

After Europe

Edited by
Stephen Slemon and Helen Tiffin



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Critical Theory and Post-Colonial Writing

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Dangaroo



Press

Introduction

[W]e ... have been blandly invited to submit ourselves to a second epoch of colonisation – this time by a universal-humanoid abstraction defined and conducted by individuals whose theories and prescriptions are derived from the apprehension of *their* world and *their* history, *their* social neuroses and *their* value systems. It is time, clearly, to respond to this new threat ...

Wole Soyinka

Myth, Literature and the African World

'A second epoch of colonisation' – this is how Wole Soyinka characterises Western theoretical practice as it applies itself, even with the best of intentions, to the cultural productions of the non-Western world. And it would be fair to say that post-colonial writing – by which we mean writing that is grounded in the cultural realities of those societies whose subjectivity has been constituted at least in part by the subordinating power of European colonialism – contains hundreds of such statements: statements which lay bare the material, often devastating, consequences of a centuries-long imposition of Euro-American conceptual patterns onto a world that is at once 'out there' and yet thoroughly assimilable to the psychic grasp of Western cognition. But even within the mainstream of First World academic activity, it is scarcely news that 'theory' – and especially the various modes of Western 'literary' or 'critical theory' – exerts a disempowering energy against other forms of registering experience and of interpreting artistic expression. As Hayden White observes in *Tropics of Discourse*: 'The contours of criticism are unclear, its geography unspecified, and its topography therefore uncertain. As a form of intellectual practice, no field is more imperialistic.'¹ What then might this present collection of essays, which focuses specifically on the intersection between some of the dominant forms of critical theory and a wide variety of post-colonial literary practices, have to contribute to an increasingly familiar debate over the proper uses and possible locations of theory? How does this collection differ from other 'theoretical' ventures into this terrain? And how might the *problem* of this collection inform the astonishingly difficult question: how can our reading of post-colonial literary texts – in their cultural specificity *and* in their post-European commonality – issue productively into a genuinely post-colonial literary criticism?

Perhaps the best way to address these questions is to begin with Derrida's famous critical dictum '*Il n'y a pas de hors-texte*': a statement which, whatever its own genealogy, stands at the headwaters of Euro-American post-structuralist thinking. '[T]here has never been anything but writing', Derrida continues; 'there have never been anything but supplements, substitutive significations which could only come forth in a chain of differential references, the "real" supervening, and being added only while taking on meaning from a trace and from an invocation of the supplement, etc. ... [W]hat opens meaning and language is writing as the disappearance of natural presence.'² It is by now generally recognised that this argument is in no way *theoretically* constrained to occlude social materiality – that is, to the wilful erasure of the actual determinants of gender, race, class, and cultural difference – in literary production and consumption. As Barbara Johnson explains, it is in fact 'the claim to unequivocal domination of one mode of signifying over another' which such a critical insight would call down,³ not the claims of social consciousness or the recognition of the inflections of power in how literary meaning is produced and circulated.

In practice, however, this 'suspension' of the referent in the literary sign, and the 'crisis of representation' which has followed in its wake, has effected within the dominant forms of Anglo-American post-structuralist theory a wholesale retreat from geography and history into a domain of pure 'textuality' in which the principle of indeterminacy smothers the possibility of social or political 'significance' for literature. Within this domain, as Kum Kum Sangari puts it, history is refigured as an apparatus of collage; and as for social contradiction, it is simply deflated into a rhetoric of ambiguity and endless deferral.⁴

Obviously, such a reading practice could only have gained credence within a dominant segment of a dominant culture. For more than anything, this ostensibly apolitical script for reading functions as an apparatus of cultural authorization. Under the hegemony of Anglo-American 'theoretical' methodology, we now read critical texts – we probably even write them – from the footnotes backwards; and the paradoxical result is that even as the theoretically vigilant critical work establishes its autonomous grounding by ploughing under the now debunked thematics of the *literary* text, it also initiates an astonishingly filiative network of semantic and citational obedience towards the master-texts and master codes of 'theory' itself. One of the most ironic developments of what began as revolutionary scepticism has been the production of an institutionalised army of ridiculously credulous readers – 'critics' who systematically shut out the

world in order to practice what Frank Lentriccia accurately depicts as a textual form of interior decoration.⁵

What is less obvious, however, are the ways in which this overarching extolling of the crisis of representation functions as a technology of containment and control within the cross-cultural theatre of neo-colonial relations. As Barbara Christian point out, post-structuralism's technical language – its graphs, its algebraic equations, its exegetical drive – has often at least one immediate effect upon Third World readers for whom the latinate compounds of deconstructive terminology evoke the horrors of missionary education and its interpellation of subordinate subjectivity: and that is to silence them in their work *as theorists*.⁶ In another vector, post-structuralism's critique of the 'centred subject' has for many critics taken on a thoroughly displacive function in relation to the project of historically specific, culturally grounded critique, with the result that some potentially crucial work on colonialist power has been lost to a flabby subsumation of real social difference into a Western obsession with epistemological legitimisation.⁷ More visibly damaging, however, is the way in which a post-structuralist refutation of the referent can underscore a theoretical dismissal of some of the basic survival strategies of subordinated and colonised peoples. As Craig Tapping has noted – and it is a theme he returns to in his essay for this collection:

despite theory's refutation of such absolute and logocentric categories as these – 'truth' or 'meaning', 'purpose' or 'justification' – the new literatures ... are generated from cultures for whom such terms as 'authority' and 'truth' are empirically urgent in their demands. Land claims, racial survival, cultural revival: all these demand an understanding of and response to the very concepts and structures which post-structuralist academicians refute in language games, few of which recognize the political struggles of real peoples outside such discursive frontiers.⁸

The dominant element here, of course, is the Western propensity for universalising and its radical fear of cultural relativity. For although the interests of Western theory are not – as Homi Bhabha has recently argued – *necessarily* 'collusive with the hegemonic role of the West as a power block', not necessarily 'freighted with Western "symbolic capital"',⁹ the practical force of theory's ranging zeal is to assimilate the literary or social 'text', wherever it is found, into a set of philosophical questions whose cultural and historical specificity within postmodern Anglo-American culture is rarely admitted, let alone significantly addressed. Sangari fixes with telling accuracy the political implications of this universalising impulse in poststructuralist methodology when she notes how

on the one hand, the world contracts into the West; a Eurocentric perspective ... is brought to bear upon 'Third World' cultural products; a 'specialized' skepticism is carried everywhere as cultural paraphernalia and epistemological apparatus, as a way of seeing; and the postmodern problematic becomes *the* frame through which the cultural products of the rest of the world are seen. On the other hand, the West expands into the world; late capitalism muffles the globe and homogenizes (or threatens to) all cultural production – this, for some reason, is one 'master narrative' that is seldom dismantled as it needs to be if the differential economic, class, and cultural formation of 'Third World' countries is to be taken into account. The writing that emerges from this position, however critical it may be of colonial discourses, gloomily disempowers the 'nation' as an enabling idea and relocates the impulses for change as everywhere and nowhere ... Such skepticism does not take into account either the fact that the postmodern preoccupation with the crisis of meaning is not everyone's crisis (even in the West) or that there are different modes of de-essentialization which are socially and politically grounded and mediated by separate perspectives, goals, and strategies for change in other countries.¹⁰

For Edward Said, this intransigence in 'theory' amounts to no less than a complete evacuation of what he considers to be genuine *critical* consciousness – consciousness, that is, which is responsive to concrete experience and which is cognizant of human activity beyond the reach of dominating social and cognitive systems. As Said sees it, 'critical' consciousness always emerges as a resistance to theory, even in those moments when 'theory' is being employed. But when this critical consciousness is missing – and within Western institutions this is so often the case – critical theory goes 'travelling':¹¹ a 'eurovision'¹² set loose upon a field of difference, and one which fixes its exoticising, objectifying, knowledge-producing gaze wherever and whenever it pleases. It thus becomes clear just how it is that certain modalities of contemporary Western theory return to source as a colonising technology, for in their assimilation of Europe's Others to a Euro-American problematic – the question of representation – these methodological apparatuses reconstitute colonial and post-colonial subjects, and the texts they produce, as useful workers in an on-going Western industry: namely, the development of intellectual strategies for understanding and locating the agency and the specificity of the metropolitan imperial Self.

As an exemplum of this practice, it might be useful to consider the figure of Benjamin Disraeli's Tancred, whose burning desire it is 'to penetrate the great Asian mystery'.¹³ '[I]t is very easy now to get to Jerusalem', notes Tancred; 'the great difficulty ... is to know what to do when you are there' (p. 136). And so, as Rana Kabbani retells the story, Tancred

... starts out from his parental estate armed with that locations' code of conduct and outlook. He heads for the East in order to become enlightened, but as his journey progresses, he gradually becomes an enlightener instead. He imports to the chaotic and emotive landscape that he travels through the restraint and the authoritative morality of his upbringing. He emerges from the East mellowed, but virtually

unchanged. He has endured the alien without suffering any fragmentation of his being.¹⁴

Tancred stakes his claim to the 'East' on the astonishing argument that since the social and moral codes of Palestine are in fact the foundational principles of the Christianised 'West', the true contemporary home of this Other world he explores is therefore precisely that ethical dilemma he is attempting to solve for English imperial culture (pp. 272-75). Tancred already possesses 'theory', but what he needs is a figural location for its seamless application. And at the end of the novel, as he stands in full possession of both the land and the woman who constitutes its allegorical emblem, Tancred asks a question which still has resonance for Western theory and its interloping practitioners: 'I am here', says Tancred, as he rises from his kiosk to greet a second wave of Western travellers to the East, 'Why am I wanted?' (p. 501).

Why indeed? A rather cynical answer is that 'theory' has paid off its mortgage on the critical academy and now owns it outright; that therefore, if the post-colonial literatures are to have any real effect on the literary canon and on mainstream pedagogical practice, post-colonial critics will simply have to 'master the discourse of contemporary literary theory'.¹⁵ This argument proves fairly easy to dismiss on ideological grounds – after all, why should First World tertiary institutions be so thoroughly privileged as *the* site of meaning-production? And why should post-colonial critics care if the post-colonial literatures fail to play up squarely on the green summer pitches of the Imperium in its neo-colonialist phase?

Tzvetan Todorov has demonstrated that one of colonialism's most supple strategies of control is to extend the principle of equality only when it withholds from its Others the principle of difference.¹⁶ This argument for the parity of post-colonial literatures in a First World literary and critical canon is thus a heavily problematical one – it reinscribes, at least in part, precisely that tropological apparatus which helps to effect the subordination of colonial Others in the first place. Nevertheless, the Western critical industry does exert enormous hegemonic power over the reading practices of literatures written in a language whose original provenance is Europe; and as is always the case with power, the institutional purchase of the West's dominant cognitive principles is never simply going to go away. And so this argument *for* 'theory' on behalf of post-colonial writing does – at least in a practical sense – make clear that institutional apparatuses for cultural authority continue to govern and to naturalise the field of 'literature'. If the post-colonial literatures are to have an impact on Western thinking, even if

only as a by-product, 'critical theory' can provide one of the vehicles through which post-colonial voices, however distorted, can be made audible.

More importantly, however, post-structuralist literary theory offers post-colonial criticism an important mechanism for making what Bhabha calls 'the historical connectedness between the subject and object of critique' thoroughly, and usefully, visible. 'It makes us aware', writes Bhabha,

that our political referents and priorities – the people, the community, class struggle, anti-racism, gender difference, the assertion of an anti-imperialist, black or third perspective – are not 'there' in some primordial, naturalistic sense. Nor do they reflect a unitary or homogeneous political object. They 'make sense' as they come to be constructed in the discourses of feminism or Marxism or the Third Cinema or whatever, whose objects of priority – class or sexuality or 'the new ethnicity' ... – are always in historical and philosophical tension, or cross-referenced with other objectives.¹⁷

Bhabha's stress upon the *constructed* nature of all theoretical discourse is an important one, for this perception – made possible by post-structuralism's suspension of the referent – opens the door to an enormously enabling critique of power in all of its social locations.¹⁸ It is therefore hardly surprising that much of the most interesting, avowedly post-structural, work to date on the question of colonialism takes as its object of study not the 'literary' texts of colonised or post-colonial peoples but rather the inescapably fractured, self-betraying 'texts' of imperial culture itself.

This project – of 'theoretically' sophisticated, anti-colonial critique – is fostering a growth industry within the Western academy, and its two major methodologies tend to classify themselves under the rubric 'deconstructive' or 'new historicist'. There are important differences between these two forms of theoretical practice (not to mention important differences within each of them); but what they share is an attempt to carry a critique of 'the imperialism of the signifier'¹⁹ forward towards – to use Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's words – a 'disclosure of complicities where a will to knowledge would create oppositions'.²⁰ Homi Bhabha's deconstructive 'commitment to theory' is thus predicated upon the possibility of exposing, through the 'translation' of mainstream post-structuralism, a 'contradictory and ambivalent space of enunciation' within the discourse of colonialism – an ambivalence, that is, which circles upon itself to disclose a radical, fissuring hybridity at the heart of colonialist 'desire' and thus a self-alienating energy within imperial authority which affords the strategic displacement of colonial discourse itself.²¹ And Stephen Greenblatt's new historicism – 'new' because it eschews the univocal assumptions of historical coherence in the 'old' historicist claim – aspires to locate within colonialist documents the presence

of subversive inquiries, of transgressions of authority, and to demonstrate how colonialism in fact depends upon such presences within the field of its power.²²

Both of these theoretical methodologies *require* post-structuralist scepticism, and both of them provide post-colonial critical practice with an important answer to Tancred's question of why we might want to use 'critical theory' in our reading and teaching, despite its unacknowledged grounding in and implicit privileging of First World cultural concerns. But at the same time, both of these methodologies for 'theory' have come in for harsh criticism from scholars who attempt to speak on behalf of historically subordinated peoples. Benita Parry, for example, has argued that although deconstructive work on the discourse of colonialism has succeeded in reversing an implicit collusion between criticism and colonial power – a collusion she rather problematically locates in 'Commonwealth' literary studies and its alleged sublimation of the political into the moral or metaphysical sphere – deconstruction's necessary privileging of the colonialist text as the object of critical attention amounts, discursively, to an erasure of the anti-colonialist 'native' voice and a limiting of the possibility of 'native' resistance.²³ And in response to the anti-colonialist practice of the new historicist theory, Carolyn Porter has questioned the implicit politics of any reading strategy which seeks, first, to position resistance as already present within the domain of power, and secondly, to envision subversion as a necessary consequence of power, an 'opposition' which actually functions to serve the hegemonic interests of dominant culture itself.²⁴

The key point in these objections to anti-colonialist 'theory' as it is most commonly being practised within the academy is that the cultural, historical *agency* of colonised and of post-colonial peoples is simply written out of the equation of power. Alongside – necessary to – 'theory's' abandonment of a reflective or mimetic purchase to literary writing comes the suspension of an operative *lived* experience under colonial power: a dimension in writing, that is, which surfaces in *thematic* contestation, in a socially *practised* linguistic rupture, and above all in the *expressive* representation of other codes of apprehending 'reality', other structures for disclosing resistance. For in reifying power and its oppositions to a specifically 'textualised' domain of inscription and its reading, deconstructive or new historicist theoretical practice, in its anti-colonialist vector, *also* forecloses on the social field as an extratextual arena of struggle and thus inscribes what Porter calls 'colonialist formalism'²⁵ onto the terrain of neo-colonial international relations. As critics such as Parry and Porter see it, contemporary anti-colonialist critical theory – at least of this kind – again carries that foundational dictum of

Derrida's, *il n'y a pas de hors-texte*, directly towards the ungrounded pole in its bifurcated potentiality. And thus this particular manifestation of 'theory', they argue, rather than arriving at a *material* critical practice which locates the 'literary' as a culturally significant dimension within the specifics of history and geography, transports colonialist 'history' and post-colonial 'society' directly into the theatre of the unrelievedly 'literary', where they function simply as semiotic figures, rhetorical presences in an endlessly self-disclosing 'text'.²⁶

And so mainstream 'critical theory', even in its more politically vigilant manifestations, locks into an ironic relation with post-colonial critical practice. Although it offers the critical project an important set of strategies for challenging Western 'textualised' hegemony and for disrupting the univocal power and 'presence' of a naturalised neo-colonialist script, it also betrays a displace purchase against the agency of marginalised and subordinated groups. Homi Bhabha points out that there is always within critical theory a 'tension ... between its institutional containment and its revisionary force',²⁷ and quite clearly this tension plays itself out in spectacular form when 'theory' turns its travelling eye towards the Others of Empire and baldly appropriates their cultural labour to its own cognitive uses. The scarifications of 'theory' become even more painful, however, when this tension, this irony, surfaces as an Anglo-American retooling enterprise whose anti-colonialist or anti-imperialist activity proceeds in its decentering work completely without reference to the oppositional, subversive cultural activity of colonised and post-colonial peoples. When theoretical practice amounts, in Parry's words, to the obliteration of 'the role of the native as historical subject and combatant, possessor of an-other knowledge and producer of alternative tradition',²⁸ it inherently joins hands with that neo-colonising apparatus which post-colonial criticism – whatever else it does – always sets out to subvert. 'Theory' – after Europe – becomes a discursive tool by which dominant culture ideologically reinscribes its imperial centrality; and yet, for all of that, 'theory' remains a potentially enabling mechanism for furthering the continuing practice of post-colonial critical resistance into new vectors.

In the early stages of our thinking about this collection, and while we were working with Anna Rutherford to formulate the intellectual 'project' that the conjunction between the two terms in our sub-title announces, we envisioned a rather different set of critical essays, a different kind of critical practice, than what this volume now offers. Specifically, we had in mind a set of papers which took on, in very direct ways, some of the more egregious

theoretical engagements within the Western universalist project. Our own paradigmatic theoretical 'text', much in need of a post-colonialist critique, was Deleuze and Guattari's appropriative subsumption of what they wanted to call 'minor literature' to an ungrounded or 'deterritorialised', anti-referential writing practice, and their bald exhortation to the First World writer simply to 'become' minor – as though the experience of physical subordination had nothing whatever to do with the formulation of literary resistance.²⁹

As we proceeded, however, we learned that for most post-colonial literary critics, a return to – a grounding in – the post-colonial literary text itself comprised an absolutely crucial gesture within the politics of critical writing and the *sine qua non* of a literary critical engagement with the structures of neo-colonialist power. This is not to say that we did not receive papers which engaged in direct confrontation with the practices of contemporary critical theory. Diana Brydon's argument for the preservation of a 'common *wealth*' criticism grounded in 'the voices of the colonised' locates the hegemonic impulses behind mainstream theoretical practices with great precision, for example. Graham Huggan's call for 'a post-colonial poetics of disturbance' takes on the global appropriations of postmodernist discourse in its specific institutional purchase. Meenakshi Mukherjee's analysis of Eurocentric educational apparatuses sets a discourse of personal, post-colonial witness against the interpellative power of both colonialism and patriarchy. Bill Ashcroft's positioning of post-colonial writing at the 'intersection' of language carries with it an explicit critique of Derrida's notion of 'infinite transmissibility' in writing. And Gareth Griffiths' and David Moody's call for a revaluation of Wole Soyinka's cultural and literary criticism makes a specific, detailed argument for the supplementation of European structural Marxism with the post-colonial theoretical analysis of Frantz Fanon.

Nevertheless, the commanding critical assumption of the essays collected in this volume is that post-colonial literary texts are *themselves* 'theoretical' documents – narratives, that is, which, whatever their expressive or reflective purchase in the heterodox realities of colonial or post-colonial societies, *also* provide detailed counter-discursive 'readings' of the 'master works' of imperial culture as it attempts to settle itself, discursively, upon an exoticised, colonised terrain. For J. Michael Dash, this 'always already' imperial inscription upon Caribbean society means that the Martinican writer Edouard Glissant's literary texts *necessarily* foreground a culturally specific 'terrain of the unspeakable' in their reflective operations, and that as they do so they implicitly mobilise a 'natural' deconstructive energy against the sign-systems of dominant culture. For Craig Tapping,

colonialism's imposition of a self-privileging representational hierarchy, in which 'writing' arrogates to itself the only grounding for cultural 'authority', means that the Australian Aboriginal writer Mudrooroo Narogin's (Colin Johnson's) textual practice implicitly interrogates the semiotic machineries of Empire as it negotiates for an orally-grounded culture the empire of the written word.

This strategy of according to post-colonial 'literary' texts that 'interpretive' power which dominant theoretical practice would normally arrogate to the literary critic has an important ramification: and that is that post-colonial criticism, at least as it is practised here, requires a conscious ideological rejection of criticism's habitual 'heroic ethnocentrism' and a much humbler self-positioning than is usually operative in First World 'strong' critical readings. 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 colonialist discourse – then the actual locus of subversive agency is necessarily wrenched away from colonised or post-colonial subjects and resituated within the textual work of the institutionalised western literary critic; and this is a form of cultural self-privileging that the contributors to this collection consciously want to avoid. This does not mean that the essays collected here refuse the critical work of reading 'against' the text or 'for' the presence of ideological contradiction within it: Vijay Mishra's analysis of social contradiction within one of the 'Bombay Cinema's' most popular cultural 'texts' is a case in point. But in Mishra's reading, the theoretical principles which permit criticism to locate within the Bombay Cinema a filmic interpellation of anti-revolutionary values emerge directly from 'the base culture' or 'deep structure' of Indian society itself, and *not* from an unassimilated application of Western cultural or film theory. 'Critical theory' here – as elsewhere in this volume – has to be *negotiated*; and what this double movement in methodology produces is a critical practice which is neither self-privilegingly autonomous in agency nor excessively affiliative in citation.

One of the immediate implications of such a critical self-positioning is that several of the textual readings that this volume offers accept the theoretical 'risk' of an intentional assumption. Generally, this recuperation of intentionality in the production of textual meaning is not, in these essays, narrowly located in the name of the 'author'. Rather, it is fastened to an anterior, though not determining, cultural dimension to writing: a grounding – as Mark Williams and Alan Riach explain – of post-colonial representation in an on-going cultural refiguration of 'the various

inheritances, traditions, cultural memories ... which make up the post-colonised world'.

Another implication of this critical self-positioning is that few of the papers collected in this volume 'speak' dynastically within the customary 'language' of 'theory'. There is little here of the filiative footnoting enterprise, little of 'theory's' linguistic obliquities, little in the way of those covert signs of post-structural 'belonging' which have become *de rigueur* in essays that wish to announce the presence of a 'serious' theoretical dimension in their plan. The reasons for why this is so are everywhere in evidence, but no one here makes the point more forcefully than does Carolyn Cooper, who challenges 'the authority of English as our exclusive voice of scholarship' through an astonishingly subversive theoretical praxis. Cooper's project finds an immediate explanatory echo in Derek Walcott's injunction to the post-colonial critic to eschew the voice that speaks in the name of 'the dead fish of French criticism', and *never* to surrender the agency of resistance to the power of Western intellectual systems. It would therefore be a gross mistake to assume that because many of these essays refuse an overtly 'theoretical' stance they necessarily fall back upon an unproblematised critical formalism or that they languish in *passé* theoretical assumptions. There remains a dominant 'developmental' model to critical language within the mainstream Western academy, a 'theorised' versus 'pre-theorised' binary assumption which ethnocentrically consigns disobedient critical practice to that discursive dead-zone in which writing remains cognitively unable to interrogate its own social and philosophical pre-conditions. But if anything, the papers collected in this volume keep squarely in view the principle that theory is always grounded to a cultural specificity, and that both 'theory' and 'criticism' – in the *first* instance – are always material practices that are ideologically motivated and historically positioned.

A third implication of this critical self-positioning is that the idea of the 'post-colonial' itself is broadened out in the essays that follow to include a wide range – and often a conflation – of all three of its possible meanings. 'Post-colonial' most commonly refers to formerly colonised Third- and Fourth-World peoples who have gained a measure of political – though not economic – independence from empire; for some critics it also refers to white settler cultures whose ambivalent location within the structures of imperial authority offers an important – though often highly ambivalent – grounding for discursive interrogations of imperialism's centralising power. The conjunction of these two variant concepts of the 'post-colonial' thus produces a third modality of signification: a 'horizon of expectation' for literary

production and consumption wherein the term 'post-colonial' nominates the actuations of a specific form of discursive resistance to colonialist power – a resistance which is grounded in experience and which is set in train the moment that colonialist culture acts upon the body and space of its Others.

This conflation of all three concepts of the 'post-colonial' in many of the essays that follow derives from a recognition of collectivity in the *motive* of their writers – which is to open the field of marginalized literatures written in European languages to a reading and teaching practice that speaks directly to geographically, culturally, and economically marginalized peoples themselves. And because of this, it is important to recognise that while most of these essays hold the 'post-colonial' literary text before them as a *seemingly* naturalised object in an undeconstructed representational space, part of their collective project is to effect a specific post-colonial intervention into an on-going – often doubly hegemonic – critical debate over the use and location of 'theory' in the study of 'literary' documents. Liz Gross has noted that cultures which are dominated by Anglo-American intellectual imperialism, but which are also to some extent 'outside' the range of its interpellative ideological power, are ideally placed to interrogate the shibboleths of Western critical theory, and to *use* unslavishly whatever is valuable within it for their own culturally specific ends.³⁰ This, we should think, remains the collective critical 'problem' that the various modalities of post-colonial literary criticism, whatever their differences, must continue to negotiate; and to that end we might offer as a figural paradigm another exemplary image of cultural mobilisation, one which might yet supplant the imperial figure of Tancred, sign of neo-colonialism's 'travelling theory' and its appropriative, exoticising eye.

The cover illustration of this collection of essays shows the Haitian artist Edouard Duval's fantastic depiction of Zaka, or Cousin Zacca, or Azacca-Medé, 'farmer-god' in the Rada nanchon of Haitian *vodun* or voodoo, and *gros-bon-ange* of a once 'living' entity which has now, through ritual and purification, attained the special status of 'loa' or divinity.³¹ Within Euro-American popular culture, *vodun* ritual has been transmogrified into stereotypical horror – a site where a universe of cultural repression and disavowal returns to the scene of civilisation and flattens it into barbarity. But for post-colonial literary 'theorists' such as Wilson Harris and Edward Kamau Brathwaite, *vodun* figures the perpetual drive in colonial and post-colonial cultures to cross through the imperial territory of the given – the imposed and the 'certain' – into a primordial realm of broken recollection where 'community' can be recovered and brought back into 'possession'.³² In *vodun*, the loa are often figured as horse riders, for their

'possession', through ritual, of a 'living' person seems absolute and unyielding – an animating force in control of a physical body, a rider in charge of a compliant mount. But when the *vodun* ritual is over, the *Xoa* release the living body and turn it back to the community; and the community now finds itself instructed, assured of its inextricable connectedness to its own pre-colonial history. lea

For post-colonial cultures, literary writing too can initiate the riding down of colonised consciousness, and 'critical theory' can mark the always provisional, always temporary, purchase of that writing upon system and structure – a complex figuring energy which, as Wilson Harris comments,³³ strives through adversarial contexts and infinite 'rehearsals' to consume both its own biases and those of its always threatening Other. If the landscape of post-colonial literature is necessarily marked by the inscriptions of dominant Western critical practice and its technologies of interpretation and control, it is also infused with a pulsating, though often silenced, subterranean energy which speaks to the post-colonial reader of *another* realm of semiotic 'meaning', *another* ground of interpretive community. 'So on that ground...', Edward Brathwaite tells us,

walk
the hooves will come, welcomed
by drumbeats, into your ridden head;
and the horse, cheval of the dead
charade of *la mort*

tongued with the wind
possession of the fire
possession of the dust
sundered from your bone
plundered from my breast

by ice, by chain, by sword, by the east wind,
surrenders up to you the graven Word
carved from Olodumare
From Ogun of Alare, from Ogun of Onire
from Shango broom of thunder and Damballa Grand Chemin

For on this ground
trampled with the bull's swathe of whips
where the slave at the crossroads was a red anthill
eaten by moonbeams, by the holy ghosts
of his wounds
the Word becomes
again a god and walks among us ...³⁴

NOTES

1. Hayden White, *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1973), p. 281.
2. Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1967; Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1974), pp. 158-59.
3. Barbara Johnson, *The Critical Difference: Essays in the Contemporary Rhetoric or Reading* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1980), p. 5.
4. Kum Kum Sangari, 'The Politics of the Possible', *Cultural Critique*, 7 (Fall 1987), p. 181. See also Edward Said, *The World, the Text and the Critic* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1983), pp. 3-4, and Frank Lentriccia, *After the New Criticism* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1980), p. 186 ff.
5. Lentriccia, op. cit., p. 186. See also Said's 'Travelling Theory' in *The World, the Text and the Critic*, cited above, and Daniel O'Hara's argument in 'Criticism Worldly and Otherworldly: Edward W. Said and The Cult of Theory', *Boundary 2*, xii, 3 / xii, 1 (Sp.-Fall 1984), pp. 378-403 that the burgeoning of 'theory' within Western tertiary institutions responds to a specific pressure within late capitalism for career patterns marked by filiation.
6. Barbara Christian, 'The Race for Theory', in *Cultural Critique*, 6 (Spring 1987), pp. 51-63.
7. For an extended critique of this arrogation of theoretical terrain by the West, see Sangari, op. cit., pp. 157-86.
8. Craig Tapping, 'Literary Reflections of Orality: Colin Johnson's *Dr. Wooreddy's Prescription for Enduring the Ending of the World*', Paper presented at the Modern Language Association, New Orleans, December 1988.
9. Homi Bhabha, 'The Commitment to Theory', *New Formations*, 5 (Summer 1988), p. 7.
10. Sangari, pp. 183-84. For an analysis how Western universalism maps itself onto Latin American cultural difference, see Jean Franco's 'Beyond Ethnocentrism: Gender, Power, and the Third-World Intelligentsia', in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson (Urbana and Chicago: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1988), pp. 503-516.
11. Said, op. cit., pp. 242-47.
12. See Benita Parry, 'Problems in Current Theories of Colonial Discourse', *Oxford Literary Review*, 9, 1-2 (1987), p. 51.
13. Benjamin Disraeli, *Tancred, or The New Crusade* (1847; London: Peter Davies, 1927), p. 128. Further references are to this edition.
14. Rana Kabbani, *Europe's Myths of Orient* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1988), p. 87.
15. Michael Awkward, in 'Appropriative Gestures: Theory and Afro-American Literary Criticism', *Gender and Theory: Dialogues on Feminist Criticism*, ed. Linda Kauffman (London: Blackwell, 1989), pp. 238-48, makes this argument in response to Barbara Christian's dismissal of critical theory in the article cited above.
16. Tzvetan Todorov, *The Conquest of America: The Question of the Other*, trans. Richard Howard (1982; New York: Harper & Row, 1984).
17. Bhabha, op. cit., p. 11.
18. On the question of post-structuralism and its troubled relations with 'history', see Derek Attridge, Geoff Bennington, and Robert Young, eds., *Post-Structuralism and the Question of History* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1987). Chris Weedon offers a useful account of 'theory's' intersection with the project of feminism in *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987). The most detailed exploration of post-structuralism's intersection with colonialism is provided by Gayatri Chakravorty

- Spivak in her collection *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* (New York and London: Methuen, 1987), but see also Homi Bhabha's 'The Other Question: Difference, Discrimination and the Discourse of Colonialism' in *Literature, Politics and Theory: Papers from the Essex Conference, 1976-84*, ed. Francis Barker et. al. (London and New York: Methuen, 1986), pp. 148-73.
19. See Peter Dews, *Logics of Disintegration: Post-structuralist Thought and the Claims of Critical Theory* (London: Verso, 1988).
 20. Spivak, *In Other Worlds*, p. 179.
 21. See Homi Bhabha, 'Signs Taken for Wonders: Questions of Ambivalence and Authority under a Tree Outside Delhi, May 1817', *Critical Inquiry*, 12, 1 (Autumn 1985), 144-65 and 'The Commitment to Theory', *op. cit.*
 22. Stephen Greenblatt, 'Invisible Bullets: Renaissance Authority and its Subversion, Henry IV and Henry V' in *Political Shakespeare: New Essays in Cultural Materialism*, ed. Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield (Ithaca and London: Cornell Univ. Press, 1985), pp. 18-47.
 23. Parry, p. 34.
 24. Carolyn Porter, 'Are We Being Historical Yet?', *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 87, 4 (Fall 1988), pp. 743-86.
 25. Porter, p. 779.
 26. The argument here follows Porter, p. 780: 'It is not only marginal groups and subordinated cultures that are occulted, whether by exclusion or incorporation, by effacement or appropriation, but the "social" itself as well. In other words, the "social text" remains a text in the formalist sense, rather than the literary being historicized as social discourse'.
 27. Bhabha, 'The Commitment to Theory', p. 17.
 28. Parry, p. 34.
 29. See Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, 'What Is a Minor Literature?', in *Kafka: Towards a Minor Literature*, trans. Dana Polan (1975; Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1986), pp. 16-27. An extended discussion of this project is offered in *Cultural Critique*, 6 (Spring 1987) and ABD 7 (Fall 1987).
 30. Liz Gross, 'Speculum Femininarum', *Southern Review*, 20, 1 (March 1987), pp. 99-100.
 31. See Maya Deren, *Divine Horsemen: Voodoo Gods of Haiti* (New York: Chelsea House, 1970) and Claude Planson, *Vaudou: un initie paris...* (Paris: Jean Dullis, 1974).
 32. See Wilson Harris, *Tradition, the Writer and Society: Critical Essays* (London and Port of Spain: New Beacon, 1967), pp. 48-54.
 33. Wilson Harris, 'Adversarial Contexts and Creativity', *New Left Review*, 154 (Nov.-Dec. 1985), p. 127.
 34. Edward Brathwaite, *The Arrivants* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1967), pp. 265-66.