True beginnings? Examples of novels by Achebe, Phillips, Duff, Lim, Roy, Barnes.

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Initial Remarks

The purpose of this largely theoretical discussion is to propose a scenario in which a new kind of reader of novels in English may potentially, and eventually, emerge. That such a process may be carried through depends on an awareness of a transition within literary Postmodernism and Postcolonialism involving their dimensionalization, theoretically speaking at least, a process which gives rise to a postmodern phase in a narrative art. To be conceivable, the creation of this new technological-ecological reader, not identifiable with the cultural and intellectual tensions operating within postcolonial studies, may also be seen to be feasible if due consideration is given to a lecture delivered by Jacques Derrida in 1959, as well as to the aesthetics associated with the recently consolidated trend within American poetry known as L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poetry. It is precisely the parallel consolidation of this 'new' reader that allows for a decolonized appraisal of such apparently postcolonial novels as *Anthills of the Savannah* (1987), by Chinua Achebe, *Crossing the River* (1993), by Caryl Phillips, *Once Were Warriors* (1995), by Alan Duff, *The Bondmaid* (1995), by Catherine Lim, *The God of Small Things* (1997), by Arundhati Roy, and *England, England* (1998), by Julian Barnes. By 'scanning' these texts, the 'new' reader comes to appreciate them, rather as instances of postmodern-world literature in English.

Totality-Multiplicty and L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poetry:

It would seem, then, that any attempt at conceiving a reading scenario that may allow for the emergence of postmodern narrative art in English, understandable, moreover, as the dimensionalization of postmodernist-postcolonial narrative, implies recognizing the liminal existence of an aesthetic tendency that signals an alternative to the totality-multiplicity paradigm as a model of containment associated with modernist-postmodernist narrative texts as well as with theoretical models of postmodern culture. In the case of the latter. In the case of the latter, the following descriptions of Postmodernity's inevitable structuring with regard to a totality-multiplicty model, by the philosopher, David Norris, and by the cultural theorist Stephen Greenblatt, acquire significance:

[I]t is wrong to suppose that there must be some ultimate choice between, on the one hand, foundationalist theories that isolate truth from the context of discursive or linguistic justification, and on the other the wholesale pragmatist view that truth is simply what counts as such according to our present, culture-specific aims and purposes (1988, 81).

[C]apitalism has produced a powerful and effective oscillation between the establishment of distinct discursive domains and the collapse of those domains into one another. It is this restless oscillation rather than the securing of a particular fixed position constitutes the distinct power of capitalism. The individual elements – a range of discontinuous discourses on the one hand, the monological unification of all discourses on the other – may be found fully articulated in other economic and social systems; only capitalism has managed to generate a dizzying, seemingly inexhaustible circulation between the two (1989, 8).

The stroboscopic instantaneity of the interaction between totality and multiplicity, which Greenblatt associates with Capitalism, has as its literary equivalent the fusion between "scepticism" and "indeterminacy," as described by Randall Stevenson (25).

Although seemingly distant from the genre of the postcolonial novel, what may throw some light upon the matter of recognising how a postmodern aesthetic may enrich world cultural history by, as far as postmodernist narrative is concerned, liberating the multiplicity variant within the totality-multiplicity paradigm from the parameters of containment, is the aesthetics typical of the movement within American poetry known as L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poetry which, since the beginning of the 1970s, has had a revolutionary effect upon the art of verse-making in the United States. Without going into a detailed analysis of the poetics of L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poetry, what would be relevant here are some brief references to a representative theoretical text in this respect, a brief essay by the poet Ron Silliman entitled "Benjamin Obscura" (Andrews 1984), linked intertextually with the theoretical essay, "A Short History of Photography" by the philosopher Walter Benjamin, published in 1931.

From a theoretical perspective, writers of L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poetry tend to appreciate Benjamin's distinction between, on the one hand, language as reference, or discourse, i.e. as a gesturing to itself within its own constituting context, and, on the other hand, language as referentiality, which implies the reproduction of itself beyond itself, i.e. in the form of description, or narrative, or types of discourse. It is this basis that Benjamin and L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poetry confirm the value of language's naturalness in its capacity to communicate its otherness and its "aura," as distinct from its containment within style and identity, both of which can be recalled in memory and, therefore, reproduced *ad infinitum* if necessary, as a photograph can be. By way of contrast, the experience of language in time and space, in terms of the "aura" in which it is immersed in the case of a particular artistic composition, and in which the reader also becomes immersed, configures the latter as a unique participant in an unique experience at a particular moment and place in time.

In keeping with Benjamin's phenomenological approach to the philosophy of language, such unique experiences are identifiable with the phenomenon of "essences" which, as Benjamin himself states in "The Epistemo-Critical Prologue" (1928) may be characterized thus:

> [A]ll essences exist in complete and immaculate independence, not only from phenomena, but especially, from each other. Just as the harmony of the spheres depends on the orbits of stars which do not come into contact with each other, so the existence of the *mundus intelligibilis* depends on the unbridgeable distance between pure essences. Every idea is a sun and is related to other ideas just as suns are related to each other. The harmonious relationship between such essences in what constitutes truth. (37)[1]

Later, it will be argued that each moment or instanty of a L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E text constitutes an "essence". The tentative truth that is being searched for in this discussion is centred on the possible existence of a postmodern, as a opposed to postmodernist-postcolonial, novel in English that, as a contribution to the idea of a would literature in that same language, may be identified by the possibility of approaching it, in each of its individual manifestations, as an unique reading experience. Despite the utopian basis of

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[1] Relevant in this respect is Zafer Aracagök's essay on Benjamin entitled "Whatever Image" (2003).

such critical aspirations, especially since it can be argued that any reading experience may be conceived of as being unique, it would seem worthwhile, from our point of view at least, making an analytical attempt to approach the otherness of the language of novels within the postcolonial tradition, as if analyzing a L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poem, so as to calibrate the extent to which such a critical exercise would be recognizable as truly post-structuralist in character. Such an approach would avoid the fundamentally formalist tendency to analyze each postcolonial novel in terms of its capacity to be read as an unique contribution to the totality of postcolonial literature understood in terms of the tensions inherent within the 'metropolitan' versus 'local' debate.

Since from the perspective, of literary criticism, such a regenerative possibility, with regard to the postcolonial novel depends on the application of reading approaches associated with the analysis of L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poems, brief reference may be made to the characteristic features of such compositions. In this respect, what Benjamin calls the unique "aura" of a work of art, in terms of its being experienced (and thus created by the reader) in time and space, is described by Reinfeld in *Language Poetry: Writing as Rescue* (6-8) and by O'Sullivan in *Out of Everywhere* (9-10), as being immersed in an "awareness" of the understanding of the text without the "guarantee" of understanding, especially since the reading experience consists of participating in the naturally creative essence of language itself. Characteristically, therefore, the surface text of a L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poem is actively creative at every point, given that it is code, as opposed to reference. The reader finds her / himself scanning that same surface, while participating in horizontal anagrammatic transformations of the language of which it is constituted. Relevant is this regard in Derek Attridge's concept of the 'portmanteau' word as applied to the art of James Joyce or what Brian McHale in "Poetry as Prosthesis" calls "radical proceduralism [and] radical radomness [which] converge on one and the same effect – that of 'all overness' – in which all stimuli become of equal importance because they lack syntax, hierarchy, or any distinction of foreground and background" (15). Attridge, referring to Joyce's polysemic creativity, describes the 'portmanteau' equivalent of what McHale recognizes as "radical[ism]" in the following way: "The portmanteau word is a monster, a word that is not a word, that is not authorized by any dictionary, that holds out the worrying prospect of books which, instead of comfortingly recycling the words we know, possess the freedom endlessly to invent new ones" (1987, 196).

At the same time, with regard to the material base of language-as-code, contrastable with semantically based 'portmanteau' language, it is significant in parodic, metaliterary terms, although L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poets would never express it thus, that those compositions, especially by poets such as Jackson MacLow and Charles Bernstein, which reveal the presence of sexual or sadomasochistic discourse as the aforementioned transformations evolve, may be understood as the ironizing of literary Postmodernism's basis in parody. In this way, L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poetry signals how literary language's unnaturalness as referentiality may be considered the equivalent of hypocrisy. It is as if in order to maintain the perpetuation of itself as itself, the postmodernist (poetic) text exploited language's referentiality, a phenomenon which L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poetry would understand as being the equivalent of inevitability, the eliminator of the uniqueness of time and space, while being synonymous with totality-as-multiplicity, i.e. all manifestations of reality become automatically representations of postmodernity. Baudrillard describes this phenomenon in terms of "simulacra," expressing himself in the following terms:

> Abstraction today is no longer that of the map, the double, the mirror or the concept. Simulation is no longer that of a territory, a referential being or a substance. It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal. The territory no longer precedes the map, nor survives it. Henceforth, it is the map that precedes the territory - *precession of simulacra…* (1988, 166)

The Postmodernist and the Postmodern:

The use of the term 'automatically' is relevant here since even poetic Postmodernism's disjunctive aesthetics, as the fragmented representation of a wide-ranging psychosocial scenario, in the end nostalgically connects through parody and intertextuality with a modernist-romantic central consciousness, as McHale reminds us (26, 28). Thus, whether as a vast intertext understandable in terms of the inevitability of parody, as described by Linda Hutcheon in *A Theory of Parody* (1985), or of the fascinating textual wilderness of literature as a whole as set down by Roland Barthes in "The Death of the Author" (1968) and "S/Z" (1970), postmodernist art remains a psychologized (Romantic we would add) phenomenon. As Donal Kuspit states in "The Contradictory Character of Postmodernism," published in 1990:

From the postmodernist art-historical perspective, the so-called nostalgia of post-modernism shows that an element of profound psychological pathos… is operational in the postmodernist manipulation of… past styles. What appears to be parodic is in fact a loose allegorical attempt to integrate sign-fragments of the past in a way that makes contemporary emotional sense. It is an effort to give a sense of dialectical inevitability to their relationship, as though their contemporary presence could only be explained by the fact that their reconciliation was imminent. There is no actual statement of reconciliation, only its proposal or rehearsal, as it were – no actual integrity, but its intimation… Postmodernism thus represents an expanded sense of the possibilities of the past. (Silverman, 64)

The important point emerging from Kuspit's vision of postmodernist art is the description of the bidirectional nature of its contradictoriness. Keeping in mind that our discussion has described that same contradictoriness in terms of the interaction of totality and multiplicity, the imminence of Postmodernism within incipient Modernism, which is what, paradoxically, makes Postmodernism a dimensionalized version of Modernism, must have an equivalent imminence working in the opposite direction, beyond Postmodernism, as it were, and beyond the totality-multiplicity impasse. The first version of imminence, involving incipient Modernism and potential Postmodernism operating within it is described by Lyotard in terms of "future (*post*) anterior" time: "The artist and the writer, then, are working without rules in order to formulate the rules of what will have been done" (1984, 10).

Derrida, 1959:

It is the recent revelatory article by Lee Spinks, entitled "Genesis and Structure and the Object of Postmodernism," which points to how Derrida's 1959 seminal lecture, "'Genesis and Structure' and Phenomenology" (1978), has the visionary capacity to bring together the two interrelated moments of imminence within Postmodernism, the first in the final decades of the nineteenth century when Modernism (which includes the seeds of Postmodernism) is about to emerge, and the second at the pre-moment when Derrida's lecture is delivered, when, for example, the postmodern novel is about to

begin its process of consolidation. Moreover, imminence is recognizable as the characteristic structural feature of Postmodernism, as Lyotard makes clear (see above).

Likewise, imminence, i.e. the imminent presence of Postmodernism within incipient Modernism at the end of the nineteenth, also characterizes the genesis of the former while, similarly, that same genesis of Postmodernism is also synonymous with its structure, based on the interaction of totality and multiplicity. This is especially relevant if we think of how the postcolonial historian Robert Young, – and this is where the connection between literary Postmodernism and Postcolonialism enters our discussion – builds upon the thesis in Arnold Toynbee's *A Study of History* (1963) that Western history's tendency to identify itself with 'History' is undermined by a growing awareness of its relative status at the end of the nineteenth century, something which Young, in *White Mythologies*, associates this with "…the re-empowerment of non-Western states" during this same period (1990, 19). It is in terms of whether the inevitability of the totality-multiplicity model as a way of envisioning contemporary culture may be questioned that Derrida, in 1959, carries out a critique of the German nineteenth-century historian Wilhelm Dilthey's concept of *Weltanschaaung* which emerges, as Spinks indicates, as response to "the movement of delegitimation of … universal structures of reason … detected in the 1860s and 1870s" (Spinks 19). Since this same concept, as formulated by Dilthey, also coincides with the recognition on the part of the German historian of the inevitability of relative, local histories replacing History as a universal structure (Spinks 21), Derrida argues that such a formulation is itself a "Historicism" (160), thereby containing History itself within a way of conceiving itself as an impasse based on the interaction of totality and multiplicity, with the former playing the uppermost role.

As an alternative to an historical model of containment with regard to the way of configuring contemporary culture, Derrida points to the advantages of a philosophical model, one which he associates with the phenomenology of Edmund Husserl. Since this is not the place to explore in depth the tenets of such a philosophical movement, reference to the intimate communication between the object being studied and the studier as one its most fundamental tenets will allow us to understand how Derrida defines Husserl's concept of *Telos*, as it emerges in the German philosopher's *Cartesian Meditations* (1924): as both a "value," as opposed to an "essence," and as "the infinite theoretical anticipation [identifiable with] phenomenological consciousness" (165, 167). With what we would be in agreement is Leo Spinks's historical contextualization

of Derrida's preference for Husserl over Dilthey since, in metacultural terms, the French philosopher's 1959 lecture de-historicizes the historical inevitability of postmodernist imminence understood as a totalizing phenomenon consisting of the stroboscopic interaction of totality and multiplicity. Moreover, Derrida offers this preference at a historical moment which is characterized by the imminent consolidation of Postmodernism's emergence out of modernist, at the inauguration of which it was already imminent (Spinks 2).[2]

Thus, what Derrida seems to be proposing is the inevitability of the imminent emergence of the (liberary) postmodern from within Postmodernism, equivalent of the latter's own genesis-as-imminence within the genesis of Modernism. Given that it is literature which concerns us here, this further dimensionalization of literary Postmodernism – in the case, of its identification with L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poetry, for example – we would label as a postmodern literary phase, the equivalent of the further dimensionalization of Modernity beyond Postmodernity. At the same time, this way of recognizing Modernity's on-going identity corresponds to Kant's concept of 'universal history'. Such a pan / trans-historical vision also has its origins in the period of the Enlightenment as may be exemplified by Kant's thoughts expressed in *On History*:

> In man (as the only rational creature on earth) those natural capacities which are directed to the use of his reason are to be fully developed only in the race, not in the individual. (2001, 13) Th[e] capacity for facing up in the present to the often very distant future, instead of being wholly absorbed by the enjoyment of the present, is the most decisive mark of the human's advantage. It enables man to prepare himself of distant aims according to his role as a human being. (2001, 57-58)

While not ignoring the implication of how a Kantian view of the History of Mankind would need to take into account historical failures such as slavery or the totalizing effect of postmodernity as a commodity culture thriving on the 'consuming'

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[2] In Postmodernist Fiction, McHale states the following: "Postmodernism is not post modern, whatever that might mean, but post modern*ism*; it does not come *after the present* (a solecism), but after the *modernist movement*…. I want to emphasize the element of logical and historical consequence rather than the sheer temporal *posteriority*. Postmodernism follows *from* modernism, in some sense, more than it follows *after* modernism" (5).

desire of each and every one of us to understand the meaning of postmodernity, what can be seen as relevant with regard to the establishment of a theoretical model for dimensionalization of cultural history beyond the postmodern / literary postmodernist 'totality-multiplicity' impasse is Derrida's signalling in "Genesis," above all in 1959, of a possible optimistic renewal of that same cultural history, an alternative to the kind of historical pessimism associated with the writings of Samuel Beckett in the 1950s, for example. It is the phenomenon of 'becoming' that Derrida underlines as being essential to Husserl's concept of *Telos* as well as to the creation of an awareness of the existence of an alternative to a 'containment' vision both of history and of postmodernity:

> Since Telos is totally open, is opening itself, to say that it is the most powerful structural a priori of historicity is not to designate it as a static and determined value which would inform and enclose the genesis of Being and meaning. It is the concrete possibility, the very birth of history and the meaning of becoming in general. Therefore it is structurally genesis itself, as origin and as becoming. (167)

Thus, as Spinks points out, Derrida, like Dilthey and Husserl before him, is "pos[ing] to historical studies" the following: "[T]o what extent is it possible to historicize the emergence of historical consciousness?" (9). At this point in our discussion it is worthwhile underlining its fundamental objective: the exploration of the possibility of recognizing as viable, from the perspective of literary criticism, the existence of a postmodern novel as a dimensionalized furthering of the postmodernist postcolonial novel. Since such a process involves the immersion of cultural history in an active, dimensionalizing model of "becoming" (Husserl, Derrida), as opposed to an inactive, hermeneutic model of containment and impasse, Spinks underlines the need "to ask different questions". He adds: "Instead of asking what the 'concept' of the postmodern *means*, we should ask how it *works…*" (19).

Given that 'the postmodern' as a literary phenomenon may be identified with "opening" and "becoming," as Derrida indicates, it may be seen in terms of both renewal and of avant-garde tendencies, as reflected in the transformational processes constantly at "work" in those compositions which form part of L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poetry. At the same time, such an active process constitutes the naturalization of the avant-garde to such an extent that the culture of "becoming," as represented by its

manifestation in L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poetry, comes to be understood as the code of History, rather than as History itself, the latter always being referential in character, as is language when unnaturalized in narrative, etc. This has its parallel in how L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poetry operates through language-as-code.

Thinking in theoretical terms of the kind of reader who finds her / himself emerging from within the transition just described, if consideration is given to the tendency within L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poetry to associate the reading process with horizontal transformations, on the one hand, as well as with the production of hybrid texts involving interaction with cybernetic or machine-generated texts, on the other, the reader in question may be understood in terms of his immersion in technology since, we would argue, from within the theoretical model being put forward in this discussion, she / he tends to scan textual surface.[3] Moreover, this same surface, naturally "open" to "becoming," at every scannable point / moment / instance within the reading, "works" in such a way that each of those points become, potentially, hypertexts in their own right. This is exemplified in the case of John Ashbery's L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poem, "A French Stamp," from the collection entitled *Wakefulness* (1988). Where the narrator philatelist's scanning of a particular specimen involves the experiencing of each pixel of the grained design that makes up its surface, giving rise thereby to multiple imagined configurations, each being set against the other by energy-saving mechanisms that allow only the essential nature of each configuration to emerge as a source of natural pleasure.[4]

Without going into detail, Shoptaw persuasively reminds us in "Lyric Cryptography," that the naturalness of reading-as-scanning "works" for all kinds of texts, not only those which are classifiable as L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poems (2000). It is for this reason, that the new "technological" reader is also proposed here as an "ecological" reader.

The Postcolonial and World Literature:

Given the levelling, or equalizing tendency, inherent within the reading-as-scanning process, which also implies the technological-ecological reader's immersion in language-as-(natural) code, and not as language-as-referentiality, in the case of coming

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[3] See Rifkin, "Making It / New: Institutionalizing Postwar Avant-Gardes" (2000).

[4] In this respect, see James Rother's essay on Ashbery entitled "Yada, Yada, Yada for the Ages: John Ashbery and the New American Sublime" (2003).

into contact with postcolonial-postmodernist narrative texts, what becomes a theoretical possibility is the perfection of such a reader's dissociation from the ideological implications of her / his coming into contact with these same postcolonial texts. As will be indicated later, freeing the theoretical figure of the reader from immersion in ideology has a levelling effect which, when recognized not only with regard to novelists from decolonized territories, but also to a so-called metropolitan novelist such as Julian Barnes, also 'works' (again Spinks) as an indicator of a postmodern-world literature in English. Moreover, as will also be stated later by way of conclusion, by levelling these two categories of novel within a postmodern aesthetics, the comparative study of world literature in English with literatures in other languages becomes a genuine possibility.

It is worthwhile pointing out that the Novel as literary form finds its place within a postmodern aesthetics of "becoming" in an absolutely natural way since its "genesis and structure" are immersed in emergence. In terms of the Novel's "genesis" in the early eighteenth century, J. Paul Hunter's comments are relevant to our discussion since that same emergence is seen to be understandable in terms of a lack of awareness, i.e. a lack of (self-)representation, on the part of those involved in the process concerning its ultimate significance:

> It is not, however, the power of the term "novel" as a totalizing – or even organizing – force in criticism and literary history that focuses our attention on the early eighteenth century in England as the time when the species became defined and self-conscious. Whatever names they went under (and there were many), the lengthy fictions that harvested the popular heritage, claimed literary status, and… began to be a self-conscious body of work by midcentury. The reason that, to some critics, the term seems "totalizing" rather than the phenomenon seeming real is that they have learned their formal distinctions from a Tory literary history that privileges intention in established literary genres. Such a literary history recognizes only what neatly fits carefully labeled boxes because its interest is in boxes. The writers of novels at midcentury did not always know they were writing in a "genre" or "species" (though some, like Richardson and both Fieldings, did): they were simply writing the kinds of books that had become the latest lasting novelty, writing to a public hungry for the combination of delight,

instruction, information, and cultural satisfaction provided by such books. (27)

It is as if the Novel form during the early eighteenth century, given its apparent non-participation in self-conscious representativity, may be considered a code and thus, as in the case of L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poetry, a naturally occurring phenomenon or development. In this sense, Hunter's use of the term "hungry" confirms the Novel's emergence as an instinctive process in which both readers and writers were / are involved. For this same reason Hunter identifies the rise of the Novel as the dissemination if a new "language" characterized by its levelling, universalizing effect, as opposed to its totalizing effect (23, 30, 91, 283).

The new readers of the postmodern (world-literature) novel are characterized, therefore, by an awareness of the importance of scanning texts as a source of pleasure (technology), as well as by their natural participation in the interpretative process as a form of instinct which includes an energy-saving mechanism that almost (just) allows interpretation-as-art to emerge, although not fully (ecology), thereby maintaining and recycling the source of pleasure. Moreover, in the case of the novels which concern us here, which will be analyzed below very briefly, and only in terms of the phenomenon of instinctive, technological-ecological reading, it may be affirmed that this same source of pleasure, given its levelling effect, contributes to the de-ideologizing of the reading process itself.

The Novels:

In the case of Roy's *The God of Small Things*, an instinctive, ecological scanning of textual surface detects an instinctive, non-allusive immersion in intertextuality on the part of this postcolonial novelist so that the tradition of English letters is, through delicacy, respected. In this way, the instinctive, overall impression that emerges (as in the case of Ashbery's "A French Stamp") is that, from a metaliterary perspective, the postcolonial implied author, wishing to avoid ideological matters, is appealing for an equal degree of respect for this postcolonial novel's unique (and thus non-metropolitan, non-English) aesthetics. What may be offered as an example of such aesthetics is part of the narration of the candy counter attendant's sexual abuse of the child Esthappen during the family outing to see *The Sound of Music* at the Abhilash Talkies, on the eve of Sophie Moll's arrival:

'Ay!' the Orangedrink Lemondrink Man said. 'Look, this is my Resting Time. Soon I'll have to wake up and work. So I can't have you singing English songs here. Stop it.' His gold wristwatch was almost hidden by his curly forearm hair. His gold chain was almost hidden by his chest hair. His white Terylene shirt was unbuttoned to where the swell oh his belly began. He looked like an unfriendly jewelled bear. Behind him there were mirrors for people to look at themselves in while they bought cold drinks and refreshments. To reorganize their puffs and settle their buns. The mirrors watched Estha. (102)

Without going into detail, by scanning the membrane of this text, the just-out-of-focus presence of Dickens (*Great Expectations*) and Defoe (*Moll Flanders*) in this extract, highlight the psychological complexes affecting the attendant. They emerge via their filtering through Miss Havisham, while the trepidation instinctively and premonitorily felt by the young Estha prior to the act of sexual abuse committed against him recalls Magwitch's threat on the marshes to search Pip out wherever he may be, on the one hand, and Pip's nightmare on the eve of leaving the safety of the forge for once and for all, on the other. At the same time, the advice tradition current in eighteenth century letters emerges in relation to what, after all, is about to constitute an initiatory moment in Estha's life. Thus, the off-centred presence of Moll Flanders's detailed, step-by-step description of the methods involved in her act of theft – part of her maturing professionalism – may also be noted in this extract. With equal disjunctive delicacy, as part of Roy's aesthetics of "becoming," Dickens's habitual registering of the timeless nature of lurking monstrosity's presence in human existence – a warning to us all, including Estha – through the images of "jewelled" pre-historic creatures, is also felt to be present.

Similarly, the impression emerges that stopping-off points within the scanning process, as described in the poetics of L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poetry (McHale 2000, 14), constitute instants of emancipated access to the metaliterary dimension of a text. In the case of this extract from *The God of Small Things*, the lexical items "puffs" and "buns" which form part of the penultimate sentence give suggestive access to Pope's description of Belinda's dressing table in *The Rape of the Lock*, while offering a parodic, ideological rewriting of metropolitan centralization and domination, viewed in

postmodernist postcolonial terms, since it is there (on the dressing table) that all the raw-materials (Belinda's cosmetic), products of colonial exploitation, are seen to converge. By contrast, from the postmodern perspective, such off-centred allusiveness constitutes shared metaliterary participation in the common pool of literary tradition in the English language. It is a technological-ecological reading of Roy's postmodern-postcolonial novel that allows for this levelling, equalizing effect to be felt to be emerging and which constitutes a telling reduction of ideological tension in this kind of text.

An extremely brief reference to Chinua Achebe's novel, *Anthills of the Savannah*, may also serve as an illustration of how scanning as a reading technique mellows the obsession with ideology that tends to characterize the criticism of postcolonial novels, although never making it disappear completely. Rather, the technological-ecological reader senses how ideology and aesthetics become fruitfully and mutually dependent upon one another. The following extract from Achebe's novel, where Beatrice is forced to attend President Sam's cocktail party held in honour of a visiting American journalist who he wishes to seduce, illustrates this same sustainable confluence of (a) ideology, observed throughout the novel in its exploration of the politics of dictatorship in Africa, of (b) aesthetics, in the form of a respectful re-writing, as well as vindicatory enrichment, of the tradition of the English novel, and, finally, of (c) language, sensed in the etymological fine-tuning of the relations between Anglo-Germanic, French and Latinate phonetics.

It is such intricate patterning, associated with the eroticism of power, and the mixing of sex and politics that contributes to Beatrice, the narrator's, capacity as a West African to remain aware of, yet separate from, such intrigue:

> The American girl drank three large glasses of Moselle in addition to the dry sherry she had had as a starter with the shrimp cocktail and whatever else she had tucked away in the lounge before dinner, all of which was clearly proving too much for her. She became increasingly voluble and less restrained as the evening wore on although she still seemed in full control of her faculties as far as giving me the widest possible berth was concerned. Which of course suited me very well. I could listen and watch without appearing to do so and without the strain of exchanging politeness for provocation. (73)

Similarly, in metaliterary, yet not in obviously ideological terms, an impressionistic, ecological, energy-saving, postmodern reading of this extract allows the intricate weaving of the presences of Jane Austen, George Eliot, as well as that of the colonial novelist Graham Greene, to be sensed, while also revealing how the African magic that allows such a process to evolve is based on the postcolonial implied author's capacity for distance (bordering on aloofness even).

From the perspective of the theoretical figure of the new, postmodern reader, what constitute the technological-ecological recycling of the interactive relations between the postcolonial novel and the English novel tradition, in terms of the minimalizing of ideology understood as being a waste product, are Catherine Lim's novel, *The Bondmaid*, Alan Duff's *Once Were Warriors*, and Caryl Phillips's collection of interrelated short stories *Crossing the River*. They "work[]" (Spinks) as reminders of how the postmodern-world novel in English cannot ignore the need to deal with (or treat) the different manifestations of such a waste, and wasting, product.

An overall analysis of Duff's novel, which cannot be undertaken here, would provide a context for the following extract belonging to it:

> Boogie, that's it. Funny thing, I think it was that Bennett who, you know, did the damage in his report that sent him away. Now they're walkin side by side. Well, well, well. Mind you, someone was at the tangi yesterday and seen Bennett and the kid, Boogie, doing one a them whatyoucalls, the old chants they do. A waiata. Yeah, that's it. Said the kid was neat too. She heard, this woman at the tangi, that Bennett spent two full days at his place with that kid coaching him to do the waiata, and hardly any sleep. Well, I'll be… (147-8)

The context in question consists of the colonization of the Maoris by violence and alcoholism, a consequence of which is a loss of historical consciousness on their part. It is significant, therefore, that a passage like this one, belonging to the second phase of the novel, enacts an alternative to such a loss by projecting an emergent aesthetics of community. Scanning the extract allows for an awareness of this emergent sense of community to arise within the reader's consciousness. The stopping-off and turning points, typical of L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poetry, create the impression, through

multiple intra- and extra-diegetic interaction, of a network of anecdotal sharing becoming the means by which a self-conscious Maori community, with its own capacity for telling its own history, can be sensed as emerging. Moreover, the off-centred presence of a type of discourse identifiable with an urban African-American speaker expands the networking capacity this text of "opening" and "becoming," while levelling its historical function in terms of the equalizing universalization inherent to historical struggle.

As far as Lim's novel, *The Bondmaid* is concerned, violence as a waste and wasting product is associated with the figure of the Reverend, the high priest attached with the House of Wu, the sadistic sexual exploiter of the female servants, or bondmaids, that attend the aristocratic family. While containing, as in the novels by Achebe and Roy, aspects of its creativity which, in metaliterary terms, activate the same kind of reconciliatory, yet firmly self-sufficient aesthetics, as a way of using the natural resources of both the traditional English and the vindicatory postcolonial modes of narrative, Lim's novel also universalizes its exposure of cruelty and exploitation. It is in this way that such horror is sensed as being the equivalent, in political terms, of crimes against humanity.

Thus, the scanning process of the metaliterary and metaideological surface text of such a novel becomes transformed, not horizontally in this case, but in terms of immersion, so that the maximum extent of such horrors may be experienced. Paradoxically, the energy-saving, ecological reader, is obliged to experience the wasting effects of excess. This is done by a necessarily self-conscious process undertaken by the implied author to satirize the inhuman figure of the Reverend by continually offering description of the refined nature of his cruelty, that same refinement constituting an excess of cruelty 'per se': "In more than ten years of the unvarying routine, *he had watched and touched and thrilled to the touch* (my italics) of the uncomfortable bondmaids, but this one, the most desirable of all, lay outside his reach" (187).

The impressionistic presence here of the rhythmic equivalent of a type of song-and-dance "routine," revealed between the second syllable of this same word and "touch of," functions in the opposite direction, away from refinement as the metaliterary equivalent of a respectful interaction with metropolitan tradition. Rather, in this case, the enormity of the Reverend's crimes emerges through the grotesque pastiche of the subtle professionalism of Fred Astaire's soft-shoe art as a dancer. Thus, the levelling process underway in this novel with regard to the theoretical figure of the new

postmodern reader concerns the appeal to the universal, natural sanity in such a figure by subjecting her / him to the experience of the effects of refined cruelty.

This same kind of levelling "work[]" (Spinks) is carried through in Caryl Phillips's *Crossing the River*. In the case of the title story that forms part of this collection of interrelated narratives, what acts as the levelling function is the incorporation of the postmodern reader into not only the experience of slavery as a historical phenomenon, but also, in a more subtle, ecological way, the experience of the supposed cruel pleasure derived from its exploitative practices by the exploiters themselves.

In this sense, ecological energy-saving within the reading process, giving rise to the pinpointing of this experience as being the story's central concern, involves the scanning of textual gaps. These are associated with the gaps that appear in both the ship's log kept by Captain James Hamilton during one of his voyages which form part of the horrendous practise of triangular trade as carried out in the eighteenth century.

It is the fascination exerted by those gaps, as well as by those that occur in his sentimental letters to his aristocratic wife-to-be who has remained in England, that subjects the reader to the coming-to-terms with the recognition of her / his own sadistic capacity to embellish those gaps with thoughts of the most horrendous kind. Thus, operating within the tradition of the slave narrative and the exemplary tale, Phillips's story displays a negative capability involving the experiencing of excess as a reminder to the technological-ecological, postmodern reader that, paradoxically, history needs to be filtered in an energy-saving way so that the true nature of its horror may be calibrated and thus justly recorded for future generations.

A brief final reference to the English metropolitan novel by Julian Barnes, entitled *England, England*, allows us to put the postmodern-world novel into perspective precisely because it "work[s]" to bring to light how such a novel in English is only possible if the technological-ecological reader may be allowed access to the experience of the loss of historical perspective itself. This occurs in the novel through the levelling of three visions of England: one emerges through the creation of "England, England" as a vast theme park occupying the whole of the Isle of Wight, containing the supposedly quintessential aspects of English history and culture; another is constituted by the geographical England within the British Isles which undergoes a catastrophic process of degradation as a result of the transfer of the nation's economic and representative institutions to the theme park; a third England, denominated "Anglia," is

the community that emerges over the years within the geographical space of ex-England, populated by exiles from the "England, England" theme park. It is this nature-based unsophisticated community that loses its capacity to record its own history. In this sense, from a metaliterary perspective, it becomes the paradigmatic equivalent of a colonized territory within the British Empire which, during the period prior to emancipation and independence, experiences the loss of its 'true' history. The scanning of Barnes's text is not possible, therefore, since it operates entirely within the metaliterary dimension. For this reason, the (technological-)ecological reader experiences it as a zone of postmodern potential, a situation which this discussion has tried to associate with a collaborative tendency within the emerging world-postmodern novel in English, the same tendency that, henceforth, the English novel itself has a potential to 'exploit' in a non-colonial, potentializing, postmodern way.

Final remarks:

The recognition of the potential for the creation of novels on equal terms in English is what also allows for the conceiving of a scenario where the true potential for a comparative literary studies may be realized, as suggested by Brill en "Postcolonial Theory and Modern Arabic Literature: Horizons of Application":

> [P]ostcolonial theory has been able to provide conceptual and ethical frameworks for Western readers in which to interpret European colonial literature and certain kinds of postcolonial texts that address colonial history along a number of specific trajectories charted by poststructuralist and postmodernist theory. Postcolonial theory unveils the limitations, as well as the persistence, of hegemonic discourses, and is therefore a healthy reminder of the existence of other worlds outside of Western modes of thought and representation. But this is also where postcolonial theory can be the most mystifying, for the moment it pretends to stand for or to subsume those other worlds, it begins to re-enact the limitations of Marxism, post-structuralism, psychoanalysis, and feminism. (60)

The technological-ecological reader takes us beyond the limitations of Postcolonial Theory. It is in this way that new horizons can be 'scanned' in literary studies. As a concluding remark, it is the theoretical figure of the 'new' postmodern,

technological-ecological reader, capable of avoiding the wastage of energy associated with obsessive ideological considerations, that will take literary studies forward in the new global era.

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