

# Monuments of Empire: Allegory/Counter-Discourse/ Post-Colonial Writing

On Tuesday, 22 June 1897, Britain's loyal subjects — at Home, in the Dominions, and in the Colonies — celebrated in song and spectacle the Diamond Jubilee of Victoria's reign. It was not only the Queen's longevity they were celebrating, not only the remarkable progress of Western technology and science over the past sixty years, but also, and most importantly, the spread of the British Empire itself to the point where it now subsumed one quarter of the world's entire population. 'From my heart,' ran the Queen's message, telegraphed across the globe, 'I thank my beloved people. May God bless them.'<sup>1</sup>

The weather in England was glorious — they called it 'Queen's weather'<sup>2</sup> — but in the city of Sydney, capital of the Crown colony of New South Wales, the skies looked threatening. Innumerable celebrations were planned for the day: a grand march-past of troops along Macquarie Street; a procession in the harbour of splendidly illuminated steamers, each of them packed with singing loyalists; a picturesque display in the Domain of school girls dancing in skirts of royal purple. But one of the 'gayest scenes'<sup>3</sup> to be enacted that day was a celebration, not of Victoria herself, but of European settlement on the Australian continent: the unveiling in the Royal Botanical Gardens of a monument to Sir Arthur Phillip, Commander of the First Fleet, and first Governor of New South Wales.

This is how the press in Sydney reported it:

On the footpaths and in the roadway thousands awaited the beat of the drums and the blare of the brass instruments which were to announce the coming of our brave defenders.... The Union Jack draping the noble proportions of the figure of the first Governor of the colony could be seen from the balconies and windows of the handsome houses in Macquarie-street, and people hung out over the railings all along and posed on the giddy heights of flat-topped roofs.... [A] guard of honor from

H.M.S. Orlando formed at the statue [and] was soon surrounded by a patriotic throng. The body guard from the Permanent Artillery under Major Bailey marched in and formed, and the Governor and suite followed...

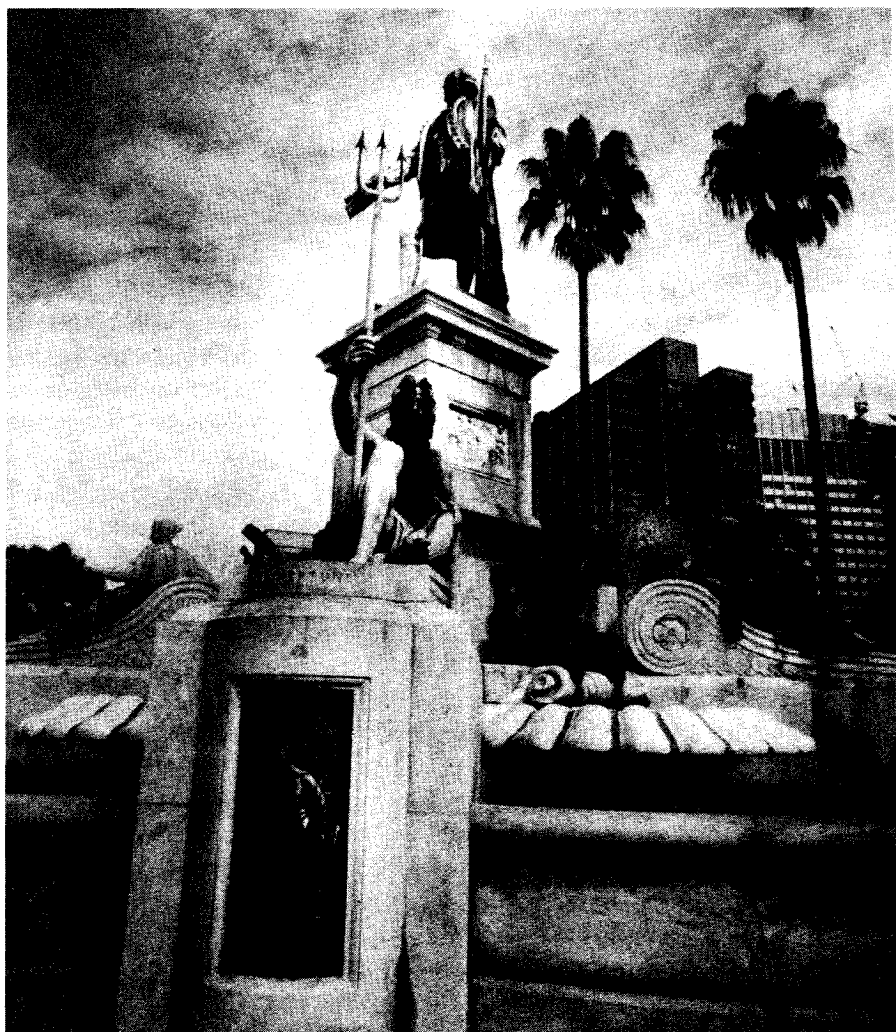
His Excellency was heartily applauded on advancing to the front of the platform.... 'Look at the picture spread out in front of your eyes today, and compare it in your mind with the view presented by this harbour when the Sirius sailed in,' said his Excellency. 'One hundred years or so have passed, and you have this great and populous city, these beautiful gardens, and a magnificent array of shipping which always adorns your harbour. You are now a great and prosperous community, dependent no longer on help from outside, but self-reliant and self-governing.' (Applause)....

His Excellency then pulled the red, white, and blue ribbon, and the Union Jack fell from the bronze figure, the bronze dolphins at the base spouted water, and the people sent up a mighty cheer....<sup>4</sup>

Three cheers were given for the Queen.<sup>5</sup>

When that flag had fallen and the cheers had died down, the people crowded around this monument would have seen, first, the huge and imposing figure of Phillip himself, dressed in full military regalia and towering above the fountain on his rectangular sandstone column, his right foot purposefully forward and his hand outstretched, as if offering to someone the written document that it displays. As their eyes slid downward to the monument's second level, they would have observed the half-sized classical figures at the four cardinal points: two males and two females, all of them dressed, but in the flowing robes and scant tunics of a distant culture and a more innocent age. They would likely have noticed, also, the bas-relief inscriptions naming each of these figures: 'Neptune' for the bearded man with the trident; 'Commerce' for the reclining woman to his right; 'Cyclops' for the figure beside her (but probably signifying Odysseus, because the virile figure has two eyes and a cunning look), and 'Agriculture' for the woman coddling a sheep. They might also have discerned, if they were close enough, a series of friezes on the statue's rectangular column, each depicting a scene from classical family life, each inscribed for its respective significance: 'Education', 'Patriotism', and 'Justice'. But unless the spectators on that day were very close, they would probably not have noticed the four small plaques on the lowest level of the statue: the level of the fountain water and the bronze dolphins. On each of these four plaques, etched flat into the bronze, is the figure of a naked Aboriginal hunter. And none of these figures is marked by any inscription of language whatsoever.

Most viewers of this statue would recognise in it the operations of some kind of allegorical structure, one going beyond the immediate level of figuration — woman as 'Agriculture' or 'Commerce', for example —



Monument to Governor Phillip. Botanical Gardens, Sydney.  
Photograph: Reece Scannell.

and applying to the semiotic system of the statue as a whole. In its simplest form, allegory (from the Greek *allos* — ‘other’ + *agoreuein* — ‘to speak openly, to speak in the assembly or market’)<sup>6</sup> is a trope that in saying one thing also says some ‘other’ thing; it is the doubling of some previous or anterior code by a sign, or by a semiotic system, that also signifies a more immediate or ‘literal’ meaning.<sup>7</sup> Allegory thus marks a bifurcation or division in the directionality of the interpretive process, and we can see such a bifurcation cutting across the kind of ‘reading’ that this monument to Arthur Phillip seems to demand. On a literal level, the statue commemorates a specific historical figure from a specific historical moment; it denotes a ‘then’ and a ‘now’ and implicitly suggests that the two are connected by the kind of development within continuity, change within permanence, that the Governor’s speech so stirringly evokes. On this literal level, Phillip’s striding figure represents that hallowed moment when European colonists first stepped onto the new land of the Australian continent, and the text he holds forth can be identified as the Letters Patent that authorises the establishment in the colony of the apparatus of British law.<sup>8</sup> On an allegorical level, however, the statue clearly signifies a great deal more. In the first place, it deploys a complex and interwoven network of spatial, numerical, and magnitudinal codes in order to construct what appears to be a fairly simple binary system of privilege and power. Phillip stands above, resplendent, while the Aborigines lurk below; he is vast in size while they are small; his full clothing resounds against their nakedness; his singularity echoes against their plurality.

Between the two poles of this system is interposed a mediating level: that of the manifold theatre of classicism. The classical world is portrayed as being contiguous to the European present, at once a pedigree of its deeply rooted codes of civilisation and a reflection of its imperial energies, and because of this, the statue can be seen to be combining its basic binary structure with another semiotic code: that of history itself. As we read downward, away from the originating moment of colonisation and Phillip’s indomitable stride, we find ourselves reading backward through time, past the founding moment of Western culture towards the lost origins of the human race itself. Here, on the unknowable, and hence uninscribed, plane of the prehistoric, contemporary Aboriginal culture is figured as the long moment of human savagery, Western culture’s deepest roots.

As this tripartite structure makes clear, then, this statue of Phillip is less an historical monument than a monument *to* history, and as such it works not only to construct the category of ‘history’ as the self-privileging

inscription of the coloniser, but also to legitimise a particular *concept* of history: that is, history as the record of signal events, the actuations of great men upon the groundwork of time and space. Within such a concept, where only those 'few privileged monuments'<sup>9</sup> of achievement, those events and figures measurable in bronze and stone, have the capacity to signify, colonised cultures must always remain uninscribed. Their communal practices of quotidian existence, their cultural acts of self-definition and resistance, are written out of the record; and in the process, subjugated peoples are 'troped' into figures in a colonial pageant, 'people without history'<sup>10</sup> whose capacity to signify cannot exceed that which is demarcated for them by the semiotic system that speaks for the colonising culture. On the allegorical plane, then, the monument to Phillip represents the March of History, the inexorable advancement of a universal progress; and significantly, this March finds its purest expression in the territorial acquisition and cultural subjugation implicit in the enterprise of colonialism.

From an aerial view, the statue describes a circle: Arthur Phillip at the centre, his eyes looking searchingly toward the horizon; the Aborigines on the statue's outside wall, their gaze downward, fixed upon the ground. Phillip's gaze encompasses the Aborigines, but their peripheral positioning, along with the angle of their vision, makes it clear that within the system of this statue the Aborigines remain ignorant of him. In this monument to the Imperial presence, the signifiers of gaze represent more than the contrast between benighted ignorance and noble enlightenment. Rather, they encode a third system of representation operating in this statue: that of 'the objectifying gaze of knowledge'.<sup>11</sup> In the logic of the gaze, the percipient constructs that which is 'out there' — individuals, cultures, spaces — into 'units of knowledge',<sup>12</sup> not, primarily, to effect genuine understanding, but rather to effect a subjective construction of Self. The process at work here, in a specifically colonial construction, is not dissimilar to that which some critics see underpinning the practice of pornography, where male viewers inscribe their will onto the bodies of represented women, fixing them to an identity fabricated entirely by masculine desire, and ascribing to them no more than the wish to be subsumed within precisely this gaze.<sup>13</sup> In the imperial context of this statue, that which is Other is 'read' against an already given matrix of identification and learning which erects itself upon the foundations of received tradition — the 'codes of recognition',<sup>14</sup> embedded in the metaphysical, social, and political systems of Western culture — and is made to figure in a system designed primarily to interpellate a subjectivity for the colonising culture itself. There is no gaze outside that of the

coloniser, no angle of vision that opens to a future other than that which the statue, as monument to History, inscribes — unless, of course, it is that of the viewers. But the viewers, in recognising the statue as a semiotic system, and in assembling from the codes it deploys the allegory of Imperial Self, become complicit in the colonising gaze, active participants whose knowledge of Western modes of representation is necessary to the communication of the statue's allegorical meaning. Like the Aborigines figured on the base of the statue, the viewers, too, are constructed by representation.

The social 'text' of Arthur Phillip's landfall recurs in a series of celebratory moments, the most recent being the physical 're-enactment' of the voyage of the First Fleet during the Australian bicentennial in 1988. The patterns of recurrence which operate through this statue, however, are a little confined to a single national history as they are to a specific temporal moment: in fact, both the ideological process this statue enacts, and the allegorical mode of representation through which it conveys that process, work as a kind of shorthand to that widespread form of cross-cultural management which critics such as Homi Bhabha and Peter Hulme identify as the 'discourse of colonialism'.<sup>15</sup> 'Discourse', as Foucault theorises it, is the name for that language by which dominant groups within society constitute the field of 'truth' through the imposition of specific knowledges, disciplines, and values.<sup>16</sup> Discourse, in other words, is a 'complex of signs and practices which organises social existence and social reproduction', and its function is 'to give differential substance to membership in a social group or class' by mediating both 'an internal sense of belonging to that group [and] an outward sense of otherness'.<sup>17</sup> As Foucault puts it, discourse is 'a violence we do to things';<sup>18</sup> it is a 'diffuse and hidden conglomerate of power'; and as a social formation it works to *constitute* 'reality' not only for the objects it appears passively to represent but also for the subjects who form the coherent interpretive community upon which it depends. And so the term *colonial* discourse, or the discourse of colonialism, is the name for that system of signifying practices whose work it is to *produce and naturalise* the hierarchical power structures of the imperial enterprise, and to mobilise those power structures in the management of both colonial and neo-colonial cross-cultural relationships.<sup>19</sup>

This statue to Governor Phillip, then, functions in at least one of its social dimensions as a signifying practice within this discourse of colonialism, and the ideological process it sets in train is that system of repre-

sentation which Gayatri Spivak calls 'othering':<sup>20</sup> that is, the projection of one's own systemic codes onto the 'vacant' or 'uninscribed' territory of the other. By this process, the Other is transformed into a set of codes that can be recuperated by reference to one's own systems of cultural recognition. The unknowable becomes known; and whatever 'spillage' might have occurred in the problematics of racial or cultural difference becomes stoppered by the network of textualization that is inscribed onto the Other and then read as a 'lack' or 'negation' of that which constitutes the Imperial and transcendent One. The Imperial self that engineers this discourse thus fixes the limits of value and signification of the Other to that which takes place within the projected system, and arrogates to (him)self sole purchase on the possibility of organic wholeness. As for the Others, they are determinant in a system of power and self-constitution, elements somewhere 'out there' beyond the circle, awaiting discovery, conquest, appropriation, and interpretation.<sup>21</sup> As one court ruling put it in 1854, the Others of Empire are 'people whom nature has marked out as inferior, and who are incapable of progress or development beyond a certain point ... [people upon] whom nature has placed an impassable difference'.<sup>22</sup>

The statue of Governor Phillip functions as one of the more spectacular allegorisations of this figural system of 'othering', but the investments of allegory in the semiotics of imperialism do not end here. In oversimplified form, allegory can be understood as a mode of representation that proceeds by forging an identity between things, and it reads present events, whatever the signifying system in which they are found, as terms within some already given system of textualised identification or codified knowledge. As Paul de Man points out, allegory consists of semantic *repetition* in a rhetoric of temporality, and within this rhetoric the sign is always grounded to a *another* sign which is by definition anterior to it.<sup>23</sup> In allegory, that is, signifiers from the world 'out there' are semantically fixed to a culturally positioned and historically grounded 'master code' or 'pretext' that is inherent in the tradition and is capable of acting as a matrix for a shared typology between the sign and its interpreters. In allegory, signs are interpreted as modalities of preceeding signs which are already deeply embedded in a specific cultural thematics, and they work to transform free-floating objects into positively identified and 'known' units of knowledge.<sup>24</sup>

That process of recognition which underwrites the statue to Phillip, then, is inherently allegorical, for it depends upon a rhetoric of anterior reference to the metaphysical, political, and social codes that construct the subjectivity of European colonising societies. And this same structure

of allegorical reference and recognition can be seen to have provided an energising impetus to the discourse of colonialism ever since the project of European imperialism began. This, of course, is a point that needs arguing, but to give one example only: when Columbus first arrived in the Caribbean, he named the first two islands he encountered for the Christian deity and the Virgin, and his next three islands for the Spanish king, queen, and heir apparent. The rhetorical structure of this ritual of naming is inalienably allegorical, for here Columbus 'reads' the site of otherness by reference to an anterior set of signs that is already situated within an overarching, supposedly universal, metaphysical and political master code of recognition. As a discursive practice such ritual works in concert with other forms of textual imposition to assimilate the so-called 'New World' into 'orthodox relation' with the religious and political hierarchies of value that comprised the dominant ideology of Europe at the time.<sup>25</sup> Columbus's onomastics help demonstrate, then, that within the discourse of colonialism allegory has always functioned as an especially visible technology of appropriation; and if allegory literally means 'other speaking', it has historically meant a way of speaking *for* the subjugated Others of the European colonial enterprise — a way of subordinating the colonised, that is, through the politics of representation.

This function of allegory in the dominant narrative patterns of imperialist textuality inherently loads the question of how allegory performs in the context of colonial and post-colonial literatures where, as Homi Bhabha points out, the semiotics of Empire so often return in repetitions whose mimicry bears the traces of a menacing difference.<sup>26</sup> Frederic Jameson, in an article entitled 'Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism',<sup>27</sup> has recently addressed the question of how a differential, non-western allegorical practice might establish itself as a social phenomenon, and his site for examining this question is the larger field of third-world textuality. 'What all third-world cultural productions have in common,' Jameson argues, 'and what distinguishes them radically from analogous cultural forms in the first world' is that 'all third-world texts are necessarily ... allegorical, and in a very specific way: they are to be read as what I will call *national allegories*, even when, or perhaps I should say particularly when, their forms develop out of predominantly western machineries of representation, such as the novel.' The reason for this inherent propensity to allegorical writing, Jameson argues, is that in the third world the determining imperatives of capitalism have not (yet) fissured the cohesive structures of social existence and therefore have not



effected their 'radical split' between private experience and the public sphere. Instead, 'the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled structure of the public ... culture and society' in third-world writing, and thus 'the coincidence of the personal story and the «tale of the tribe», as still in Spenser' remains the dominant mode of literary representation.

Jameson admits that his thesis is 'sweeping' in its canvas, but not that it is 'totalising' in its essential binarism, as Aijaz Ahmad wants to argue.<sup>28</sup> Rather, Jameson insists, his thesis is intended to function as an intervention in the institutional purchase of first-world literary criticism, which in a very basic sense has failed to recognise the 'constitutive presence' of narrative allegory in other parts of the world.<sup>29</sup> We need to take on board *relational* ways of 'thinking global culture' and to establish 'radical *situational* difference in cultural production and meanings', Jameson argues, and this thesis of national allegorisation helps perform the work of this structural emplacement in an effective manner. For critical modes of this cognitive relationality can lead on to specific pedagogical improvements in first-world syllabi, which in their present form can neither initiate genuinely dialectical modes of critical cognition nor recognise the presence of cultural and discursive 'third worlds' within their own social formations.

The interventionary project of Jameson's reading is, of course, wholly admirable in its attempt to call down that professional first-world ethnocentrism which most mainstream programmes of literary study continue to endorse at the level of their methodology. But given the prior investments of allegorical figuration in the tropological technologies of Empire, it is hard not to feel that Jameson's argument overprivileges a culturally expressive reading of 'ex-centric' allegorical practice at the expense of a much more immediate energetics of dialects and relationality. Why, for example, should the performative actuations of textual allegory necessarily be fixed to the dominant modalities of allegorical representation that Spenser's poetry and the English tradition so visibly exemplifies? And why should the conditions of discursive relationality or intervention be bound to, or solely enabled by, a first-world pedagogy which, in ascribing expressive status to the non-first-world text, denies the literature of Others its own measure of radical intervention and textual contestation? The historical positionality of allegorical figuration within the discourse of colonialism would suggest another way of reading at least part of the 'text' of allegorical differentiability, one which would require a realignment of the modality of critical access away from the determining structure of the first-world/third-world binary into the problematics of

what might more accurately be called the conditions of post-coloniality. For the fact is that post-colonial cultures — including not only third-world post-colonial cultures such as those in East and West Africa, South-east Asia, or the Caribbean, but also those colonising/settler societies such as anglophone Canada or white Australia and New Zealand<sup>30</sup> — have been and still are producing an enormous number of highly visible allegorical texts, and many of these allegories are *themselves* productive of an interventionary, anti-colonialist critique. In the face of this *literary* form of critical intervention and cultural resistance, then, the project of a radical critical practice might be constituted as something not unlike the close reading of the literary text, except that here the text would be grounded to a specific vector of historical materiality and dialectical positionality. Within such a form of reading, the dynamics of radical critique would inhere not within the avowed methodology of the critical perspective but within the space of post-colonial literary writing itself, and the critic would become no more and no less than a facilitator of the kinds of cultural *work* certain post-colonial allegorical texts inherently seek to perform. The following comments (in their extremely truncated form) are intended to sketch out some of the ways in which such a form of critical practice might functionally proceed.

The Jamaican writer John Hearne, in a review of Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*, writes on the question of why it is that so many post-colonial writers find it necessary to *write back* against literary texts such as Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, which present colonial cultures and characters according to the dictates of anterior, canonical, and specifically European narrative patterns. The validity of Rhys's novel, Hearne notes, 'depends on a *book* from elsewhere, not on a basic, assumed life. And yet,' he continues

is this not a superb and audacious metaphor of so much of West Indian life? Are we not still, in so many of our responses, creatures of books and inventions fashioned by others who used us as mere producers, as figments of their imagination; and who regarded the territory as ground over which the inadmissible or forgotten forces of the psyche could run free for a while before being written off or suppressed?<sup>31</sup>

Hearne's point here is that the actual experience of life in a colonial or post-colonial culture has been, and continues to be, 'written' by the texts of colonial discourse — or in other words, that colonial discourse, through its figurative appropriation of colonial subjects and its inscription of a complex network of textuality upon them, has 'preconstituted' social existence in the marginalised territories of Empire. Hearne's observation thus helps to situate George Lamming's seemingly hyperbolic comment that the one of the three most significant things ever to

happen in the Caribbean Third World was the development of the West Indian novel.<sup>32</sup> Together, these two observations make it clear that the horizon of figuration upon which a large number of post-colonial literary texts seek to act is this prefigurative discourse of colonialism, whose dominant mode of representation is that of allegory. And thus allegory, in a dialectical sense, becomes an especially charged site for the discursive manifestations for what is at heart a *cultural* form of struggle. Allegory, that is, becomes an historically produced field of representation upon which certain forms of post-colonial writing engage head-on with the interpellative and tropological strategies of colonialism's most visible figurative technology. Allegory becomes a site upon which post-colonial cultures seek to contest and subvert colonialist appropriation through the production of a literary, and specifically anti-imperialist, figurative opposition or textual *counter-discourse*.

The concept of counter-discourse, as the critic Richard Terdiman explains, begins in that 'present and scandalous trace of an historical potentiality for difference'<sup>33</sup> which in a Derridean sense inhabits all forms of semiotic 'presence' and all complacent or dominant discursive structures.<sup>34</sup> Counter-discourses, that is, inherently situate themselves as 'other' to a dominant discourse which by definition attempts to exclude heterogeneity from the domain of utterance and is thus functionally incapable of even conceiving the possibility of discursive opposition or resistance to it.<sup>35</sup> Counter-discourses thus, as Richard Terdiman puts it, 'read' that which is structurally unable to 'read' them, and the means by which they perform this oppositional 'reading' are always textually specific and always strategically variable.<sup>36</sup>

In the context of post-colonial writing, then, certain literary texts inhabit the site of allegorical figuration in order to 'read' and contest the social 'text' of colonialism, and the ways in which they perform this counter-discursive activity are inherently differential and diverse. Clearly, an adequate critical reading of this form of cultural work would need to proceed at the level of the individual literary text,<sup>37</sup> but the following summary comments may nonetheless help to locate some of the counter-discursive dimensions that characterise post-colonial allegorical practices. In one group of post-colonial allegories, for example, a textual counter-discourse seeks to interrogate those notions of history which colonialism leaves in its wake by reiterating those notions on an allegorical level of signification. Ayi Kwei Armah's 'An African Fable', for example, foregrounds the rape of the coloniser by the colonised and shows how this rape continues into the political sphere of neo-colonialism. Kole Omotoso's *The Combat*, V.S. Naipaul's *Guerrillas*, Armah's

*Why Are We So Blest?*, Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Devil on the Cross*, and Gabriel Okara's *The Voice* provide specific allegorical doublings of cultural rupture and its political consequences, all of which can be traced to the colonial encounter. Gwendolyn MacEwen's *Noman* stories allegorise the New World myth of a country without mythology or memory, while David Foster's *Moonlight* allegorises ironically the pattern of New World capture, appropriation, and settlement. In these texts, allegory functions as a *structurally* counter-discursive principle, for here received notions of history are bracketed off by a literal level of fictional activity and displaced into a secondary level of the text accessible only through the mediation of the primary fictional level. Allegory here foregrounds the fact that history, like fiction, requires an act of reading before it can have meaning. History must be *read*, and read in adjacency to, a fictional re-enactment of it, and this relocation of the received shibboleths of history into the creative and transformative exercise of reading opens a space within which new ways of formulating the past can come into being.

In a related group of post-colonial texts — Hearne's *The Sure Salvation*, for example, Lamming's *Natives of My Person*, or J.M. Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians* — allegorical representation is employed counter-discursively in order to *expose* the investment of allegory in the colonising project and thus to identify allegorical modes of cognition as the enemy of cultural decolonisation. In a variation of this technique, Lamming's *Water with Berries* figures the inescapability of colonial discourse's cultural prefiguration by narrating the entrapment of realistic characters within the allegorical roles of that paradigmatic colonialist text, *The Tempest*. And Susan Swan's *The Biggest Modern Woman in the World* demonstrates how a fictional character attempts and fails to escape her subordinate allegorical role in a national allegory of imperial domination.

Other post-colonial allegories, such as Randolph Stow's *Tourmaline* or Kofi Awoonor's *This Earth, My Brother...*, employ the inherently *excessive* quality of allegorical figuration in order to replace monolithic traditions with the plural typologies which inevitably inhere in cross-cultural situations. This excessiveness can surface as an allegorical carnivalisation of received notions of history, as in Salman Rushdie's novels; while in allegorical texts such as Armah's *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* or Keri Hulme's *The Bone People*, indigenous or pre-contact allegorical traditions engage with, and finally overcome, the kinds of allegorical reading which a universalising European tradition would want to impose. Still other post-colonial allegories, such as Wilson Harris's *Carnival*, attempt to reappropriate allegory from its colonialist archive and deploy it towards specifically differential and heteroglossic structures.

Whatever the specific nature of the counter-discursive strategy, however, all of these post-colonial texts position themselves upon the site of allegorical figuration in order to subvert the codes of recognition which colonial discourse has settled upon post-colonial cultures. They seek to establish the presence of cultural heterogeneity and difference against a dominant discourse that, as Richard Terdiman puts it, 'casts itself and its hegemony as timeless, as transparent, as proof against all corrosion and complication',<sup>39</sup> and they work to *transgress* that discourse by reclaiming one of the representational strategies — allegory — in which it is grounded. Such acts of post-colonial literary resistance function counter-discursively because they 'read' the dominant colonialist discursive system as a whole in its possibilities and operations and force that discourse's synchronic or unitary account of the cultural situation toward the movement of the diachronic.<sup>39</sup> In other words, these post-colonial allegorical texts inherently historicise the conditions of their own possibility and reinstate the sphere of the political as paramount over the individualistic or private by virtue of its discursive productivity within the material condition of post-colonial existence. These texts establish an oppositional, disidentificatory voice within the sovereign domain of the discourse of colonialism, and in doing so they help to open a space upon which the false clarities of received tradition can be transformed into the uncertain ground of cognitive resistance and dialectical reiteration.

That an essay into the question of allegorical writing in post-colonial cultures should begin with a moment in the history of Empire is, in one way, dismaying. It suggests that the kinds of practices operating within a widespread form of post-colonial literary activity are overshadowed by a discourse of Empire, that a measure of determinism continues to mark the literary production of decolonised cultures, and that whatever writers within those cultures might individually feel about cultural and literary traditions, the hand of a constricting and unwanted History holds their creative products firmly in its grasp. But as Derrida notes: 'the movements of deconstruction do not destroy structures from the outside. They are not possible and effective, nor can they take accurate aim, except by inhabiting those structures.'<sup>40</sup> If the kind of critical reading advocated by this essay undermines the essentialist or expressive claim of certain post-colonial allegorical texts, it nevertheless manages to ground this widespread form of literary practice to a refigurative impulse, one committed to cognitive unsettling of those hegemonic and universalist codes of recognition that colonial modes of representation underwrite,

and one invested in the fissuring of those practices and institutions which colonial discourse continues to inscribe onto geographies of difference. For Derrida's observation suggests that the kind of work now going on in a growing body of contemporary, institutionalised theoretical practice — namely, the deconstructive 'reading' of the social text of European imperialism — is *already* going on in post-colonial literary activity, and that the project of a fissuring, deconstructive reading or critique has always underwritten certain figural practices in post-colonial writing. Post-colonial literary writing, that is, can be read not only as literature, but also as a form of cultural criticism and cultural critique: a mode of disidentifying whole societies from the sovereign codes of cultural organisation, and an inherently dialectical intervention in the hegemonic production of cultural meaning.

The specific focus of this paper is allegory, but the logistics of the critical practice it seeks to advocate implicitly suggest that the kind of critical, refigurative activity that operates on the site of post-colonial allegorical writing also operates through other modes of textual disidentification and other markers of semiotic resistance. And if this is so, then one of the projects for a future criticism of post-colonial writing is to learn to read not just the overt thematic declarations of anti-colonial resistance in 'ex-centric' post-colonial writing, but also the counter-discursive investments of post-colonial figuration on the level of genre and mode. For it is through the refigurative, counter-discursive articulations of representational mode and generic structure, as much as through the textual manipulation of plot and character or theme and voice, that post-colonial writing reclaims its text from the dead hand of received tradition and enjoins the project of cognitive liberation; it is *within* the space of historical prefiguration that a differential, contestatory, and genuinely *post*-colonial semiotics actuates through literature in pursuit of political change.

## NOTES

1. James Morris, *Farewell the Trumpets: An Imperial Retreat* (1978; rpt. London: Penguin, 1979), pp. 21-22.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 21.
3. *The Sydney Mail*, 26 June 1897, p. 1360.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 1360.
5. *The Town and Country Journal*, 26 June 1897, p. 12.
6. Angus Fletcher, *Allegory: The Theory of a Symbolic Mode* (Ithaca & London: Cornell Univ. Press), p. 2.

7. See Craig Owens, 'The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism', *October*, 12 (Spring 1980), 68, and Stephen Barney, *Allegories of History. Allegories of Love* (Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1979), p. 311.
8. R.M. Younger, *Australia and the Australians* (Melbourne: Hutchinson, 1970), p. 67.
9. Roberto Ganzáles Echevarría, *Alejo Carpentier: The Pilgrim at Home* (Ithaca and London: Cornell Univ. Press, 1977), p. 259.
10. The phrase is T.S. Eliot's but has been given specific meaning within contemporary historiography by Eric Wolf in his *Europe and the People Without History* (Berkeley, 1982).
11. Liz Gross, 'Speculum Feminarum', *Southern Review*, 20, 1 (March 1987), 97.
12. See Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (1978; rpt. New York: Vintage, 1979), p. 67.
13. Gross, p. 97.
14. The term is taken from Coral Ann Howells, 'Re-visions of Prairie Indian History in Rudy Wiebe's *The Temptations of Big Bear and My Lovely Enemy*', in Shirley Chew, ed., *Re-visions of Canadian Literature* (Leeds: Univ. of Leeds, Institute of Bibliography and Textual Criticism, 1984), p. 62.
15. Useful discussions of the discourse of colonialism are provided by Peter Hulme, *Colonial Encounters: Europe and the native Caribbean, 1492-1797* (London and New York: Methuen, 1986) and in the essays collected in *Europe and its others*, ed. Francis Barker et al., 2 vols. (Colchester: Univ. of Essex, 1985); *Black Literature and Literary Theory*, ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (New York and London: Methuen, 1984); and *Critical Inquiry*, 12, No. 1 (Autumn 1985) and 13, No. 1 (Autumn 1986). See also Paul Brown, '«This thing of darkness I acknowledge mine»: *The Tempest* and the discourse of colonialism', in *Political Shakespeare: New essays in cultural materialism* (Ithaca and London: Cornell Univ. Press, 1985), 48-71. The preceeding reading of the statue of Arthur Phillip relies upon the methodology for cultural critique developed in these publications.
16. Robert Young, Preface to Michel Foucault, 'The Order of Discourse', trans. Ian McLeod, in *Untying the Text: A Post-Structuralist Reader*, ed. Robert Young (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), p. 48.
17. Richard Terdiman, *Discourse/Counter-Discourse: The Theory and Practice of Symbolic Resistance in Nineteenth-Century France* (Ithaca and London: Cornell Univ. Press, 1985), p. 54.
18. Foucault, 'The Order of Discourse', p. 67.
19. Peter Hulme, *Colonial Encounters: Europe and the native Caribbean, 1492-1797* (London and New York, Methuen, 1986), p. 2.
20. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'The Rani of Sirmur' in Francis Barker et al., eds., *Europe and its others*, Vol. 1 (Colchester: Univ. of Essex, 1985), p. 132.
21. See José Rabasa, 'Allegories of the Atlas', in *Europe and its others*, Vol. 2, p. 7.
22. From *People versus George Hall* (1854), cited in R. Valerie Lucas, 'Yellow Peril in the Promised Land: The Representation of the Oriental and the Question of American Identity', *Europe and its others*, Vol. 1, p. 43.
23. Paul de Man, 'The Rhetoric of Temporality', in *Interpretation: Theory and Practice*, ed. Charles S. Singleton (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1969), p. 190.
24. Some recent theoretical work in the area of allegory includes Craig Owens, 'The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism', *October*, No. 12 (Spring 1980), 67-86 and No. 13 (Summer 1980), 59-80; Stephen Melville, 'Notes on the Reemergence of Allegory, the Forgetting of Modernism, the Necessity of Rhetoric, and the Condition of Publicity in Art and Criticism', *October*, No. 19 (Winter 1981),

- 55-92; Paul Smith, 'The Will to Allegory in Postmodernism', *Dalhousie Review*, 62, 1 (1982), 105-22; Joel D. Blac, 'Allegory Unveiled', *Poetics Today*, 4, 1 (1983), 109-26; and Gregory L. Ulmer, 'The Object of Post-Criticism', in Hal Foster, ed., *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays in Postmodern Culture* (Port Townsend: Bay Press, 1983), 83-110. See also Maureen Quilligan, *The Language of Allegory: Defining the Genre* (Ithaca and London: Cornell Univ. Press, 1979); Stephen Barney, op. cit.; and Carolyn van Dyke, *The Fiction of Truth: Structures of Meaning in Narrative and Dramatic Allegory* (Ithaca and London: Cornell Univ. Press, 1985).
25. See Colin Partridge, *The Making of New Cultures: A Literary Perspective* (Amsterdam: Costerus, 1982), pp. 33-34; Tzvetan Todorov, *The Conquest of America: The Question of the Other*, trans. Richard Howard (1982; New York: Harper & Row, 1984), pp. 14-50; and Peter Hulme's chapter on 'Columbus and the cannibals' in *Colonial Encounters*, pp. 13-43.
  26. Homi Bhabha, 'Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse', *October*, 28 (Spring 1984), 125-33.
  27. Fredric Jameson, 'Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism', *Social Text*, 15 (Fall 1986), 65-88.
  28. Aijaz Ahmad, 'Jameson's Rhetoric of Otherness and the «National Allegory»', *Social Text*, 17 (Fall 1987), 3-25.
  29. Fredric Jameson, 'A Brief Reply', *Social Text*, 17 (Fall 1987), 26-27.
  30. For a discussion of how the concept of 'post-colonial' can be engaged in these terms, see Helen Tiffin, 'Commonwealth Literature: Comparison and Judgement', in *The History and Historiography of Commonwealth Literature*, ed. Dieter Riemenschneider (Tübingen: Gunter Narr, 1983), pp. 19-35.
  31. John Hearne, 'The Wide Sargasso Sea: A West Indian Reflection', *Cornhill Magazine*, V, 180 (1974), 325-26. My thanks to John Thieme for directing me to this article.
  32. George Lamming, *The Pleasures of Exile* (1960; rpt. London: Allison & Busby, 1984), pp. 36-37.
  33. Terdiman, p. 343.
  34. See Jacques Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena and Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs*, ed. Newton Garver, trans. David B. Allison (1967; Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1973), pp. 129, 142-43.
  35. Terdiman, p. 77.
  36. Terdiman, p. 77.
  37. See, for example, my 'Post-Colonial Allegory and the Transformation of History', *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, forthcoming in XXIII, 1 (1988); 'Carnival and the Canon', forthcoming in *Ariel*, 19, 3 (July 1988); and 'Within the Domain', forthcoming in *Re-reading Australian Writing*, ed. Kenneth Gelder and Paul Saltzman.
  38. Terdiman, p. 69.
  39. Terdiman, p. 69.
  40. Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: John Hopkins Univ. Press, 1976), p. 24.

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