

least prepare another space that makes visible the fault lines in slogans of the European Enlightenment—nationalism, internationalism, secularism, culturalism—the bulwark of nativism, without participating in their destruction. This, strictly speaking, is de(con)structive pedagogy. Like all good teaching in the humanities, it is hopeful and interminable. It presupposes and looks forward to a future anterior of achieved solidarity and thus nurses “the present.” In the strictest sense, then, (para)logical: morpho-genetic (giving rise to new ways of reading, writing, teaching in the strongest sense), without terminal teleological innovation. Its “present” is a field of value coding, in a sense of “value” that is not logically (but not necessarily chronologically) prior to the economic; the political, the economic, the affective are entangled there.

In the contractual site that held speaker and audience that evening, or in this book, the remaking of history is a persistent critique, unglamorously chipping away at the binary oppositions and continuities that emerge continuously in the supposed account of the real. The cultural politics of repetition are in play with the strategically necessary gesture politics of rupture attendant upon the political independence that is the minimal requirement for “decolonization.” As it happens, generations like “my own” (I could just hear the purist murmur of “essentialism” from theoretically correct friends), straddling the transition, and groups like my own (again!), diasporics circulating within patterns of “internal colonization,” can put one item on the agenda when they speak to a group like “that audience” (again and again!), serious metropolitan radicals, when the speakers belong to the trade of cultural work: I repeat, a persistent unlearning of the privilege of the postcolonial elite in a neocolonial globe.

A false hope, as I now repeat.

How to Read a “Culturally Different” Book

ONE OF THE PAINFULLY slow results of the demand for a multicultural canon is the inclusion of Global English on the college curriculum. The results of this uncertain victory are often dubious, because neither teacher nor student is usually prepared to take the texts historically and/or politically. This chapter is an attempt to walk a conscientious teacher through a limpid novel, R. K. Narayan’s *The Guide*.¹

In the late 1950s, the term “Indo-Anglian” was coined by the Writers’ Workshop collective in Calcutta, under the editorship of P. Lal, to describe Indian writing in English. Although the term has not gained international currency, it is useful as a self-description.

The first question to be asked of a piece of Indo-Anglian fiction is the author’s relationship to the creative use of his or her native language. This question is not identical with that asked by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, referenced in Chapter 1 of this book.

The complexity of Ngũgĩ’s staging of the relationship between English and Gikuyu also involves the relationship between dominant literature and subordinate orature. To draw that parallel in an admittedly asymmetrical way, we should have to consider the millennially suppressed oral cultures of the aboriginals of India. We have not yet seen an Indo-Anglian fiction writer of tribal origin; we are far from seeing one who has gone back to his or her own oral heritage. Indeed, anyone aware of the ruthless history of the expunging of tribal culture from the so-called Indic heritage and the erasure of the tribal paraph—the authenticating flourish above or below the signature—from Indian identity will know that the case is difficult to imagine.

By contrast, literary activity is usually prolific in the mother tongue of the writer of Indo-Anglian prose or poetry. The writer of Indo-Anglian literature might represent this dynamic base of regional public culture as if it were no more than a medium of private exchange or a rather quaint simulacrum of the genuine public sphere. This artificial separation of public and private is, strictly speaking, a cultural class-separation. The relationship between the writer of "vernacular" and Indo-Anglian literatures is a site of class-cultural struggle. This struggle is not reflected in personal confrontations. Indeed, the spheres of Indo-Anglian writing and vernacular writing are usually not in serious contact. By "class-cultural struggle" is meant a struggle in the production of cultural or cultural-political identity. If literature is a vehicle of cultural self-representation, the "Indian cultural identity" projected by Indo-Anglian fiction and, more obliquely, poetry can give little more than a hint of the seriousness and contemporaneity of the many "Indias" fragmentarily represented in the many Indian literatures.

In fact, since the late 1960s, as metropolitan (multi)cultural studies began to establish itself through the good works of the Birmingham School, inaugurated by Richard Hoggart's *The Uses of Literacy* and continued under the able direction of Stuart Hall, the Indo-Anglian writer began to acquire and transmit an increasingly "postcolonial" aura of cultural self-representation.² How does international cultural exchange of this sort operate? This question should be kept alive, not answered too quickly. A too quick answer, taking the novels as direct expressions of cultural consciousness, with no sense of the neocolonial traffic in cultural identity and the slow and agonizing triumph of the migrant voice, would simply see them as repositories of postcolonial selves, postcolonialism, even postcolonial resistance.

However difficult it is to fix and name the phenomenon, one might consider it carefully because its tempo is so different from the boomerang-effect of the cultural shuttle in fully telematic (computerized and video-graphic) circuits of popular culture. Consider merengue in New York: the artists are in Santo Domingo, the market is supported by the Dominicans in New York, and the trend changes from the original "pure" strain as fast as you can count. Consider Rap in South Africa, where the singers themselves acknowledge American influence, and remark on how African the U.S. groups sound; the South African newscaster considers this a cultural re-appropriation of what originated in Africa; and the U.S. group compliments the South African group on being so comprehensible in English, of having so little "African accent." Consider the Chicaricano "border art" of the Mexican artist Guillermo Gomez Peña that we discuss in "Teaching for the Times," Chapter 6 in this book.

The only Indo-Anglian postcolonialist novel in this telematic tempo is Shashi Tharoor's *The Great Indian Novel*, inspired by Peter Brook's *Mahabharata*, which prompted the author to read the *Mahabharata* for the first time, in its condensed English version as the play-script for Brook's production of the epic.³ The novel is an amusing verbal comic-strip series superimposing the struggle among the great nationalists of the Indian Independence Movement upon the family feud at the heart of the ancient epic. Translation is immediate here. *Maha* is literally "great" and *Bharata*, all complexities of history and geography forgotten, can be taken as identical with the contemporary (Hindi) name for India. *Maha-Bharata* = Great India; the postcolonial politicians' fantasy to make the present identical with the hallowed past, and thus win votes for a politics of identity at degree zero of history.

This example remains an anomaly. The spoof is inaccessible to the international readership of Commonwealth literature. And the Indo-Anglian novel is simply not a part of "popular" culture on the subcontinent, whether global "kitsch" or indigenous "folk." To think of the Indo-Anglian novel, even in its aggressively postcolonial manifestations as "popular," is to think of *Sons and Lovers* as a novel of the international working class. The tragedy (or the bitter farce?) of *The Satanic Verses* is that, precisely through electoral manipulation in India, it became available to, though not read by, the "people" of whom it spoke.

By contrast, the general tempo of two-way traffic in the course of change in the Indo-Anglian novel in India and in its readership, institutional or otherwise, is less tractable. The change that we begin to notice in the early 1970s is an exuberantly mocking representation of the native language. In the wake of swiftly changing global cosmopolitan identities riding like foam on waves of diversified diasporas, what was an upper class, upwardly mobile, or upwardly aspiring private relationship to a vernacular in national peripheral space is literally "re-territorialized" as the public declaration of ethnic identity in the metropolitan space of the newish migrant writer, borrowing his or her discursive strategy from the field prepared for the new immigrant by the only slightly less new.⁴ Although *The Satanic Verses* might be the classic case of this, the landmark text, before the preparation of its readership, is Desani's *All about H. Hatterr*, a virtuoso novel where "English" attempts to claim its status as one of the Indian languages (belonging to a national underclass) through the technique of sustained literal translation of the vernacular rather than islands of direct monstrous speech in a sea of authorial Standard English.⁵

Writers like R. K. Narayan (Nayantara Schgal, Kamala Markandeya, Ruth Prawer Jhabwala, Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao, et al.) pre-date this

hyperreal scramble for identity on the move.⁶ The “internal evidence” for this is the stilted English of the dialogue in their novels, whenever it happens between the rural or underclass folk they often choose to represent, and of the representation of the subjectivity of such characters in so-called indirect free style.⁷ The situation of the underclass, or rural characters, or yet of the language of indirect free style, is dealt with quite differently in the vernaculars. With this earlier group of reportorial realist writers, then, one must be especially aware of the relationship with the vernacular.

The group started publishing fiction in English well before Indian Independence in 1947. Narayan’s first book, *Swami and Friends*, was published in 1935. The emergence of a mode of production of identity recognizably “postcolonial” by a younger group meant a setting wild of the private space of the mother tongue. Negotiated political independence set this earlier group adrift, away from the current from which the postcolonial monstrous would emerge. They became novelists of the nation as local color, the nostalgic rather than the hyperreal.

The representation of the temple dancer in *The Guide* stands out in this miniaturized world of a nostalgia remote from the turbulence of postcolonial identity. The story, given in flashbacks, in between an autobiography, in the book’s present, of the male lead released from prison and sheltering in an imageless temple, to a devotee who authenticates his felicity as a saint, can be summarized as follows:

With the coming of the railway station, Raju’s father’s shop moves up in class. With his father’s death, Raju is able to respond to this upward move. He becomes not only a railway store owner but also a flashy and resourceful guide of conducted taxi tours of local beauty spots. On such a tour he meets Rosie/Nalini, daughter of a temple dancer (henceforth *devadāsi*—female servants of the Lord), the dancing in her blood strictly suppressed, first by a personal ambition that prompts her to take a master’s degree in Political Science, and second by an archaeologist/art historian husband. Raju the Guide seduces her, she comes to live with him, his mother leaves home with his scandalized uncle, he makes immense amounts of money by setting her up as a dancer and being her agent, and he goes to jail for forging her signature in order to prevent re-establishment of contact between herself and her husband. She disappears from the scene. After a brief stint in prison, he emerges and takes shelter in the temple. He attracts one follower and then, as a result, an entire village full of devotees. When he is urged to fast and stand knee-deep in water for twelve days to end a regional drought, he starts telling his story to Velan, his follower.

The novel is not arranged in this straightforward way. It begins with Raju talking to Velan in the temple. We are not aware that the account is a confession, for two contradictory motives bleed into each other: avoidance of the hardship of fast and penance, and avoidance of “enforced sainthood.”⁸ We only know these motives toward the end of the book. In the meantime, some of the chapters begin to move out of the frame narrative as regular flashbacks. To put it in code, the reader begins to say “yes” to Raju’s past by inhabiting the roguish personality of a past character so unlike the present. That is the historically established power of the indirect free style of storytelling. The reader does not have to exercise his mind to get used to experiment. When the story makes no difference to Velan, the reader can say “yes” to that indifference as well.

(Given primitive distinctions such as first world—third world, self-other, and the like, I tend to classify readers by slightly less crude stereotypes. In that spirit, and in the strict interest of decolonizing the imagination, let it be proposed that, for the metropolitan reader or teacher reading or teaching Commonwealth literature, the limpid local color prose of this style is quite satisfactory. For the rather special Indian readership of Indo-Anglian fiction, this class-distanced hyperreal is also satisfying, perhaps because it conveys a cozy sense of identification at a distance, thus identity-in-difference. The person who reads “popular” vernacular literature for fun will not read *The Guide*. The reader of “high” vernacular literature will, if she reads English literature with her antennae up, be dissatisfied with the “subjectivity” opened up by the free indirect style, precisely because the limpid prose would seem a bit “unreal,” a tourist’s convenience directed toward a casual unmoored international audience.)

Narayan tells us that the novel was written in a hotel room in Berkeley, California. There is a sizable literature of displaced writers writing from abroad in the various vernacular literatures. *The Guide* has no need to make use of that convention. To classify readers in this way is a denial of contingency, which seems a particular loss when talking about literature. Deconstruction has taught us that taking contingency into account entails the immense labor of forging a style that seems only to bewilder.⁹ If literary study is to work with established metropolitan colonial history, it seems best that one stay with the outlines of rational agency and give a hint of postcolonial heterogeneity according to the impoverished conventions of mere reasonableness.

This fake saint then becomes a sacrifice. To what? Faith is not, after all, reasonable. And the line between virtue and the sustained simulation

(making something happen by insisting it is so) of virtue is hard, perhaps finally impossible, to fix. So the book can suggest, in the end, that perhaps Raju is a miracle-worker, after all: "Raju opened his eyes, looked about, and said, 'Velan, it's raining in the hills. I can feel it coming up under my feet, up my legs—' He sagged down" (p. 220). A nice bit of controlled indeterminacy there, resting upon one of the most firmly established European cultural conventions: transition from Christian psychobiography to Romantic Imagination.¹⁰

(In a broader field it is seen as the transformation of Christianity into "secular" ethics, theology into philosophy. Michel de Certeau and Michel Foucault have, among others, speculated about the relationship between these changes and the turn to capitalism.¹¹ The dominant Hindu "colonial subject" in India came to terms with his Hinduism with the help of the epistemic trick allowed (often clandestinely) by this shift. At the colonial limit, sacred geography thus became an interior landscape. The problem of irrational faith was interiorized into allegory in the narrowest possible sense. Religion as cultural allegory allowed the Indo-Anglian writer of the first phase to produce an immediately accessible "other" without tangling with the problem of racism or exploitation. Raja Rao is perhaps the most striking example of this.)

In the literary history of Britain, one reads this transition or transformation by way of the nineteenth-century project of re-writing Milton: by Blake, Wordsworth, Shelley. In Wordsworth's "Hail to thee, Urania!" Imagination is supposed at last to be triumphant.

Alas, this high register, where literary production is in the same cultural inscription as is the implied reader, cannot be employed for the epistemic ruses of the colonial subject. No Indo-Anglian writer of Narayan's generation can speak of his education in English literature without self-irony, however gentle. Narayan offers a vividly ironic account of his own education in English literature in chapters four, five, and six of his *My Days: A Memoir*. It would be difficult to imagine from this book that his conversations with his grandmother and the street-people might have taken place in his native Tamil. "Thus ended one phase of my life as a man of Madras; I became a Mysorean thenceforth."¹² This meant a bilingual move—from Tamil to Kannada—for an adolescent. Can one surmise that the bilingualness of the move was not significant for largely English-speaking Narayan? Of course, from this memoir or indeed, from the self-contained small-town world of *The Guide*, one would not be able to guess either that Tamil has one of the longest continuous literatures in India, and that both Tamil and Kannada were active in literary production and experimentation at the time of the writing of *The Guide*.¹³ For example, the

literary and cultural-political universe inhabited by Anantha Murthy, the Kannadese novelist, is at many removes of "concreteness" in terms of the weaving together of the fabric of national identity, torn from end to end in the current conjuncture. Native readers of Tamil and Kannada literature suggest that there might have been a surreptitious and unacknowledged one-way traffic between Indo-Anglian writing produced by Tamilian and Kannadese writers and the vernacular literatures in this case. This writer, whose mother tongue is neither, cannot vouch for this judgment without extensive research, although she is au courante in her own.

In Narayan's own estimation at least, the novel's core is the predicament of the male lead.¹⁴ Rosie/Nalini is therefore merely instrumental for the progress of the narrative.

My method of considering this instrumentality will be "allegorical" in the most ordinary sense (one-to-one correspondence, as we used to say), or semiotic in the most formulaic way (this "means" that). This may be the only way in which the literary critic can be helpful for the study of culture and, for the historical study of the aftermath of colonialism and the postcolonial present. It is an enabling limitation, a *découpage* for the sake of the disciplines.¹⁵

~~Rosie/Nalini is, then, the remote instrument of Raju's enforced sanctity. How does Narayan represent her so that the narrative of Raju's transformation may be revealed? Let us notice, first of all, that she is absent at the actual transformation, the present of the frame narrative. She is only instrumental in getting him to jail. Release from that chain of events, release from imprisonment, is release into the road to sanctity.~~

~~The story is not just a boy-girl story, however. It is also a decently muted tale of access to folk-ethnicity (protected by that nice indeterminacy already mentioned). Here the main burden of the frame narrative is that Raju transforms Rosie into Nalini or lotus. But that is represented as an inauthentic entry into folk-ethnicity. The author makes clear that that attempt was the vulgarization of culture in the interest of class-mobility. Raju transforms Rosie into Miss Nalini, and, as her impresario, becomes besotted by his access to money and the attendant social power. Within the miniature field of Indo-Anglian fiction this authorial judgment is the celebration of tradition over modernity that its readership can devoutly endorse, at a tasteful distance. And, since Raju's obsession interferes with his obsessive love for Rosie, it resonates on the boy-girl register as well. It is by a neat and accessible irony that his forgery, prompted by "love" (he wants to keep Rosie from further contact with her husband), is mistaken for "love of money."~~