, a little later, that he has not made payments on his cars 'for three months now' (87). If El Hadji forgets time in the immediate present, overshadowed by his worries about the xala, his financial commitments remind him that his time is one that is cut out in regular, payable instalments. Even if there are numerous temporal markers in *Xala*'s plot, these merely seem to add to the suspension of any real action; time remains wholly abstract in El Hadji's world.[12] Instead we encounter a de-historicised, contemporised and flattened world, one that lacks depth and purpose – and, as such, an *unreal* world; there is a pervasive sense of in-authenticity characterising the world that El Hadji inhabits (together with the characters related to him, professionally or privately).

As we saw above, in El Hadji's world the dimension of truth has no legitimate form, or agent, no bearer within the present. This lack of a legitimate form in the present is closely related to the temporal

inconsistence at the heart of El Hadji's spectacle, the *corruption* of time, one that has been distorted for ideological reasons. El Hadji and his business colleagues – the national bourgeoisie – must necessarily transform the present into a *spectacle*, so as to repress the fact that their interests and actions are fundamentally in contradiction with whatever their radical and revolutionary goals were in the past. To legitimise their positions and actions in the *present*, the businessmen must conceive the *past* in an ideologically coded way – as 'finished' or 'overcome', in the sense that a 'before' no longer plays any significance in the present. In other words, they must construct the present as one that is ultimately *independent* from the past – the past of the colonisers, as well as their own compromised roles in the past. But as the novel demonstratively points out, independence is precisely what they have *not* achieved. What they *have* achieved is merely the licence to play roles in a staged scenario in which independence *appears* to have been achieved.[13] This is an unreal world cut off from the memories of the crimes and betrayals of the past; for example, El Hadji's crime – the fact that he stole another man's land and ordered this man to be imprisoned and tortured – which El Hadji cannot *afford* to remember in the present, which must remain forgotten, repressed. It is an imaginary world which is also wholly impotent, as the xala symbolically illustrates; wholly reified, de-temporalised and de-historicised.

History as still life

In the essay 'Traveling Theory Reconsidered', Edward Said suggests that Frantz Fanon may have been inspired by Georg Lukács's concept of reification while writing *The Wretched of the Earth*. In this work, Fanon focuses on the artificiality of the polarised colonial world – a world in which the native appears as dehumanised and reified – warning that this spectacle may be continued by the post-independent national bourgeoisie. *Xala* portrays a reified world of post-independent Senegal which in an uncanny way echoes Fanon's description of the motionless, un-dynamic colonial world. The similarities between Fanon's analysis of the colonial world and *Xala*'s neo-colonial situation also reveal a deeper affinity at the level of form which, I believe, becomes clearer if we trace Fanon's alleged source of inspiration one step further, namely to the literary reflections that accompanied Lukács's concept of reification.

In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon warns against the dangers of empowering the national bourgeois class, which, after the revolutionary stage, eventually will decay and become stagnant, clinging to power

for the sake of power rather than introducing genuine social reforms.[14] In Lukács's development of the concept of reification, we also find a notion of decay in relation to the national bourgeoisie; after the confrontation between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat in 1848, bourgeois literature – previously constituting a vital part of social critique – becomes superficial and empty, reflecting the interests of a class that no longer wishes to see history as anything but static and unchanging.[15]

To Lukács, post-1848 bourgeois literature is characterised by what he calls naturalism, a literary technique that reflects the bourgeois class's desire for a static, deterministic, a-historical and unchanging society. It is an aesthetic modality which in Lukács's view is radically false, because it portrays the dynamic of history and society as fundamentally meaningless, incoherent, arbitrary and immobile – without perspective or direction. In Lukács's notion of naturalism, history is portrayed as a lifeless, dead subject; it is a narrative form that *suspends* narrativity and representativity, a form that offers no critical and interpretational paradigms. In the essay 'Narrate or Describe?' from 1936, Lukács argues that in a proper, organic narrative form (before 1848), descriptive elements are always inserted within an overall narrative dynamic, a dynamic to which they contribute in a meaningful way. In bourgeois literatures after 1848 (naturalist novels), these descriptive elements are given equal importance *in themselves*, which according to Lukács disrupts and undermines the unfolding of a temporal narrative dynamic, because the novel's parts become fetishised, incoherent or independent: 'Description contemporizes everything. Narration recounts the past' (*Writer and Critic*: 130).[16] Since naturalist literary form is essentially a surface aesthetics, Lukács argues that it cannot adequately convey a sense of the real dynamics of history. Instead, naturalist literature, Lukács ominously writes, conveys 'a series of static pictures, of still lives connected only through the relations of objects arrayed one beside the other according to their own inner logic, never following one from the other, certainly never one out of the other' (144).

Lukács's notion of naturalism can be criticised on a number of different accounts, above all because of its categorical dismissal of any critical potential this form may possess. From a different perspective, one could argue that naturalism – *for the very same reasons* that Lukács attacks it – might be seen as subversive: naturalism's lack of narrative coherence and unity, its allegedly fragmentary and static character are all central aspects of what today is often viewed as 'subversive' qualities in a literary text (in this context, one may also think of Lukács's

harsh critique of modernist literature, which he saw as – basically – an extension of naturalist decadence).[17] However, drawing on Lukács's biased and somewhat crude notion of naturalism may help illuminating certain literary aspects of *Xala* – particularly in relation to the novel's *thematic* use of Fanon's reflections on the decadence of the national bourgeoisie, as well as the *formal* link between Sembène's novel and Lukács. But *Xala* should not be seen as a Lukácsian naturalist novel *as such*, just as the novel cannot be seen as a straightforward novelistic formulation of Fanon's theory either; rather, it is through the critical, and at times ironic, engagement with certain Lukácsian ideas, via Fanon – and vice versa – that the novel formulates a distinctly *literary* perspective, which is different from Lukács as well as Fanon. As a literary interpretation of (the Fanonian) problematic of the intermediary class of the national bourgeois class, via a formally self-conscious use of the (Lukácsian notion of) naturalist modality, the literary potential of *Xala* emerges first and foremost in a *negative* form; the novel illustrates, not so much the 'validity' or 'truth' of the theories of Fanon or Lukács, but rather the *absence* of a form through which truth as such may be articulated and represented. And it is in order to illustrate this aesthetic paradox, I argue, that the novel mobilises a self-conscious engagement with the ideas of Fanon as well as Lukács.

In *Xala*, the relation between El Hadji's world and the country as a whole is broken, or perhaps rather *repressed*.[18] El Hadji's world lacks genuine action, a world which only *appears* to be dynamic while actually being static and repetitive. Only through the *cracks* of this world of appearances do we see traces of another, different form of reality, traces that illuminate – negatively – the in-authenticity of El Hadji's world.

Although there is a clear emphasis on the dimension of mobility in the text – that is, El Hadji constantly roaming here and there in his Mercedes, more and more frantically as the narrative progresses – this dimension is not an expression of any form of power, but rather powerlessness in disguise; the car functions, as mentioned, as a temporary shelter for El Hadji, sheltering his insecurity and uncertainty, while preventing him – temporarily – from realising that he has no permanent home. Significantly, when El Hadji and Modu (El Hadji's faithful driver) travel to the almost unreachable village of Sereen Mada, they are forced to change from the Mercedes to a horse-drawn cart.[19] The narrative slows down, to a point at which everything stands still:

> The baobabs, with their squat trunks and their thick, leafless branches; the slender palms, straight and elegant, topped with their

> broad leaves; the parasol trees, spreading their dry-season foliage, a haven for animals, shepherds and farmers, and a resting-place for birds; the yellow, dry grass, broken at its roots; stumps of millet and maize stalks, indicating the boundaries of the ancient *lougans*; ghost-like trees, burnt by repeated bush fires. Beneath the torrid heat of the sun nature was covered with a thin layer of greyish dust, streaked by the rough tongue of the wind. The landscape was marked by a grandiose, calm austerity and harmony. (62)

What El Hadji cannot reach, the novel seems to suggest, is a *repressed* space, a margin forgotten within the limits of El Hadji's world. It is a timeless or anachronistic place, one that cannot be properly mapped, an unknown territory inside of which El Hadji becomes a stranger:

> Then, as they emerged from a ravine, they saw conical thatched roofs, grey-black with weathering, standing out against the horizon in the middle of the empty plain. Free-ranging, skinny cattle with dangerous-looking horns fenced with one another to get at what little grass there was. No more than silhouettes in the distance, a few people were busy around the only well … The village had neither shop nor school nor dispensary; there was nothing at all attractive about it in fact. It was life based on the principles of community interdependence. (64)[20]

Sereen Mada's barren and poor village is a space that seems to be located outside the temporal order of El Hadji's world.[21] While El Hadji waits for Sereen Mada, he falls asleep and when he wakes up 'with a start' he finds himself wrapped in 'complete darkness' (65); having lost his sense of time, blinded by the depthless darkness that has swallowed him, immobilised without the car, waiting in uncertainty for the marabout, El Hadji feels utterly alienated in the world of Sereen Mada. El Hadji wakes up in a world that seems to be inscribed in a strange, un-locatable, forgotten tense, a *past* tense. But if Sereen Mada's world – based on the principles of community interdependence – exists outside the familiar sphere of El Hadji's world, the irony is that El Hadji is already alienated in his *own* world. It is precisely for that very reason that he travels to Sereen Mada's 'unattractive' world, since it is here that the xala, the main cause of his estrangement, may be resolved.

Much of *Xala* tells the story of El Hadji trying desperately to be at *home* in a world that he himself, above all, has constructed. After he returns from Sereen Mada's village, Modu asks him where he should

take him. At this point, El Hadji realises that he has no proper home: 'he had three villas and three wives, but where was his real *home*?' (69). The xala, the curse of impotence, has literally made El Hadji homeless. Afraid of visiting his wives' villas, because of his sexual shortcomings, El Hadji at one point visits a hotel, owned by a Syrian, who tells him: 'Here you are at home' (56). Significantly, at the Syrian's hotel, El Hadji falls asleep and later wakes up confused, having no sense of time, immobilised without the car – similarly as to when he later wakes up in Sereen Mada's hut. 'Sleep' here signifies a reflective, static moment in the narrative. El Hadji's 'unreal' experience at Sereen Mada's place is an experience of otherness; an other reality utterly unrecognisable within the discourse of El Hadji's narrow world.

As I have argued, Lukács's notion of naturalism as an ideologically coded narrative modality which attempts to *suspend* narrativity, while contemporising everything by offering a string of disconnected tableaux, may be seen as an apt way of understanding the reified, inauthentic world inhabited by El Hadji and his business colleagues. As several critics have observed, *Xala* 'is written in a naturalist genre' (Gugler and Diop: 149), but often this is seen as a sign of the novel's *weakness*. Kenneth Harrow, for example, observes:

> As a successful novelist, he [Ousmane Sembène] has learned to make skilful use of the oppressors' tools, but not in a revolutionary sense. The banal composition and trite polemics … betray a tradition of naturalism that dates from Zola and that has scarcely improved on the original … In the novel version of *Xala* the contradictions for Sembène are heightened by the fact that he must use French to identify those moments when his characters are supposed to be speaking in Wolof. But what he dares not do in the novel … he triumphantly affirms in the film. (183–184)[22]

Harrow's view reflects a general tendency in critical essays discussing *Xala* as a novel and as a film, namely the political and aesthetic preference for the latter. Initially, it is easy to see why; the film version offers a complex and stylistically sophisticated interpretation of the story of *Xala*, which, in comparison, puts the novel's dreary, descriptive scenes, focalised entirely through the commodified world of El Hadji, in a rather unfavourable light. The aesthetic codification of in-authenticity of this world can, for obvious reasons, be explored and shown through the visual medium of film in ways much more pronounced and vivid than through the form of the novel. But whereas the medium of the film

has many advantages in relation to what *Xala* as an aesthetic-political project is concerned with (such as language, superficiality, role-playing), the novel version, I would argue, is a more accomplished work, precisely because the form of the novel can, uniquely, unfold *Xala*'s overall *temporal* problematic, in a way that the film version cannot. One of the fundamental differences, Lukács observes in his early work *The Theory of the Novel*, between the genre of the drama and the genre of the novel is that the former 'does not know the concept of time: it is subject to the three unities and, provided these are properly understood, the unity of time signifies a state of being lifted out of the duration of time' (121). On the other hand, the genre of the novel, given its flexibility and taxonomic formlessness, is according to Lukács *the* aesthetic genre of temporality in the modern world.

As I pointed out earlier, *Xala* should not so much be seen as a naturalist novel per se, in the Lukácsian sense, but rather as a novel that self-consciously portrays a world ideologically inscribed in a modality that demonstrates certain similarities with Lukács's view of naturalism. It is important to maintain this distinction, since it is precisely in this way that the novel formulates its negative aesthetic-political project.[23] Moreover, the distinction helps to illuminate the novel's temporal configuration of the *margins* of El Hadji's world. If we contend that El Hadji's world is cloaked in what Lukács defines as naturalist ideology – a world suspending narrativity – how should we understand Sereen Mada's marginal world, which, to an even larger extent, is portrayed as still life? 'Still life,' the art historian Norman Bryson writes, 'is the world minus its narratives … the world minus its capacity for generating narrative interest' (60). In still life the 'subject is not only exiled physically: the scale of values on which narrative is based is erased also' (61). Sereen Mada's world is wholly unattractive to El Hadji because it appears as static, arrested – without narrative and without the capacity for generating narrative interest. It is a world of boredom, a temporally anachronistic world, robbed of its narrative.[24]

What *haunts* El Hadji throughout the story, and what eventually punctures his world, is at the same time the failure of this ideology to *repress* its margin, its subtext, despite the energetic attempts to deform and dehumanise it – *as* still life, or as a lifeless, objectified world. El Hadji's present world is ideologically codified precisely as an effect of the national bourgeoisie's betrayal of its past, radical ideals. It is a present world that *appears* to be 'progressive', but which merely covers El Hadji and his business colleagues' desire for an unchanging and permanent order, entirely cut off from the past. At the same time, this 'betrayal'

of the past is necessarily conditioned by the repression or re-writing of the margins of the present, its subtext, which, within the ideologically coded spectacle of the present, emerges as still life; but only because this subtext has been radically robbed of its narrative within a present temporal order that appears to be dynamic while in reality being static and conservative.

If the otherness of Sereen Mada's world is basically one that appears in the form of still life – a distant, strange and anachronistic place, a forgotten, past tense – it also becomes an other world that negatively, that is, qua its radical difference, possesses the power to disturb the world of El Hadji. In fact, Sereen Mada's anachronistic world incorporates not only a forgotten or repressed past within El Hadji's present; it incorporates temporality itself. Because Sereen Mada's world is essentially not *part* of El Hadji's inauthentic world – because it appears, in relation to El Hadji's world, as de-narrativised, or as still life – it also embodies an uncanny, allegorical margin, in the Freudian sense; an objectified margin that is suddenly given an autonomous, ghostly life – like a de-narrativised subtext coming to life, narrating an alternative narrative, one that is radically different from the narrative of El Hadji. Sereen Mada's world, a world in which El Hadji's xala may be cured, is one of the subtexts – the cracks – coming to life in *Xala*; a subtext that remains stubbornly resistant to becoming integrated in El Hadji's narrative, precisely because the latter's narrative cannot afford to incorporate it – except in a repressed form, a subtext. What gives life – and indeed potency – to this subtext is of course El Hadji's curse, his impotence, the uncanny xala.

The return of the repressed

Xala's grotesque, exaggerated portrayal of the hapless unravelling of the character of El Hadji belongs to the genre of political satire. And yet the novel's inscription in a satiric modality is also ambiguous, limited to the bourgeois world of El Hadji. Whereas to the readers, as well as to many of the characters in the novel, the xala takes on a comic dimension, the margins of El Hadji's bourgeois world are marked by an altogether more solemn and bleak tonality. Moreover, the xala remains an utterly uncanny experience to El Hadji himself:

> He aged overnight. Two deep lines starting at the top of the nostrils curved around his mouth, widening as they did so. His chin broadened. The lack of sleep showed at the edge of his eyelids and bathed his eyes in a reddish lustre crossed by threads … A dense cloud took

> possession of his thoughts. Everything seemed to shake unsteadily. A skein of questions unwound itself in an endless thread through his mind. (39)

If El Hadji feels estranged when confronted with the *other* reality of Sereen Mada's rural world, there are cracks in El Hadji's inauthentic world already from the very beginning of the novel – similarly portrayed as still life – namely the beggars. We are told that El Hadji is 'raging against the beggar' (28), chanting continuously in the background of many of the novel's various scenes: 'The beggar was part of the décor like the dirty walls and the ancient lorries delivering goods. He was well-known in the street … He seemed attached to it' (27).

The beggars, who, as the novel explicitly informs us, were not beggars in the past,[25] are in a literal sense the repressed of history (and more specifically El Hadji's history) – a history of which they no longer play any part, except in the form of dehumanised, reified still-life objects. The beggars represent the garbage leftover after history has run its course: a 'procession of lame and blind people, lepers, legless cripples, one-legged cripples, men, women, and children … There was something repulsive about the procession, which gave off a fetid smell of ragged clothes' (97).

If the gap between El Hadji's world and its margins (Sereen Mada's anachronistic world and the still-life presence of the beggars) is one that is repressed, the experience of the xala is all the more unsettling to El Hadji precisely because he is forced to *confront* it, to *cross* this gap, if he wants to be cured from his impotence – or, in the end, allow the beggars to cross his police-protected doorstep.[26] It is a crossing moreover suggesting that the xala constitutes a figure that participates simultaneously in two, mutually irreconcilable, modalities that are brought into direct conflict. In the narrative discourse of the novel, the xala represents an ambiguous and undecidable figure, partly because it participates in different narrative discourses simultaneously (hence its un-reality or uncanniness, a Freudian betrayal of common sense), and partly because it constitutes a symbolic configuration of the non-configurative; a configuration of otherness that brings two narrative discourses together, and hence – negatively – gestures towards the absence of truth.

As a superstitious power, the xala embodies an *absent cause*, only manifest in its effects (that is, a superstitious, ghostly power causing impotence, allegorically illustrating the impotence of the national bourgeoisie), which becomes manifest only near the end of the novel, when the chanting beggar claims to be the 'author' of the xala: 'I can tell you

now, it was I who caused your *xala*' (101). But what endows the beggar, at this particular moment in El Hadji's life (and the life of the national bourgeoisie), with such a causal power? What essentially endows the beggar with power over El Hadji, at this particular moment in his life, is the event of the wedding night by which El Hadji attempts to *inscribe* himself in the future of the country (by marrying the young N'Gone), and thereby *seal off* the past, as well as *elevating* himself 'to the rank of the traditional notability; it represented a kind of promotion' (4).

If the wedding night, during which the xala occurs for the first time, constitutes a fixation of failure, a castration – that is, the revelation of the impotence of the symbolic power invested in the event of the wedding – much of the novel is occupied with coming to terms with the reality of this failure; El Hadji doggedly searches for people who can cure him; with an increasing degree of paranoia he suspects people who might have caused the xala. Indeed, the search for the cause of an effect (the impotence of the present situation) lies at the centre of the novel's narrative dynamic. During El Hadji's desperate search for a cure, he maintains a high living standard: 'three villas, several cars, his wives, children, servants and employees. Accustomed to settling everything by cheque, he continued to pay his accounts and his household expenses in this way. He went on spending. Soon his liabilities outstripped his credit' (47). In *Xala*, the capitalist circulation is dead – a false dynamic which, inevitably it becomes clear, must collapse. At the heart of this false dynamic we see a tightly woven pattern of sexual and economic relations. When El Hadji begins to suffer from impotence, he spends all his time trying to find a cure while neglecting his business. When he is cured by Sereen Mada, albeit only temporarily, he is no longer able to save his business – and hence pay the marabout who has cured him (and who consequently restores the xala). A strange, inverted logic is at stake here; initially, El Hadji's sexual impotence – caused by the xala – seems to lead to economic impotence (El Hadji's business is ruined because he is entirely focused on finding a cure). But as we know, the xala itself is empowered as a causal force of impotence *because* of El Hadji's corrupt business methods – the fact that his wealth has *not* been achieved legally or properly, that is, via a proper, capitalist circulation, but rather through plain theft.

The xala becomes powerful, or meaningful, as a cause of impotence only in a *negative* sense; that is to say, as an incomprehensibility or contradiction which cannot be solved within the false dynamic of El Hadji's world. Finding a cure, which is what El Hadji is trying to do for much of the novel, thus remains a futile, impotent effort. The novel ends with

the beggar claiming the 'authorship' of the xala, but only after El Hadji painstakingly has traversed through all other (false) options first, and in the process ruined himself financially, as if the novel suggests that it is only when El Hadji can no longer pay his way out of reality, that reality is able to force itself upon him.[27] Disempowered, El Hadji has run out of options, credit and credibility when the beggar approaches him; that is, El Hadji has *worked through* a series of misrecognitions as if to prepare for the true, and truly remembered, form of recognition.

As an absent cause – a gap or incomprehensibility – the xala is at the same time not a proper, absolute cause, but must, in turn, be seen as an effect caused by some preceding cause; the paradox here is of course that this preceding cause is no one but El Hadji himself – the corrupt businessman who robbed and tortured his way to wealth and power in the past. In other words, the xala is not a cause but rather the effect of a repressed reality. The xala is charged with power *because* it is not a cause, but must be interpreted as an effect that returns – to its empowering source, the cause. The xala is unable to manifest itself except as an absent cause, that is, impotence, in El Hadji's world, which in effect causes El Hadji to search for its real source of origin, and which eventually turns out to be his own repressed past.[28]

The beggar does not in fact *cure* anything (or at least the novel makes a point out of leaving this issue unsettled); rather, as it is, the beggar merely seems to *confirm* that the xala, the impotence, is a figure of power because it embodies the negative effect of a criminal event of the past – the crime *of* the past, as well as the crime *against* the past, which El Hadji cannot afford to remember – embodied in the very fate of the beggars *as* beggars in the present. El Hadji's amnesia is ideological in the sense that it has removed any memory trace of his criminal past, a crime that precisely has made possible El Hadji's wealth and powerful position in the present. The more El Hadji becomes immersed in the task of finding a cure, the more he forgets the immediate concerns around him, such as his family, the business, and himself, which fatally leads to his expulsion from the lucrative business collective, at which point he, as a consequence of his forgetting the present, remembers the radical ideals of his past.

Amnesia is also embodied in the narrative principle of *Xala*; the unfolding of the plot has, as mentioned, no real coherence – it cannot configure coherence as a meaningful narrative dynamic within one frame. Events unfold, one by one, in between which the meaning of previous events emerge dissonantly. It is as if *Xala* constitutes a narrative – conceived as a false, naturalist modality – that attempts to cure itself of its amnesia, an amnesia that has become so comprehensive

and powerful at this stage that even the memory of its own ideologically coded amnesia seems to have been forgotten as well.

The beggars' visit to El Hadji's house is a return of the real. It constitutes their narrative claim – the linking of the real effects to their true cause, El Hadji himself; not the inauthentic El Hadji of the present, but the criminal, neo-colonial capitalist, the betrayer of the past. It is a figure who is identifiable only within a unified narrative discourse that includes the past. The beggars' return is a narrative claim to tell their story, which is also the true story of El Hadji – an uncanny desire to reclaim a collective, realist narrative in an unreal, privatised and split world.

Negative realism

Xala's split world deals explicitly with what I initially referred to as the problematic of imitativeness, reflecting the difficulties of finding a form that may contain and formulate an authentic, truthful perspective. 'The colonialist,' El Hadji hypocritically reproaches his business colleagues when he is about to be expelled from their lucrative, but politically compromised, collective, 'is stronger, more powerful than ever before, hidden inside us, here in this very place' (84). As a novel, *Xala* develops a utopian-interpretive perspective to trace and explore the hidden ways in which truth becomes radically undermined as well as to trace and explore forms in which it can be contained.

Exploring disjointed connections, the novelistic dynamic of *Xala* brings together different narrative constellations that mutually cancel each other out – in an effort to trace the hidden ways in which truth has been radically undermined, and how it may be rediscovered. In the novel, the two pivotal scenes – the wedding night and the beggars' humiliation of El Hadji – are inserted within one narrative frame, despite being temporally displaced, and thematically as well as realistically disconnected, as two mutually irreconcilable, yet equally mutually conditioning, events; events that reverberate as the haunting spectacle of Senegalese post-independence history itself.[29]

The margins, or subtext, of El Hadji's world introduce an *other* reality – a different, allegorical codification, independent of the main narrative; a qualitative, temporal difference, tearing apart the present, or rather the *in-authenticity* of the present. The in-authenticity of the present is dominated by a temporal modality similar to what Walter Benjamin calls 'homogenous, empty time' (designating the positivist notion of time that Lukács saw as characteristic of the naturalist mode of representation). The opposite of 'homogeneous, empty time' is, according to Benjamin,

'Jetztzeit' (*Illuminations*: 253), which refers to a qualitative dimension of time that conveys a sense of 'discontinuity' (as opposed to the faked spectacle of continuity embodied in homogenous, empty time). 'Jetztzeit' is characterised by a messianic dimension, similar to the threshold, the arcade, or the work of translation – that is, instances at which the past and future meet and condition one another. It is a *de-reifying* force through which, Benjamin argues, a qualitative temporal experience can be glimpsed. The subtext of El Hadji's world can be seen as constituting moments of what Benjamin calls 'Jetztzeit', breaking the homogenous, empty time of El Hadji's world.[30] It is a subtext that introduces a sense of history, conceived as dynamic, narrativisable, and graspable. In *Xala*, this sense remains at a utopian level – to be achieved in and through time, or indeed *healed* through time; a utopian impulse that negatively measures the in-authenticity of the present moment.

It is in this way *Xala* raises a number of epistemological questions about the *potential* of novelistic representation within a particular, historical situation – of which Sembène's novel is the symptom as well as its symbolic resolution, an aesthetic 'working-through'. In *Xala*, the return of the repressed constitutes a figure of negation; a dimension of absence in the present, indeed the *impotence* of the present. As I have argued, one may see this as the novel's way of configuring a utopian impulse that cannot *realistically* exist within the ideologically coded reality of the present, cannot be given any reality – except in a transfigured way, as the beggars' supernatural power (which on another level is not a supernatural power at all, but rather the projection of a moral-transcendent revenge fantasy). The narrative dynamic in *Xala* strives toward a point at which ideologically separated trajectories are brought together – what one may see as a *realist* ideal (in the Lukácsian sense), albeit one that remains situated within a highly allegorical framework, measuring, negatively, the gap between its own formal-representative conditions and the legacy of the radical ideals of independence (thus illustrating the later Lukács's thesis of the necessity of the *repetitive* dimension of critical realism, while equally demonstrating the earlier Lukács's point that this dimension essentially must remain an *ideal* rather than a *norm*). This realist ideal – which *Xala* as a novel traces negatively through its melancholic, utopian-interpretive dynamic – constitutes a level on which everything correlates within a unified framework of meaning; on which a collective form of meaning may be understood spontaneously across disjointed levels; and, as such, a level upon which a 'working-through' of the truth can be symbolically re-enacted.

5
Arcades of Foreignness: J. M. Coetzee's *Foe*

Writing back to the centre and the question of canonicity

As we have seen, Ousmane Sembène's novel *Xala* explored the continued forms of colonial modes of exploitation in the aftermath of independence, in order to criticise the national bourgeoisie's ideological use of nationalism as a rhetorical tool serving its own class interests. Within the field of postcolonial studies, one of the problems with *Xala*, as I mentioned earlier, is the novel's alleged use of a western 'naturalist' form, which is probably also one of the main reasons why many postcolonial critics have preferred the *film* version of *Xala*, rather than the *novel* version. To put it in a crude way, *Xala* as a novel quite simply does not seem resistant enough in an aesthetic-formal way – not distanced enough from what it supposedly criticises and interrogates politically. My reading of *Xala* attempted to stress a different angle from which one might avoid reading the text within this particular framework, and instead focus on what I saw as *Xala*'s novelistic potential as social critique. In the following, I want to explore some of the mechanisms through which postcolonial studies has attempted to renegotiate – via the dimension of the aesthetic – what I have called the problematic of imitativeness (that is, the hegemonic influence of western forms and techniques) in ways more explicitly distanced from hegemonic discourse.

If a novel like *Xala* on the one hand criticised continued forms of colonial exploitation, while on the other hand allegedly continued using oppressive and complicit western aesthetic forms, another way of (dis)solving the problematic of imitativeness, as Roberto Schwarz observes in *Misplaced Ideas*, would be to *reverse* the direction of that influence; to deconstruct the hierarchical notion of the copy, as always

somehow being inferior to the original – the posterior to the prior – as well as the peripheral to the centre.[1]

What Schwarz refers to is of course the notion of 'writing back to the centre', a highly influential concept originally coined by Salman Rushdie, who argued that English as a language needed to be 'decolonised'.[2] Subsequently, the notion was crystallised and popularised in *The Empire Writes Back*, a book which epitomises one of the ways in which much postcolonial criticism has dealt with the problematic of imitativeness at an aesthetic-formal level. From merely being 'imitative' texts, or texts evaluated in the shadow of a foreign aesthetic framework whose meaning and function remained disconnected from local concerns, the poetics of 'writing back to the centre' added a renewed radical dimension to postcolonial cultural concerns. Strategies of writing back to the centre, at least in theory, would boost the self-esteem of subjectivities of the margin, moving from being considered as backwards, passive, derived, secondary, belated, translated and imitative, to being part of a larger process of radical re-thinking and re-organisation of modernity – not the westernisation of the world, but the creolization and hybridisation of the global discourse.[3]

The concept of writing back to the centre gave the critical dynamic and methodology of postcolonial studies a utopian aura of radicalism, subverting experiences of secondariness in creative and counter-discursive ways, as mimicry and pastiche, and thus apparently re-vitalising a tired, exhausted Europe while at the same time generating renewed hope for the preservation of an assumed, anti-essentialised local identity performed on the global stage. A literary key text within this perspective is J. M. Coetzee's novel *Foe* (published in 1986),[4] which writes back to the centre in a conspicuous and explicit way, while also framing, directly and indirectly, the question of institutionalisation – and, by implication, the question of *canonicity*. Canonicity is of course a particularly sensitive issue within the field of postcolonial studies, since a large part of the *ethos* of postcolonial criticism has precisely been to formulate a challenge to a narrow, Eurocentric literary canon based on allegedly universal values.

As a complex, fictive reworking of Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (published in 1719), *Foe* frames the issue of canonicity in a direct way by 'writing back' to one of the most canonised texts in western culture.[5] Yet in an indirect way, *Foe* has also become an exemplary, canonised text itself, one of the most cited texts within postcolonial studies. This of course raises the question as to whether *Foe*, even if it challenges the western canon, itself reproduces or promotes mechanisms by which canonicity as such functions. The latter seems to be an increasingly

relevant issue in the light of what I have referred to as postcolonial melancholia, the unease about the field's possible complicity with the processes of global commodification of otherness and marginality in the market place.[6]

Having successfully dismantled and destabilised the traditional canon, the success of postcolonial studies has, as I have been arguing, to some extent itself become a problem, in the sense that it has increasingly become an institutionalised, authoritative field, operating with a narrow, fixed vocabulary, repeatedly employed in discussions of specific canonised texts that allegedly unfold, and thus confirm, the claims proposed by postcolonial studies as a theoretical field. Among those texts, *Foe*, along with Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, must be considered as one of postcolonial studies' key texts, perhaps *the* text of 'writing back to the centre'.

There is something manifesto-like about the way in which criticisms have approached *Foe* as an exemplary postcolonial text, a text which apparently formulates postcolonial studies' aims and values in a mirror-like way. Reading critical responses to *Foe*, one finds a remarkably harmonic pattern of opinions and arguments, generally supported by a narrow theoretical set of orthodoxies and dogmas; very few critics actually question or criticise in a negative way the text's qualities as a subversive project.[7] There is of course nothing 'wrong' or 'suspicious' about that *as such*, but given the contemporary field's anxiety about the loss of radicalism and questions of institutionalisation, the *relationship* between a canonised text like *Foe* and postcolonial studies as an increasingly institutionalised field demands further critical investigation.

To reiterate my argument from the previous chapters, literary criticism may with a text like J. M. Coetzee's *Foe* also become exposed to a certain hermeneutical blindness – or what Franco Moretti calls an 'interpretive vicious circle' – whereby the critical discourse of postcolonial studies prescribes specific aims and values that must be confirmed and echoed in selected, canonised literary texts, for example Coetzee's *Foe*; texts which in order to be 'heard' must conform to these claims, while, on the other hand, non-canonised texts are implicitly devalued, ignored or perhaps even demonised. In the following, I will attempt to reconstruct as faithfully as possible the narrative dynamic that *Foe* enacts, in order to frame what I see as the novel's complex relationship with the discursive framework of postcolonial theory, the particularly literary problematics this relationship may involve, and how *Foe*'s formal-aesthetic concerns relate to the overall theoretical framework of this book.

Literalness and irony

Robinson Crusoe, the 'Father' of the English novel, echoes throughout *Foe* in an oblique, yet always apparent way. Written at a time when western capitalism had long been embedded in the process of developing into a complex, imperial system of overseas exploitation, *Robinson Crusoe* embodies the nostalgic dream of a new beginning, or a beginning all over again, in a simpler, more transparent, capitalist society in which the individual middle-class artisan could still determine his own fate through hard, honest work.[8]

A text about new beginnings, or beginning again, there is an impatience scurrying along Defoe's sentences, a rough, unpolished style that gives the novel a certain kind of transparency or immediacy, which has often been seen as one of the first examples of literary realism; one that is evoked by the everyday-like level of the novel's laconic language, fused with carelessly long reportages of mundane, practical things, as well as non-literary, factual discourses on economics, trade, crafts and geography that are never fully integrated in the plot of the story itself.[9] In an essay on *Robinson Crusoe*, Coetzee has described this style as 'a matter of pure writerly attentiveness, pure submission to the exigencies of a world which, through being submitted to in a state so close to spiritual absorption, becomes transfigured, real' (*Stranger Shores*: 20).[10]

In one sense, the language of *Foe* is strikingly crystalline and lucid, which preserves much of the atmosphere of Defoe's transparent style. On another level, it is a text bristling with an ironic force always threatening to explode its fictional frame. One might even say that it is precisely its apparent lack of irony which constitutes the greatest ironic force in the novel. It is a novel that insists on being read literally or transparently, *not* as an allegorical text, a text figuratively subverting its predecessor through irony. Yet, the more one reads it literally, the more ghostly it appears, as a text almost entirely consisting of material other than itself, other than its actual story – that is to say, a story materialising itself literally to the extent that it almost vanishes.[11] As a novel, *Foe* not only engages with otherness on the level of the story, but also in a very literal sense *is* other to itself. Much of the text in Coetzee's novel is framed by quotation marks,[12] such as the first chapter which later turns out to be a manuscript. Another chapter consists of a series of letters addressed to the elusive writer Mr Foe, while the actual diegetic level in the story consists of a dense, dream-like, inter-textual web of semi-meta-fictive reflections on an imaginary narrative, a narrative that is about to be written. It is as if *Foe* as a story never quite begins – as if it remains a long, ghostly prelude

to another narrative that echoes in a strangely disembodied way through the text; a story that it can never quite become.

Read literally, then, *Foe* becomes a story about its own inability to become a story, a ghostly musing on the circumstances *before* Defoe's famous castaway story has been written, the story of its genesis or pre-text, the imaginary primary scene of one of the founding texts in the western canon. Yet, read literally, *Foe* at the same time becomes ironic precisely to the extent that the reader is unable to read it in a pure sense, but only as an already mediated text filtered through Defoe's shadowing text. *Foe* becomes a negative narrative, writing the ghostly absences, exclusions and silences of everything that did not eventually become part of the 'official' story as everyone knows it – of everything that was different from a text like *Robinson Crusoe* which famously claimed its authenticity from a wholly different source.[13]

Narrative silences and mysteries

Foe is mainly told from the I-narrator Susan Barton's perspective. It begins with the text of her rudimentary and provisional memoir from Cruso's island, written down after she and Friday have arrived in England, explicitly addressed to the author Mr Foe whom she has asked to write her story.

The memoir begins, literally, from the beginning, that is, from the time she arrives on the island: 'At last I could row no further … I slipped overboard … I swam towards the strange island' (5). Throughout her account, she stresses the *difference* between the island she encounters, and what readers may expect: 'For readers reared on travellers' tales, the words *desert isle* may conjure up a place of soft sands and shady trees … But the island on which I was cast away was quite another place' (7). The same goes for one of the island's inhabitants – Cruso (spelled without an e, distinguishing him, at least in writing, from Defoe's Crusoe) – whose life story she never learns to know properly:

> I would gladly now recount to you the history of this singular Cruso, as I heard it from his own lips. But the stories he told me were so various, and so hard to reconcile one with another, that I was more and more driven to conclude age and isolation had taken their toll on his memory, and he no longer knew for sure what was truth, what fancy. (11–12)

Cruso is almost a negation of the adventurer portrayed by Daniel Defoe. He has only managed to save a small knife from the wreck, showing no

wish to save more; he has kept no journal and does not share Susan Barton's regrets for not having done so; and his work on the island is entirely sterile, consisting of a pointless construction of stone terraces for which he has no seeds. 'I only clear the ground for them,' Cruso replies to the bemused Susan Barton; 'Clearing the ground and piling stones is little enough, but it is better than sitting in idleness' (33). When she asks him why he has not built a boat and tried to escape, Cruso merely answers, 'And where should I escape to? … Brazil is hundreds of miles distant, and full of cannibals … we shall see sailing-ships as well and better by staying at home' (13). Having kept no record to preserve a sense of time, 'no carvings, not even notches to indicate that he counted the years of his banishment or the cycles of the moon' (16), the character of Cruso is difficult to integrate properly in the memoir that Barton is writing.

Cruso's apathetic silence – his dispassionate nature, his futile desires – is all the more troublesome for Susan Barton's narrative because, contrary to Defoe's Crusoe, he has not taught Friday to speak his language. In fact, as she later discovers, Friday has no tongue. The story of Friday proves to be even more elusive and mysterious.[14] Her attempt to recount the true experiences on the island is prevented by absences or secrets, which, as Matthew Greenfield observes, 'invite interpretation but fiercely resist it: they have the form of messages, but the envelopes cannot be opened and may be empty' (231).

As we saw in Chapter 3, among the things that Lukács foregrounds as one of the particular potentials of the novel, at least in its traditional narrative form, are its connecting energies. Or, as Peter Brooks has argued in *Reading for the Plot*, narrative forms convey plots that connect, recover and reconstruct, that is, produce a causally ordered meaning of reality's temporal flow of disparate and heterogeneous events:

> Narrative is one of the ways in which we speak, one of the large categories in which we think. Plot is its thread of design and its active shaping force, the product of our refusal to allow temporality to be meaningless, our stubborn insistence on making meaning in the world and in our lives. (323)

Susan Barton's chronological recount of her experiences on the island is, however, constantly obstructed by a number of aspects that refuse to be integrated into – and to work as parts of – her story. The characters of her story, Friday and Cruso, as well as their stories and actions, are reluctant to be assimilated into – and thus 'saved' by – Susan Barton's story.

When the ship that will take them back to England and 'civilisation' arrives at the island, Friday immediately attempts to escape, but is captured on Barton's request, while Cruso himself – like Conrad's Kurtz – dies of fever on the ship. None of them seems to survive the journey into Susan Barton's narrative without actually vanishing, figuratively or literally.[15]

For much of the novel, Susan Barton's motive for telling the story is presented as a desire for truth. Thus, when the captain of the ship that saves them suggests that she may sell her story to a professional writer, who will also 'put in a dash of colour too', she immediately replies 'I will not have any lies told … I would rather be the author of my own story than have lies told about me … If I cannot come forward, as author, and swear to the truth of my tale, what will be the worth of it? I might as well have dreamed it in a snug bed in Chichester' (40). Barton's claim to narrative authority is the ability to confirm, as a witness, the truthfulness of the story, which also means that she must guarantee the truth of the story with her own being or identity.

The inconsistencies and gaps in her narrative threaten this desire for truth or, more specifically, a desire for a truth substantiated and grounded in real events. She feels that in her story a 'liveliness is lost' (40), that it is a mere imitation which cannot do justice to the original, real experience, and that she herself has not been fully integrated in her writing, partly because the island's inhabitants stubbornly have kept their stories for themselves. She cannot repress the sense of merely appearing as an insubstantial, ghostly person in the margin, and that she thus 'has violated herself by defacing herself in her own narrative' (Jolly: 5).

To bring back the liveliness as well as the meaning of the story as a whole, which by implication means her own experiences – her own identity as a castaway, a survivor, a witness, as the centre of the story – she needs Mr Foe, the professional writer, experienced in transforming castaway stories into successful, profitable adventure tales. She wants Mr Foe to bring back her life: 'Return to me the substance I have lost, Mr Foe: that is my entreaty. For though my story gives the truth, it does not give the substance of the truth' (51). Warned by the captain on the ship that rescues them, Mr Foe's trade is however 'in books, not in truth' (40).

Authorial struggles

Mr Foe's trade is not in the truth, yet 'truth' is an integrated part of the ways in which he promotes the saleability of his books, that is, his

trade. As the epistolary chapter suggests, Mr Foe, in whom Susan Barton has entrusted her manuscript of the story, is an elusive, secretive figure, troubled by debt and hiding from bailiffs, always on the lookout for the next sensational travel adventure from which he can profit. Eventually Susan Barton and Friday meet the author, only to find that Mr Foe is dissatisfied with her narrative: 'The island is not a story in itself' (117), he observes, referring to its plainness, its lack of exciting elements such as cannibals or exotic animals. Popularity among readers is to him a sign of the story's 'truth'; to make Susan Barton's story exciting, to make it saleable, is to align it with the genre conventions of the travel adventure, and which furthermore means to compromise the singularity of the story itself – its own, singular truth.[16]

This also means, as it turns out a little later, that the actual problem for Mr Foe is not so much the fact that Cruso represents something quite different from the active hero that readers will expect from a travel adventure, or that the story lacks scenes of cannibals invading the island. The problem is more precisely Susan Barton. She represents not only a character in the story, but also, and more problematically, a co-author insisting, as a witness, on the story's truthful rendering in the hands of Mr Foe.

Mr Foe's philosophy of writing is fundamentally at odds with Susan Barton's original and primary intentions, to narrate the story truthfully, a substantiated truth, grounded in lived events and experiences of specific referents, as recounted in her memoirs. Underlying Susan Barton's reasoning there is a fundamental contradiction that refuses to be reconciled. On the one hand, she expects Mr Foe, as the professional writer, to produce a story that will substantiate its truth, explain its mysteries and enigmas, bring back its liveliness; yet on the other hand, to *substantiate* the story is also at the same time to compromise, if not wholly negate, its truth-value – a story which can only remain true insofar as it exposes its own inability to explain truthfully its mysteries and enigmas, bring back its liveliness, that is, substantiate its truth-value.

To Barton, this narrative paradox is initially due to the character of Cruso: 'She desires and expects Cruso to be Defoe's Robinson Crusoe' (Jolly: 5). Barton's Cruso represents a narrative violation of the conventions which are prescribed by the genre of the travel adventure, the expectations and desires of the readers. The inability to reconcile Barton's Cruso with Defoe's Robinson Crusoe suggests not only the contradictory workings of Susan Barton's narrative desire, but ultimately tells us something about the nature of fiction itself; an irreconcilability which can be seen as an allegory of the *birth* of fiction in the modern sense.[17]

Foe attempts to take the story away from her by offering her a different story – that is, by suggesting that Barton ought to include her own, previous story, the search for her kidnapped daughter in Bahia before she ended up on the island. Readers will hear an echo of Defoe's *Roxana* (published in 1724) in this story, in particular during the meta-fictive episode in *Foe* when Susan Barton is approached by an unknown girl, claiming to be her lost daughter.[18] Barton, however, dismisses the girl as being a manipulative authorial gesture carried out on Mr Foe's demand. While Mr Foe attempts to manipulate Susan Barton into accepting the story of *Roxana*, he wants to adapt the story of the island to the form of a proper travel adventure, that is, *Robinson Crusoe*, the canonical novel. But Barton is aware of this act of disempowerment, insisting that the story of the island must be narrated as independent from her own, previous story. Dissatisfied with Mr Foe's alternative story of *Roxana*, which in any case would not have been possible to narrate truthfully since it would end unsuccessfully, unfinished, without Barton finding what she believes to be her real daughter, she instead wants to reclaim the authority of the island story. To reclaim the right to 'father' her story, she impersonates him: 'I write with your pen on your paper, and when the sheets are completed they go into your chest. So your life continues to be lived, though you are gone' (65).[19]

Cannibalism and otherness

Susan Barton nevertheless cannot overcome her own insubstantiality in writing, that is, reconcile truth with substance. Truth only appears in the form of a negation that undermines the ground beneath her story. Unlike other female heroines of the eighteenth century, including Roxana and Moll Flanders, Susan Barton's role-playing is a reluctant shelter, rather than a pleasurable freedom, in a world full of dangers – for example, when she disguises herself as a man, but only after being harassed on the road. As Matthew Greenfield observes: 'She wants to fix and preserve a stable and integral self by authorizing if not authoring a single version of her story' (229). This is also why she must reject the girl claiming to be her daughter. Susan Barton must resist being cast as a mother if she wants to reclaim the right to 'father' the story of the island. To claim narrative authority, to claim the power to transform life into a substantial truth in narrative, is nevertheless to perform a practice which comes dangerously close to Mr Foe's ethos of writing – the same degree of fictionalisation, violence and cannibalism. Gradually, Susan Barton succumbs to the pressure of Mr Foe's authorial appropriation, his desire to absorb

and devour her claim to narrative power as a truthful witness. Near the end of chapter three, the two struggling authors merge, ending up in bed together. Biting Susan Barton's lip and sucking the blood from her wound, he murmurs: 'This is my manner of preying on the living' (139). In an explicit way, *Foe* as a novel emphasises the violence involved in the act of narrating; the figurative cannibalism of narrative authority – in contrast to the possibly *literal* cannibalism of Friday.[20]

The inconsistencies in Susan Barton's story represent blind spots that must be uncovered, illuminated – or otherwise repressed. Mr Foe chooses the latter since he has no need to uncover the truth of the story's silences. On the contrary, it allows him artistic freedom – for example assuming that Friday is a cannibal without actually knowing so. Barton, however, cannot merely replace absence with lies; she must translate the figure of Friday faithfully, or otherwise lose the credibility of her own story. If the story is not true, her identity is inevitably cast into serious doubt at the same time. Susan Barton tries to communicate with Friday, for example through language, writing, drawings, gesticulations, music and desire. Yet all these attempts leave Friday unresponsive, self-absorbed. The 'meaning' of Friday remains stubbornly resistant.[21]

The inability to penetrate Friday's muteness, his otherness, is one that threatens to reveal an uncomfortable truth about the inadequacies and limitations of both Mr Foe's and Susan Barton's power of storytelling – a truth exposing their interpretations of Friday as ultimately being caught in a blind hermeneutical circle; that is to say, largely self-confirming interpretational efforts which in fact uncover little else but projections of their own desires. Aware of this dilemma, Susan Barton, whose narrative desire is the one most directly affected by the implications of this hermeneutical trap, recognises that the centre of her story, its truth, is haunted by an absence which can only be replaced by lies:

> Friday has no command of words and therefore no defence against being re-shaped day by day in conformity with the desires of others. I say he is a cannibal and he becomes a cannibal; I say he is a laundryman and he becomes a laundryman. What is the truth of Friday? You will respond: he is neither cannibal nor laundryman, these are mere names, they do not touch his essence, he is a substantial body, he is himself, Friday is Friday. But that is not so. No matter what he is to himself … what he is to the world is what I make of him. (121–122)

As Dominic Head observes, Friday's silence is both 'a resistance to, yet also the product of, the dominant discourse' (*J. M. Coetzee*: 121) – a silence

which apparently both renders him helpless in the text, but also seems to hinder the text in reaching him. Friday gradually grows old and loses his liveliness, as Mr Foe observes: 'They lose their vivacity when deprived of human flesh' (*Foe*: 127). But if Friday gradually is transformed into an insubstantial ghost through the figurative cannibalism of Susan Barton, she too must eventually starve: Friday's insubstantiality makes him indigestible, that is, he becomes an enigmatic sign, a ghost hiding in dark corners.

Thresholds of translation

Desperate to translate, faithfully, the figure of Friday into the story, Susan Barton starves as she is unable to devour and digest his untranslatable otherness. Her translation becomes a text of failed translational attempts to recover, faithfully, the originality or singularity of Friday's otherness, and, thus, by implication, to *save* the 'true' meaning of her story, which will confirm her identity as a witness.

But Susan Barton is never saved, never redeemed, ending up as the disfigured, swollen corpse trapped inside a sunken phantom ship in the novel's last sentences:

> In the black space of this cabin the water is still and dead, the same water as yesterday, as last year, as three hundred years ago. Susan Barton and her dead captain, fat as pigs in their white nightclothes, their limbs extending stiffly from their trunks, their hands, puckered from long immersion, held out in blessing, float like stars against the low roof. (156–157)

Her story becomes a narrative of non-existence or negation, one that is incapable of reconciling a contradictory narrative desire for truthfulness and meaning, concluding in failure and silence. *Foe* may present Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* as a road not taken, as Gayatri Spivak writes: 'The actual is presented as the counterfactual. Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, which engenders *Foe*, does not exist' ('Theory': 167). And yet the very imagination of *Robinson Crusoe*'s non-existence at the same time throws Susan Barton's narrative into a bottomless darkness of pure, abstract fiction.

But what does the silence of this bottomless darkness tell us? Is *Foe* a story which ultimately informs us of the un-translatability of radical otherness – that any attempt to translate, faithfully, the other is bound to end up shipwrecked? A failed translation is usually conceived as one

that has failed to render the original text in terms of faithfulness or similarity. Conversely, a successful translation is one that has erased all traces of itself, that is, one that does not *read* like a translation, but on the contrary reads as though it was the original text itself.

The story of *Foe*, the story of Susan Barton's narrative desire, is the story of a failed translation of otherness, which is to say a translation that fails to erase itself. Coetzee's novel as an imaginary projection constitutes a suspension of *Robinson Crusoe*, the imaginary pretext of Defoe's novel, and, as such, it grounds itself upon the imaginary possibility of *Robinson Crusoe*'s non-existence. Yet since the *failure* of Coetzee's novel to become the story of *Robinson Crusoe* is precisely the condition of its existence as an imaginary possibility, this failure also constitutes the very possibility of conceiving *Foe* as a text that 'truthfully' speaks silence itself, a silence conditioned by the existence of *Robinson Crusoe* as a text that cannot allow *Foe*'s failure to enter its story.

One could see this as a negative potential released through *Foe*'s imaginary projection, one that comes close to Walter Benjamin's concept of translatability. In Chapter 2 I briefly mentioned Benjamin's translation theory in connection with some aspects of Gayatri Spivak's call for a greater attention toward the figures of the literary within the field of postcolonial studies; here I want to discuss Benjamin's concept of translation further, both in order to demarcate some of the theoretical issues at stake in Coetzee's text, as well as connecting those issues with the context from which Gayatri Spivak's concerns emerged.

According to Benjamin, all languages undergo 'complete transformation over the centuries' (*Illuminations*: 74), which means that a translation striving to reproduce the *meaning* of an original text is fundamentally misleading; what must be translated is not meaning, not subject matter, which is always in flux, both in the original text's language as well as in the language to which it is translated. Rather, the translation must 'demonstrate' what Benjamin sees as 'the kinship of languages' (73). At the heart of Benjamin's language theory is a distinction between what he calls 'the mode of intentions' (*Art des Meinens*), and what he calls the original text's 'intentions', or 'the intended object' (*Das Gemeinte*). In each language, 'the mode of intentions' is always singular – for example, words like the German name for bread, *Brot*, or the French word *Pain*; yet both words 'mean the very same thing' (73), that is, they both refer to the same 'intended object'. Benjamin's point is that as long as national languages are kept apart, kept separate and isolated in their insular domesticity, one can never recover or reveal this 'kinship'.

Within this context, the act of translating takes on a renewed function. Rather than translate the original's meaning, the translational process must reveal the kinship of languages by 'testing' how *remote* 'the mode of intentions' is from 'the intended object' in the original text (and, by implication, the translation's own language) – a *remoteness* which also tests how *closely* it may approach the revelation of the kinship of language: 'how close can it be brought by the knowledge of this remoteness'. The messianic task of the translation is, however, only one that is able to reach a provisional knowledge, as a 'way of coming to terms with the foreignness of languages' (73). Even so, what exactly is revealed in this provisional knowledge of the kinship of languages – what is the original's 'intended object', the intentions, which the translation must render? Throughout the essay, Benjamin constantly shifts between different expressions, like the messianic longing for 'linguistic complementation'; a 'pure language' which is the sum of all languages' intentions supplementing each other; and finally, that dimension 'which is meant in all languages' (80). To Benjamin, the 'intentions' are fragments of a language of truth, a truthful language; that is, the *original*, prelapsarian, divine language, which, after the fall, has become divided into a multiplicity of provisional languages that can only be grasped negatively, un-originally. In the profane world, the 'truth of language' is, in Benjamin's view, a 'nucleus' which remains *untranslatable* insofar as one attempts to render its meaning. This nucleus is also what the translation paradoxically must translate, precisely by negating or destroying the meaning of the original text's language.

The translator must find an effect in his or her *own* language 'which produces in it the echo of the original' (77). According to Benjamin, this is achieved by a translational strategy of *literalness*: 'A literal rendering of the syntax completely demolishes the theory of reproduction of meaning and is a direct threat to comprehensibility' (78).[22] One could also say that what Benjamin wants the translator to render is not meaning, the subject-matter, but rather the original's *form*, because 'it is self-evident how greatly fidelity in reproducing the form impedes the rendering of the sense' (78). In the original text, form and content usually correlate together in an effort to generate some kind of meaning. The translation, however, 'transplants' the original 'into a more definitive linguistic realm' (76), which is no longer reproducible (like the original), because the emphasis on formal literalness or syntax – that is, the fidelity to the singular positions of words in the original – breaks any unity between form and content, which might contain meaning. In this way, the translation liberates the original's pure language, its intentions, from

'a heavy alien meaning' (80), a *foreignness* – constitutive to all profane languages – which precisely has been erased, covered or familiarised in one's own, native language. At this specific point, Benjamin argues, the translational practice, itself becoming an echo of a language not quite belonging to anywhere, locks two different languages together in a mutual recognition of their otherness.

It is a recognition which involves loss, activated in between two languages, which allows a kind of transparency. The translation is transparent, Benjamin argues, it does not cover the original, does not block its light, 'but allows the pure language … to shine upon the original all the more fully' (79). This transparency, which more specifically means the 'literalness' of the translation, also designates what Benjamin refers to as an arcade: 'For if the sentence is the wall before the language of the original, literalness is the arcade' (79). As an arcade, literal or formal translation allows light to shine through to the original text, rendering its contingency and historicity.[23]

Arcades of foreignness

The loss, as it is preserved and exhibited in this arcade, is not only one that signifies Friday's loss of identity, origins, and locations. Rather, it is one that reverberates, affecting Susan Barton as a figure of narrative desire which is obstructed from reaching its goal because of Friday's loss. Susan Barton's attempt to translate Friday's otherness ends in failure; a *literal* translation, rendering no meaning, because the sign of Friday's body returns as an empty, insubstantial echo of her own sign, devoid of meaning. As such, the failure of Susan Barton's attempt to translate faithfully is at the same time what allows the foreignness of Friday to appear, negatively, *in* its otherness, that is to say, situated in Susan Barton's own language without being domesticated or familiarised, but on the contrary *literally* breaking down the meaning of her language, turning it into a foreign or other language – an uncanny language. Susan Barton's failure to translate, faithfully, Friday's otherness, reminds us, as Sigmund Freud observed, that 'we ourselves speak a language that is foreign' ('The Uncanny': 221).[24]

It is in this way that *Foe* as a text of failed translations attempts to configure possibilities of transgressing binary, one-way models of cultural transference; possibilities of experiencing the strangeness of the provisional, narrow limitations of one's own constructed familiarity through which otherness is usually defined and recognised. *Foe* seems to open an arcade of foreignness in which the 'original' and the 'translation', and the figures of these two terms, may possibly recognise one another in their shared otherness.[25]

When Mr Foe and Susan Barton discuss the substantiality of their beings, the latter concludes: 'I am substantial; and you too are substantial, no less and no more than any of us. We are all alive, we are all substantial, we are all in the same world' (152). But as Mr Foe, who profits on stories of loss, observes; they are not all in the same world, because she has omitted Friday. Friday's other world is a world of loss – an arcade of foreignness, and of transparency, which illuminates the text's configuration of desires.

In the final section we enter this arcade of foreignness. The story, now freed from quotation marks, is taken over by a new, unidentified narrative persona, who makes two attempts to make Friday speak. The first time is in an apartment where Barton and Mr Foe, seemingly dead, lie sprawled on the bed while Friday is lying in the alcove. The narrator opens Friday's mouth, hearing the sound of the island. With this image we are transferred to a house, in which the narrator yet again encounters the trio, and again the focus is on Friday, whose neck reveals a scar from a rope or chain.[26] The narrator finds Susan Barton's unpublished manuscript, and, while reading, slips 'overboard' and literally *into* Susan Barton's manuscript, with which the novel began, that is, falls into the water covered with petals, floating like a flower.[27]

Sprawling in the bed of seaweed, the narrator dives (and thus fulfilling Susan Barton's desire) and finds the wreck which, as Dominic Head has observed, seems to conflate three different ships: 'Cruso's wreck (it is located off his island); the ship from which Barton is originally set adrift (she is found with "her captain"); and the vessel which rescues her (and Friday, who is on board as well)' (*J. M. Coetzee*: 125). For the third time, we encounter Barton and her partner (now the captain), as well as Friday who yet again is the only one giving a sign of life. And again the narrator tries to open his mouth, to force him to speak. The novel ends with the (non-)sound of Friday's silence streaming out, passing through his body, the narrator, the ship and running 'northward and southward to the ends of the earth' (157).

Worldliness, criticism and literature

The last chapter of the novel presents a dense, metaphorical intertwining of previous events or fragments, tied together in a metonymic movement which seems to resist being interpreted without being violated or reduced. It *speaks* the silence, literally, by moving, gradually, toward a point of sensuous non-communicability, 'not a place of words' (157) but of collapse, that is, a place where the words of the novel cease.

As the narrator says, this is the 'home of Friday', but at the same time it is also the home of western culture's silence. It is a silence coming from the depths of other, forgotten histories, manifesting itself with a ghostly authority that silences or ends the narrative of *Foe*; a silence embodied in the figure of Friday, chained to the ship of slavery whose scars, like signs, are inscribed upon his ghostly body. Friday's 'home', as it says in the novel, is 'a place where bodies are their own signs' (157), that is, the foreign signs of the chains tying him to another identity, whose enigmatic, uncanny story may be recognised, in another('s) language, as western culture's own, repressed imperial history.

As Derek Attridge observes, the ending of *Foe* seems to take the modernist project of the novel one step further: 'It is as if in its dealings with otherness the main part of the story, for all its subversion of realist narrative, has been too conventional' (*Coetzee*: 27). I would agree with this point, and furthermore agree with Rosemary Jane Jolly's argument that *Foe* can be read as an 'allegory of narrative strategies' (2), which ultimately draws parallels, or at least explicitly explores such parallels, between the act of narrating and cannibalism, both implying violence and the suppression of difference.[28] The main *target* for much of the novel, as several critics rightly have pointed out, is the classic realist text and its alleged act of suppressing difference and otherness; the radical ending of *Foe* seems once and for all to dismantle the project of realism.[29]

So far I have attempted to render, faithfully, what I see as the aesthetic project of *Foe*, its narrative strategies and literary codifications; what is at stake in the text as a *literary* text. In the following, I want to focus more specifically on the text's complicated relationship with critical discourse, whose ambiguity, I would argue, becomes particularly pronounced in the last section of *Foe*. While the radical ending of *Foe* can be read as a final critique of the traditional realist text, it may also, as various critics have pointed out, be read as a cautious disclaimer of the novel's preceding project. *Foe*'s final chapter can to some extent be read as a warning against its own, poststructuralist-inflected modality, a warning against the one-dimensional focus on writing and textuality which ignores the material, worldly circumstances from which texts originate.[30] Insofar as one reads the ambiguous ending as a cautious disclaimer of the novel's overall poststructuralist project, one may also see this as a way of 'double-safeguarding' its aesthetic claims. There is a characteristic ambiguity at stake here, which, I would argue, partly is related to *Foe*'s complex relationship with postcolonial theory – indeed, an ambiguity which to some extent explicitly *inscribes* the novel within the discourse of postcolonial theory.

To several critics, *Foe* is Coetzee's most 'theoretical' novel,[31] which, I would argue, also constitutes one of the most important factors as to *why* it has become a canonised text within the field of postcolonial studies. Coetzee's text is, in some ways, both an exemplary *and* a problematic postcolonial text; the novel is exemplary because it evokes and deals explicitly and self-consciously with issues that are central to postcolonial studies; but Coetzee's text is also problematic because it has become almost *too* exemplary.[32] As an exemplary novel, *Foe* eminently circles around the dimension of otherness, or rather, how to represent otherness and marginality through narrative strategies, without violating these dimensions; it explores its own formal insufficiencies, its lack of legitimacy, by simultaneously enacting *and* disclaiming its literary project, as I have attempted to show hitherto.[33]

Seen within this perspective, Coetzee's text embodies an extreme act of suspension; an imagined, ghostly demarcation of the margins of another narrative, namely Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*. Through this subversive-imaginary project, *Foe* arrests movement, narrativity and working-through in order to fixate a non-narrative (or, indeed, *pre*-narrative) moment within an un-locatable space or arcade, as I tried to show via the excursus to Walter Benjamin's theory of the translation-as-arcade; an arcade in which the dimensions of foreignness and otherness are explored, investigated and illuminated.

If *Foe*'s painstaking exploration of literary strategies identifies traditional realist narrative as being the ultimate problem, one could however also argue that this exploration of the limits of traditional narrative constitutes a kind of projection through which the novel distances itself from alleged acts of narrative violence; an act of distancing which in turn bestows the aesthetic project of *Foe* with an aura of radicalism and legitimacy. As such, *Foe*'s project apparently avoids the traps involved in representing otherness – precisely through the exploration of the limits of another, allegedly different, aesthetic modality.

In this sense, *Foe*'s project is not only about finding a way of negotiating otherness or marginality in the arcade of foreignness, but also about legitimising, and producing the need for, the discourse of postcolonial theory, by painstakingly acknowledging the shortcomings of its own formal means of representation. As such, *Foe* emerges as a canonised text precisely in terms of its allegorical enactment of the claims of postcolonial theory – a text selected because of its fetishised suspension of representativity, marking and formulating the impossibility of its own project; the inadequacies of the literary and the importance of theory as *the* legitimate negotiator of otherness, *the* radical position.

Foe may in this sense be read as a kind of aesthetic 'blockage', a text that constructs the ambiguous space of an arcade that not only negotiates foreignness and otherness, but also enacts a process of legitimising those very codes of negotiation – rather than a *working-through* of what I have referred to as the utopian-interpretive potential of the literary within postcolonial space. As such, *Foe* may constitute an 'allegory of narrative strategies', but equally, I would argue, an ideologically coded melancholic mourning of the loss of the figures of the literary – a melancholia which moreover implicitly carves out the space for *theory*, as a legitimate dimension working through the loss and failures of the literary.

We may illuminate this ambiguous relationship further – the relationship between postcolonial modernist textuality writing back to the centre via an exploration of the limits of narrative, and postcolonial theory as the legitimate negotiator of otherness – through an excursus to two critical principles coined and developed by Edward Said, namely affiliation and worldliness, which I see as particularly illuminative in this context. In the essay collection *The World, the Text, and the Critic*, Edward Said focuses on what he sees as the 'worldly' dimension of the text's discursive situatedness within various formations of power, a situatedness which traditional criticism tends to ignore. Closely linked to, albeit more refined than, the notion of worldliness is the concept of *affiliation*, which refers to the transactions, transformations, interactions and interplays of the text within the discursive network of power relations with which it is affiliated (and which stands in opposition to the notion of *filiation*, embodying natural bonds, linearity, centre, completion and paternal authority). According to Said,

> one way of imagining the critical issue of aesthetic genesis is to view the text as a dynamic field, rather than as a static bloc, of words. This has a certain range of reference, a system of tentacles (which I have been calling affiliative) partly potential, partly actual: to the author, to the reader, to a historical situation, to other texts, to the past and present. In one sense no text is finished, since its potential range is always being extended by every additional reader. (*World*: 157)

Affiliative criticism, as Said explains in an interview with Gauri Viswanathan, attempts to make 'explicit all kinds of connections that we tend to forget and that have to be made explicit and even dramatic in order for political change to take place' (Viswanathan, *Power*: 336).

The act of evaluating the literary is, according to Edward Said, 'fundamentally to value it as the individual work of an individual writer

tangled up in circumstances taken for granted by everyone, such as things as residence, nationality, a familiar locale, language, friends, and so on' ('Traveling Theory Reconsidered': xv). By seeing the valuable aspect of the literary, the conveyance of value through a literary text, as somehow opposed to, while still being situated in relation to, the coordinates of a familiar discourse, Said's critical writing traces the experiences of uprootedness, dislocation and exile, that is, traces of affiliative networks, while performing a double perspective, one that takes into account simultaneously 'how to read the work *and* its worldly situation' (xv). In *Beginnings*, Said explains that whereas the traditional form of the novel (such as *Robinson Crusoe*), and the conventional criticism it encouraged, operated according to filiative principles, *radicalism* is fundamentally tied to the affiliative principle, embodied in what Said sees as 'the *methodological* vitality of modernism' (376).

Initially, it is easy to see the discourse of modernism as constituting a radically *affiliative* break with an earlier discourse. The affiliative principle, as embodied in modernist literature (undogmatic, suspicious of totalising gestures, oppositional and so forth), becomes *the* radical form of literature; the modernist literary text is affiliative *because* it negatively explores the impossibility of its own project – and hence its need for criticism or theory, which thus is granted authority and legitimacy. Yet, the concept of affiliation also implies its own set of problematics. Bruce Robbins has outlined, on the basis of Said's position in *The World*, *The Text*, *The Critic*, a tripartite pattern of the affiliative process:

> (1) an initial break with natural filiation – the unchosen, almost biological relationships enmeshing the individual in a given culture – leads to (2) a 'pressure to produce new and different ways of conceiving human relationships', artificial and compensatory social bonds … which now however assume (3) all the authority of the old filiative order, becoming 'no less orthodox and dominant than culture itself.' ('Homelessness': 72)

The potential reification of the principle of affiliation, especially within an increasingly institutionalised academic discourse, seems to raise the question as to how some, if any, forms of modernist writing can avoid this negative process of gradual institutionalisation or reification, that is, a process in which the principle of affiliation becomes trapped within its own self-confirming system of authority.

The atmosphere of melancholia, as I discussed earlier, is an expression of the awareness of a lack of a distinct notion of the margin, particularly

noticeable within the postcolonial relation to the figures of the literary; the figures of the literary, being singularly literary *as* figures of otherness and marginality, constitute a problematic, I would argue, which can be seen as related to the modernist ethos underlying Edward Said's critical discourse, as well as, in a larger perspective, the dominant field of contemporary postcolonial studies. That the 'methodological vitality of modernism' has possibly, at least to some extent, become institutionalised, would seem to raise a series of concerns with regards to the legitimacy of the methodology underlying Said's critical vocabulary, a critical language which, as Abdirahman Hussein has observed, has become the 'common currency in the past decade and a half' (165).

As 'constitutively opposed to every form of tyranny, domination, and abuse' (*World*: 29), Said's affiliative criticism may be seen as one that legitimises its radicalism *through* its relation to its phantasmagorical 'ego-ideal', namely modernist literary writing. One could argue that the work of legitimisation at stake in Said's critical discourse follows as a consequence after the collapse of the filiative principle; haunted by oedipal guilt, the strategies of miming, parodying or – indeed – writing back to an alleged realist-authoritative and filiative text may be seen as attempts coming to terms with the critical illegitimacy of affiliation as a critical principle, and the specific *need* for legitimising mechanisms.

The melancholia of contemporary postcolonial studies – as it has been shaped and outlined in particular by the critical authority of Edward Said – can in a wider sense be seen as a self-defensive strategy, an anxious protection mechanism repressing the suspicion that its insights, claims and findings, as exemplified via the literary text, are mere critical fictions. This suspicion, as I have argued, is precisely expressed through the excessive amount of self-criticism and self-interrogation in much contemporary postcolonial criticism, and which I read as strategies of legitimisation, reinforced by the phantasmagorical construction of the literary ego-ideal, the canonised postcolonial text; that is, the literary text chosen and canonised as being representative of the postcolonial imperative because it exemplifies the claims of the field, and thus legitimises it.

One example of this phantasmagorical or anamorphic transfiguration of the literary would be the fetishisation of the text as 'writing back to the centre', such as J. M. Coetzee's *Foe* – a text embodying a resistant and self-conscious strategy actively involved in reversing the apparent effects of the process of global commodification, the hybridisation of the cultural edifices of the world. The notion of writing back to the centre is a pleasurable, even masochistic, fantasy developed along what can

be seen as an oedipal dynamic of a progeny rebelling against originating paternity that must be subverted (postcolonial criticism constructing a notion of the postcolonial literary as a text that rebels and viciously attacks a western 'father-figure'). Arun P. Mukherjee has argued that this scenario allows 'only one modality, one discursive position. We are forever forced to interrogate European discourses, of only one particular kind, the ones that degrade and deny our humanity. I would like to respond that our cultural productions are created in response to our own needs' ('Whose Post-Colonialism … ?': 6).[34] If the current atmosphere of melancholia can be seen as both an expression of loss as well as a pre-emptive response to this loss, the ongoing process of coming to terms with the anxiety of paternal influence – as an indeterminate repetitive compulsion – is also an expression of an insufficient attempt to work through the ambiguities of otherness in the postcolonial arcade, an expression of an unwillingness to take risks and responsibility.

The beginning is a ruin

Walter Benjamin's arcade is, as we have seen, never an easy, straightforward passageway. When Benjamin argues that the translation is like an arcade that allows pure language to shine upon the original all the more fully, and that this involves literalness and transparency, he is at the same time being obscure. It does not mean that the translation's literal rendering of the original must make the 'original' all the more clear and visible, which would mean to revalorise the 'original'. In that sense, the translation would be no more than a mere passageway through which the reader is allowed to consume a foreign text.

The arcade, as Benjamin describes it in his unfinished work *The Arcades Project*, is a space of consumption, a market of desires and temptations transfigured or translated into commodities whose origins are lost. The light of the arcade, Rey Chow comments in an essay on Benjamin's translation theory, 'is a profane, rather than pure and sacred, light, to which non-Western cultures are subjected if they want a place in the contemporary world' (201). It is the place where foreignness of otherness is violently negotiated in terms of one's own desires.

Benjamin's literalness in the arcade of translation is rather connected to the idea of breaking down the *figurations* or *allegorisations* of the objects on display.[35] The literal translation alienates the 'original', exposing it as a translation, a commodity, which has repressed its origin – the site of its own translation.[36] As a text already *in* translation, *in* language always-already in the process of being translated, Benjamin's translation

cannot claim the 'original' as its truthful origin, if this means a fixed, stable constellation of signification. Both the 'original' and the 'translation' are situated, at particular moments in the flux of history, in a proliferating 'language forest', and it is within the context of this 'language forest' that the translation's own language must address the 'original': 'it calls into it without entering, aiming at that single spot where the echo is able to give, in its own language, the reverberation of the work in the alien one' (*Illuminations*: 77).

In one sense, *Foe* calls into the 'language forest' from which *Robinson Crusoe* originates, receiving an echo of the novel's reverberating silence, which is also, in a figurative sense, the literal existence of *Foe* as an imaginary projection. As an imaginary projection, *Foe* is the filiative origin of *Robinson Crusoe*, yet it is an origin that is profoundly ruined.[37] It is an origin that cannot be translated into Defoe's novel. As such, Coetzee's novel can be seen as constituting an arcade of foreignness, displaying otherness as it is mediated through the existence of *Robinson Crusoe*, and the cultural, canonical tradition which it represents.

Yet in another sense, the *affiliative* project of *Foe* as a canonised postcolonial text may also be seen as the returning echo of the critical claims advanced by postcolonial theory. In this sense, *Foe*'s radical ending can in some ways also be read as a desperate attempt to break out of the particular discourse in which the text is situated; an attempt to break off the ambiguous relationship to its critical reception, or, in a figurative sense, to break *through* the arcade of its readings. Friday's otherness and, by implication, the otherness of *Foe* as a literary text, is not an absolute otherness, but rather an otherness that seems to move *toward* representation and reconciliation, without actually reaching it; it remains an imaginary possibility, a utopian gesture, an arcade of foreignness but one that shelters many kinds of foreignness, including one's own, and, by implication, the foreignness of criticism. Echoing inside this arcade is Friday's silence which, during the last pages of the novel, moves beyond Susan Barton's voice, beyond Mr Foe's voice, and beyond the last, unidentified narrator's voice; it moves toward its own voice, yet a voice that remains untranslatable in the novelistic language of *Foe*.

The early Lukács's notion of a 'realist ideal', as developed in *The Theory of the Novel*, involves a notion of literary form as an interpretational dynamic which 'rivals' other interpretational dynamics (such as criticism); a process of 'working-through', which, I would argue, poses specific problems for a any given theoretical discourse (including, as we have seen, Lukács's own), and in particular an increasingly *institutionalised*

field such as the contemporary formation of postcolonial studies. If *Foe*, as a canonised modernist-postcolonial text, can be seen as a 'blocking' instead of a 'working-through' – that is, as a text tracing and exploring the impossibility of representativity as such – it is also a text that *opens* itself up to the alleged radicalism of postcolonial criticism by suspending the legitimacy of its own 'rival' interpretational perspective.

In the essay 'Beyond the Cave: Demystifying the Ideology of Modernism', Fredric Jameson suggests

> that all modernistic works are essentially simply cancelled realistic ones, that they are, in other words, not apprehended directly, in terms of their own symbolic meanings, in terms of their own mythic or sacred immediacy … but rather indirectly only, by way of the relay of an imaginary realistic narrative of which the symbolic and modernistic one is then seen as a kind of stylization. (129)

The idea of a 'cancelled realism' has certain resonances in the aesthetic project of Coetzee's *Foe*. In another essay, 'Modernism and Its Repressed; or, Robbe-Grillet as Anti-Colonialist', Jameson argues that to repudiate modernist works 'is simply to reconfirm the reified prestige, and as it were the sacred aura, of these fetishized names and reputations'; instead, Jameson argues that

> What is needed is rather something on the order of the psychoanalytic *working-through*, yet now on the level of political and ideological content … only through such a process of dereification and of working-through can we restore something of the fragility and the pathos of aesthetic play as it stirs feebly and intermittently within the massive solidification of contemporary culture and media language. (179–180)

I have argued that this notion of 'working-through' must be seen as a process taking place *within* the literary text itself, that is, as the literary text's specific, utopian-interpretive perspective. On this basis, I would argue that the notion of realism could be seen as what Jameson – similar to the early Lukács – has called 'zero degree of allegory' ('Beyond the Cave': 128), an 'impulse' or a 'point of measure' existing in literary texts to various extents. The allegorical voice of otherness haunting the last sentences of *Foe* can in some ways be seen as the utopian-interpretive perspective of the literary, a voice which cannot be formulated. The painstaking explorations of the ways in which this voice remains

unheard, unvoiced, may be seen as *Foe*'s most radical gesture – that is, the demarcation of its own borders within which it remains trapped, paralysed, dreaming of a path which the novel, at the same time, must *refuse* to take. If *Foe*'s subversive project is established via the demarcation of its own borders, the novel must necessarily refuse to take this path, precisely because it would lead to the text that it has subverted, that is, *Robinson Crusoe*. Yet *Foe*'s subversive project may also be seen as one that is established not only via the exploration of its own aesthetic impossibility, but also as a way of avoiding taking risks, such as voicing otherness. Interpretation involves responsibility in the sense that it fixates a specific kind of pattern or codification; *Foe* traces the very act of interpretive fixations, not only, one could argue, as a way of showing the illegitimacy of interpreting otherness, but also as a way of coming to terms with its own (or postcolonial studies') anxiety or paranoia about representing the other. The text masochistically explores its own impossible position, while thus at the same time legitimising its position, as it is authorised by its openness to postcolonial criticism.

Foe's exploration of the silences of *Robinson Crusoe* may thus be seen as a way of legitimising its own silences, its refusal to take risks that may question and undermine its alleged radical project of subversion.[38] In a way, one could see *Foe* as a novel that traces the silences of *Robinson Crusoe* as a way of filling out the space of its own silences. One could furthermore argue that insofar as Coetzee's text appears to reach the utmost limits of the potential of the literary, exploring the borders between the figures of the literary and modes of criticism, its actual radicalism lies in the fact that such limits in fact have already been transgressed. The limits of the literary which *Foe* explores must also be seen as postcolonial criticism's limits. If the figures of the literary in some ways can be seen as postcolonial studies' uncanny doppelganger, as I argued in Chapter 1, a canonised text like *Foe* constitutes not so much the 'return of the repressed', as much as postcolonial studies' pre-emptive response to the symptom of melancholia. In a radically inverted way, *Foe*, as a canonised and institutionalised text, *becomes* postcolonial studies in disguise (as literature), and, by implication, literature's uncanny doppelganger – demonstrating, in a caricatured and mimic way, the limits and inadequacies of the literary, while simultaneously attempting to demonstrate the radicalism and necessity of postcolonial studies as an affiliative, critical perspective.

I have been arguing that *Foe* as a canonised postcolonial novel may not only be read as a paradigmatic strategy of textual resistance, but also be seen as kind of blockage, a suspension – a writing back at the expense

of working-through – in the sense that it enacts an exaggeratedly self-reflective, interpretive perspective which ideologically veils the fact that it *refuses* to interpret, or rather that it defers the act of interpreting to its postcolonial reception. Interpretation involves risks, taking responsibility; *Foe*'s 'allegory of narrative strategies' can be seen as a project of 'double-safeguarding' its claims, a project anxiously exploring so many other strategies that it successfully eliminates the trace of its own strategy. The cul-de-sacs and dead-ends of *Foe*'s arcade evoke a sense of loss – the loss of the literary – which in another sense can also be seen as a melancholic desire, a projection, a pre-emptive response to the lack of radicalism within the increasingly institutionalised discourse of postcolonial studies, which is in need of canonised texts like Coetzee's *Foe* which may confirm and validate the field's claims to a radical identity.

6
Realism in Rohinton Mistry's *A Fine Balance*

Lukácsian overtures

Georg Lukács argues in *The Theory of the Novel* that the novel form must have a 'strict, compositional and architectural significance' (76) in order to constitute a meaningful, conceptual totality. This does not mean that every element and heterogeneous part must fit into a perfect, symmetrical pattern. Such a structure would be profoundly inauthentic and inartistic, since it would not generate that particular dialectic of ironic forces and counter-forces striving toward a point of immediacy and non-interpretation: a dialectic that the young Lukács sees as unique to the novel as an aesthetic medium. Rather, as we have seen, Lukács's argument about the compositional form of the novel is that the events and parts must not be represented as mere decoration, but must occupy positions where they receive particular meanings as defined in relation to the overall structure.

The novel's strict compositional form, however, only designates the first step within a dialectic process – an abstract architecture subsequently undermined and subverted through irony, revealing the inadequacy of any interpretational schematic. This arduous dialectic trajectory produces a temporal insight that is also a *realist* ideal, a transient form of experience that 'rubs the sharp edges off each heterogeneous fragment and establishes a relationship – albeit an irrational and inexpressible one – between them' (*Theory*: 125). What the novel form does, then, is to interpret a string of events as causally related, while balancing, objectifying or correcting this interpretation through irony, that is, the subversion of those events inferred to be causally related. It is through this dialectic that the novel form is able to strive for the transcendence of both its abstractness and its subversion,

producing a temporal perspective in which events reverberate on their own, establishing relations between one another, echoing and mirroring each other in an unauthorised and ultimately unformulable and indefinable pattern that merges the novel's abstractly connected and disconnected parts and events into an imagined totality.

Relations, strings, balance: all play a major role in *A Fine Balance*, which represents perhaps one of the most unashamedly explicit examples of the workings of contemporary postcolonial realism.[1] The historical framework of the novel spans nine years, from 1975–1984, set in Bombay during Indira Gandhi's state of emergency. Indira Gandhi, as the leader of the Indian National Congress party, first became Prime Minister of India in 1966. Nine years later, Gandhi strategically declared a state of emergency[2] as a pretext to stay in power, which lasted until 1977, when she lost the elections to the Janata Coalition Party, and subsequently accepted her defeat.[3] In 1980, she succeeded in becoming India's Prime Minister again but was assassinated by her own bodyguards in 1984, when *A Fine Balance* ends. These historical events constitute the background of Mistry's novel, which depicts four individual characters – the Parsi widow Dina Dalal, the Parsi student Maneck Kohlah, the Hindu tailor Ishvar, and his nephew Omprakash – whose life stories the novel skilfully weaves together like strings in a huge, panoramic patchwork quilt (one of the text's dominant metaphors). The novel balances the disruptive forces generated by the state of emergency and the experiences of hope, desire, and tragedy at the individual level, evoking a very concrete sense of the historical era during which these four characters toil and struggle through everyday life, constantly obstructed and regulated by what appears to be an endless series of accidents, coincidences and random forces.

Accidents play a significant part in Mistry's realist vision, as scales constantly tipping the balance of existence. 'Without chance,' Lukács writes in the 1936 essay 'Narrate or Describe?', 'all narration is dead and abstract. No writer can portray life if he eliminates the fortuitous' – an argument that could easily be applied to Mistry's state-of-emergency narrative. More troublesome for Mistry's novel, however, would be Lukács's immediate qualification that: 'On the other hand, in his representation of life he must go beyond crass accident and elevate chance to the inevitable' (*Writer and Critic*: 112). Stretching the quote, one could see it as a crude summarising of the trajectory of Lukács's critical work, from *The Theory of the Novel* to his realist writings of the 1930s; the young Lukács would probably not disagree fundamentally with the first part of the quote, while the second part – the necessity of elevating

chance to the inevitable – remains an *ideal* in *The Theory*. In 'Narrate or Describe?' it has become the critical *norm*, the hallmark of 'serious' literature. One would be mistaken, however, to see the later Lukács's theory as a radical departure from his earlier work: rather, it would be more correct to say that the later Lukács is being dogmatically *blind* to the problems involved in fixating this ideal as a critical norm – to the extent that the *potential* of the literary, what I have seen as its utopian-interpretive dynamic, is in danger of being eliminated. To define the potential of the literary in terms of a critical, extra-literary norm also transfers authority or legitimacy to critical activity, as I argued earlier. The Lukács of the 1930s, enmeshed in party politics,[4] had a distinct, political interest in formulating a concrete definition of literary potential, which to some extent explains the rigorous and dogmatic way in which he transforms his original arguments from *The Theory*. At the same time, this transformation also reflects what can be seen as the later Lukács's attempt to de-reify and historicise *The Theory*'s abstract utopian-reconciliatory formalism, as a necessary measure in a historical epoch increasingly out of balance – that is, a historical epoch designating not so much 'the fragility of the world' as much as the reifying and repressive force of capitalism.

The important thing here is however to learn from the Lukácsian trajectory at a time when the contemporary field of postcolonial studies is threatened by dogmatism – as reflected through its ambiguous relationship to the literary. Mistry's text (as well as its postcolonial readings) provides us with an opportunity to recuperate some of the valuable insights as formulated in *The Theory of the Novel* and, in a more indirect sense, Lukács's realist writings, with regards to the dimension of the literary – valuable perhaps particularly within the context of contemporary postcolonial studies, as I will go on to show.

Accidents and history

A Fine Balance begins with three interrelated accidents or coincidences. During a train journey, Maneck Kohlah accidentally drops his study books on the Hindu tailor Omprakash; stumbling together coincidentally in an overcrowded train, they are surprised to discover a little later that they are heading toward the same address, Dina Dalal's apartment – Maneck, to rent a room, Om and his uncle Ishvar, to work as tailors. The train suddenly comes to a halt as a body is found on the tracks: '"Maybe it has to do with the Emergency," said someone' (5) – that is, the state of emergency announced on the radio earlier

that day. Nobody among the train passengers is sure what the 'state of emergency' actually means, except that it is 'Something about [the] country being threatened from inside' (5), and that this event may be related to the 'accident' on the railway tracks,[5] which causes the train suddenly to halt, and which in turn causes Maneck accidentally to drop his books on Om's back, whereby the three characters accidentally meet for the first time and initiate a friendship. The historical event of the state of emergency here apparently constitutes little else than a blurred background of which no one, at the individual level, seems to take much notice, yet which embodies an uncertain initiator of a chain of causally related accidents. The state of emergency is at this particular level no more than a random, accidental force disrupting people's lives, 'the cause of their delay' (6).[6]

This is not to say that History as such (or its concrete materialisation as the state of emergency) constitutes an accidental force in Mistry's novel, but rather to stress the way in which it is experienced *differently* at the individual human level. Laws and controlling instances are at work everywhere in the novel, but we never receive a clear, concrete and unified sense of power; rather it operates in dispersed forms, embodied and manifest through representatives and agents, seeping through relations at all levels of society. This 'effect' of dispersion has everything to do with the way the historical dimension operates in the novel. The meaning of the historical paradigm framing the text and its characters is to some extent separate from the level of individual experience. Coincidences, random events and accidents (or what appear to be accidents) constitute a large part of the novel's mechanisms of cohesion, the bolts and screws holding the text's events together. The two levels – the trans-individual level (History) and the level of individual, quotidian experience – are inextricably intertwined without thereby becoming identical or symmetrically overlapping. The *difference* (which is also a force of irony) between those two levels consequently seems to be unable to escape its figuration as something coincidental or accidental in the novelistic discourse (despite being subjected to the regulative laws of the state of emergency).[7] It is precisely this difference that shapes, or even allows, *A Fine Balance*'s novelistic or literary interpretation to emerge both as a symptom of this problematic and as its symbolic resolution.

The historical dimension in Mistry's novel has generated some debate among critics. Bharucha criticised Mistry's novel for failing to integrate history in a proper way: the novel, she writes, 'appears to have been pieced together from fragments of newspaper reports, with the author riffling through pages of old newspapers from 1977 to 1986' (167).

Ross has questioned whether 'the exposé of political corruption and tyranny during Indira Gandhi's tenure still hold that much interest' (240). Commenting on this passage, Schneller writes that 'Ross appears to suggest that in Mistry's latest novel, history can be separated from the fiction, which I contend it cannot' (242–243). I agree with Schneller here, even while I understand Ross's and Bharucha's concerns. The problematic that Mistry's text explores, I would argue, is the link between the forces of History on the one hand, and on the other hand, the toils and struggles of everyday life. That these two dimensions are inextricably linked is no doubt the case, but how these two dimensions are linked remains *abstract* – an abstractness that is concretised in and through the *realist* form of Mistry's novel. One should equally see the novel's sparse, yet significant, references to India's colonial past in this light: as a fading horizon, the effects of which reverberate in ways increasingly blurred and uncertain.

When Ishvar asks Dina what the state of emergency actually implies, she answers: 'Government problems – games played by people in power. It doesn't affect ordinary people like us' (75). And yet, the whole novel is about how the intricate and indecipherable pattern of History – 'government problems' – wraps its strings around the fates of the four characters;[8] Om and Ishvar ending up as beggars, Dina becoming the servant in her brother's house after losing the apartment (and thereby losing her independence), while Maneck kills himself. In none of these cases is it possible to find a clear or direct link between a trans-individual, historical force and the outcome of a character's life, yet in neither is such a link entirely absent; it remains, however, an abstract relation during much of the novel, occasionally breaking through in the form of random acts of political violence, demonstrations, or government initiatives (like the sterilisation campaign, the beautification programme and others).[9]

Mistry's novel, depicting the country's transition towards globalisation, echoes Lukács's agonising analysis of early capitalist society, in which specialised work-processes are determined by 'pure calculation and which therefore seem to be arbitrarily connected with each other' (*History and Class Consciousness*: 88). When Dina is on her way to a music shop to sell Rustom's old violin, she 'had to duck inside a library while demonstrators rampaged briefly through the street, breaking store windows and shouting slogans against the influx of South Indians into the city who were stealing their jobs' (61–62). Dina waits a few moments; no further comment on the episode is given, and the story moves on to the sale of the violin in the music shop. A little later, she starts her sewing

business in the apartment, hiring two people who have migrated to the city to find jobs. There are countless examples of similar tacit yet ironic constellations in the novel where the political-historical dimension briefly makes an uncommented and relatively un-disturbing appearance, whose implications are only felt or made explicit at some later stage.

Superfluity, interpretation, causes

Ian Almond has emphasised the frequent appearance of what he calls the 'superfluity of the incident' ('Re-Orientalizing the Indian Novel': 206) in Mistry's text. Take, for example, the episode just after the thugs or 'goondas' have trashed Dina's apartment. A stench fills the apartment, which later turns out to stem from Dina's shoe (she has stepped in something outside). Almond comments:

> She cleans it off, the story moves on. The vignette seems somehow unconnected with the surrounding developments, unstitched (to follow the book's metaphor) to the complex fabric of the novel, until we realize that the unrelatedness of the incident is precisely the author's point … there is no single source of evil responsible for the myriad difficulties Mistry's characters suffer. Whether it is dog-dirt on the streets or goondas on the doorstep, difficulties rain down upon the characters from all sides … In this sense, the reticence and sparseness of Mistry's prose signifies a reluctance to stitch and blend the novel's vicissitudes into a single diatribe, a single cry against a single foe. (206)[10]

The banality of the example, its vulgar meaninglessness, resists any elaborate effort to interpret it within a larger context. The text is full of repetitive events, motifs and gestures of a banal, meaningless nature, as when Dina accidentally drops a shoe in the gutter while crossing some rotten planks to Nawaz's place. Some hundred pages later, Om's foot almost crashes through the same rotten planks (68, 153). Another recurrent type of accident, still apparently meaningless, yet of a more sinister character, is the traffic accident, in which Dina's husband Rustom is randomly killed by a truck. Likewise, Omprakash is hit by a car when he attempts to follow Dina to the place from where she collects the raw material for the dresses; and when Maneck arrives at his college for the first time, he sees an old man who has been hit by a bus (45, 189, 234).[11] One is tempted to agree with Ian Almond's conclusion that the unrelatedness of the incidents is the author's point. But one may also say that it is precisely the impossibility

of upholding a clear distinction between possibly motivated events (that is, events with a specific relational or causal significance) and random, redundant events, which on the one hand produce a sense of unrelatedness, but also, on the other hand, point to the underlying conditions for the production of this sense *in the first place*.

What emerges is a pattern of a historical framework haunted by randomness – a framework that cannot overcome its abstractness and thus cannot become truthful, or self-evident. The concrete meaning of the historical force that acts on the characters' lives, on the surface, is separate from any concrete doings at the quotidian level. However, its effects are present in most of the events narrated, as mediated through an ironic or contradictory series of transformative and transforming parts, joints and sequences. At the quotidian-individual level, it is difficult, if not impossible, to trace these effects back to their original cause, except in an abstract sense (for example, when the body is found on the tracks, as an accident that *may* be related to the state of the emergency but which has concrete consequences involving both tragedy at an individual level, and that which may result from delaying the train). In almost all of the characters' trajectories, it is possible to relate – in an abstract sense – the causes of the particular bends, creases and folds in their life stories to a grand narrative of India's post-independence history: economically, politically and culturally. The Kohlah family, peacefully running a store at the foothills of the Himalayas, is threatened by 'the broad vision of nation-builders and World Bank officials' (215), which means 'the transmogrification' of Mr Kohlah's 'beloved birthplace where his forefathers had lived as in paradise' (216), and which furthermore causes the father to send his son Maneck to the big city to get a university degree. Likewise, Om and Ishvar are eventually led to the big city because a new ready-made clothing store opens in their town. After Rustom's premature death, Dina struggles to maintain her economic independence, ruining her eyes on sewing work until she starts a business by employing Om and Ishvar to make dresses from raw materials supplied by Mrs Gupta's export firm. Dina is eventually forced out of her apartment by the landlord who wants to turn the valuable building into luxury apartments; she reluctantly moves back with her brother, the businessman Nusswan, whose business has profited from the policies of the state of emergency. In all these cases it would be possible to inscribe their miseries and toils into a larger framework of global capitalism, as Morey observes:

> … all characters and relationships are affected by the machinations of the capitalist economy: from the piece-working tailors and their

> well-intentioned employer Dina, who is nonetheless implicated as an exploiter of cheap, non-unionized labour … to the beggars whose place in the warped economy of beggary is determined by the severity of their mutilation … It emphasizes the text's interest in moral culpability and the impossibility of total insulation against the taint of money in a society where anything or anyone can be bought and sold. This is not to say that Mistry is nostalgic for some idealized, pre-capitalist rural society. He recognizes that the roots of India's problems lie also in the concept of caste, and portrays rural society as often brutal and superstitious. (181–182)

But within this interpretational framework, the question emerges as to what significance the 'superfluity of the incident' exactly plays, that is, the unrelatedness to which I referred; if the novel produces a sense of unrelatedness while also pointing toward the underlying causes that produce this sense, how should we read the text's inscription in a larger, allegorical-historical framework of 'the machinations of the capitalist economy'?

It is not so much because the novel does *not* suggest that such links should be made, that the root of evil should not be identified in the final analysis. Quite the contrary, the novel itself readily provides us with particular frameworks in which we can insert individual events. Yet, to suggest that the novel 'shows' how global mechanisms impact the individual in postcolonial India requires a leap that cuts out another aspect of what is at stake in Mistry's novel as a *literary* text, namely, the exploration of the (im)possibility of positing such links in the first place and, by implication, the necessity of shaping such links into social critique.[12] The way in which such a trajectory – or linking – is to be mapped so as to become effective as a critique of power is also somehow what the novel's narrative economy refuses to render – what remains confusing, missing, lost; what ultimately remains un-reconstructable, unformulable and indefinable.

When Dina asks Valmik why the Supreme Court 'turns the Prime Minister's guilt into innocence', he answers:

> Who knows why, madam. Why is there disease and starvation and suffering? We can only answer the how and the where and the when of it. The Prime Minister cheats in the election, and the relevant law is promptly modified. *Ergo*, she is not guilty. We poor mortals have to accept that bygone events are beyond our clutch, while the Prime Minister performs juggling acts with time past. (563)

Quoting this particular passage, Morey comments that it sums up the 'central absurdity' of the historical situation: 'A nation which does not learn from the oppressions of the colonial past seems doomed to repeat them' (182). I would not fundamentally disagree with this reading, only add that it also strategically leaves out or even represses another problematic evoked in this passage: namely, the radical *disjunction* of socio-historical levels that undermines the legitimacy of establishing such an interpretation in the first place. That the interpretation of the historical force as it affects the individual, human level is reduced to an abstract generalisation (say, 'the main problem identified in the novel is global capitalism or the caste system') because the novel explicitly disembodies the two levels is also a way of showing the ineffectiveness and rhetoricity of such an endeavour. One may see an allegorical representation of this kind of ineffective interpretive endeavour in the figure of Mr Valmik; a figure who not only absorbs much of the rhetorical excess of the novel, but also, at a meta-level, becomes the unflattering mirror image of the literary critic who mimics Mr Valmik's 'high-flown manner' (563) and grandiose abstractions (as well as mimicking his fate near the end of the novel as the assistant to the fake prophet Bal Baba, previously known as Rajaram the hair collector), while Dina, Mr Valmik's listener, feels increasingly irritated. While his analysis of the condition of the nation may 'ring true' (564), it helps little in her struggle to keep the apartment, that is to say, it changes little in terms of the actual, concrete toils and misfortunes of individual people's meandering lives.

Antibodies and blood

If Valmik's high-flown rhetoric does not in the end save Dina's apartment, this does not mean that he is merely to be seen as the false prophet's messenger. His words *do* 'ring true' in Dina's ears; but what bestows Valmik's speech with truthfulness, however abstract, ambiguous or imitative? What kind of authority ultimately distinguishes the picaresque lawyer's insights from ineffective ramblings? The dialogue between Dina and Valmik outside the court house constitutes a kind of meta-reflective miniature allegory of the overall dynamic of the novel. Valmik narrates 'life as a sequence of accidents'; at the same time we are told that there 'was nothing accidental about his expert narration. His sentences poured out like perfect seams, holding the garment of his story together without calling attention to the stitches' (565). The act of telling, Dina reflects while listening to Valmik, seems to create 'a natural design. Perhaps it was a knack that humans had, for cleaning

up their untidy existences – a hidden survival weapon, like antibodies in the bloodstream' (565). Valmik's words – however abstract – 'ring true' to Dina, because she is able to 'balance' their abstract truth with the experiences of her own lived life: 'Here he goes again, she thought. But his words did ring true. She tested them against her own experience. Random events controlled everything' (564).

This 'balanced truth' also designates what one could see as an effect of the 'workings' of *A Fine Balance*'s novelistic dynamic; a dynamic in which two different yet mutually conditioning dimensions – Valmik's 'abstract truth' and the truth of Dina's 'concrete experiences' – achieve a certain symmetry, a 'natural design', or 'hidden survival weapon'. The essential point here is that it is only insofar as these two dimensions *interact* with each other that a 'balanced truth' emerges. Neither dimension can be seen as truthful in and of itself. Valmik's reflections do not reveal the truth of Dina's experience, nor does Dina's experience constitute the truth, reiterated or articulated by Valmik. Seen independently, they constitute a symptom of the absence of truth as such. By holding these two dimensions up against each other as dialectical counter-forces, the novel develops a framework of meaning that seeks to combine disjointed, separate levels; for example, the lawyer's speech reminds Dina in a symbolic way 'of her languishing patchwork quilt' (565), just as Dina's sewing would presumably remind Valmik of his rhetorical abstractions.[13]

Moving from this meta-reflective scene to the novel as a whole, one may argue that *A Fine Balance*'s novelistic dynamic produces a narrative form in which a series of events are implicitly inferred to be causally related – an act of inference which, however, in actuality has no truth-value. The 'truth' of the novelistic dynamic does *not* mean that the series of events implicitly inferred to be causally related in fact *are* causally related in an absolute way, as the randomness of the events ironically cancels out this possibility in advance. Rather, the novelistic dynamic must be seen as simultaneously constituting an abstract, interpretive schematic (what the early Lukács saw as 'a strict compositional and architectural significance') and a balancing structure of concrete events, through which it dialectically strives for a resolution of the contradictions in between the disjointed, split dimensions of society. Thus, the novelistic dynamic of *A Fine Balance* should be seen not only as a *symptom* of contradictions between disjointed dimensions (each operating according to their own set of laws and rules) but also as the dialectic attempt to *resolve* them symbolically, or formally, in a world out of balance – a symbolic resolution conveying the sense of truth and hope, a 'natural design', or, a 'hidden survival weapon'.

Games and laws

Aesthetic form becomes a 'hidden survival weapon' when laws do not operate according to absolute principles, but rather operate like arbitrary scales in a world out of balance, such as Mistry's state-of-emergency epoch. 'The epic world', in contrast, writes Lukács,

> is either a purely childlike one in which the transgression of stable, traditional norms has to entail vengeance which again must be avenged *ad infinitum*, or else it is the perfect theodicy in which crime and punishment lie in the scales of the world justice as equal, mutually homogeneous weights. (*Theory*: 61)

In Mistry's text, the law, as legislated and enforced by representatives of Indira Gandhi's government policy, is 'a grim, unsmiling thing' (566), as members of the lower classes constantly experience, while the high court has become 'a museum of cheap tricks, rather than the living, breathing law that strengthens the sinews of society' (562). A recurrent figure in the text is the law being aligned with rules in a game. To the Beggarmaster, for example, the state of emergency has 'become a game, like all other laws. Easy to play, once you know the rules' (379). Although apparently operating on the other side of the official law, 'his laws … are no different from those enforced by the state through the police, politicians, or courts' (Tokaryk: 22). 'Justice', in effect, has become an entirely abstract dimension, wholly disconnected from its concrete embodiment – a law which spreads terror and disruption among the population. The abstractness of the legal system, enforced by the representatives and agents of the nation's political power structure, catachrestically circumscribes its pretext, the game of capitalism; easy to play, once you know the rules, like the corrupt businesspeople and government officials who know that there are two sets of rules, the official one and the unofficial one, and who know that it is only if one obeys the latter while pretending to obey the former that one is able to play the game. In contrast, Maneck's father, 'attempting to take on the soft-drink opponents who did not observe the rules of the game, who played draughts using chess pieces' (271), never learns to play the game of capitalism properly. 'Learning' is however a word which should be modified here, since it only applies to the more well-to-do classes, the middle and upper classes. Om and Ishvar (and their 'friends', the hair-collector Rajaram and the Monkey Man), for example, are excluded from participating in the 'game'. When the tailors are being

forced to listen to one of the Prime Minister's political rallies, the text weaves together scenes of Om playing cards with Rajaram while the Prime Minister's speech is heard in between: 'He played his card … took back the card and played another, while the features of the new Twenty-Point Programme were outlined' (265). The ironic meaning of the scene is not only that the Twenty-Point Programme, vaguely being heard in the background of their card game, as it affects the lives of Om and Ishvar is decidedly not a 'game' to them (Om is castrated, while Ishvar's legs are amputated), but that it is a game played precisely with the goal of eliminating their significance (such as through sterilisation campaigns).

Avinash, Maneck's student friend, is the only one among the novel's characters who actively takes up a political fight against the injustice of Indira Gandhi's state, actively taking up the role as the opponent in the game of the state of emergency. When Maneck reproaches him for no longer finding time to play chess because of his involvement in political activities, Avinash says: 'I'm playing it all the time. Everything I do is chess' (245). Later, when Avinash is in trouble because of his political activities, Maneck 'remembered the early days with him, when their friendship was new. Everything I do is chess, Avinash had once said. Now he was under serious check. Had he castled in time, protected by three pawns and a rook?' (271). Avinash has not, as it turns out, which Maneck eventually discovers when he tries to return his friend's chess set. Avinash's grieving parents inform Maneck that he has been killed by the authorities. Overcome by shock, Maneck forgets to give them the chess set. This apparently insignificant detail receives a larger symbolic importance within the narrative economy of the figure of Maneck as one of class consciousness gradually developing throughout the rest of the novel. Maneck's fateful realisation of the concrete meaning of Avinash's words – 'Everything I do is chess' – is a realisation that does not become fully conscious until the epilogue of the novel precisely because it only works *retrospectively*, when the act of 'forgetting' can be inscribed in an overall political-symbolic framework of remembering, which at the same time becomes a recognition of irretrievability, of human failure and futility.

Mistry's text dwells on a series of recurrent, fetishised objects, and in particular the chess set to which Maneck repeatedly returns, not only because it represents the memory of lost friendship but also because it represents his undoing. Significantly, he never finds someone with whom he can play chess after Avinash is gone. Instead, he plays by himself. When the apartment has been destroyed by the goondas, Maneck

passively withdraws to his room: 'Time is running out, you have still so much to do!' (441) Dina angrily yells at him, but instead of packing his things, Maneck 'had the chessboard set up, and was staring at the pieces' (441). Why this inactivity, not only at this critical moment, but also more generally about Maneck's Hamlet-like character – his pathetic melancholy and his chronic inability to face the brutal realities of the world?

It is true that he does take initiative on his own at times (for example, to finish the dresses for Mrs Gupta, when Om and Ishvar involuntarily have been taken to a working camp), but both the decision to go to university and the decision to work abroad are made by Maneck's parents; his most independent decision throughout the entire novel is, ironically, to commit suicide. The suicide appears as a strange, awkward (rather than tragic) and somewhat unresolved denouement of the novel. One might, however, see this awkwardness as related to the disjunctions generated by the political-symbolic meaning that is retrospectively bestowed on the chess set. Maneck forgets the chess set in Dina's apartment before he travels abroad (and forgets everything else for eight years), and he forgets it in the restaurant when he returns home. On each occasion, it is returned to him. Originally, Maneck borrowed the chess set from Avinash, and forgot to give it back to him, suggesting that the act of forgetting should here be seen as the ambiguous or unconscious realisation of the fact that the chess set was meant for him (and no one else, to paraphrase Kafka's gatekeeper), which only much later becomes a conscious realisation – precisely through the act of remembering. The political-symbolic meaning of the chess set here becomes clear. It means action, political action, struggle, confrontation. The chess set symbolically embodies Maneck's call for action, his chance to participate in the game of the state of emergency, to play the role of the opponent in a world where everything is politicised, which is precisely what Maneck has avoided by going to the Middle East.[14]

This explains not only Maneck's suicide but also its awkwardness, and why the novel's epilogue is set seven years after the state of emergency officially ended. By the time Maneck returns eight years after he left the country, it is too late to act.[15] Much earlier in the novel, Maneck taught Om to play another kind of game, where strings were collected in a ball: 'We used to play a game when I was little, unravelling it and trying to remember where each piece of string came from' (490). Avinash's chess set represents such a string of remembering, and all the implications attached to it. The chess set at this particular moment represents Maneck's failure, his *undoing*; the last thought that passes his mind before he dies, 'was that he still had Avinash's chessmen' (612).

Stitching, narrating, describing

In Mistry's text, the act of returning is a potential figure of disaster. After having been trained as a tailor, Ishvar's brother Narayan returns to their parents' village with great success, which provokes hatred and jealousy among higher-caste people. Among them is Thakur Dharamsi, who eventually kills the family in one of the cruellest scenes in the novel. Ishvar and Om narrowly escape, but when they return to the area for Om's wedding, they meet the family's old nemesis Thakur Dharamsi, now a prominent politician, who orders the doctors to castrate the coming bridegroom. For much of the novel, Dina struggles hard not to look back, following closely the mantra: 'The road towards self-reliance could not lie through the past' (56). Eventually, she is forced to give up her self-reliance and return to her brother's house, where Maneck meets her, each nearly unrecognisable to the other. As Dina returns the chess set to Maneck, he is returning to attend the funeral of his father, as well as to visit, he imagines, 'Om, happily married … and Ishvar, the proud grand-uncle … and Dina Aunty, supervising the export tailoring in her little flat' (598).

These great expectations, as evoked during the stay at his parents' home, stand in contrast to an existence abroad in total alienation, 'now as it had been when he had landed there eight years ago' (585). The description of his life in Dubai, or what he remembers of it, resembles the problematic that Lukács saw as characteristic of the *naturalist* style, where the 'so-called action is only a thread on which the still lives are disposed in a superficial, ineffective fortuitous sequence of isolated, static pictures' (*Writer and Critic*: 144). What Maneck's life has become abroad is precisely such a thread upon which static, isolated images indifferently pass by.

In his later writings on realism, Lukács stresses the importance of what he calls 'the natural principle of epic selection' (*Writer and Critic*; 130). Epic selection is particularly important, he continues, if one wants to avoid the Sisyphean task of *description*, which entails, Lukács contends, the rejection of any principles of selection. It is the principle of selection (or inference) that stands at the heart of the novelistic dynamic (in the early as well as the later Lukács)[16] – as a de-reifying force paving the way for a re-conceptualisation of relations between humans and things (the subject-object problematic). Consequently, 'the loss of the narrative interrelationship between objects and their function in concrete human experiences means a loss of artistic significance' (131). For objects to be 'related to men's life', their function must be exposed 'in the mesh of human destinies, introducing things only as they play

a part in the destinies, actions and passions of men' (137). Otherwise, Lukács observes, 'everything in composition becomes arbitrary and incidental' (134).[17]

We see how the novel conceptualises and re-historicises the relationship between objects and human life through the principle of selectivity, when Maneck, shortly after his father's funeral, finds some old newspapers in the basement:

> In a corner of the cellar stood a stack of mouldering newspapers ... The newspaper dates went back ten years, and jumped haphazardly over the decade. Strange, he thought, because Daddy used them up regularly in the store, for wrapping parcels or padding packages. These must have been overlooked … There were articles about abuses during the Emergency, testimony of torture victims, outrage over the countless deaths in police custody. (592–593)

Going through the horrors, injustices and misfortunes of the state of emergency, and the time following it (that is, everything of which Maneck was not a part), Maneck randomly, and without much interest, summarises ten years of history compressed in a stack of mouldering newspapers until he suddenly discovers the story of Avinash's three sisters, who have hung themselves for similar reasons as Thomas Hardy's Little Father Time. It is at this point that the 'object' of the newspaper transcends itself, revealing a dimension of history not as abstract and impersonal, but as the trace of concrete, human struggle that is under erasure, almost forgotten and lost in a dark, humid basement that has become the temporary sanctuary of human defeat.

The newspaper is here inserted in the narrative dynamic through which Maneck's reified relation to history is re-conceptualised, generating anew 'experiences of hope and memory' (*Theory*: 124).[18] It is after this episode that Maneck, filled with hope, decides to leave Dubai permanently in order to take over his father's shop, and visit Dina and the tailors in Bombay. To return to 'the strange magic' (574) of memory in the way Maneck does is at the same time necessarily restricted to, and subsumed within, the confines of an already-written history, both in an overall, trans-individual sense (Maneck arrives in India simultaneously with the closure of an epoch, Indira Gandhi's death), and in an individual-personal sense (the life stories of Dina, Om and Ishvar have all taken their fateful curve). It is an already-written history that Maneck has left behind, and which in his absence has taken a bend that leaves him incapable of reconnecting with it again when he returns, ironically because of his memory.[19]

If Chapter XV ('Family Planning') tells the undoing of Om and Ishvar, Chapter XVI ('The Circle Is Completed') tells the undoing of Dina. After Dina has moved back to her brother's house, that is, after she has lost her apartment, she 'covered herself with the quilt and took to recounting the abundance of events in the tightly knit family of patches … If she stumbled along the way, the quilt nudged her forward' (573). What makes Dina able to start looking back (something she has distinctly refused to do throughout the novel) is the fact that the patchwork quilt by now is finished, even if it lacks one corner, as Ruby, Nusswan's wife, points out; but Dina has decided that 'there was nothing further to add' (573). The closure of the quilt's design symbolically fixates and frames the story of the time that the four main characters have spent together, the stories they have told to each other, and the experiences they have gone through.[20]

The novel does not end here, because we still need Maneck's story, that is, the story of his doings after leaving Bombay. Maneck's story is, however, absent (like the missing corner in Dina's finished patchwork quilt), or at least postponed. The thread of his life is eventually taken up in the novel's epilogue, taking place eight years after the adventurous time in Dina's apartment, and we hear very little of what has happened to him in between. And *when* it is told, Maneck's undoing (an undoing ultimately caused by the knowledge of the other characters' undoing) has already become an excess, a waste, one of the 'leftovers of fabric' (194) after the textual patchwork has come to an end – an undoing which thus furthermore becomes the symbolic undoing of the novel as a whole; an open-ended closure that frames and knots the text-within-the-text (the story of the four main characters together), leaving it undisturbed to its work of remembrance.

But, significantly, the novel does not end here either, that is, it does not *finish* with Maneck's suicide. It ends with a small, banal episode – like one of those small snippets left over when the overall design has been completed – during which Dina secretly feeds Om and Ishvar while her brother and his wife are out. While they are eating, a 'thread had unravelled from the quilt' (614), which Ishvar is now using as a cushion for his small board with castors. He borrows a needle, fixes it (thus symbolically preserving their collective narrative memory undamaged from the harsh realities of the present), and soon the tailors are on their way again. Dina closes the door, thinking: 'Those two made her laugh every day. Like Maneck used to, once' – then she cleans the kitchen, and decides 'to take a nap before starting the evening meal' (614). The ordinariness and cosiness of the episode stands in stark contrast to the previous scene, Maneck's pathetic suicide, and as such, it

both restores the balance of the novel, 'a fine balance between hope and despair' (231), while also suggesting (as does the epilogue – or even the novel as a whole) that for every grand design there will always be 'little garbage pieces' left over, ready to be put 'to good use' (286).

Mistry's novel, focusing on a moment of crisis in India's transitional period – an intensified and ambiguous historical moment capturing the fading memories of a colonial past and an approaching global future – lends itself to a Lukácsian approach in various ways, although not in a dogmatic or mechanical sense, but rather by pursuing the potential of a realist modality that offers a renewed perspective on the historical discourse from which the novel's story emerges. As I have argued, *A Fine Balance* can be seen as an attempt to explore, negotiate and ultimately maintain a formal balance between different levels of postcolonial historicity, as they are brought together through a specific, causally inferred plot; a 'truthful' design working through, in order to establish, a narrative dynamic that integrates abstract truth with concrete experience, and thus attempting to resolve the contradictions as experienced in between different levels of historicity. It is a process of resolution that ultimately becomes an attempt to transcend the abstractness of representativity as such – a transcendence which, in its ideal form, produces an immediate, spontaneous sense of history, or what the early Lukács calls 'experiences of hope and memory'. In *A Fine Balance*, the national history of India, as shaped and determined by its colonial past, is woven together with the lives of individuals from different classes and backgrounds through a narrative dynamic scanning and revealing the contradictions, leaps and abstractions as well as the concrete effects and consequences generated between those levels. Events in the novel, as they are experienced at a concrete, human level, appear accidental and meaningless. By exploring and interpreting the ways in which such events become connected, disconnected, attached or detached to and from one another within the framework of a particular historical epoch, that of India during Indira Gandhi's state of emergency, Mistry's postcolonial realist form shapes and unifies irreconcilable perspectives into one inseparable unity – a novelistic dynamic which traces the possibilities of *de-fetishished* forms of experiences. Mistry's novel provides an interpretive-utopian perspective integrated with, and confirmed through, the experiences of concrete human struggle – a fine balance in a world out of balance.

Conclusion: Realism, Form and Balance

I have argued that the contemporary field of postcolonial studies may learn an important lesson from the trajectory of Lukács's reflections on the novel – from *The Theory of the Novel*, where he develops an argument about the potential of the novelistic form, to his later realist theories, where this potential is transferred to a set of extra-literary norms – a trajectory reflecting the institutionalised and dogmatic context that Lukács gradually found himself in. The contemporary field of postcolonial studies is similarly haunted by the negative effects of institutionalisation (this is not to say, of course, that the situation of postcolonial studies is identical to the situation of Lukács). Having successfully secured its position within the institutions of academia, I have argued that its new-found authority is in danger of transforming its radical insights into a series of dogmatic and self-congratulating gestures. Furthermore, I have suggested that one of the places where such a danger is particularly notable is the place of the literary. This is not to say that the literary as such has disappeared – the literary still represents one of the most important objects of study in postcolonial studies, but the reasons for this importance have increasingly become ambiguous. This ambiguity, I argued, is partly related to the ways in which the dimension of the literary has been channelled into institutionalised conceptions – reduced to a narrow set of canonised expectations of what constitutes a proper, and properly representative, postcolonial literary text; that is, expectations of the potential of specific, canonised forms, styles, techniques and modalities that are seen as politically radical and resistant. Implied in this logic is also the way in which non-canonised postcolonial forms, styles, techniques and modalities have been channelled into equally, if not more, stereotypical conceptions of their allegedly negative potential.

The notion of realism, as I have demonstrated, occupies an unacceptable position in much contemporary criticism, an unacceptability which on the other hand also designates an ideologically coded process of radicalising modalities that are apparently antithetical to whatever realism may imply (in its variously stereotyped versions). Rohinton Mistry's *A Fine Balance* is perhaps one of the clearest recent examples of a postcolonial novel employing a realist style. While any number of critics agree on this point, it is an agreement often followed by some qualifications. Sharmani Patricia Gabriel's Bhabha-inspired discussion of Mistry's text argues the novel 'appears to have been influenced by the narrative concerns of nineteenth-century European social realism … *A Fine Balance* is fuelled by the desire to root narrative in the realities of the diverse social, political and class formations of Indian national life' (87). Symptomatically, Gabriel follows this 'concession' with a qualification: 'However, although Mistry accedes to the representational power of the realist novel … he is also aware of the inadequacies of the traditional realist novel to represent the kind of imagined community that is the nation' (87). What Gabriel sees as the 'inadequacies of the traditional realist novel' more or less correlates with Benedict Anderson's rather simplifying notion of the realist novel as embodying 'homogeneous, empty time' (25). The fact that Gabriel credits Anderson here as the final authority on whatever the traditional realist novel does and desires, tells us, I would argue, more about the framework of criticism from which Gabriel's reflections emerge than about literary realism proper. What we see is a critical construction or fiction that allows Gabriel to formulate a dichotomy between a 'bad realism' (as embodying an Andersonian imagined community) and a 'good realism' that 'sets out to destabilize those aspects of the realist narrative that contribute to the homogenization of the nation's time-space continuum' (88). Although Mistry's text initially *appears* to be realist, Gabriel concludes, it turns out in fact to be a *critique* of realism.

What emerges from this critical manoeuvre is also a startling blindness, maintained by an institutionalised postcolonial vocabulary of constantly repeated mantras such as 'hybridity', 'incommensurability', 'the liminal', the 'anti-hegemonic', the 'ambivalent', 'difference' – as if these concepts were to be seen as natural synonyms of the figures of the postcolonial. Exemplifying this blindness is Gabriel's reading of one of the dominating metaphors in Mistry's text, the patchwork quilt:

> For Mistry, the national narrative of Indianness, like the novel's patchwork quilt, is construed not through the presumed unities and homogeneities of nationalist narratives but through what Homi

> Bhabha calls the 'incommensurability', which takes into account multiple and contending realities. In this way, the nationalist fantasy of the national 'people-as-one' is constantly challenged and disrupted in the novel by the reality of the resistant discourses of minorities. (94)

But one should also ask what a patchwork quilt is if not also unifying? It may be, as I have tried to show, a very different operation of homogenisation and unification than the stereotypical notion of 'national homogeneity' that Gabriel has in mind. To ignore the text's configuration of sewing, linking, stitching, and putting-together (that is, to ignore the text's realist aesthetics), in order to focus on disruption, subversion and incommensurability (that is, to focus on the text's alleged critique of realism), seems to be a misreading that is not only blind, but wilfully blind to its own blindness.[1]

Much of the critique of realism within a postcolonial perspective is undoubtedly related to the critical fetish of literary *resistance*. As Moss observes, 'the prevalent view – both popular and academic – is that, for whatever reason, realism and resistance do not converge' ('Rohinton Mistry's Realism': 158).[2] Opposed to such prevalent views, Almond calls Mistry's text 'a novel of social protest – but one in which all the happy, surviving characters are those who have decided to work with the system, not against it' (211) – an argument which suggests that the novel is ultimately one of defeat and resignation. But one should, I think, also hesitate to judge the novel merely in terms of resistance or resignation along a political barometer that itself has become a homogenising device. As I have tried to demonstrate, I am not against a reading of the novel as one of social protest or resistance; but I have tried to stress that one should also follow Spivak's pertinent advice from *Death of a Discipline*, and avoid drawing 'too-quick conclusions about gender, freedom of speech, and modernity' (61). Indeed, my reading of the text does not so much argue against reading it as a critique of, say, the impact of globalisation and neo-colonial structures of economy on the lives of citizens in India in the 1970s, but rather that we understand how such a reading involves a leap, an abstraction that cuts out another dimension in Mistry's text – namely, what I have seen as the workings of the literary.

Literariness here should not be equated with a collection of anti-realist textual strategies that in turn are being equated with 'hybridity' or 'incommensurability' in a wholly predictable and formulaic way, as opposed to 'the inadequacies of traditional realism'. What I see as the

interpretive-utopian potential in *A Fine Balance* – as well as in Sembène's *Xala* and Coetzee's *Foe*, each in their own distinctive way – is the exploration of the itineraries through which such leaps are constructed, shaped and motivated; the exploration of the (im-)possibility of establishing such links and relations in the first place and, furthermore, the (im-)possibility as well as necessity of shaping such links into social critique. As Jonathan Culler has observed, 'One problem of postcolonial studies … is the absence of good accounts of *literary* norms against which postcolonial authors are said to be writing' (11; emphasis added). I stress the word *literary* here because there are plenty of norms and normative jargon in postcolonial studies; this is why a reconsideration of literary realism – as a utopian-interpretive potential – is of vital importance to postcolonial studies.

Postcolonial studies emerged as an academic discipline in the wake of what Neil Lazarus in the book *Resistance in Postcolonial African Fiction* has called 'the mourning after',[3] the period of widespread disillusionment in the postcolonial world in response to the unfulfilled or broken promises that had been bred by the event of independence. The field quickly distanced itself from the dreams and hopes that had flourished – and failed – in the years after independence, by developing an alternative, more theoretical, set of imperatives which gradually became bolder and more self-confident, as postcolonial studies came of age. Postcolonial melancholia, as I have construed it in this book, constitutes the field's own moment of disillusionment; a response to the by now widespread fear that postcolonial studies has lost its critical edge, and that it has contributed to the process of global commodification.

As I have argued, this loss in particular becomes explicit within the complex relationship between postcolonial criticism and literary texts. The literary texts I have been using to explore this complex relationship – *Xala*, *Foe* and *A Fine Balance* – should by no means be seen as 'representative' of postcolonial literariness. Rather, each novel, I believe, illustrates *specific* formal-aesthetic problematics that directly and indirectly demonstrate, in their own singular way, why the dimension of the literary is important in postcolonial studies. My critical exploration has been framed around what I see as the contemporary crisis – or melancholia – of postcolonial studies, the field's blind spots and institutional impasses; I have attempted to establish links between postcolonial melancholia and the dimension of the literary, and finally I have proposed a hermeneutical alternative (via a return to some theoretical issues in the works of Georg Lukács) that reinstates the work of melancholia in the literary work itself.

Partly *because* postcolonial studies emerged as a response to the failures of the socialist-utopian dreams formulated by nationalist and liberationist movements, one of the field's distinctive (and distinctively poststructuralist) traits has been the emphatic employment of strategies of dismantling, subverting, disconnecting and deconstructing – coupled with a prejudiced suspicion of alternative strategies (typically accused of reproducing colonial logic). The exhaustion of such negative strategies is evidenced in contemporary theoretical writings, expressing misgivings about the field's loss of criticality, its repetitiveness and its institutionalised homogeneity. At the same time, this moment of melancholia, I have argued, is also an opening, a possibility to move beyond the current impasses and culs-de-sac. In this book, I have been pursuing such an opening by exploring a notion of the postcolonial literary as basically a connecting, interpretive – or melancholic – process; a reconstructive ethos or a dynamic of working-through *at the level of form*.

Notes

Chapter 1: The Melancholia of Postcolonial Studies

1. Lukács, *Probleme der Ästhetik*: 118 (I quote here from Frow, *Marxism*: 10; Frow's translation). As Frow points out – pace Moretti in the following quotation – Lukács still believed 'in the organic connection between the institution of genre and history' (*Marxism*: 10) as late as 1952.
2. Moretti, *The Way of the World*: xii.
3. I am here focusing on the academic field of postcolonial studies, beginning, roughly, with Edward Said's *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient* from 1978; my focus should seen as an attempt to trace the delineations of a contemporary notion of the literary within a largely academically led field of postcolonial studies, defined by Bart Moore-Gilbert as a 'set of reading practices, if it is 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' (12).
4. In the book *The Aesthetics of Cultural Studies*, Michael Bérubé and Rita Felski, among others, address what they see as a recent trend among academics to 'Return to Beauty' (2), while simultaneously accusing cultural studies and other – theory-obsessed – fields for being aesthetically insensitive. Among those advancing such arguments are works like Alvin Kernan's *The Death of Literature*, John Ellis' *Literature Lost*, James Soderholm's *Beauty and the Critic*, Peggy Brand's *Beauty Matters*, Wendy Steiner's *Venus in Exile*, Denis Donoghue's *Speaking of Beauty*, and Elaine Scarry's *On Beauty and Being Just*. To Bérubé and Felski, these works constitute a misguided critical impetus, which reveals a lack of knowledge of what cultural studies *actually* is doing. Rita Felski feels that the 'accounts of beauty under threat from the villainous machinations of cultural studies' ('The Role of Aesthetics': 39) are getting tiresome since to her cultural studies has *always* shared an interest in form and the dimension of the aesthetic (for a similar argument see the works by Kacandes and Hunter). Although Felski's notion of the aesthetic is one that leaves out a great deal of what I feel the above-mentioned works address, it is important here to stress that when I am arguing for a return to the study of form and attention to the literary dimension in postcolonial texts, this argument should be seen as different from recent calls for a return to a notion of beauty.
5. Throughout this book I will refer to an overall notion of the literary in order to stress both the overall neglect of this dimension, while also framing some of the difficulties in maintaining such a distinction between 'the literary' and 'the extra-literary' in postcolonial studies. One might object that

'the literary' is not necessarily the same as, say, 'literary form', with which I would partly agree; however, my argument is that the concept of the literary dimension, literature's *differentia specifica*, can most advantageously be discussed through a focus on literary form (or what other theorists in various ways have referred to as discourse, composition, sjuzhet and plot), precisely as a means to explore the ambiguous potential of literary texts. Focusing on the literary in postcolonial studies, I have deliberately limited my discourse to the genre of the *novel*, without thereby suggesting that poetry and theatre have played no literary significance within a postcolonial context, quite the contrary; however, the latter genres (as well as others) tend to occupy a relatively peripheral role in much postcolonial criticism – and especially in terms of the *constitution* of postcolonial studies as an academic field with which this book is mainly concerned. For discussions on the close links between postcoloniality and the novel form, see Brennan ('The National Longing for Form'), Anderson, Fraser and Cheah.

6. The way in which I use the notion of 'the modernist ethos' is also similar to Fredric Jameson's critique of what he calls the 'ideology of literary modernism'. Modernism, Jameson argues, has basically subsumed the notion of the literary as such; literature has come to designate 'simply modernism' (*Singular Modernity*: 210).
7. See Astradur Eysteinsson's comprehensive discussion of the many versions of modernism in *The Concept of Modernism*.
8. As Gerald Graff has argued, regarding anti-realist arguments more broadly in literary studies, there is often a very strong moralisation involved in attacks on conventional-realist representations, programmatically dividing certain anti-realist assumptions as being 'good' per se while others are deemed 'bad' per se (22–24).
9. In the essay 'Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism', Fredric Jameson committed precisely this cardinal sin by suggesting that: 'The third-world novel will not offer the satisfactions of Proust or Joyce' (65). Often misread, Jameson's essay has been exposed to an unusually vehement tide of critiques ever since it was published in 1986, perhaps most emblematically in Aijaz Ahmad's essay 'Jameson's Rhetoric of Otherness and the "National Allegory"'.
10. The modernist ethos functions in a similar way to what John Frow (after Arjun Appadurai) calls a 'regime of value', which more precisely implies a set of 'mechanisms that permit the construction and regulation of value-equivalence, and indeed permit cross-cultural mediation' (*Cultural Studies*: 144). See also Appadurai, Huggan (*Postcolonial Exotic*), and Frow ('On Literature') for further discussions of 'the regime of value'.
11. I have attempted to outline these two approaches as crudely as possible, without simplifying their main characteristics, in order to illuminate some of the problems a return to the study of form may imply. One could argue that the content-based approach would be more characteristic of earlier forms of postcolonial criticism, whereas later forms could be seen as more open to the textual approach. Seen within this perspective, the two approaches are not so much complementary as mutually excluding one another, in the sense that poststructuralist-oriented postcolonial criticism, for example, has often criticised the content-based postcolonial reading strategy for operating

with a naïve, mimetic-representational model, whereas the latter has often accused poststructuralist-oriented postcolonialism of ignoring questions of history and materially determining forces. However, the implications of these theoretical concerns go beyond what I have labelled here as 'earlier' and 'later' forms of postcolonial criticism.

12. In W. J. T. Mitchell's view, today's most important literary theories are produced in the west, while the most exciting literatures stem from the west's former colonies (14). Although it is a somewhat crude simplification of the problematic relationship between theory and literature (which Mitchell himself admits), I agree with Huggan's comment on Mitchell's argument that 'it seems worth questioning the neo-imperialist implications of a postcolonial literary/critical industry centred on, and largely catering to, the West' (*Postcolonial Exotic*: 4).
13. Cf. Timothy Brennan's argument that a 'set of doctrinal demands for the "third-world" writer' (*At Home*: 36) has emerged – that is, demands developed in terms of the prescriptive conditions imposed by cultural and postcolonial studies.
14. Given its relatively brief history as an academic discipline, it is remarkable how much the field of postcolonial studies has revolutionised humanities, and in particular literary studies. One of the reasons for this remarkable rise is no doubt postcolonial studies' identity as a radical break from previous discourses; yet to claim such an identity as a 'radical break' is simultaneously to debunk, or partly debunk, previous discourses, from which the postcolonial perspective claims to be different in a radical way. This has of course in turn led to much critique *of* postcolonial studies, and the ways in which it legitimises itself as a radical break; yet what is perhaps most surprising is that many of these critics of postcolonial studies are to be found within the field itself. In Graham Huggan's view, the excessive amount of self-criticism in postcolonial studies is an expression of what he sees as a 'defensiveness' which 'has been part of the price the field has paid for achieving increasing institutional visibility' (*Postcolonial Exotic*: 258).
15. Similarly, Sean Homer argues that 'an anti-essentialist theory of fragmented subjectivity and multiple subject positions provide late capitalism with an intellectual justification for precisely that form of subjectivity most appropriate to meet the demands of a decentred, unstable and fluctuating global economy' (9). Likewise, Kumkum Sangari argues in the article 'The Politics of the Possible' that postmodernism generally must be seen as complicit with the social formation of the west, incapable of transgressing its Eurocentrism, even in its politically radical forms.
16. As an alternative to this impasse, Dirlik reiterates the fetish of critical self-reflexivity, suggesting that the 'global intelligentsia' – that is, postcolonial critics and 'third-world' theorists – must 'generate a thoroughgoing criticism of its own ideology and formulate practices of resistance against the system of which it is a product' (356). Dirlik's Marxist-materialist notion of self-reflexivity represents one end of an axis along which the poststructuralist notion of self-reflexivity represents the other, an axis that I questioned earlier; both can be seen as legitimising gestures covering institutional blind spots.
17. See for example McClintock, Shohat, Mishra and Hodge, Dirlik, and Bahri ('Coming to Terms').

18. Paul A. Bové writes: 'When the tools of opposition … lose their negative edge – when their critical edge makes no difference and they simply permit the creation of new texts, new documents recording the successful placement of the previously "oppositional" within the considerably unchanged institutional structures of the discipline – at that point criticism must turn skeptical again and genealogically recall how the heretical became orthodox' (64) – hence the proportional growth of self-reflexivity.
19. Other critical studies addressing melancholia within a contemporary perspective include Butler, Eng, Žižek ('Melancholy'), Almond ('Post-Colonial Melancholy') and Gilroy. As these various studies demonstrate, the notion of melancholia has been used in a wide range of contexts and disciplines; what is *specific* about postcolonial melancholia, among other things, I argue, is the field's extensive incorporation of other disciplinary practices and methodologies (and hence other disciplines' melancholic forms), as is evident in, for example, Gayatri Spivak's or Homi Bhabha's theoretical discourses.
20. The notion of the margin in multiculturalism often constitutes, as Seshadri-Crooks puts it, a 'source of rejuvenation of the center, where knowledge as positive knowing is made possible' (8), that is, a 'politics of recognition'. Michael Denning explains: 'It is here we find the struggles to reassert the dignity of despised cultural identifications: the assertion that black is beautiful, that gay and lesbian romance and sexuality are as central to our collective narratives … as are heterosexual marriage and adultery, that art forms practiced by women are not 'minor' forms, that speakers of minority languages have rights to cultural autonomy and representation' (164).
21. Postcolonial critics often tend to exaggerate the worldly impact of literary texts, partly in order to justify the importance of their disciplinary existence. Simultaneously, postcolonial critics have been eager to move beyond literary studies. However, today the field remains tied to literary departments of academia; outside this realm, it would be legitimate to raise questions as to how much impact the postcolonial framework has actually had. Ania Loomba may have a valid point that: 'If postcolonial studies is to survive in any meaningful way, it needs to absorb itself far more deeply with the contemporary world' (256) instead of merely fiddling with 'literatures written or translated into English' (257). In a longer perspective, I think Loomba's argument is of the utmost importance; in its present state, however, I would argue that postcolonial studies needs to return to an elaborate discussion of the literary, so as to be able to appreciate the specificity of the literary and the specific ways in which the literary text absorbs itself with the contemporary world. Here I agree with Chris Bongie's argument that postcolonial literary critics 'need to come to terms with the fact that if literature matters, it matters first and foremost as literature, regardless of whether or not one tags it with a label like "postcolonial"' ('What's Literature': 267). See also Bongie's *Friends and Enemies* for an extended discussion of this point of view.
22. In the book *Absolutely Postcolonial*, Hallward distinguishes between the singular and the specific; postcolonial studies is a singular theoretical enterprise because it produces its own, self-validating value-system, while an actually *critical* – or specific – position includes norms and judgments that are produced outside its own regime of values. The way in which literary texts have

been used to 'confirm' the radical identity of the postcolonial would be an example of such a singular enterprise.

23. I am particularly indebted to Nicholas Harrison's edited volume *The Idea of the Literary* and Deepika Bahri's *Native Intelligence* – both referring to Robert Young's comment on the 'revolution' in the field of postcolonial studies – for my reflections on the aesthetic dimension in postcolonial theory.
24. The occurrence of melancholia as a symptom in postcolonial studies, I argue, is registered *negatively*; that is to say, the source of melancholia in postcolonial studies can be observed through the often reductive, simplistic readings of postcolonial literature, which pay scant attention to formal-aesthetic concerns or, at the other end of the schizophrenic axis along which much postcolonial criticism operates, readings which exaggeratedly and uncritically valorise modernist textual modalities at the expense of more conventional textual modalities.
25. Although my focus in this book is on literary form and the problematic role it plays within the contemporary field of postcolonial studies, I am also indirectly suggesting a series of other factors which may be taken into account in a discussion of some of the underlying reasons why postcolonial studies has become institutionalised, such as the one-dimensional focus on a very narrow historical framework (modern history), the dominating focus on a narrow geographical framework (the west and its former colonies), and a narrow linguistic framework (primarily English and French).
26. One could of course object that Lazarus, Bahri and Ahmad (and, by implication, my own position) draw a rather homogenised and monolithic picture of the field of postcolonial studies, its practices and methodologies, which does not take into account differences in terms of, say, regions, local histories, gender, language and so on. It would undoubtedly be possible to make a very important case for this; moreover, I think the objection would be compatible with my overall argument, which however, in this chapter, is concentrated around the notion of postcolonial melancholia as a symptom of the problematics, limitations and possibilities inherent in the relationship between a given postcolonial theoretical discourse and the figures of the literary, rather than an investigation of the ways in which this symptom is differentiated in particular practices, traditions and contexts.
27. See in particular Jameson ('Modernism and Imperialism'), Said (*Culture and Imperialism*), Chrisman, and Parry (*Postcolonial Studies*) for readings of colonial and imperial inscriptions in domestic fictions.
28. Jameson's much-criticised notion of the 'always-already read'-dimension of Third World literary texts (as national allegories) questions the possibility of a reading beyond ideologically inflected habits reinforced by a value-coded system in which novels that do not correspond to an institutionalised and pre-conceived set of literary norms are devalued *before* the integrity of the reader's proficiency is interrogated. What Jameson's essay on Third World literature addresses is the appearance of a belatedness, a non-immediacy, of the postcolonial novel in the hands of a reader unfamiliar with its contexts of origins, as a text always-already interpreted within the category of nationalism. And it is exactly the impossibility of an attempt to move beyond this appearance of a belatedness, that is, to read the postcolonial novel 'on its own terms' (or, for that matter, to read *any* literary text on its

own terms), that leads Jameson to stress the futility in an evaluation of this genre through traditional aesthetics: 'The third-world novel will not offer the satisfactions of Proust or Joyce' (65). See also McGonegal for a reading of the 'always-already read' dimension in Jameson's work.

29. Cf. Stephen Slemon's and Helen Tiffin's argument that: 'When reading for textual resistance becomes entirely dependent on a "theoretical" disentanglement of contradiction or ambivalence within the colonialist text – as it does in deconstructive or new historical readings of colonial discourse – then the actual locus of subversive agency is necessarily wrenched away from colonised or post-colonial subjects and resituated within the textual world of the institutionalised western literary critic' (xviii; also quoted in Moore-Gilbert: 18–19).
30. In her Lacanian-deconstructive-inspired essay 'Turning the Screw of Interpretation', Shoshana Felman argues that literature constructs a 'trap'; criticism attempts to master the meaning of the literary text, but thereby becomes trapped in a re-enactment of the figures of the text. The fear of entering this trap, I believe, is to a certain extent reflected in many post-colonial analyses of the literary, never quite willing to enter a position claiming the mastery of the text (that is, being caught in literature's trap), while instead engaging in a blinding process of 'mastering' their own blindness to which the literary becomes a guide, a reader, that is, a theoretical correction (caught in the trap of the postcolonial).
31. Timothy Brennan argues that many contemporary postcolonial writers 'have given their novels the unfortunate feel of ready-mades. Less about authenticity of vision than the context of reception' (*At Home*: 203).
32. As Peter Childs and Patrick Williams remind us, 'it was the literatures of former colonies which were originally designated post-colonial' (20), whereas postcolonial theorists today, according to Peter Hallward, 'seem embarrassed by what remains of their disciplinary affiliation' (335).
33. That is, the part of the ego which Freud in his article on narcissism from 1914 calls ego-ideal, and which he later designates as the *Über-Ich*.
34. For a thought-provoking use of Freud's essay on melancholia within postcolonial studies, see Anne Anlin Cheng's *The Melancholy of Race: Psychoanalysis, Assimilation, and Hidden Grief* in which she uses the concept of melancholia to describe the processes of racial identification and identity-formation in an American context. As will become clearer in the following, I am using Freud's notion of melancholia in a similar way, but in connection with what I see as the melancholic relationship between postcolonial literary criticism and the (lost or absent) object of the literary as a configuration of otherness – a margin through which postcolonial criticism has always identified itself, but which increasingly has become commodified due to institutionalised and prescriptive reading practices of the literary.
35. With the obvious exceptions that prove the rule, such as the works of Salman Rushdie or J. M. Coetzee, to name a few of the canonised post-colonial authors; works that speak *in tune* with the vocabulary of much postcolonial criticism. Insofar as one may see the literary as constituting an important component in the identity-construction of the postcolonial perspective, so-called radical texts *confirm* the radicalism of the postcolonial perspective as an original value, an ideal, while so-called conventional texts can be seen as revealing an uncanny difference or incompatibility.

Chapter 2: Returning to the Literary

1. Spivak's argument in *Death of a Discipline* was to some extent conceived as a critical challenge to the ideology of 'liberal multiculturalism' proposed in the third ACLA report, 'The Bernheimer Report, 1993: Comparative Literature at the Turn of the Century' (Bernheimer: 39–48). See Stephen Yao's essay 'The *Unheimlich* Maneuver' for a discussion of the differences between Spivak's *Death of a Discipline* and the Bernheimer report.
2. Or, as Nicholas Harrison argues, a return to issues with which Spivak was occupied while she was writing a thesis on W. B. Yeats ('Idea of the Literary': 3). There are, however, also clear overlaps between the arguments about the literary proposed in *Death of a Discipline* and other, both contemporary and earlier, essays by Spivak, which are perhaps more representative of the postcolonial position for which she is most known.
3. One of the contradictions, as has often been pointed out, with Spivak's argument in 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' is that while it stresses the radical silencing of the subaltern voice, it also formulates a notion of subaltern otherness which is too absolute; as such, it could be argued that Spivak merely reverses, albeit still maintains, as Bart Moore-Gilbert points out, 'one of the most fundamental and enduring binary oppositions between the West and the Third World constructed by metropolitan forms of knowledge (such as Orientalism)' (104). One might see Spivak's focus in *Death of a Discipline* as a way of approaching a more nuanced notion of otherness, as conveyed in and through the figures of the literary. Spivak's notion of the literary is equally one that shares a number of similarities with Derek Attridge's theory of otherness and literature, which I will come back to later.
4. On the notion of 'Value-coding', see also Spivak's essays, 'Speculations on Reading Marx: After Reading Derrida' and 'Scattered Speculations on the Question of Value' (the latter from the essay collection *In Other Worlds*).
5. Cf. 'Translation as Culture': 17.
6. Parabasis designates to go aside/distance-as-interruption (see de Man, *Allegories*: 300–301).
7. Sometimes Spivak writes, after Bataille, the prefix in parenthesis – '(im)-possible' – to indicate the ambiguity of the logic of rhetoricity operating within the figures of the literary, 'the rhetorical question that transforms the condition of the (im)-possibility of answering – of telling the story – into the condition of its possibility. Every production of experience, thought, knowledge, all humanistic disciplinary production, perhaps especially the representation of the subaltern in history or literature, has this double bind at its origin' (*In Other Worlds*: 263). The (im)-possible in this sense thus corresponds in similar ways to her use of Freud's concept of the uncanny in *Death of a Discipline*.
8. See Silvia Tandeciarz's essay 'Reading Gayatri Spivak's 'French Feminism in an International Frame': A Problem for Theory' for a critique of Spivak's catachrestic methodology and meta-theoretical discourse. See also Barbara Christian's essay 'The Race for Theory' and Nancy Hartsock's 'Rethinking Modernism: Minority vs. Majority Theories', both criticising what they see as the excesses of theoretical developments in literary studies, a tendency to which Spivak's postcolonial discourse arguably has contributed.

9. Spivak's theoretical discourse has often been accused of an exaggerated emphasis on the dimension of textuality, which allegedly short-circuits further investigation of materially determining factors. For an argument that Spivak's reliance on a poststructuralist vocabulary balances toward an unintentional disempowering of socially anchored resistance, see in particular Benita Parry's chapter 'Problems in Current Theories of Colonial Discourse' in her book *Postcolonial Studies*: 13–36.
10. From Derrida's *Politics of Friendship*.
11. In Chapter 5 I will discuss Walter Benjamin's theory of translation, which shares a number of similarities with Spivak's argument in *Death of a Discipline* (as well as other essays by Spivak). Both Spivak and Benjamin's approaches to the question of form and the specificity of literature, its 'poetic' qualities that distinguish it from other modes of expression, argue for the importance of maintaining, indeed 'translating' or 'transferring' (*überleiten, überliefern*) something foreign, alien, or unhomely, into one's own cultural taxonomy of experience. And both stress the importance of approaching the literary work's *formal* dimension, in order to preserve something about to vanish. Although Benjamin and Spivak formulate different views on what constitutes the potential of the literary figures, they share a utopian vision of the possibility to overcome the radical differences between cultures, attentive of the dangers of commodifying and domesticating otherness, through the attempt to let the figure of the other *survive*, überleben through the act of überliefern, whether in reading, criticism or translation.
12. *Death of a Discipline* can in a different sense be read as a response to the emergence of what today has become a significant field of literary studies, namely 'world literature' – a potentially infinite category that seems to have absorbed a large number of surviving, contentious issues from earlier, now debunked, research areas, such as canonicity and representativity, the national vs the international, Eurocentrism, and language and translation (cf. David Damrosch's influential *What Is World Literature* and Haun Saussy's edited collection *Comparative Literature in an Age of Globalization*). However, I agree with Nicholas Harrison's contention that 'the notion of "world literature", still entangled in complicated ways with nations and national languages, tends to propel critics towards a certain framework of thematic criticism' – a framework which fails to address some of the concerns that Spivak voices in *Death of a Discipline*. The literary critic, as Harrison observes in the same article, 'must rely, at some fundamental level, on some notion of [literature's] specific value, and so of a partial but irreducible cultural or aesthetic autonomy' ('Life on the Second Floor': 346). Harrison's article furthermore contains a sound discussion of the practical dimensions of the issues of translation and 'reading closely in the original' within the field of comparative literature, thus balancing some of Spivak's more absolute imperatives (cf. 336–341).
13. Both Spivak and Attridge are inspired by a poststructuralist notion of the literary, and more particularly Derrida's hugely influential notion of literariness (see in particular *Acts of Literature*). The notion of the literary as a process of 'border-crossing' is similar to what Derrida has designated 'débordement' (see 'Living On': 69), an effect signalling the unavoidable instability at the heart of all frameworks, margins and divisions. For a discussion

of Derrida's notion of literature, see Nicholas Harrison's 'Idea of the Literary' and Timothy Clark's *Derrida, Heidegger, Blanchot*.

14. The notion of the 'singular' has been used in various ways in recent criticism (see, for example, Peter Hallward's *Absolutely Postcolonial*). To Attridge, 'The singularity of a cultural object consists in its difference from all other such objects, not simply as a particular manifestation of general rules but as a peculiar nexus within the culture that is perceived as resisting or exceeding all pre-existing general determinations' (*Singularity*: 63).
15. By 'Otherness' Attridge does not imply 'a mystical ideality nor an inviolable materiality, neither a Platonic Form nor a Kantian *Ding an sich*. The other can emerge only as a version of the familiar, strangely lit, refracted, self-distanced. It arises from the intimate recesses of the cultural web that constitutes subjectivity, which is to say it arises as much from within the subject as from outside it' (*Singularity*: 76). This version differs, Attridge points out, from otherness as understood in the notion of 'the violence of representation' or 'the domestication of the other' (e.g. as formulated by Gayatri Spivak or Edward Said). Such a notion, Attridge argues, 'presupposes a narrative in which the other starts by being wholly different and is then stripped of its otherness so that it can be integrated or manipulated' (30). As a 'truth-value', the other must within this perspective be distinguished from the 'real' subject, or, from reality itself; as such, Attridge's poetics elaborates some of the potential of literary otherness which Spivak emphasises in *Death of a Discipline* – different from, although related to, otherness in the notion of 'the domestication of the other'.
16. One might, for example, see this aspect unfolded in Attridge's book *J. M. Coetzee and the Ethics of Reading*, containing a series of brilliant, and specifically *literary*, readings of the South African Nobel Prize winner's works, yet a book that also leaves open the question as to what possible literary potential works of fiction might contain or demonstrate, which are markedly different from the aesthetics of Coetzee's highly sophisticated modernist forms.
17. Lazarus writes: 'Like Williams's modernists, postcolonial critics have also been disposed to construe their own particular dispositions … as cultural universals' ('Postcolonial Modernism': 432–433), which effectively have produced a distorted perspective on aesthetic resistance (because of the canonisation of a narrow list of themes, questions, strategies etc.). By focusing on explicitly modernist textual modalities, however, Lazarus fails to produce credible solutions on how to avoid the marginalisation of works that do not conform to the institutionalised postcolonial perspective. That Lazarus does not take up a sustained reflection on the aesthetics of realist form, for example, seems to indicate a certain blind spot within his theoretical perspective; a blindness, I would argue, which precisely has been advanced by the process which he sets out to criticise, namely the institutionalisation of postcolonial studies.
18. See, for example, the essays 'Modernism and Modernity', 'Hating Tradition Properly', as well as the books *Resistance in Postcolonial African Fiction* and *Nationalism and Cultural Practice in the Postcolonial World*. Similar to Lazarus's position, Deepika Bahri's *Native Intelligence: Aesthetics, Politics and Postcolonial Literature* provides another important attempt to rethink the

field of postcolonial literary studies inspired by Adorno and the Frankfurt school, yet ultimately I would raise similar concerns with regard to her argument for a return to the aesthetic, as I do in connection with Lazarus's position.

19. In the essay 'Modernism and Modernity', Lazarus observes that: 'To read Coetzee is to understand why, in the years after World War II, Lukács was to reverse himself and to begin celebrating Kafka as a *realist*' (150). Besides Lukács's reflections on Kafka in the massive work *Ästhetik* from 1963, Lazarus may think of a 1964 preface to *The Historical Novel*, in which Lukács is surprisingly generous toward Kafka's texts; or he may have in mind a passage in *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism* where Lukács, equally surprisingly, suggests that 'Kafka belongs with the great realist writers' (77). Although Lukács generally has become notorious for his dismissal of Kafka, he in fact always showed a considerable amount of admiration for Kafka's technique and craft (even before the war). And yet, the essay from which the quote stems ('Franz Kafka or Thomas Mann') also spells out quite crudely why Lukács prefers Thomas Mann's critical realism over Kafka's in the end 'decadent modernism' (92), precisely because the latter, according to Lukács, did not provide an adequately *resistant* response to the forces of fascism.
20. See also the essay 'Hating Tradition Properly' for the argument that 'For most practicing scholars in the field … the "post-" of postcolonialism is indeed the same as the "post-" of postmodernism' (27). Interestingly, in the essay 'Doubting the New World Order', similarly presenting a critique of the 'postmodern condition' from a postcolonial position, Lazarus is 'reminded of the world of modernist literature as it was analyzed critically by Georg Lukács' (98), a critique which he finds equally valid in connection with the 'postmodern condition'. Following a more explicit Adornian aesthetic perspective in other works, Lazarus's reminiscence of Lukács's scathing dismissal of modernist works in connection with critical comments on poststructuralist-oriented versions of postcolonialism disappears, so as not to undermine, one may assume, his attempt to implement a modernist-inflected Marxist perspective in postcolonial studies.
21. Lazarus refers to Homi Bhabha's essay 'The Postcolonial and the Postmodern' (in *The Location of Culture*: 245–82).
22. The simple fact that Lazarus on the one hand claims that most writers simply do not write from the perspective that Bhabha spells out, naming a writer like Ngugi, while on the other hand failing to see that many writers, including Ngugi, do not write from Lazarus's Adornian perspective either, is perhaps an indication of this blindness.
23. In a different context, Lazarus has defended realism (in an epistemological sense) against poststructuralist and postmodernist attacks; in the essay 'Doubting the New World Order' Lazarus writes that 'postmodernism prematurely extirpates *realism* in the course of its campaign against *empiricism*' (115). Part of Lazarus's argument, referring to Roy Bhaskar among others, is that postmodernist discourse confuses 'reality with knowledge of it' (118), degrading realism to a simple form of empiricism. In Lazarus's view, postmodernism refuses to accept that an independent reality may exist outside its descriptive and theoretical discourse (even if this 'outside' may ultimately only be grasped through theory), which introduces a kind of epistemological

relativism that ultimately renders it reformist and anti-revolutionary (despite its constant claims of being radical). Lazarus's defence of realism, as an alternative to postmodernism, is however one that is first and foremost formulated at an *epistemological* level, whereas I am arguing that Lazarus's preference for a poetics of disconsolation may tacitly devalue realism as an *aesthetic* form. Lazarus's strong emphasis on aesthetic *resistance* is possibly one of the main reasons why he seems unwilling to engage with realism at an aesthetic level; as Laura Moss has observed: 'If a text does not fit the profile of postcolonial resistance, as realist texts seldom do, it is generally considered incapable of subversion' ('Alternate Realities': 2).

24. Although this argument may seem as a rather totalising conflation of modernism and postmodernism, what I am referring to here is more precisely an *aesthetic discourse* (as distinct from a political discourse) which emphasises textual self-reflexivity, formal disruption, metafiction, and other distinctly anti-realist techniques. At this level, that is to say, there are in my view only minor qualitative differences between modernist literary techniques and postmodernist literary techniques (although of course one of the ongoing debates over the last four decades is in what way modernism and postmodernism differ; in my view, there are a number of radical differences between them which suggest that they cannot be conflated, but I would maintain that these differences are less conspicuous in terms of their *opposition to realism*, and what realism has come to stand for). Focusing on *form* furthermore opens up for a critique which is different, I believe, from Benita Parry's more language-oriented critique (which is similar to Lazarus's critique) of Homi Bhabha's discourse theory (see Parry, *Postcolonial Studies*: 55–74).
25. For recent scholarly work on realism *outside* the field of postcolonial studies – see the special issues of *Journal of Narrative Theory* 37:3 and 38:1; as well as Matthew Beaumont's edited collection *Adventures in Realism*.
26. In a similar line of argument, Arun P. Mukherjee writes: 'I am worried by the postmodernist tendency to valorize antirealist fiction. When critics like Catherine Belsey and Linda Hutcheon suggest that antirealist fiction "denaturalizes" what we had taken to be real and this warns us against being sucked into the illusionist trap set by realist presentation by constantly drawing attention to its process … I feel like telling them that after a while, the metafictions of postmodernism stop having that effect because of our increasing familiarity with their stylistic manoeuvres. Secondly, for those of us who never experienced realism as a dominant form, the "denaturalizing" of metafiction does not affect us in the same way. Thirdly, I do not believe that there is any necessary link between autoreflexive fiction and right politics' ('Whose Post-Colonialism …?': 4).
27. For an elaborated discussion of this argument, see also Jameson's essay 'The Ideology of the Text' in *The Ideologies of Theory: Essays 1971–1986*, vol. II: 17–71. Moreover, see Jameson's discussion of realism in 'The Existence of Italy' in *Signatures of the Visible*: 155–229.
28. Cf. Homi Bhabha's article 'Representation and the Colonial Text'.
29. On the other hand, as I noted earlier, realism has arguably been an integral part of various colonial discursive strategies, but even such a historically supported argument would not necessarily make realist form complicit with colonialism per se. Moreover, one would also do the revaluation of

realism a disservice, I believe, by arguing that it can be read in terms of poststructuralist language games (such as for example J. Hillis Miller has done, however brilliantly); even if, as I have argued, one agrees that realism is not necessarily a closed and totalising form, I think it is vital that one pays attention to the *specific* potential of realism, as *distinct* from more fragmented and explicitly self-conscious modalities.

30. See also Robert Scholes' *Textual Power* and Ora Avni's *The Resistance of Reference* for critiques of the poststructuralist notion of linguistic referentiality. For defences of the referential function in postcolonial literature (and for critiques of Homi Bhabha's and Gayatri Spivak's textual approaches), see the essay collection *After Europe*, edited by Stephen Slemon and Helen Tiffin.
31. As Gerald Graff argues, many defenders of realism have done the notion of realism a disservice by narrowing the range of formal characteristics down to a very limited number of conventions, which made it all too easy for anti-realists to dismiss realism as ideology (11–12).
32. See Fredric Jameson's '"End of Art" or "End of History"?' in *The Cultural Turn: Selected Writings on the Postmodern, 1983–1998* for the argument that the emergence of Theory in the Sixties seems to have supplanted the meaning, as well as taken over the function, of traditional literature.
33. The need to be radically differentiated from colonial discourse (and, by implication, differentiated from Commonwealth literature's naivety), which at the same time is a desire for radicalism, is also one of the reasons why realism has become one of the favourite targets for postcolonial critiques. The homogenised notion of realism functions as an important component within the identity-construction of postcolonial studies as a radical discipline.
34. Related to what I have referred to as postcolonial studies' *prescriptive* ethos (what *ought* to be, as distinct from what *is*), is the noticeable utopian rhetoric in works like the paradigmatic text *The Empire Writes Back*, as well as Homi Bhabha's notion of 'third space', which, as Graham Huggan points out, has 'become irritatingly prevalent in postcolonial theory, in part as a result of Bhabha's consecration as a (or even *the*) postcolonial thinker' (*Postcolonial Exotic*: 268n). The awareness of the unfulfilled promises and potential that earlier critical works – like *The Empire Writes Back* and Bhabha's *The Location of Culture* – outlined, is expressed in a recent roundtable discussion published in *PMLA*, during which Jennifer Wenzel observes: 'the world has changed, and changed in ways that bear directly on the concerns of the field … Does the post-9/11 return to an expansionist, Manichean foreign policy imply a failure of postcolonial studies? I do feel a certain despair in this regard: our critiques have proved inadequate to obstruct or reroute the imperialist, racist logic of fighting over there to maintain power over here' (Yaeger: 634).

Chapter 3: Utopian-Interpretive Trajectories

1. Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe argue that the notion of the literary, in the modern sense, emerges in the age of romanticism, as a philosophical, 'eidaesthetic' vocation. The emergence of the literary signals, according to Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe, the moment when criticality as such becomes a particular, and distinctly *theoretical*, discourse, embodied or expressed

through the literary. Nicholas Brown comments: 'Literature here emerges as the middle term in a temporal and logical series, sandwiched between two apparently extra-literary discourses as it *takes up* philosophy on one hand and *opens up* the space for theory on the other' (13), that is, when literature becomes, and deals explicitly or self-consciously with, a *theory* of literature.

2. Brown refers to Kant's philosophical critique of aesthetic judgment which originally was meant to 'mediate between the "otherwise irreconcilable opposites" that characterize the Kantian impasse: the well-known antitheses of subject and object, phenomenon and noumenon, and the ever-widening circle of antinomies this fissure produces' (14). Here Brown qualifies the Kantian analysis with Lukács's notion of reification (as developed in the work *History and Class Consciousness*), in which the latter argued that these Kantian impasses are not merely to be seen as part of a philosophical discourse, but also reflect what Lukács calls the 'antinomies of bourgeois thought', that is, the reification of labour and the pervasive dominance of the commodity form.
3. This 'specific ontological burden' is in Brown's view literature's engagement with 'the problem of the absolute, understood explicitly now as the social totality' (21).
4. Utopianist, anti-colonial literature was eventually replaced by a literature of disillusionment, which according to Brown was due to the fact that the conditions of the utopian element were often thoroughly mystified and dissembled from the very beginning (by national bourgeois classes). Here, the eidaesthetic project of the literary, as continued in postcolonial literature, seems to come to a dead end. At this point, however, Brown enlarges the framework by reminding us that postmodernism, the paradigmatic aesthetic discourse of the First World from the Sixties and onwards itself is a phenomenon unthinkable without the decolonisation movement. To Brown, this also means that 'all theory is postcolonial theory: it owes its very existence to the struggle against colonial domination and its echo in the political urgency of the First World 1960s' (24).
5. One may argue that such a notion of realism is problematic in contemporary postcolonial theory because it does not seem to allow space for the development of an independent discourse of reflexiveness (such as postcolonial *theory*) – at least not to the same extent as, for example, modalities belonging to the modernist ethos; the latter kinds of texts seem to call for the *need* of an independent discourse of interpretation.
6. For example, Lukács's attempt to translate an abstract utopian ideal into a concrete, political programme. Likewise, one may equally sympathise with many of the claims underlying what has become a dominant postcolonial vocabulary in contemporary discourse, yet the problems of dogmatism and institutionalisation nonetheless remain.
7. And insofar as this balance is broken, one could argue that the consequence is a development toward an institutionalised and dogmatic perspective, however sympathetic or justified this perspective might initially have appeared.
8. The human life as the narrative perspective of the novel is, according to Lukács, necessary in order to give the form an inner coherence, which however remains inauthentic and constructed. It is nonetheless important to

stress that Lukács does not see the novel as being strictly a *biographical* form, but rather believes that it employs the biographical form as a centralising perspective. As Lukács later will argue in *The Historical Novel* (published in 1937), one of the reasons why Thomas Mann is unable to reach the same historical depth as Walter Scott is precisely because of his use of the biographical form; here, the individual perspective is still seen as centralising, but in a negative sense, as something that bars access to trans-individual insight.

9. The first part of *Theory of the Novel* orchestrates a grandiose, melancholic mourning of the loss of totality (or of Greek harmony) in the age of modernity – a loss which is used strategically to measure, negatively, the episteme from which the novel, as a historically 'adequate' genre, emerges as an aesthetic response (similar to Fredric Jameson's Althusserian notion of history as an 'absent cause'; for a reading of Lukács's *Theory of the Novel*, see Jameson, *Marxism and Form*: 160–205). Lukács's notion of totality in *Theory of the Novel* implies a world which is in need of no interpretation because each part coheres perfectly and meaningfully with all other parts, like in the (phantasmagorically imagined) Greek world. See also Susan Derwin's *The Ambivalence of Form* for a reading of Lukács's strategic use of 'Greece' as a counter-image to modernity.
10. As Jameson, in his reading of *The Theory of the Novel*, evocatively writes: 'a hybrid form which must be reinvented at every moment of its development. Each novel is a process in which the very possibility of narration must begin in a void, without any acquired momentum: its privileged subject matter will therefore be the search, in a world in which neither goals nor paths are established beforehand' (*Marxism and Form*: 172).
11. In the second part of *The Theory of the Novel*, Lukács develops an outline of a 'typology' of various novelistic genres balancing the subject-object problematic (that is, the problematic subject's relation to reality). His introduction of temporality occurs during his discussion of the novel of romantic disillusionment, although I would argue that it also correlates more generally with his overall theory of the novel form, as developed in the first part of *The Theory*. The finer details of Lukács's somewhat eclectic typology will not be pursued further here. See instead Eva Corredor's *György Lukács and the Literary Pretext* and J. M. Bernstein's *The Philosophy of the Novel*.
12. Since the novel is only a 'half-art', Lukács argues, it must prescribe 'still stricter, still more inviolable artistic laws for itself' (*Theory*: 73) than other art forms, and 'these laws are the more binding, the more indefinable and unformulable' (74). It is only through the employment of these laws that the novel's ethical complexes can maintain 'equilibrium', or remain in a state of self-correction.
13. This is also another way of saying that stressing the 'discrete autonomous life' of each part leads to artificiality, 'excessive obviousness of composition' (*Theory*: 76), something for which Lukács later criticised naturalism and modernism. To show that the parts are contingent is merely to shed 'light upon a state of affairs which is necessarily present at all times and everywhere' (77). On the other hand, this does not mean that the novel 'naturalises', because while the novel form may strive for an organic-natural connectivity between the parts (that is, dissolve their discrete autonomous lives into an organic and meaningful totality), it can only do so at a purely conceptual level (irony).

Yet, importantly, neither the 'naturalising' part nor the ironic 'tearing apart', the twofold process of creating a conceptual totality, which is 'revealed again and again as illusory' (77). Precisely in that very gesture, a new (albeit negative) recognition can be achieved, 'a mere glimpse of meaning' (80) – the rendering of the fragility of the world, and the abstract interpretation of it, the latter of which is undermined through the represented.

14. Lukács's theory of the narrative dynamic of the novel form resembles the one Peter Brooks outlines in his appropriation of the Freudian figure of *Nachträglichkeit* in *Reading for the Plot*; the master trope of narrative, Brooks argues, is the '*anticipation of retrospection*' (23), the expectation of a narrative end that 'can finally determine meaning, close the sentence as a signifying totality' (22). According to Lukács, the novel 'comprises the essence of its totality between the beginning and the end' (*Theory*: 83), in between which life is 'the thread upon which the whole world of the novel is strung and along which it unrolls, but … this development acquires significance only because it is typical of that system of ideas and experienced ideals which regulatively determines the inner and outer world of the novel' (82). Paul Ricoeur's notion of narrative temporality (which informs Peter Brooks's theory of 'plot') is also similar to Lukács's narrative dynamic: 'A story is *made out* of events to the extent that plot *makes* events *into* a story. The plot, therefore, places us at the crossing point of temporality and narrativity' (167).
15. See also Timothy Bewes' article 'The Novel as an Absence: Lukács and the Event of Postmodern Fiction' for a discussion of forms of de-reified temporal experience in *The Theory of the Novel*.
16. In a discussion of literary realism, Christopher Prendergast observes: 'The connecting energies of realism may well be a value to hold on to in the continuing debate, in counterpoint to the fashionable emphases on dispersal and fragmentation' (132). The early Lukács's notion of a realist ideal constitutes, I would argue, precisely such a counterpoint, which particularly in the context of postcolonial studies, where notions of dispersal and fragmentation are indeed fashionable, may find a renewed relevance.
17. After the June 1848 revolution, which according to Lukács constituted the first real action of the working class, the bourgeois class felt it had to consolidate its power and guard itself against potential rivals. Thus, it retreated to a conservative position, whereas the working class took the progressive position (previously occupied by the bourgeois class).
18. One of the most central, and most problematic, notions in Lukács's realist theory is no doubt 'typicality'. The realist writer must portray characters, things or events as 'typical' so that they appear as 'universal' (and vice versa): 'The universal appears as a quality of the individual and the particular, reality becomes manifest, and can be experienced within appearance, the general principle is exposed as the specific impelling cause for the individual case being specially depicted' (*Writer and Critic*: 34–35). As Lukács stresses, this does not imply a generalisation of the individual object, although one can of course argue that this is precisely what the norm of typicality-as-universal inevitably implies. Another problem with this notion is quite simply the fact that it transfers authority *from* the literary text *to* a particular set of extra-literary norms (of what is typical), legislated by, say, the Marxist literary critic.

19. Lukács's emphasis on totality does not imply the total portrayal of society, but rather a part which dynamically is oriented toward a whole: 'Each part, novel or short story, contains only a small segment, though complete in itself. But the greatness of [Balzac's] conception is that the whole is constantly present in the parts. Each individual novel is organically related to that whole' (*Meaning of Contemporary Realism*: 99). One should also note that while Lukács's notion of realism often has been accused of being crude, a naïvely transparent representation, it is rather one that involves, as Harry Shaw observes, 'a *selection* of reality, not its mere "transparent" replication. Yet, as part of his inheritance from German romantic aesthetics, he sometimes makes it seem as if he's offering an aesthetics of transparency, in suggesting that though works of art are really necessarily selective, they must *seem* to readers to leave no gaps' (13n).
20. It is important to distinguish critical realism from what Lukács refers to as social realism; both strive for the elimination of social contradictions, but whereas social realism often sees this elimination 'as something immediately realizable' (*Meaning of Contemporary Realism*: 120), critical realism is heavily grounded within the constraining limits of the capitalist horizon, as a 'negative perspective' (114) rather than a reconciliatory answer. Critical realism, as the 'solution-bringing third way', is thus less about offering a future solution as much as offering a *process*, a movement toward something else, such as the breakdown of capitalism and the emergence of the socialist state – at which point critical realism 'will wither away, as the literary forms of feudalism have withered away' (115).
21. See Adorno's critique of Lukács in 'Reconciliation under Duress' (151–176). For a discussion of the Frankfurt School's critical treatment of realism as part of the Enlightenment project, see Eric Downing's *Double Exposures* (7–14).
22. As John Frow rightly points out, 'In the later Lukács the notion of historical recurrence seems increasingly to have led him to ignore the moment of negativity he had recognized in the novel. History itself loses its uncertainty and its formlessness … An ethical-aesthetic valuation (realism/decadence) replaces the morally neutral categories of *The Theory of the Novel*, and the bourgeois historical novel becomes … a new manifestation of wholeness … [But] if novelists can no longer *discover* meaning, this is nevertheless primarily a moral failing on their part, not the result of an objective social process' (*Marxism*: 11). What this means more concretely is that, in Stuart Sims' words, 'the theory-wielding critic has edged ahead of the author' (44). Whereas in *The Theory*, the novel form is primarily seen as a process of *becoming-form* (and the dialectic search for its elimination), in the later Lukács, novelistic dynamic (ultimately reified and esssentialised) becomes a process striving toward certain norms, as formulated and legislated by the critic.
23. This argument is of course also Adorno's and Brecht's, but in a fundamentally different sense; Lukács's trajectory toward dogmatism is a dogged attempt to historicise, and thus stay faithful to, the abstract aesthetic ideal as formulated in *The Theory*.
24. Pheng Cheah follows Benedict Anderson's discussion of the close relationship between novel and nation in *Imagined Communities* (published in 1983). Furthermore, Cheah employs Lukács's *The Theory of the Novel* to emphasise

the organicism of the novel form, arguing that novels of the early phase of decolonisation 'almost invariably figured the emergent nation-people as a living organism suffering from the chronic malaise of colonialism' (239); this 'disease', according to Cheah, is 'cured' through the concept of *Bildung* as an organising principle and it is in this particular connection that the novel form plays a vital role.

Chapter 4: Form and Temporality in Ousmane Sembène's *Xala*

1. Yet, according to Gikandi, this notion of independence was ultimately wrong because it was based on a misunderstanding, 'not so much of the terms of liberation and its narrative claims, but of the possibilities of an epistemological revolution inherent in the decolonization gesture' (379).
2. Generally, Sembène is hailed by many critics as the founder of African cinema (see in particular David Murphy's study *Sembène: Imagining Alternatives in Film & Fiction* from 2001).
3. For example, Francoise Pfaff writes: '*Xala* … is a perfect illustration of … Frantz Fanon' (149). It should be noted that Pfaff refers to the film version of *Xala*, but since her comments primarily are orientated toward the *story* of *Xala*, they could equally be orientated toward the novel as well. Another critic, Ogunjimi Bayo, writes: 'This is the central message of Ousmane in *Xala*. The thematic emphasis is on the satirical exposure of the errandboy function of those Fanon refers to as "tin-pot bourgeoisie"' (133). Quoting Fanon, Thomas J. Lynn argues that 'El Hadji symbolizes the post-independence African middle class that wrested to itself colonial privileges while forgetting the needs of the rest of its nation – whose resources it used to gain power' (192).
4. Ousmane Sembène died on 10 June 2007. For an historical overview of Sembène's career and the extraordinarily fertile artistic environment in Senegal's independence era from which his works emerged, see David Murphy's *Sembène: Imagining Alternatives in Film & Fiction*.
5. Although no specific, historical dates are given, it would be fair to assume that the story of the novel, and the film, roughly takes place around the beginning of the 1970s – around 10 to 13 years after independence – that is, at the time the novel was written. For specific historical details about the Chambre de Commerce in Senegal, see Gugler and Diop: 154n.
6. Gloria Nne Onyeoziri notes 'how the narrator distances himself … (using quotation marks in the original),' which produces an 'ironic attitude toward El Hadji' (110).
7. Significantly, after El Hadji has been cured by Sereen Mada, whom he has paid by cheque in reward, a person who apparently has 'been sent by Sereen Mada' (89) shows up at El Hadji's office, informing him that the cheque has bounced; but El Hadji does not recognise that this person is none other than Sereen Mada himself – that is to say, there is no gap between the appearance and the actual person of Sereen Mada, yet El Hadji, busy 'entangling himself in vague explanations' (90), has already forgotten everything about the marabout.

8. Fírinne Ní Chréacháin-Adelugba argues that in Sembène's novel *God's Bits of Wood* (1960), we similarly see an example of a speech which contains truth, but within an entirely different context – the speech is used as a genuine weapon against the foreign colonisers, spoken by an authentic revolutionary. In contrast, 'El Hadji uses [his defence speech] as a final desperate smokescreen to protect his own skin' (101). If *God's Bits of Wood* is a novel that presents a collective vision of the social problems facing a newly independent nation, *Xala* offers a narrow and privatised vision of disillusion and dehumanisation around a decade later.
9. Another aspect reflecting El Hadji's dual, and inauthentic, character is his religious identity: El Hadji has gained the right to his Moslem name ('El Hadji') after having made a pilgrimage to Mecca. He is, however, not particularly religious; rather, as with much else in his life, the pilgrimage seems to have been undertaken primarily with the aim of adding further prestige to his social reputation and his business name. As Kenneth Harrow writes: 'A <<Hadj>> who drinks and steals, evoking his <<religious patrimony>> to justify his greed and desire for a pretty, young wife; who sleeps through the hours of prayers and seeks a cure from holy men so he can fornicate; whose prosperity is won by theft and who lacks in real charity for the poor – in all respects is really the opposite of a pilgrim of great piety, which is the meaning of the title <<Hadj>>' (186).
10. El Hadji is to be married to N'Gone, whom we hear is 'the child of national flags and hymns' (7), thus, symbolically, marrying himself to the myth of a new nation.
11. The president's speech evokes an illusion of a radical departure in the country's history: 'Since the beginning of the foreign occupation no African has ever been President of the Chamber … In appointing me to this post of great responsibility our government has acted with courage and shown its determination to achieve economic independence in these difficult times. This is indeed an historical occasion' (2). When the businessmen are no longer able to obtain credit from the foreigners, after El Hadji's financial excess has discredited them, they nonetheless find themselves in a position just as helpless as before.
12. It is precisely *because* time as a constitutive force eventually is introduced in El Hadji's static, inauthentic world that it unravels in the way it does. What corrupts El Hadji's life, indeed *suspends* it, is ironically the reinsertion, the return, of the true past. Even if he spends much energy on the search for a cure, El Hadji's life remains suspended. We get the impression that El Hadji is elsewhere for much of the novel (during which people are scheming and plotting), even if he is present; when he is together with the family, he agrees to everything thoughtlessly to get peace; in the cinema, 'His thoughts were elsewhere' (60); and as a businessman, he sits in his office for over two months, doing little else than to speculate about his xala.
13. In the film version of *Xala*, the bribery of the businessmen is made even more explicit; in the beginning of the film, foreign investors hand over briefcases full of money to the businessmen, which they zealously protect throughout the story.
14. There are several reasons for this reversal, Fanon points out, the most explicit one being the fact that it is an *under-developed* class: 'It has practically

no economic power … Neither financiers nor industrial magnates are to be found within this national middle class. The national bourgeoisie of under-developed countries is not engaged in production, nor in invention, nor building, nor labour; it is completely canalized into activities of the *intermediary type*' (120; emphasis added).

15. Lukács's Marxist notion of history is based on the idea that beneath the chaotic surface of reality an immanent, overall logic may be recovered via the right aesthetic means. To Lukács, history is fundamentally a meaningful, purposeful *telos*, which, however, in the age of capitalism appears confusing and disorientating; history, in other words, appears in a form that needs interpretation. This view forms the basis of Lukács's magisterial work *The Historical Novel* (published in 1937), in which he argues that the pre-1848 bourgeois historical novel constitutes an interpretational paradigm that confronts, in an aesthetic way, the disruptive experience of history. The historical novel, Lukács argues, is based on the concept of a progressive temporal dimension through which the past is seen as constituting the preconditions – the pre-history – of the formation of the present; the main function of the historical novel is to reconcile concrete experience with the overall meaning of history. This revolutionary potential is, according to Lukács, lost after 1848.
16. Lukács's schematic distinction between pre- and post-1848 literature explains the curious fact that he attributes a revolutionary potential to a bourgeois-realist aesthetics (Balzac), which, as several critics have pointed out, thus becomes an *a-historical* potential. But Lukács's point is that the potential of a bourgeois-realist aesthetic stems entirely from the time *before* 1848; before that year, Lukács argues, the bourgeois class was radical because it was liberating itself from feudalism, whereas after that year, it had gained power and thus was no longer in a position of struggle, but rather one of conservatism. Replacing the once radical bourgeois class, Lukács points out, the emerging proletariat class struggles to liberate itself from the bourgeois class, and it is in connection with this struggle that the proletariat may *rediscover* and *repeat* the lost radicalism of the bourgeois class, and hence *reuse* its 'weapons' – the bourgeois-realist aesthetics before 1848, or what Lukács calls critical realism. Critical realism, as a revolutionary aesthetics, must be repeated at different, transformative stages of history, until the final resolution – the socialist state – has been achieved.
17. For a more positive evaluation of literary naturalism, see in particular Sandy Petrey's *Realism and Revolution*. As for Sembène's novel *Xala*, Lukács's notion of naturalism is particularly relevant, I argue, because it is so closely related – in a *formal* sense – to the Fanonian argument of the decadence of the national bourgeoisie; however, at the same time, it is important to stress that *Xala* also differs from Lukács's (as well as Fanon's) perspective, and that a more positive notion of naturalist form in connection with Sembène's novel may lead to equally valuable insights.
18. Sigmund Freud operates with three, connected, notions of repressions; the *Ur*-repression, the actual repression and the return of the repressed (see Laplanche and Pontalis's *The Language of Psychoanalysis*). All three forms of Freudian repression can be seen as enacted in *Xala*; the *Ur*-repression as El Hadji's crime in the past; the actual repression as embodied in the static

present of El Hadji's world; and the return of the repressed as illustrated through the beggars entering the house of El Hadji.

19. Cars connect people in *Xala* but only in a superficial sense. Outside of Dakar, that is, outside of El Hadji's world, the Mercedes is useless. The Mercedes is eventually taken away from El Hadji by automobile creditors when he runs out of money. And *when* he runs out of money, things start to escalate in a string of causally related events (one of the few times in the novel a narrative causal chain seems to emerge); his business is ruined; he is expelled from the banks; his employees flee; and his family starts to dismantle. When the money runs out, the faked spectacle of dynamics and mobility of El Hadji's world equally starts to crack.
20. In 'Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism', Fredric Jameson briefly analyses and discusses this passage in *Xala*, arguing that it illustrates that 'the space of a past and future utopia – a social world of collective cooperation – is dramatically inserted into the corrupt and westernized money economy of the new post-independence national or comprador bourgeoisie' (81). Jameson argues that Ousmane Sembène, as a radical African writer, in the aftermath of independence, found himself in a dilemma; 'a passion for change and social regeneration which has not yet found its agents.' This, Jameson adds, is 'also very much an aesthetic dilemma, a crisis of representation.' What Jameson refers to is the problematic of representing the 'evils' of societies as, not foreign colonisers, but one's own people, which makes the connections and determinations 'much more difficult to represent' (81).
21. Yet it is also a 'harmonic,' 'restful' and 'peaceful' place that stands in glaring contrast to El Hadji's frantic Dakar: 'An empty, cloudless sky. The torrid, stifling heat hung in the air. Clothes stuck to damp bodies. Everyone was returning to work after lunch, so the streets were very busy. Mopeds, bicycles and pedestrians streamed in the same direction towards the commercial centre of the city' (32).
22. Besides the issue of literary form in *Xala*, with which I am predominantly occupied, Harrow also raises the important issue of language in the novel; in the French-speaking world of El Hadji, the indigenous language of Wolof becomes a site of resistance, 'the weapon of struggle par excellence' (182) against the invasion of foreign influence. Rama, El Hadji's eldest daughter, is a student activist politically involved in recuperating the language of Wolof, considering French 'An historical accident. Wolof is our national language' (86). However, in the novel Rama does not represent, in an unambiguous way, a genuinely radical figure; despite her political commitment, her position is equally compromised, albeit in a more subtle way than El Hadji's position, and the bourgeois discourse to which he belongs. Significantly, in the novel she is hit twice by someone. The first time is when she fiercely criticises her father for marrying N'Gone, shouting that 'A polygamist is never frank' (13). El Hadji slaps her, retorting that 'You can be a revolutionary at the university or in the street but not in my house. Never!' (13). Near the end of the novel, when the beggars have entered their house, Rama is filled with anger but 'Against whom? Against her father? Against these wretched people? She who was always ready with the words "revolution" and "new social order" felt deep within her breast something like a stone falling

heavily into her heart, crushing her' (100–101). She slaps a beggar woman, who gets up and gives 'Rama a resounding slap' (103) in response. Whereas Rama was slapped the first time for being radical, she is slapped the second time for being reactionary, thus illustrating the ambiguities and complexities of maintaining a radically political identity.

23. One could argue that the novel version of *Xala* mourns the fact that it cannot, in the end, be a theatre – an ideologically coded desire caught in the 'wrong' form, so to speak – which of course is also precisely *why* the novelistic version of *Xala* is important as an aesthetic-political project.
24. See Fredric Jameson's essay 'Beyond the Cave' for a discussion of boredom as a form of ideological repression.
25. Such as, for example, one of the beggars who shouts: 'I'll never be a man. Someone like yourself knocked me down with his car. He drove off, leaving me lying there' (100). The beggar's anger is directed at El Hadji, but his tragic fate also puts the politically radical character of Rama, standing next to El Hadji, in an uncomfortable position; earlier, we were told that she 'loved speed. At a pedestrian crossing she just missed someone and skidded towards the pavement' (43).
26. It remains uncertain as to whether the beggars are allowed to return to the streets, as the novel's last sentence ambiguously reads: 'Outside the forces of order raised their weapons into the firing position' (103). To Gugler and Diop, this ending seems to undermine the novel's revolutionary potential: 'If the wretched of the earth … can curse and cleanse, are they a political force to be reckoned with? The novel seems to preclude such a revolutionary prospect as the police outside the house raise their weapons into firing position at the end' (151). One should, however, be careful not to put too much emphasis on the novel's (lack of) revolutionary potential, since this would undoubtedly lead to rather one-dimensional readings of the overall aesthetic-political project of Sembène's work of fiction, which – as I have argued – above all explores and traces the mechanisms by which revolutionary potentials are formulated *in the first place*.
27. As such, the novel moreover suggests that the actual fetish, the real superstition, is money, both in the Marxist sense – as concealing the true social totality – as well as in the Freudian sense – as concealing lack. It is only when El Hadji is no longer in a position to buy a cure for money, that he in fact is offered a genuine form of cure – curing his lack, as well as curing his ideologically coded blindness. For a discussion of the differences between the Marxist fetish and the Freudian fetish, see Žižek's *Sublime Object of Ideology*: 49.
28. In terms of the novelistic dynamic as formulated by the early Lukács in *Theory of the Novel*, what is significant about *Xala*'s narrative dynamic is that it interprets the impact of hidden causal forces upon a present that for ideological reasons has repressed those forces. As a *cause*, the xala is unable to manifest itself except as a negative effect, that is, impotence, in El Hadji's world, which in effect causes El Hadji to search for its cause, and which eventually turns out to be his own repressed past. Searching for the real source of the xala, El Hadji at the same time apparently sets in motion other, negative, causal forces; for example, he is expelled from the group of businessmen because, as the president tells him, 'Your colleagues want to stop the rather

serious prejudice you are *causing* them' (77; emphasis added). Significantly, when El Hadji defends himself by referring to the xala as the cause of his neglect, no one at this stage seems to accept this as a proper reason, that is, at this level the power of the xala as a cause has no validity. The causal principle in *Xala* remains abstract, controlled or legitimised through interpretive measures which are dependent on particular ideological concerns; time becomes the corrupting principle that disturbs this abstract-ideological causal principle by inserting the real past which has been repressed.

29. That is, the haunting spectacle as embodied in the problematic of imitativeness; the sense of being a paradoxical *effect* in search of an absent cause that may authorise a legitimate, proper *beginning*, independent of the colonial past.
30. The beggar often chants in the background of the novel's scenes – for example in front of El Hadji's business, outside Oumi's villa, and near N'Gone's villa. When El Hadji visits Sereen Mada's distant villa, out of the beggar's reach, he is, temporarily, cured. The beggar's music seems to introduce a different temporal modality in El Hadji's world, similar to Benjamin's 'Jetztzeit', breaking the deafening continuity of homogenous, empty time that pervades all life in the city.

Chapter 5: Arcades of Foreignness: J. M. Coetzee's *Foe*

1. See Schwarz, *Misplaced Ideas*: 9.
2. See 'The Empire Writes Back': 32.
3. See Schwarz: 2.
4. J. M. Coetzee was born in Cape Town in 1940 and grew up in a white middle-class environment, speaking both English and Afrikaans. Early in his life, Coetzee left South Africa and worked as a computer programmer in England between 1962 and 1965. He received a doctoral degree in linguistics from the University of Texas at Austin, and began teaching at the State University of New York at Buffalo in 1968. Four years later, he returned to South Africa to teach literature at the University of Cape Town. In 1974, Coetzee published his first novel, *Dusklands*. His early novels are characterised by a political directness, yet they also reveal an aspect that becomes more prominent in his later works; an ambiguous, hermetic, self-referential, and often allegorical style – of which *Foe* (as well as the earlier *Waiting for the Barbarians* from 1980) represents the culmination.
5. See Tiffin's article 'Post-Colonial Literatures' and Thieme's *Postcolonial Con-texts* for discussions of *Foe*'s 'writing back' to the canon.
6. For a critical discussion of *Foe* as a canonised postcolonial text, see Derek Attridge's *J. M. Coetzee*: 65–90.
7. For critical assessments of Coetzee's writing and *Foe* in particular, see Benita Parry's essay 'Speech and Silence in the Fictions of J. M. Coetzee', in which she argues that there are signs in Coetzee's fictions of an 'urge to cast off worldly attachments' (44). See also Kirsten Holst Petersen's critical essay 'An Elaborate Dead End? A Feminist Reading of Coetzee's *Foe'*. Those two essays in particular have equally been refuted and criticised in turn many times by adherents of Coetzee's style.

8. See Eagleton's *The English Novel*: 25, 40.
9. See Watt's *Rise of the Novel*, Hulme's *Colonial Encounters* and Eagleton's *The English Novel* for discussions of *Robinson Crusoe*'s literary realism. To clarify, *Robinson Crusoe*'s realism is of course very far from the kind of critical realism Lukács had in mind; rather, as Hulme has argued, Defoe's text is more an example of 'surface realism' (176) – that is, a colonial romance or myth.
10. Coetzee's view of Daniel Defoe as a writer of purity, a writer of a 'real' language devoid of irony, is particularly interesting to bear in mind when we read his novel *Foe* whose relationship to its predecessor, as I mentioned earlier, is often seen by many postcolonial critics as one primarily involving a negative, ironic critique, a 'writing back'. Coetzee himself, however, has expressed the hope that *Foe* will not merely be 'read like pastiche', but also 'a tribute of sorts to eighteenth-century English prose style' (Attwell: 146).
11. Derek Attridge has pointed out that 'the larger part of the novel consists of a memoir and several letters written by the newly returned castaway Susan Barton to the well-known author Daniel Foe, quotation marks before each of her paragraphs reminding us constantly that this is not the mysterious immaterial language most fiction uses as its medium, nor even a representation of speech, but a representation *in* writing *of* writing' (*Coetzee*: 73).
12. Gayatri Spivak observes: 'Susan Barton begins the novel with quotation marks, a self-citation … At the beginning of the text is a quotation with no fixed origin' ('Theory': 162).
13. See the introduction to Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*: 7–21.
14. Friday's silence presents yet another series of inconsistencies in Susan Barton's memoir; how he lost his tongue; where he comes from; how he came to the island; whether he is a cannibal; why he does not rebel against Cruso's command; why he plays the same melody again and again; what are his desires; and why he spreads petals on the sea. To all of these questions, Cruso's stories are of no real assistance, but on the contrary open up the possibility 'that a number of "truths" may be operating simultaneously' (Jolly: 3) – multiple possibilities which undermine any single, authoritative explanation, as Susan Barton melancholically reflects: 'in the end I did not know what was truth, what was lies, and what was mere rambling' (12).
15. See Jolly: 8.
16. Susan Barton is, as Rosemary Jane Jolly observes, equally interested in making the story a bestseller, but for reasons and with intentions different from Mr Foe. Turning the story of the island into a popular adventure tale means to her the prospect of an economically independent life, a life in which she can restore the imbalance of her misfortunes; to live an autonomous life, an individual in control of her own destiny, like Cruso's island-dream. In other words, the story written by Mr Foe must rescue her (see Jolly: 5).
17. Daniel Defoe is often seen as the father of modern fiction, the enigmatic negotiator of truth and lies, a writer on the market writing for someone and for something. For a comment on Daniel Defoe as the first modern fiction writer, see Coetzee's essay 'Daniel Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe*' in which he calls Defoe 'an impersonator, a ventriloquist, even a forger … The kind of "novel" he is writing … is a more or less literal imitation of the kind of recital his hero or heroine would have given had he or she really existed. It is a fake autobiography' (*Stranger Shores*: 19).

18. For a discussion of *Foe*'s inter-textual elaboration of *Roxana*, see Spivak's essay 'Theory in the Margin,' as well as *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*: 174–197.
19. As Rosemary Jane Jolly observes, 'She associates the exercise of this power with liberation; and, tellingly, views it as an expression of the masculine authorial fantasy of self-engenderment' (141).
20. See Jolly: 8.
21. Friday's apparent lack of desire or curiosity represents to Susan Barton a kind of laziness which she ultimately interprets as a lack of 'civilisation'. On the other hand, Friday's lack of interest in *her* is also a threat to Barton's sense of subjectivity.
22. Benjamin's emphasis on literalness also distinguishes his theory from deconstructive theories of translation, despite many similarities (for an account of deconstructive translation practice, see Tejaswini Niranjana's *Siting Translation*). In deconstruction, the literal is problematic since it connotes something 'proper', as opposed to the figurative, which is always a false proposition. In poststructuralist accounts of translation, a 'proper' rendering of an original text is always a misreading, a failure, which at the same time reveals that the original itself is a disarticulation. The original, as for example in Paul de Man's deconstructive reading of Walter Benjamin's translation essay ('Conclusions'), is de-sacralised by the translation, yet at the same time the very idea of an 'original' is however preserved, even though it turns out to be a failure. Translation, in this dynamic, remains a one-way process, still retaining the idea of the purity or untranslatability of the 'original'. See also Chow: 186–188.
23. In this connection, see also Spivak's essay 'Theory in the Margin' where she comments on the arbitrariness and historicity of the words which Susan Barton attempts to teach Friday, such as the word 'Africa': '*Africa* is only a time-bound naming; like all proper names it is a mark with an arbitrary connection to its referent, a catachresis. The earth as temporary dwelling has no foundational name' (170).
24. See also Spivak who quotes and uses this phrase from Freud's 'The Uncanny' in her book *Death of a Discipline*: 22.
25. Friday's otherness does not allow a fixed, stable, univocal interpretation of meaning; on the contrary, it is an otherness that is manifested through activities that remain enigmatic – such as playing repetitiously the same melody; throwing petals on water; dancing in a state of manic self-absorption. Friday's continuous drawings of the sign O are not merely black holes, but also arcades of transparency, illuminating the silences in the narrative.
26. As Rosemary Jane Jolly has observed, Friday's scars can be seen as an ironic comment on the episode during which Susan Barton attempts to send him back on a ship to wherever he came from, having no idea where that might be (reflecting the simplistic idea of a possible return to some 'original' condition before imperialism); around his neck she hangs a 'bill of freedom' to state that he is a free man, not to be treated as a slave, which nevertheless does not bring about Friday's liberation, but on the contrary indicates the lack of his rights as a human being (see Jolly: 11, 15).
27. The manuscript starts by addressing the author – 'Dear Mr Foe, At last I could row no further' (155) – thus deviating slightly from the opening of chapter one,

which begins 'At last I could row no further' (5); one could see the manuscript which the unnamed narrator encounters in the last chapter as a combination of *both* Susan Barton's original manuscript *and* chapter two's epistolary narrative, consisting of letters addressed to Mr Foe.

28. See Jolly: 8. Rosemary Jane Jolly furthermore argues that representation (the realist representation of Susan Barton and the popularising representation of Mr Foe) of otherness implies the suppression of difference (see Jolly: 3).
29. For example, Kossew writes: 'It is this realist model of authorship itself, along with such related aspects as 'truth' and 'reality', that is being questioned in *Foe*' (164). Similarly, Titlestad and Kissack argue that *Foe*'s 'post-modern play, its anti-realism, precludes any interpretation based in an assumed mimesis; we are reminded constantly that we are caught in a web of textuality' (211). I would argue that the novel's alleged critique of realism (and I agree that the novel *is* a critique of realism) may also be seen as too caricatured, too simplified; Susan Barton's desire, for example, is too absolute, too demanding, and hence too unrealistic – unless the impossibility of her alleged desire for realism itself becomes the point.
30. Jolly, for example, argues that the 'ending of *Foe* … suggests that the novel itself goes beyond the deconstructive project of its own postmodernism. The figure of Friday in *Foe* can and has been described as a postmodern figuring of the other. However, the figure of Friday can also be read as a kind of critique of the postmodern strategy for representing the other. In this light the figure of Friday can be seen as suggesting an alternative to the violations that both recuperate and postmodern strategies for figuring the other inflict upon their subjects' (Jolly: 142–143). For an exposition of various interpretations of *Foe*'s ending, see Kossew: 172–177.
31. See Jolly: 1. Similarly, Teresa Dovey argues that 'the critical activity of *Foe* operates within a far wider discursive area [than his first four novels]. Indeed, the space of this arena would seem to be constituted by nothing less than the discourses of feminism, postcolonialism and postmodernism' (330).
32. Ian Glenn, for example, argues that the theoretical or critical dimension in Coetzee's texts 'may be said to have attempted to make his works critic-proof' (25). For a discussion of Glenn's argument as well as other critics who have suggested that in Coetzee's works the distinction between theory and fiction seems to have been dissolved, see Dominic Head's *J. M. Coetzee*: 24–27.
33. As a text exploring its own formal insufficiencies as a *narrative*, I tend to read *Foe* as a *modernist* text (rather than, say, a postmodernist text, although clearly characteristics of both 'isms' can be found in the novel, depending on how one defines those terms) – a text which in an emblematic way questions and resists narrativity as such.
34. I quote here from McLeod: 28.
35. In a discussion of Benjamin's concept of allegory, as developed in the latter's thesis on the German *Trauerspiel*, Georg Lukács links it with modernism per se and argues that it merely furthers the process of abstraction: 'Modern allegory, and modernist ideology … deny the *typical*. By destroying the coherence of the world, they reduce detail to the level of mere particularity (once again, the connection between modernism and naturalism is plain)' (*Meaning of Contemporary Realism*: 43). Lukács's exaggerated critique of modernism should, however, be seen against the background of his growing

concerns about fascism and Nazism, as Mary Gluck has argued: 'Lukács's argument against modernism … had to do not so much with the modernists' complicity with fascism but, rather, with their impotence to forge effective weapons against it' (881).

36. Benjamin's notion of the 'original' as already being in/a translation also to some extent distinguishes his theory, despite many similarities, from poststructuralist-oriented translation theories. In the latter, the 'original' is de-sacralised as a site of authority, while the secondariness of the translation is revalued as liberating. However, the *notion* of the 'original' is still intact, even if it turns out to be a failure; conversely, in Benjamin's theory, 'original' and 'translation' are placed side by side, as fragments of a larger, as-yet-to-come language. Within the context of postcolonial studies, one could argue that the notion of 'writing back to the centre' is basically a deconstructive case, that is, a strategy deconstructing the hierarchical notion of the original, the centre of authority, while endowing the site of 'translation', the position from which writing back is initiated, with radicalism; yet a strategy which also accepts the notion of the 'original', even if it is deconstructed. Characteristically, one may read *Foe* both as a deconstructive 'writing back' to Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (which would be the orthodox postcolonial reading), as well as an arcade of foreignness in the Benjaminian sense (which is the one I have attempted to follow in my reading of the text).
37. I follow here Derrida's notion of the beginning: 'In the beginning, at the origin, there was ruin. At the origin comes ruin; ruin comes to the origin, it is what first comes and happens to the origin, in the beginning. With no promise of restoration' (*Memoirs*: 65).
38. Within this perspective, one might see the theoretical dimension in *Foe* as similar to what Graham Huggan (in connection with the metalanguage of theory in postcolonial studies) has called 'a measure of ideological self-protection' (*Postcolonial Exotic*: 259).

Chapter 6: Realism in Rohinton Mistry's *A Fine Balance*

1. Rohinton Mistry emigrated at the age of 23 from India to Canada, where he has lived ever since. *A Fine Balance* was published about 20 years after his immigration, when Mistry was about 43 (Mistry was born in 1952 and the novel was published in 1995); the fact that the author emigrated the same year Indira Gandhi's state of emergency began (1975) also means that he did not 'witness' the historical events evoked in the novel at first hand.
2. The state of emergency involved a series of totalitarian government regulations and initiatives such as strict censorship, the arrest of opposition leaders, union activists and radical critics, and the suspension of human rights and civil liberties. For an historical overview of the state of emergency, see Dube: 105–06.
3. Although Indira Gandhi is never named in *A Fine Balance* (just like the city by the sea in Mistry's text is never named as Bombay), the novel is built around very specific and easily identifiable historical events.
4. For a discussion of Lukács's intellectual and political activities in the 1930s, see Arpad Kardakay's *Georg Lukács: Life, Thought, and Politics*: 297–359.

5. Thus, echoing Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*, the body found on the tracks forebodes the end, when Maneck commits suicide by throwing himself in front of a train, as well as the body of Avinash, which is found on the tracks (to make it look like an accident), a body clearly bearing the marks of torture.
6. The scene furthermore reveals, at a symbolic level, the contradictions generated by the impatient force underlying the state of emergency. As Morey, commenting on this scene, writes: 'The equation of the railway with a preferred form of death is an instantly striking metaphor for a nation that runs over the people while, itself, going "off the rails"' (175). Trains and railways of course metaphorically refer to connectivity and linking, but the body causing delay also becomes a figure of the opposite; the breaking of human relations, the suspension of individual connectivity, as well as the suspension of causality as such (for example, causal explanatory power).
7. The novel elaborates a notion of history that is similar to what one may call an 'absent cause', in the Jamesonian sense: 'history is *not* a text, not a narrative, master or otherwise, but that, as an absent cause, it is inaccessible to us except in textual form, and that our approach to it and to the Real itself necessarily passes through its prior textualization, its narrativization in the political unconscious' (*Political Unconscious*: 20).
8. The historical force, at the level of the individual, is one that imposes itself on the characters, like an Orwellian Big Brother. Morey sees the historical dimension of the text in terms of 'the gargantuan body of Mrs Gandhi' (180). Schneller reads the historical force of the state of emergency as 'a Hyrdra-like [sic] occurrence, in which the tentacles of government reached across the entire subcontinent, destroying lives in its wake' (243).
9. While history is shaped and formed by those at the top of the social hierarchy, its effects are most powerful on the ones at the lowest step of the hierarchy – as represented, for example, through the characters of Om and Ishvar, as well as Rajaram, the Monkey Man, Shankar, and the rent collector Ibrahim. Their concerns remain of the most rudimentary kind (to eat, find a place to sleep, to find work), and the motivations of their actions and doings remain limited to these concerns, which at the same time constitute the framework of possibilities of narrative motivation for much of the novel. 'History is what hurts,' Jameson observes; it 'can be apprehended only through its effects' (*Political Unconscious*: 102). It is through the obstruction of these rudimentary motivations that history, among the lower classes, manifests itself in the novel.
10. Almond's point could here be seen as similar to the one Roland Barthes makes in the essay 'The Reality Effect', in which he draws attention to the presence of 'those details which are "superfluous"' (135) in realist texts. Another thing characterising the realist text, Barthes argues, is its dependence on a certain redundancy or repetition that guarantees its readability, and which produces the 'reality effect' (the habitual travails and patterns of everyday life). One could see the superfluity of details as correlating with the realist text's dependence on redundancy, but, as Eric Downing points out in his reading of Barthes's poetics, 'the realist's hypertrophic evocation of discrete details is intent on challenging, on *resisting*, meaning: on opposing functional assimilation to the established systems of intelligibility, whether these be conceived as primarily literary or as more broadly sociocultural' (3).

11. A third type of accident throws suspicion, in a political sense, on the dimension of the accidental as such. Avinash's death is officially classified as a 'railway accident' (thus reminding us of the railway accident in the prologue), but the body reveals that he has been tortured to death. When Maneck meets Avinash's parents, the father says: 'We saw burns on many shameful parts of his body, and when his mother picked up his hand to press it to her forehead, we could see that his fingernails were gone. So we asked them in the morgue, how can this happen in falling from a train? They said anything can happen' (499). After the police's brutal treatment of Ashraf, the hospital declares 'the cause of death as accidental' (538). A fourth type of accident, no less political, includes events suddenly endowed with an allegorical dimension, such as a market suddenly destroyed by the police: 'In seconds the square was littered with tomatoes, onions, earthen pots, flour, spinach, coriander, chillies – patches of orange and white and green, dissolving in chaos out of their neat rows' (529). As Morey observes, the colours of the down-trodden vegetables are 'the colours of the Indian flag' (181).
12. One may argue that the textual dynamic consists of a series of what *might* be motivated events, but events that do not possess the authority to be translated into a certain chain of motivation, except in an abstract sense. This, it would seem, is one of the *literary* ways in which the political-historical dimension works and is explored in Mistry's novel. At the quotidian-individual level, the narrated events take on a 'functional' appearance, in the Russian formalist sense of the term, that is, as events primarily orientated toward the *outcome* or the *consequences*. One cause may be replaced with another, but the consequences carry actual, concrete signification, while the meaning of the event itself takes on an accidental appearance. As the novel progresses, the accumulative force of the narrative unfolding eventually achieves a certain authoritative gravity which translates, retrospectively (that is, when all the novel's many warnings, expectations, omens, forebodings, hopes, dreams, desires, fears and so forth, have either been confirmed, de-confirmed, fulfilled or unfulfilled), particular events into a particular chain of motivation.
13. It is important not to confuse Valmik's abstract reflections with what I have referred to as the 'abstractness' of history as such; history is abstract because it cannot be grasped or represented except in textual form. The textuality of history is fundamentally an interpretation or a representation of history, which is intended to transform the abstractness of history into a representable form; yet this interpretation or representation is equally in need of balancing its own abstractness, in order to become truthful. The novelistic dynamic in Mistry's text can be seen as one that attempts to unify or combine the dimensions of abstract truth and concrete experience – that is, forming two irreconcilable perspectives – into one inseparable unity which generates glimpses of the transcendence of abstraction, albeit in a conceptual sense. In the postcolonial context of *A Fine Balance*, the necessity of such a perspective is also, I would argue, one of the reasons for the importance of the *literary*.
14. Among the novel's four main characters, Maneck is the only one who possesses a real opportunity to voice critical resistance; in contrast, Om's resistance is limited to the defiant yet in the end foolish and harmless act

of spitting at Thakur Dharamsi, which causes the latter to demand the castration of Om. The character of Maneck stands in between Om and Avinash, and lets both of them down in the end.

15. In a crude schematic, *A Fine Balance*'s first five chapters introduce us to the setting, fill us with background information about the characters, and outline the 'stakes' of the narrative – the accumulation of goals, dreams, risks, omens, determinants and so forth; after that the novel is followed by five chapters (VI–X) in which relations are mended, consolidated and established; then the 'crisis' chapters follow, in which these relations are being put to test (XI–XV); and finally there is the chapter 'The Circle Is Completed', in which the threads and lines of the novel come to a dead end. In the epilogue we jump ahead eight years to a stage *after* the end; as though the novel, after its grand design is complete, collects all the small snippets, scraps and pieces left over. During these eight years since the state of emergency, 'nothing has changed … Living each day is to face one emergency or another' (581), as a taxi driver tells Maneck.
16. Although, as I argued in Chapter 3, in the later Lukács's writings from the 1930s, the authority of this principle of 'epic selection' is ultimately deferred to a process *outside* of the literary work itself.
17. To stretch Lukács's principle of selectivity in a perhaps rather mechanical way, one might see an echo of this when Ishvar tells Dina, while she is working on her patchwork quilt, that 'the talent is in joining the pieces, the way you have' (489). To Maneck, noting how difficult it will be to make all the bits and scraps match properly, Dina says: 'Difficult, yes, but that's where taste and skill come in. What to select, what to leave out – and which goes next to which' (273).
18. As Tokaryk argues, *A Fine Balance* puts a lot of emphasis on individual objects, 'in an effort to explore the "systems" of which the objects are a part, not because the objects are significant in and of themselves' (16). Recurrent objects, used in different situations and for different purposes, taking on a variety of different meanings, include, for example, umbrellas, plastic folders, nameplates and hair. In each of these instances it would be possible to interpret them as being part of a wider process demonstrating how the overall system, in which they are inserted, functions.
19. When Maneck meets Dina again after eight years, she unsuccessfully tries to 'breathe life into him' (606). When Maneck a little later meets Ishvar and Om, now beggars, he becomes paralysed, unable to utter a single word. Later, Om concludes that 'He didn't recognize us' (613). As we know, however, Maneck did indeed recognise them, and it was precisely because of the shock of this recognition that 'his words of love and sorrow and hope remained muted like stones' (608). Maneck, we are told, 'saw that Ishvar was sitting on a cushion. No, not a cushion. It was dirty and fraying, folded to the size of a cushion. The patchwork quilt' (608). The patchwork quilt, now 'dirty and fraying', is one of the prevailing metaphors of epic memory in Mistry's text; when Maneck discovers it, it has a petrifying effect because its metaphorical dimension has been transformed into a traumatic reality. A sad reunion of misrecognitions, the scene symbolically enacts the way in which the dimensions of connectedness and relatedness as narrative principles work in Mistry's novel; the relation between Om, Ishvar and Maneck is at this stage one that has become hidden or unformulable, while at the same time being present or manifest, in a traumatic sense.

20. Much of their story takes place, or is re-told or re-visited, in Dina's apartment and, to a lesser extent, at the Vishram Vegetarian Hotel. Dina's apartment and the Vishram Vegetarian Hotel are places where individual stories of human lives – at the human-individual level – are being told, heard, nurtured and collected; and both places eventually collapse and disappear. Significantly, Maneck forgets Avinash's chess set twice, the first time in Dina's apartment, and the second time in the Vishram Vegetarian Hotel (by that time transformed into a fashionable, modern place), suggesting that the act of forgetting here in a symbolic sense precisely implies collapse and disappearance of individual stories as well as individuality itself.
21. Dina, for example, leaves her memories again; she folds the quilt and locks it away because she becomes 'frightened of the strange magic it worked on her mind, frightened of where its terrain was leading her. She did not want to cross that border permanently' (574).

Conclusion: Realism, Form and Balance

1. Other examples include Morey who writes that whereas 'several critics' have misrecognised Mistry's text 'as merely perpetuating the traditions of the nineteenth-century European realist novel', it uses 'patterns of recurrence and cyclicality and metafictional elements' (implying that it, for those reasons, cannot be 'merely' realism), and that *A Fine Balance* rather should be seen as 'post-colonial metarealism' (183–184). Ian Almond reads *A Fine Balance* as a novel that 're-orientalizes' the East, a process that competes with the text's 'more political vocabulary of social realism' (215). Tokaryk offers an explicit 'defence' of Mistry's realist form, referring to both Shaw's *Narrating Reality* and Lukács's realist theories but choosing instead to read *A Fine Balance* in terms of Bakhtin's notion of 'grotesque realism' (25), as an example of 'postmodern storytelling in a realist novel' (25).
2. In the short article 'Can Rohinton Mistry's Realism Rescue the Novel?', Laura Moss writes that one of the reasons why critics hesitate to call Mistry's *A Fine Balance* a realist text is that it is often conceived to be 'degrading to see Mistry's writing as derivative of a European form, where the Indian writer has now "caught up", in the literary evolutionary scheme of things, to the point where British writers were in the nineteenth century' (160). Moss argues that whereas Mistry's novel undoubtedly is inspired by nineteenth-century realism, it is also inspired by social realism as developed by Indian writers such as Anand, Rao and Bhattacharya.
3. Cf. Lazarus's *Resistance in Postcolonial African Fiction*: 2.

Works Cited

Adams, Jon-K, 'Causality and Narrative', *Journal of Literary Semantics*, 18:3 (1989), 149–162.

Adorno, Theodor W., 'Reconciliation under Duress', in *Aesthetics and Politics*, ed. and trans. Ronald Taylor (London: Verso, 1977), 151–176.

—— 'Commitment', in *Aesthetics and Politics*, ed. and trans. Ronald Taylor (London: Verso, 1977), 177–195.

Afzal-Khan, Fawzia, 'At the Margins of Postcolonial Studies: Part 2', in Kalpana Seshadri-Crooks and Fawzia Afzal-Khan (eds), *The Pre-Occupation of Postcolonial Studies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), 24–34.

Agamben, Giorgio, *Stanzas: Words and Phantasm in Western Culture*, trans. Ronald L. Martinez (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).

Ahmad, Aijaz, 'Jameson's Rhetoric of Otherness and the "National Allegory"', *Social Text*, 17 (1987), 3–25.

—— *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures* (London: Verso, 2000).

Almond, Ian, 'Post-Colonial Melancholy: An Examination of Sadness in Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines*', *Orbis Litterarum: International Review of Literary Studies*, 59:2 (2004), 90–99.

—— 'On Re-Orientalizing the Indian Novel: A Case Study of Rohinton Mistry's *A Fine Balance*', *Orbis Litterarum: International Review of Literary Studies*, 59:3 (2004), 204–217.

Anderson, Benedict, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991).

Appadurai, Arjun (ed.), *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in a Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back* (London: Routledge, 2002).

Attridge, Derek, 'Literary Form and the Demands of Politics: Otherness in J. M. Coetzee's *Age of Iron*', in George Levine (ed.), *Aesthetics and Ideology* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1994), 243–263.

—— *The Singularity of Literature* (London: Routledge, 2004).

—— *J. M. Coetzee and the Ethics of Reading: Literature in the Event* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

Attwell, David (ed.), *Doubling the Points: Essays and Interviews by J. M. Coetzee* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992).

Avni, Ora, *The Resistance of Reference. Linguistics, Philosophy and the Literary Text* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990).

Bahri, Deepika, 'Coming to Terms with the "Postcolonial"', in Deepika Bahri and Mary Vasudeva (eds), *Between the Lines: South Asians and Postcoloniality* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996), 137–164.

—— *Native Intelligence: Aesthetics, Politics and Postcolonial Literature* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003).

Barrett, Michèle, 'The Place of Aesthetics in Marxist Criticism', in Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (eds), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988), 697–713.

Barthes, Roland, 'On the Reality Effect in Descriptions', in Lilian R. Furst (ed.), *Realism* (New York: Longman, 1992), 135–141.

Bayo, Ogunjimi, 'Ritual Archetypes: Ousmane's Aesthetic Medium in *Xala'*, *Ufahamu*, 14:3 (1985), 128–138.

Beaumont, Matthew (ed.), *Adventures in Realism* (Malden: Blackwell, 2007).

Belsey, Catherine, *Critical Practice* (London: Routledge, 2002).

Benjamin, Walter, 'Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers', in *Gesammelte Schriften* IV:1 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1977), 9–23.

—— *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn, ed. Hannah Arendt (London: Pimlico, 1999).

—— *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002).

Bernheimer, Charles, 'The Bernheimer Report, 1993', in Charles Bernheimer (ed.), *Comparative Literature in the Age of Multiculturalism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 39–48.

Bernstein, J. M., *The Philosophy of the Novel: Lukács, Marxism and the Dialectics of Form* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

Bérubé, Michael (ed.), *The Aesthetics of Cultural Studies* (Malden: Blackwell, 2005).

Beverley, John, *Against Literature* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).

Bewes, Timothy, 'The Novel as an Absence: Lukács and the Event of Postmodern Fiction', *Novel: A Forum on Fiction*, 38:1 (2004), 5–20.

Bhabha, Homi, 'Representation and the Colonial Text: A Critical Exploration of Some Forms of Mimeticism', in Frank Gloversmith (ed.), *The Theory of Reading* (Brighton: Harvester, 1984), 93–122.

—— *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 2004).

Bharucha, Nilufer, *Rohinton Mistry: Ethnic Enclosures and Transcultural Spaces* (Jaipur: Rawat Publications, 2003).

Bongie, Chris, 'What's Literature Got To Do With It?', *Comparative Literature*, 54:3 (2002), 256–267.

—— *Friends and Enemies: The Scribal Politics of Post/Colonial Literature* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2009).

Bové, Paul A., 'Discourse', in Frank Lentricchia and Thomas McLaughlin (eds), *Critical Terms for Literary Studies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 50–65.

Brand, Peg Zeglin (ed.), *Beauty Matters* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000).

Brecht, Bertolt, 'Against Georg Lukács', in *Aesthetics and Politics*, ed. and trans. Ronald Taylor (London: Verso, 1977), 68–85.

Brenkman, John, 'Extreme Criticism', in Judith Butler, John Guillory and Kendall Thomas (eds), *What's Left of Theory?* (London: Routledge, 2003), 114–136.

Brennan, Timothy, 'The National Longing for Form', in Homi Bhabha (ed.), *Nation and Narration* (London: Routledge, 1990), 44–70.

—— *At Home in the World: Cosmopolitanism Now* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997).

Brooks, Peter, *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984).

Brown, Nicholas, *Utopian Generations: The Political Horizons of Twentieth-Century Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).
Bryson, Norman, *Looking at the Overlooked: Four Essays on Still Life Painting* (London: Reaction Books, 2001).
Butler, Judith, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997).
Carroll, David, 'Representations or the End(s) of History: Dialectics and Fiction', *Yale French Studies*, 59 (1980), 201–229.
Carter, David, 'Tasteless Subjects: Postcolonial Literary Criticism, Realism and the Subject of Taste', *Southern Review*, 25 (1992), 292–303.
Cheah, Pheng, *Spectral Nationality: Passages of Freedom from Kant to Postcolonial Literatures of Liberation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003).
Cheng, Anne Anlin, 'The Melancholy of Race', *Kenyon Review*, 19:1 (1997), 49–61.
—— *The Melancholy of Race: Psychoanalysis, Assimilation, and Hidden Grief* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).
Childs, Peter and R. J. Patrick Williams, *An Introduction to Post-Colonial Theory* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1997).
Chow, Rey, *Primitive Passions: Visuality, Sexuality, Ethnography, and Contemporary Chinese Cinema* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995).
Chréacháin-Adelugba, Fírinne Ní, 'Self and Other in Sembene Ousmane's *Xala*', in Kolawole Ogungbesan (ed.), *New West African Literature* (London: Heinemann, 1979), 91–103.
Chrisman, Laura, 'Imperial Space, Imperial Place: Theories of Empire and Culture in Fredric Jameson, Edward Said and Gayatri Spivak', *New Formations*, 34 (1998): 53–69.
Christian, Barbara, 'The Race for Theory', in Abdul R. JanMohamed and David Lloyd (eds), *The Nature and Context of Minority Discourse* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 37–49.
Clark, Timothy, *Derrida, Heidegger, Blanchot: Sources of Derrida's Notion and Practice of Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).
Coetzee, J. M., *Foe* (London: Penguin Books, 1987).
—— *Stranger Shores: Literary Essays 1986–1999* (New York: Viking, 2001).
Corredor, Eva L., *György Lukács and the Literary Pretext* (New York: Peter Lang, 1987).
Culler, Jonathan, *The Literary in Theory* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007).
Damrosch, David, *What is World Literature?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003).
Defoe, Daniel, *Robinson Crusoe* (London: Penguin Books, 1985).
de Man, Paul, *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979).
—— 'Georg Lukács's *Theory of the Novel*', in *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism* (London: Methuen, 1983), 51–59.
Demetz, Peter, 'Zur Definition des Realismus', *Literatur und Kritik*, 16/17 (1967), 333–345.
Denning, Michael, *Culture in the Age of Three Worlds* (New York: Verso, 2004).
Derrida, Jacques, *Acts of Literature*, ed. Derek Attridge (New York: Routledge, 1992).

—— *Memoirs of the Blind: The Self-Portrait and Other Ruins*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1993).
—— *The Politics of Friendship*, trans. George Collins (New York: Verso, 1997).
—— 'Living On', in Harold Bloom, Paul de Man, Jacques Derrida, Geoffrey H. Hartman and J. Hillis Miller, *Deconstruction and Criticism* (London: Continuum, 2004), 62–142.
Derwin, Susan, *The Ambivalence of Form: Lukács, Freud, and the Novel* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992).
Dirlik, Arif, 'The Postcolonial Aura: Third World Criticism in the Age of Global Capitalism', *Critical Inquiry*, 20:2 (1994), 328–356.
Donnell, Alison, 'She Ties Her Tongue: The Problems of Cultural Paralysis in Postcolonial Criticism', *Ariel: A Review of International English Literature*, 26:1 (1995), 101–116.
Donoghue, Denis, *Speaking of Beauty* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003).
Dovey, Teresa, *The Novels of J. M. Coetzee: Lacanian Allegories* (Johannesburg: Ad. Donker, 1988).
Downing, Eric, *Double Exposures: Repetition and Realism in Nineteenth-Century German Realism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000).
Dube, Siddhart, *In the Land of Poverty* (London: Zed Books, 1988).
Eagleton, Terry, 'In the Gaudy Supermarket', *London Review of Books*, 21:10 (1999), 3–6.
—— *The English Novel: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005).
Ellis, John M., *Literature Lost: Social Agendas and the Corruption of the Humanities* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997).
Eng, David, 'Melancholia in the Late Twentieth Century,' *Signs*, 25:4 (2000), 1275–1281.
Eysteinsson, Astradur, *The Concept of Modernism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990).
Fanon, Frantz, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1974).
Felman, Shoshana, 'Turning the Screw of Interpretation', in Shoshana Felman (ed.), *Literature and Psychoanalysis* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 94–207.
Felski, Rita, *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics: Feminist Literature and Social Change* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989).
—— 'The Role of Aesthetics in Cultural Studies', in Michael Bérubé (ed.), *The Aesthetics of Cultural Studies* (Malden: Blackwell, 2005), 28–43.
Fraser, Robert, *Lifting the Sentence: A Poetics of Postcolonial Fiction* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000).
Freud, Sigmund, 'Remembering, Repeating and Working-Through', in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. XII, 1911–1913, trans. James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press, 1958), 147–156.
—— 'Mourning and Melancholia', in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. XIV, 1914–1916, trans. James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press, 1968), 243–258.
—— 'The Uncanny', in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. XVII, 1917–1919, trans. James Strachey (London: Vintage/ The Hogarth Press, 2001), 219–252.

Frow, John, *Marxism and Literary History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986).
—— *Cultural Studies and Cultural Value* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995).
—— 'On Literature in Cultural Studies', in Michael Bérubé (ed.), *The Aesthetics of Cultural Studies* (Malden: Blackwell, 2005), 44–57.
Gabriel, Sharmani Patricia, 'Diasporic Hybridities and the "Patchwork Quilt": Contesting Nationalist History and Other Fictions in Rohinton Mistry's *A Fine Balance*', *Commonwealth Essays and Studies*, 25:2 (2003): 83–94.
Gabriel, Teshome H., '<<Xala>>: A Cinema of Wax and Gold', *Présence Africaine: revue culturelle du monde noir*, 116 (1980), 202–214.
Gikandi, Simon, 'The Politics and Poetics of National Formation: Recent African Writing', in Anna Rutherford (ed.), *From Commonwealth to Post-Colonial* (Sydney: Dangaroo Press, 1992), 377–389.
Gilroy, Paul, *After Empire: Melancholia or Convivial Culture?* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2004).
Glenn, Ian, 'Nadine Gordimer, J. M. Coetzee, and the Politics of Interpretation', *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 93:1 (1994), 11–32.
Gluck, Mary, 'Towards a Historical Definition of Modernism: Georg Lukács and the Avant-Garde', *The Journal of Modern History*, 58:4 (1986), 845–882.
Graff, Gerald, *Literature against Itself: Literary Ideas in Modern Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979).
Greenfield, Matthew, 'Coetzee's *Foe* and Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*: Confessions, Authority, and Private Languages', *Journal of Narrative Technique*, 25:3 (1995), 223–237.
Gugelberger, Georg M. (ed.), *Marxism and African Literature* (London: Currey, 1985).
Gugler, Josef and Oumar Cherif Diop, 'Ousmane Sembène's *Xala*: The Novel, the Film, and Their Audiences', *Research in African Literatures*, 29:2 (1998), 147–158.
Hallward, Peter, *Absolutely Postcolonial: Writing Between the Singular and the Specific* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001).
Harrison, Nicholas, *Postcolonial Criticism: History, Theory and the Work of Fiction* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003).
—— 'Preface', *Paragraph*, 28:2 (2005), iii–vi.
—— 'Who Needs an Idea of the Literary?', Paragraph, 28:2 (2005), 1–17.
—— 'Life on the Second Floor', *Comparative Literature*, 59:4 (2007), 332–348.
Harrow, Kenneth W., 'Sembène Ousmane's *Xala*: The Use of Film and Novel as Revolutionary Weapon', *Studies in Twentieth-Century Literature*, 4:2 (1980), 177–188.
Hartsock, Nancy, 'Rethinking Modernism: Minority vs. Majority Theories', *Cultural Critique*, 7 (1987), 187–206.
Head, Dominic, *J. M. Coetzee* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).
Homer, Sean, 'It's the Political Economy, Stupid! On Zizek's Marxism', *Radical Philosophy*, 108 (2001), 7–16.
Huggan, Graham, 'The Postcolonial Exotic: Salman Rushdie and the Booker of Bookers', *Transition*, 64 (1994), 22–29.
—— *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins* (London: Routledge, 2001).
Hulme, Peter, *Colonial Encounters: Europe and the Native Caribbean 1492–1797* (London: Routledge, 1992).

Hunter, Ian, 'Aesthetics and Cultural Studies', in Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson and Paula A. Treichler (eds), *Cultural Studies* (London: Routledge, 1992), 347–372.
Hussein, Abdirahman A., *Edward Said: Criticism and Society* (London: Verso, 2002).
Jameson, Fredric, *Marxism and Form: Twentieth-Century Dialectic Theories of Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971).
—— 'Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism', *Social Text*, 15 (1986), 65–88.
—— *The Ideologies of Theory: Essays 1971–1986*, vol. I (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989).
—— *The Ideologies of Theory: Essays 1971–1986*, vol. II (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989).
—— 'Modernism and Imperialism', in Seamus Deane (ed.), *Nationalism, Colonialism and Literature: Terry Eagleton, Fredric Jameson, Edward W. Said* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), 43–66.
—— *Signatures of the Visible* (London: Routledge, 1990).
—— *The Cultural Turn: Selected Writings on the Postmodern, 1983–1998* (London: Verso, 1998).
—— *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1999).
—— *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (London: Routledge, 2002).
—— *A Singular Modernity: Essays on the Ontology of the Present* (London: Verso, 2002).
Jolly, Rosemary Jane, *Colonization, Violence, and Narration in White South African Writing* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1996).
Kacandes, Irene, 'Beauty on My Mind: Reading Literature in an Age of Cultural Studies', in Michael Bérubé (ed.), *The Aesthetics of Cultural Studies* (Malden: Blackwell, 2005), 156–174.
Kadarkay, Arpad, *Georg Lukács: Life, Thought, and Politics* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1991).
Kernan, Alvin B., *The Death of Literature* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990).
Kossew, Sue, *Pen and Power: A Post-Colonial Reading of J. M. Coetzee and André Brink* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1996).
Laplanche, J. and J.-B. Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, trans. D. Nicholson-Smith (New York: Norton, 1973).
Lazarus, Neil, 'Modernism and Modernity: T. W. Adorno and Contemporary White South African Literature', *Cultural Critique*, 5 (1986–1987), 131–155.
—— *Resistance in Postcolonial African Fiction* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990).
—— 'Doubting the New World Order: Marxism, Realism, and the Claims of Postmodernist Social Theory', *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*, 3:3 (1991), 94–138.
—— *Nationalism and Cultural Practice in the Postcolonial World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).
—— 'Hating Tradition Properly', *New Formations*, 38 (1999), 9–30.
—— 'The Politics of Postcolonial Modernism', in Ania Loomba et al. (eds), *Postcolonial Studies and Beyond* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 423–438.
Levine, George (ed.), *Aesthetics and Ideology* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1994).

Lichtheim, Georg, *Lukács* (London: Fontana, 1970).
Loomba, Ania, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* (London: Routledge, 2002).
Lukács, Georg, *Ästhetik*, vol. I–II (Neuwied: Luchterhand, 1963).
—— *Probleme der Ästhetik* (Neuwied: Luchterhand, 1969).
—— *Die Theorie des Romans* (Neuwied: Luchterhand, 1974).
—— 'Realism in the Balance', in *Aesthetics and Politics*, ed. and trans. Ronald Taylor (London: Verso, 1977), 28–59.
—— *Writer and Critic*, ed. and trans. Arthur Kahn (London: Merlin, 1978).
—— *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism*, trans. John and Necke Mander (London: Merlin, 1979).
—— *Essays on Realism*, ed. Rodney Livingstone, trans. David Fernbach (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1980).
—— *The Historical Novel*, trans. Hannah and Stanley Mitchell (London: Merlin 1989).
—— *Studies in European Realism*, trans. Edith Bone (London: Merlin, 1989).
—— *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (London: Merlin, 1990).
—— *The Theory of the Novel*, trans. Anna Bostock (London: Merlin, 2003).
Lunn, Eugene, *Marxism and Modernism: An Historical Study of Lukács, Brecht, Benjamin and Adorno* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).
Lynn, Thomas J., 'Politics, Plunder, and Postcolonial Tricksters: Ousmane Sembène's *Xala*', *International Journal of Francophone Studies*, 6:2 (2003), 183–196.
Lyotard, Jean-François, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991).
MacDonald, Amanda, 'Death by Representation: Of Postcolonial Daydreams and Objectifying Criticism', *Postcolonial Studies*, 7:3 (2004), 253–269.
Marx, John, *The Modernist Novel and the Decline of Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).
McClintock, Anne, 'The Angel of Progress: Pitfalls of the Term "Post-Colonialism"', *Social Text*, 31/32 (1992), 84–98.
McGonegal, Julie, 'Postcolonial Metacritique: Jameson, Allegory and the Always-Already-Read Third World Text', *Interventions*, 7:2 (2005), 251–265.
McLeod, John, *Beginning Postcolonialism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000).
Michel, Martina, 'Positioning the Subject: Locating Postcolonial Studies', *Ariel: A Review of International English Literature*, 26:1 (1995), 83–99.
Mishra, Vijay and Bob Hodge, 'What is Post(-)colonialism?', in Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (eds), *Colonial Discourse and Post-colonial Theory: A Reader* (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993), 276–290.
Mistry, Rohinton, *A Fine Balance* (London: Faber and Faber, 1997).
Mitchell, W. J. T., 'The Commitment to Form; or, Still Crazy after All These Years', *PMLA*, 118:2 (2003), 321–325.
Moore-Gilbert, Bart, *Postcolonial Theory: Contexts, Practices, Politics* (London: Verso, 2000).
Moretti, Franco, 'The Spell of Indecision', in Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (eds), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988), 339–344.

——— *The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in European Culture* (London: Verso, 2000).
Morey, Peter, *Fictions of India: Narrative and Power* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000).
Moss, Laura, 'An Infinity of Alternate Realities: Reconfiguring Realism in Postcolonial Theory and Fiction', unpublished doctoral dissertation, Kingston, Ontario, Queen's University, 1998.
——— 'Can Rohinton Mistry's Realism Rescue the Novel?', in Rowland Smith (ed.), *Postcolonizing the Commonwealth: Studies in Literature and Culture* (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2000), 157–165.
——— '"The Plague of Normality": Reconfiguring Realism in Postcolonial Theory', *Jouvert*, 5:1 (2000), at: http://english.chass.ncsu.edu/jouvert/v5i1/moss.htm (accessed online 1 October 2009).
Mukherjee, Arun P., 'The Vocabulary of the "Universal": Cultural Imperialism and Western Literary Criticism', *World Literature Written in English*, 26:2 (1986), 343–353.
——— 'Whose Post-Colonialism and Whose Postmodernism?', *World Literature Written in English*, 30:2 (1990), 1–9.
Murphy, David, *Sembene: Imagining Alternatives in Film & Fiction* (Oxford: James Currey, 2001).
Nancy, Jean-Luc and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *The Literary Absolute: The Theory of Literature in German Romanticism*, trans. Philip Barnard and Cheryl Lester (New York: State University of New York Press, 1988).
Nayar, Pramod K., 'The Text(ure) of Cruelty: Power and Violence in *A Fine Balance*', in Jaydipsinh Dodiya (ed.), *The Fiction of Rohinton Mistry: Critical Studies* (New Delhi: Sangam Books, 1998), 119–126.
Niranjana, Tejaswini, *Siting Translation: History, Post-Structuralism, and the Colonial Context* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).
Noyes, John K., 'Multiculturalism, Geography, Postcolonial Theory, in Patrick Williams (ed.), *Edward Said*, vol. III (London: Sage, 2001), 345–359.
Onyeoziri, Gloria Nne, 'Revisiting the "Roman de la Désillusion": A Semiotic and Cultural Reading of Ousmane Sembène's *Xala*', in Kamal Salhi (ed.), *Francophone Post-colonial Cultures* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2003), 102–113.
Parry, Benita, 'Speech and Silence in the Fictions of J. M. Coetzee' in Graham Huggan and Stephen Watson (eds), *Critical Perspectives on J.M. Coetzee* (London: Macmillan, 1996), 37–65.
——— 'Directions and Dead Ends in Postcolonial Studies', in David Theo Goldberg and Ato Quayson (eds), *Relocating Postcolonialism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 66–81.
——— *Postcolonial Studies: A Materialist Critique* (London: Routledge, 2004).
Petersen, Kirsten Holst, 'An Elaborate Dead End? A Feminist Reading of Coetzee's *Foe*', in Hena Maes-Jelinek, Kirsten Holst Petersen and Anna Rutherford (eds), *A Shaping of Connections: Commonwealth Literature Studies – Then and Now* (Sydney: Dangaroo Press, 1989), 243–253.
Petrey, Sandy, *Realism and Revolution: Balzac, Stendhal, Zola and the Performances of History* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988).
Pfaff, Francoise, *The Cinema of Ousmane Sembène, A Pioneer of African Film* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1984).
Prendergast, Christopher, *The Triangle of Representation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000).

Ricoeur, Paul, 'Narrative Time', in W. J. T. Mitchell (ed.), *On Narrative* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 165–186.
Robbins, Bruce, 'Homelessness and Worldliness', *Diacritics*, 13:3 (1983), 69–77.
——— 'Modernism and Literary Realism: Response', in George Levine (ed.), *Realism and Representation: Essays on the Problem of Realism in Relation to Science, Literature and Culture* (Madison: Wisconsin University Press, 1993), 225–231.
Ross, Robert, 'Seeking and Maintaining Balance: Rohinton Mistry's Fiction', *World Literature Today: A Literary Quarterly of the University of Oklahoma*, 73:2 (1999), 239–244.
Rowe, John Carlos, 'Structure', in Frank Lentricchia and Thomas McLaughlin (eds), *Critical Terms for Literary Study* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 23–38.
Rushdie, Salman, 'The Empire Writes Back with a Vengeance', *The Times*, 3 July (1982), 8.
Said, Edward W., *Beginnings: Intention and Method* (New York: Basic Books, 1975).
——— *The World, the Text and the Critic* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983).
——— *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Vintage, 1994).
——— *Orientalism. Western Conceptions of the Orient* (London: Penguin Books, 1995).
——— 'Traveling Theory Reconsidered', in *Reflections on Exile and Other Literary and Cultural Essays* (London: Granta Books, 2001), 436–452.
Salgado, Minoli, 'Tribal Stories, Scribal Worlds: Mahasweta Devi and the Unreliable Translator', *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 35:1 (2000), 131–145.
Sangari, Kumkum, 'The Politics of the Possible', *Cultural Critique*, 7 (1987), 157–186.
Saussy, Haun (ed.), *Comparative Literature in an Age of Globalization* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006).
Scarry, Elaine, *On Beauty and Being Just* (London: Duckworth, 2000).
Schneller, Beverly, '"Visible and Visitable": The Role of History in Gita Mehta's Raj and Rohinton Mistry's *A Fine Balance*', *JNT: Journal of Narrative Theory*, 31:2 (2001), 233–254.
Scholes, Robert, *Textual Power: Literary Theory and the Teaching of English* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985).
Schwarz, Roberto, *Misplaced Ideas: Essays on Brazilian Culture*, ed. John Gledson (London: Verso, 1992).
Sembène, Ousmane, *Les bouts de bois de Dieu* (Paris: Le Livre contemporain, 1960).
——— *Xala* (Paris: Editions Présence Africaine, 1974).
——— *Xala*, trans. Clive Wake (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 1976).
Seshadri-Crooks, Kalpana, 'At the Margins of Postcolonial Studies: Part I', in Fawzia Afzal-Khan and Kalpana Seshadri-Crooks (eds), *The Pre-Occupation of Postcolonial Studies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), 3–23.
Shaw, Harry E., *Narrating Reality: Austen, Scott, Eliot* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999).
Shetty, Sandhya and Elizabeth Jane Bellamy, 'Postcolonialism's Archive Fever', *Diacritics*, 30:1 (2000), 25–48.
Shohat, Ella, 'Notes on the "Post-Colonial"', *Social Text*, 31/32 (1992), 99–113.
Sims, Stuart, *Georg Lukács* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1994).

Slemon, Stephen and Helen Tiffin (eds), *After Europe: Critical Theory and Post-Colonial Writing* (Sydney: Dangaroo, 1989).
Soderholm, James (ed.), *Beauty and the Critic: Aesthetics in an Age of Cultural Studies* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1997).
Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty, 'Speculations on Reading Marx: After Reading Derrida', in Derek Attridge, Geoff Bennington and Robert Young (eds), *Post-structuralism and the Question of History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 30–62.
——— 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', in Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (eds), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988), 271–313.
——— *In Other Worlds*: *Essays in Cultural Politics* (New York: Methuen, 1988).
——— 'Who Claims Alterity?', in Barbara Kruger and Phil Mariani (eds), *Remaking History* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1989), 269–292.
——— 'Poststructuralism, Marginality, Post-coloniality and Value', in Peter Collier and Helga Geyer-Ryan (eds), *Literary Theory Today* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 219–244.
——— *The Post-Colonial Critic: Interviews*, *Strategies*, *Dialogues*, ed. Sarah Harasym (London: Routledge, 1990).
——— 'Theory in the Margin: Coetzee's *Foe* Reading Defoe's *Crusoe*/*Roxanna*', in Jonathan Arac and Barbara Johnson (eds), *Consequences of Theory: Selected Papers from the English Institute, 1987–88* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 154–180.
——— *Outside in the Teaching Machine* (New York: Routledge, 1993).
——— *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*: *Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999).
——— 'Translation as Culture', *Parallax* 6:1 (2000), 13–24.
——— *Death of a Discipline* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003).
Steiner, Wendy, *Venus in Exile: The Rejection of Beauty in Twentieth-Century Art* (London: Free Press, 2001).
Tandeciarz, Silvia, 'Reading Gayatri Spivak's "French Feminism in an International Frame": A Problem for Theory', *Genders*, 10 (1991), 75–90.
Thieme, John, *Postcolonial Con-Texts: Writing Back to the Canon* (London: Continuum, 2001).
Tiffin, Helen, 'Commonwealth Literature and Comparative Methodology', *World Literature Written in English*, 23:1 (1984), 26–30.
——— 'Post-Colonial Literatures and Counter-Discourse', *Kunapipi*, 9:3 (1997), 17–34.
Titlestad, Michael and Mike Kissack, 'The Persistent Castaway in South African Writing', *Postcolonial Studies*, 10:2 (2007), 191–218.
Tokaryk, Tyler, 'Keynes, Storytelling, and Realism: Literary and Economic Discourse in Rohinton Mistry's *A Fine Balance*', *Studies in Canadian Literature/ Etudes en Littérature Canadienne*, 30:2 (2005), 1–31.
Ulmer, Gregory L., 'The Object of Post-Criticism', in Hal Foster (ed.), *Postmodern Culture* (London: Pluto, 1985), 83–110.
Viswanathan, Gauri, *Masks of Conquests: Literary Study and British Rule in India* (London: Faber, 1990).
——— (ed.), *Power, Politics, and Culture: Interviews with Edward W. Said* (London: Bloomsbury, 2004).

Watt, Ian, *The Rise of the Novel. Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding* (London: Penguin Books, 1977).
Williams, Raymond, *The Politics of Modernism: Against the New Conformists*, ed. Tony Pinkney (London: Verso, 1989).
Yaeger, Patricia, 'Editor's Column: The End of Postcolonial Theory? A Roundtable with Sunil Agnani, Fernando Coronil, Gaurav Desai, Mamadou Diouf, Simon Gikandi, Susie Tharu, and Jennifer Wenzel', *PMLA*, 122:3 (2007), 633–651.
Yao, Steven G., 'The *Unheimlich* Maneuver: or the Gap, the Gradient, and the Spaces of Comparison', *Comparative Literature*, 57:3 (2005), 246–255.
Young, Robert, 'Editorial', *Interventions*, 1:1 (1998), 4–8.
——— *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001).
Žižek, Slavoj, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso, 1992).
——— 'Melancholy and the Act', *Critical Inquiry*, 26:4 (2000), 657–681.

Index