

Imperial Entanglements and Literature in English¹

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Abstract

Britain's imperial involvement has been extremely problematic for the people affected by them over the centuries but it has also been mostly productive for literature in English. Whether in mainstream English literature or the literatures written in English in the once colonised regions, works of lasting value have been created right from the time England began to acquire an overseas empire in the seventeenth century through its consolidation in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and eventual dismantling in the twentieth century. This paper traces the impact of the acquisition and consolidation of the British empire on creative writing in the English language over the centuries and till decolonisation began. It goes on to show, too, how decades after the end of the empire both British writers and non-British writers from the decolonised regions are continuing to use the English language effectively to write imaginatively about issues directly or indirectly connected to the rise and fall of the British empire and its lingering presence in our time.

Keywords

Imperialism and literature in English, colonial and post-colonial encounters, literature of the contact zone, South Asian literature in English, neo-imperialism, diasporic literature

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It may be difficult to ascertain exactly when British imperialism began to impact on literature in English, but it is certain that English writers started to project the possibilities of empire-building as well as record the stresses associated with it imaginatively at least as early as the seventeenth century. One can locate in Francis Bacon's writings, for example, the strong impulse to annex and control overseas territories; he thinks of using them to sustain and expand English power and treats them as the locus for control and conquest over people and places. Whether in his philosophic disquisitions on science, knowledge and power or in his essays into the "useful" arts, Bacon showed that his mind was constantly preoccupied over the thought of extending his country's dominion not only over nature but also unclaimed or even uncharted extra-European spaces and unconquered men and women living in distant lands.

In the first book of Bacon's *Novum Organum* we can thus find him extolling men who "labour to extend their own power of their country and its dominion over men" (114). Stimulated by the wind of discoveries of new continents that were blowing over the mindscape of European intellectuals, he urges in his essay, "Of Plantations," the need for schemes of rational expansion and programmed exploitation of the "new" world. Step by step, he details how the plantation should advance: through sending professionals who will know what to plant and when; through steps taken for the efficient exploitation of the land; and through proper administration of the overseas territories of an island empire. He writes about where to set up the plantations, how to deal with the natives, and even when to send in the women to further people the land. In "Of Empire," another of his essays, Bacon the political philosopher provides the rationale for expanding Britain's dominions through colonial wars, especially against Spain. Resorting to (science) fiction as well as discursive prose in *New Atlantis*, he creates a utopia discovered by the sailors of a ship blown off course in the South Seas, an island full of riches which provides him with the perfect pretext for linking knowledge and power and for "the enlarging of the bounds of Human Empire, to the effecting of all things possible" (351).

At about the same time as the greatest of seventeenth century English philosophers, his exact and no less luminous contemporary William Shakespeare was showing through the theatre how acts of imperial domination could and would lead to problematic and fascinating entanglements in newly annexed settings. In *The Tempest* (c.1610-11), the brilliant and scientifically inclined Prospero takes over an island in the new world through superior knowledge in a manner which would have no doubt gained the endorsement of Bacon; unfortunately for Prospero, however, he has to deal with Caliban, son of the original owner of the island, Sycorax who he had displaced. Caliban's resentment at Prospero's annexation of the island and bitterness at the enslavement of his mother and himself, that is to say, the original inhabitants, lead to intemperate outbursts and repeated gestures of rebellion. Taught the language of the usurper by his daughter Miranda, Caliban will only resort to denunciation,

“You taught me language, and my profit on’t/ Is, I know how to curse. The red plague rid you/ For learning me your language” (I, ii, 362-64).

The coloniser, for his part, knows that his empire depends on his utilisation of the colonised in setting up his empire. As Prospero tells Miranda, “We cannot miss him; he does make our fire/ Fetch in our wood, and serves in offices that profit us” (I, ii, 311-13). However, their acquaintance with the rebellious and irascible slave means that neither Prospero nor Miranda can relax fully in the island; Prospero is prone to intemperate outbursts and Miranda expresses her abhorrence of Caliban forcefully; the idea of rape is articulated and two kinds of violation are implied: of the land once owned by Caliban’s family and the body of Prospero’s daughter. Clearly, the colonial encounter is a problematic one and fraught with tension since both coloniser and colonised are bruised in their souls by their conflictual relationships.

The Civil War that dominated the English political and cultural scene at that time meant that the mid-seventeenth century saw little by way of colonial engagements on the part of Englishmen except in North America. After the restoration, however, and especially towards the end of the century, the Bacon-inspired Royal Society, resurgent and newly sanctioned trading companies, as well as a more settled and confident English administration once again began to patronise and promote further colonial ventures. Inevitably, new incursions outside Europe and the seemingly endless prospects of colonisation meant that the time had come once more for intrepid Englishmen and women to engage themselves imaginatively in these ventures through their writings. The results could be seen, increasingly, and particularly, in the prose fiction of the period.

Aphra Behn’s *Oronooko or, the Royal Slave* (1688) heralds both the rise of the English novel and the renewed British interest in empire and the consequent excitement, tension and moments of apprehension occasioned by new opportunities for colonisation as well as the risks associated with such ventures. In addition, it registers the traumas associated with forcible occupation of bodies and of overseas places. Basing her fictional account of the Dutch colony of Surinam on her own stay there, Behn creates in the novel, on the one hand, a resource-rich territory that is being developed through using slave labour and, on the other, a place where racism, physical violence, and exploitation are rife. At the end of the novel we are even made to view the kind of “frightful Spectacles of a mangled king” (77) that became endemic in the initial stages of conquest and colonisation.

The point to be noted in this paper, though, is how imperial entanglements contributed to the birth and consolidation of prose fiction in general and the novel in particular. It can be reinforced by discussing Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), a work which displays the hero as a successful coloniser, someone who masters and appropriates an unclaimed piece of space through the use of his rational faculties. Once on the island, Crusoe demonstrates again and again how nature can be mastered through observation, right reason and the experimental approach. As any

reader of this book and its sequel will discover, he eventually ends up as the owner of a flourishing plantation-colony peopled by reformed convicts and cannibals, morally reclaimed white men and domesticated Carib slaves, all motivated to work for their “governor.” Crusoe, from this perspective, can claim to be the owner of the island in the short view and a representative of the nascent British empire in the long run. Indeed, he is the archetypal English imperialist, an exemplary planter-settler, explorer, valiant defender of his domain and benign master of an ever-increasing number of subjects on behalf of his king and country. But viewed from another perspective, he shows himself to be aggressive, self-centred bloody-minded, voracious, ethnocentric and racist in his treatment of the original users of the island. Whether fantasising about murdering them or actually destroying the cannibals that he encounters, or subjugating and exploiting Friday and his father, Crusoe is a driven, paranoid and power-hungry man, someone who has an authoritarian and insecure side to his personality coexisting with the “rational” and religiously tempered one. Looked at from both perspectives he is the archetypal coloniser. The ambiguity of his portrayal, intentional or not, is also symptomatic of the early classics of imperial fiction: they celebrate expansion and project efficient colonisation but intermittently and at times unwittingly reveal bad faith and guilt.

But if Defoe was ambivalent about certain aspects of colonisation even while loudly proclaiming its virtues in a work like *Robinson Crusoe* as well as countless other non-fictional and fictional volumes, Jonathan Swift, the Irishman whose affiliation with his own people had often been occluded in the early stages of his career, increasingly chose corrosive irony and bitter satire to express his abhorrence of ventures such as the South Sea Company, the brutal suppression of other races and forcible appropriation of their lands by pirates and adventurers, and by officially sanctioned expeditions. Swift denounced projectors – we would call them “consultants” nowadays – and colonial propagandists like Defoe who cooked up schemes for colonisation, and mocked outlandish experiments and explorations sanctioned by the Royal Society in the extra-European world in the name of science and business ventures associated with trading companies. Far-sighted, he foresaw the way scientific knowledge would be abused to oppress and dominate other races and the way speculative capital would lead to degradation of lands and people outside England.

No doubt Swift’s Irishness made him especially percipient about the evils of imperialist schemes in a way that was not possible for an Englishman; it is, surely, no coincidence that he is also the author of bitter anti-colonial works like *Drapier’s Letters* and *A Modest Proposal*. Small wonder then that *Gulliver’s Travels* parodies colonial propaganda masquerading as fiction. It is no coincidence, too, that another Irishman, Oliver Goldsmith, proved also to be critical of the British overseas in a work such as his *An Enquiry into the Present State of Learning* (1759) and depicted the English as domineering and self-centred in his poem *The Traveller* (1764). Similarly, Richard Brinsley Sheridan, also Irish in origin, used his play *Pizarro*

(1799) to dramatise his dismay at the unscrupulous methods adopted by colonialists and to reveal his sympathy for the oppressed. Clearly, being Irish in the eighteenth century gave some British writers an entirely different perspective on imperial entanglements.

To put it somewhat differently, Great Britain's increasingly aggressive imperial policy in the course of the eighteenth century produced major and minor works of literature that took up opposite positions as far as imperialism was concerned. On the one hand were novels like *Robinson Crusoe* and *Moll Flanders* that advocated overseas expansion, colonisation and empire building. On the other was a satire such as *Gulliver's Travels* that underscored the rapacity and brutality associated with the process. Other major writers of the century – for example, Pope in *Windsor Forest* and *The Rape of the Lock* – showed England's preoccupation with global commerce indirectly and registered England's colonising thrusts into the wider world in one way or the other. Minor writers such as James Thomson in his 1744 edition of *The Seasons* ranged over most of the uncolonised parts of the world either to display amazement at new worlds being suddenly revealed to the West or to record the attractions of regions ripe for takeover in the interest of empire. But especially by the close of the century a counter-discourse to empire was evident in American pamphlets against the British presence in their continent. In addition, Edmund Burke and Richard Sheridan took up the cause against Warren Hastings and the East India Company's policy of the conquest of India any which way possible. Burke did so in a series of celebrated speeches arraigning Hastings as well as by authoring a number of reports for parliament, while Sheridan reinforced the same cause by his splendid oratory as well as his plays.

England, as we all know, suddenly woke up somewhere near the end of the eighteenth century and found that it now owned an empire. As some recent scholars have noted, the initial reaction of many English men and women to this fact was positive. They had begun to settle in the burgeoning newly annexed territories and write about the people and places of those newly possessed world enthusiastically. A few even went native and entangled themselves in liaisons that did not seem all that dangerous. William Dalrymple, in his fascinating recent work, *White Mughals* (2002), declares that one only has to read the voluminous letters and memoirs of the early British settlers in India to realise how, “during the period 1770 to 1830, there was wholesale interracial sexual exploration and surprisingly widespread cultural assimilation” (10) in the new provinces of empire. In fact, it is obvious to a student of the phenomenon such as Dalrymple that the British in India were getting promiscuously entangled in a way with the natives that had no precedence. To quote him once more: “reading the letters, diaries and reports of the period, it is as if the participants are improvising their way through problems, prejudices, tensions and emotions that people have simply never experienced before” (10).

Throughout the eighteenth century, then, a tradition of British writing about empire took roots in travel accounts, memoirs, journals and histories; even the

occasional novel began to be written about Britain's overseas possessions. The concept of an Indian empire administered through the East India Company and based in Calcutta had emerged decisively by the end of the century. However, as Kate Telscher has observed in *India Inscribed*, these works ran the gamut from accounts providing "confident narratives of national identity" to works documenting the "anxieties and instabilities" of the colonisers (17).

Not a few of these works produced on the basis of their experience of empire by English men and women resident in the island empire's steadily expanding possessions are well worth reading for their literary qualities as well as their historical importance. An example is Eliza Fay's *Original Letters from India* (1817), a collection of letters this valiant Englishwoman wrote about her travels to India and her extended stay in Calcutta where she tried to make her fortune. Fay's book was picked up by E.M. Forster who saw her as "a work of art" (7) and applauded her for her "vitality" and "brilliant" style. To us it is additionally valuable for recording the racial, imperial and social consciousness of a coloniser in what Mary Louis Pratt has identified in her book on travel writing, *Imperial Eyes*, as a "contact zone." Fay's work is valuable for the originality with which she depicts an Englishwoman encountering cultural "others" in such a zone and her ambivalence about Anglo-Indian as well as Indian life in Calcutta. Her book is intriguing also because of the way she sees aspects of India, including women; it is as if she is often impelled by the hidden recognition of her own vulnerable status as a woman in Anglo-Indian society to record what Pratt has identified in her work as major themes of travel books set in colonial landscapes: "conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict" (6). For sure, the imperial entanglements recorded in a book such as Fay's and analysed in Pratt's scholarly work are fascinating no matter how minor they may appear to be because they invariably reveal the complexity of the colonial encounter throughout the period of colonisation.

Just as English writing began to benefit from the travel writings of English men and women who were reporting about their experience in the outposts as well as the cities of empire, Indians too were beginning to record their impressions about their travels to Britain or their sojourn in the heartland of imperialism. Thus the Indian Sake Deen Mahomet travelled to Ireland and then resettled in England, ultimately publishing *The Travels of Deen Mahomet, a Native of Patna in Bengal, through Several Parts of India* (1794). This is a travelogue that can claim to be the first notable work of South Asian writing in English. Not too long later, Raja Rammohun Roy, who had also travelled to England, began to publish essays in English on topics such as religion and social reform in India in the first decades of the nineteenth century. He also led a campaign by Indians demanding English education for them years before Macaulay's momentous minutes of 1835 argued for the introduction of English to better govern India through English-educated and Western-value laden Indians.

As is often the case, there were several false starts before South Asian writing in English could have a place of its own in the literature considered to be of value in the language. Major Indian poets such as Michael Madhusudhan Dutt and novelists such as Bankim Chandra Chatterjee did try their hands in English but ultimately decided that they would do better in articulating their world through Bengali, their mother tongue. Not surprisingly, the initial output in English for Indians who opted to express themselves in the coloniser's language was meagre and not particularly distinguished. True, the verse of Toru Dutt showed promise and the prose of Swami Vivekananda was inspirational but the works of these nineteenth-century Bengalis did not have a lasting impact at home or abroad. Inevitably, and initially, the earliest writers of the region to make a lasting impression internationally were those who published in the West: Rabindranath Tagore's *Gitanjali (Song Offering)* or Ananda Coomaraswamy's books on the art and craft of India and Ceylon, both works belonging to the early half of the twentieth century. Unfortunately, there were only a handful of such works. This is to say, South Asian Writing in English, one of the lasting legacies of Britain's imperial entanglements, would not become a fixture in our imagination for a while yet.

To go back to purely English literature though, England's overseas empire now began to be represented in its literary and cultural productions only indirectly for the next little while. Edward Said's *Culture and Imperialism* has been valuable, for among other reasons, for focusing on the occlusion of empire in the classics of British literature in the first half of the nineteenth century. As Said has shown, novels like *Mansfield Park* and *Great Expectations* register in their sub-texts the ubiquity of the British empire, although on the surface they have little to say about the consolidation of British rule in the West Indies or Australia during this period. Said notes how "as a reference, as a point of definition, as an easily assumed place of travel, wealth, and service, the empire functions for much of the nineteenth century as a codified, if only marginally visible, presence in fiction" (63). In a parallel development, the British now began to frown on cross-cultural exchanges, assuming the position that East and West did not mix and that fifty years of Europe was better than a cycle of Cathay. In *White Moghuls*, Dalrymple has noted how "the early promiscuous mingling of races and ideas, modes of dress and ways of living" (xli) was soon abandoned in official imperial exchanges by Victorians who had succeeded "in colonizing not only Indians but also, more permanently, our imaginations, to the exclusion of all other images of the Indo-British encounter" for a few decades or so.

By the middle of the nineteenth century, the mood of the writers who were projecting Britain's overseas empire in their writings was upbeat and reflected the nation's increasing confidence in its imperial destiny. South Asia as well as Africa and the South Seas were places, they believed, the British had annexed rightfully and the British literature of the period reflected the nation's belief that it was its mission to control and civilise whole countries and peoples of these regions. This was, of course, the period when the sun was not ever seen to set on Britain's overseas

possessions. For a while, there seemed to be no end to the empire-building proclivities of the British, evident only symptomatically in Defoe's works. The success of their empire appeared to arm the British with notions of racial superiority and a belief in their abilities to shape the world to suit their needs.

British confidence in empire building and about the morality of empire, however, was once more called into question by the "Sepoy Mutiny" of 1857 or what is now known as India's First War of Independence. Ironically, a period that has been characterised by historians as that of "high imperialism," and a phase of British history marked by what Elleke Boehmer has characterised in her "Introduction" to her anthology of colonial writing, *Empire Writing*, as "a more officially expansionist, assertive and self-conscious approach to empire" (xv), became almost concurrently fraught with anxiety, instability, uncertainty, and loss of self-belief. To quote Boehmer again, "in spite of coercive efforts to set up distinct categories and impose racial divisions in the high Victorian era, the post-mutiny cultural productions of empire" once again shows a contact zone that had become activated in a manner where the exchanges between the colonizers and the colonized meant that official policies and "colonial perceptions were being ceaselessly waylaid, sidetracked, interrupted, and unsettled by countervailing perceptions and impulses" (xxiv).

As the English got more and more entwined in their Indian empire in ways that they had not anticipated, and as Indian resistance to the English presence began to increase by the end of the nineteenth century, the tone of British writing on India changed noticeably. The optimism to be found in an early settler like Eliza Fay or the complacency of mid-century novelists who were interested in India mainly as a place where fortunes were made or where the British went to do missionary work would now give over to the insecurities registered in Kipling's Indian writing at the close of the century.

Kipling's early verse and short fiction reveal the sense of strain he shared with his fellow Anglo-Indians upset by the launching of the Indian National Congress in 1885. It is certainly no coincidence that the disquieting story, "The Strange Ride of Morrowbie Jukes," was published in the same month in which the Indian National Congress was holding its inaugural session: it registers vividly not only the kind of recurring nightmare induced in the British by the long shadow cast by the Sepoy Mutiny but also apprehensions about what India would be for Anglo-Indians if Indians were allowed even token measures of democracy. Kipling and his friends were convinced that the triumph of Lord Ripon's liberal policy and consequent Indian self-rule would spell doom for them and the empire and his bitterness at reform-minded English administrators and usurping Indians are quite apparent in the verse, sketches and fiction he wrote at this time.

"The Strange Ride of Morrowbie Jukes" can thus be seen as one of the works that inaugurated the penultimate phase of the English literature that developed from England's imperial entanglements. It is a phase that centres on anxious depiction of the contest over the distribution of power that had begun in the empire. The contact

zone now became a site of increasing conflict, whether easily observable in overt protests or discernible only through the fissures of resentment in everyday politics. Even in a work as mellow in mood as *Kim* (2001), bathed as it is in imperial nostalgia, and written out of the unshaken conviction of its author that the British should be governing India because it was theirs by right, and tempered with the genuine affection the Anglo-Indian writer had for the land of his birth, one can discern the Sepoy Mutiny disturbing the equilibrium of the narrative. The violence associated with the event is recounted by a loyal Indian subaltern in the novel as a kind of madness that swept over some Indian soldiers, albeit only to bring out the best in a faithful soldier like him. Similarly, Hurree Babu's drunken outburst which leads him to become "thickly treasonous" and makes him speak "in terms of sweeping indecency of a government which had forced upon him a white man's education and neglected to supply him with a white man's salary" (316) disturbs the comic mode of the story, though we are supposed to smile at the Babu's inability to stay sober and though he is meant to be continuously deflated because of his ape-like imitation of his English masters and their habits and interests and his incapacity to fully digest their knowledge and mores.

The truth is, Britain's imperial entanglements had by the turn of the century made thinking Brits nervy and pessimistic and unthinking ones cocky but equally edgy. In Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1902), for instance, a gloomy Marlow reminisces in the imperial London setting of the novella about his traumatic experience in the outposts of Congo in a manner that reflects bafflement about the mess associated with imperial ventures and anguish at the unforeseen consequences of empire building. The perplexity of thinking Englishmen about the muddle created by the nation's imperial entanglement can also be seen in E.M. Forster's *A Passage to India* (1924) and George Orwell's *Burmese Days* (1934), in scenes where British men and women discuss their future or in the representations of the tense interactions of the ruling class and the ruled in India and Burma. It is clear from these novels that governing increasingly restive races had become quite upsetting for white people who could sense the intensity of Indian emotions about the tyranny of foreign rule and sense their impatience with the imperial yoke. The increasing disturbances reported all over the subcontinent and Burma was becoming a reason for intense soul-searching and bewilderment to at least a few of these writers. In "Shooting an Elephant," the classic essay coming out of Britain's imperial imbroglio, we have the mature Orwell remembering ruefully how as a green young police officer he had got himself involved in a senseless act of destruction because of a kind of *sahib oblige*. His shooting of an elephant in Burma, it was apparent to the older man now, was indicative of "the real nature of imperialism" where fear of the "other" unsettles and leads to mindless acts of violence. As for Forster's novel, Benita Parry's conclusion about it in her book *Postcolonial Studies: A Materialist Critique* is worth reproducing: we can recognise through it, she says, "the extent to which both the

textual India of British writing and the empire of British self-representation are disorientated" (175) by this time.

But if the struggle for independence in the subcontinent was a source of disquiet for the British, it was a cause of some hope for South Asians who now began to use the English language not only to register their protest at imperial excesses but also to articulate their aspirations for independence. Key works to be noted here are Gandhi's *Indian Home Rule* (1919, originally written in Hindi but dictated into English by Gandhi himself); Tagore's *Nationalism* (1916) and the essays he wrote such as "The Spirit of Freedom" collected in his *Creative Unity* (1922); Nehru's *Autobiography* (published in 1936 but retitled, significantly, for the American edition of 1941, *Towards Freedom: The Autobiography of Jawaharlal Nehru*) and *The Discovery of India* (1945), and of course, the English speeches of these and other stalwarts of Indian independence. In their works and oratory the coloniser's language was being used effectively not only to write back to empire but also to propel a discourse that would lead to freedom.

The ferment of nationalism also led to the emergence of writers at this time who would truly consolidate South Asian writing as a viable literary tradition within the region. The most outstanding among them are R.K. Narayan, Raja Rao, Mulk Raj Anand and Ahmed Ali, pioneers of the South Asian novel in English. In their works the English language was used creatively and in a sustained fashion for the first time to depict the reality of life in the subcontinent. Inevitably, in the process, the burgeoning nationalist movement also began to be portrayed in South Asian writing in English. To put it somewhat differently, one of the remarkable outcomes of Britain's imperial entwinement is that the English language itself evolved in the pre-independence years into a vehicle for depicting the aspirations of Indians and of the life they wanted to lead as well as the life they were having to live. Narayan's novels, it might be added, and those of Raja Rao and Anand, directly or indirectly depict the stirrings of independence all over the region. They capture a region in ferment and people attempting to break free not only of British rule but also of traditions and conventions that had remained intact for centuries, by embracing Gandhi's ideals.

Although the British were forced to wind up their South Asian empire by 1947 and their African ones by the nineteen fifties, the manner in which Britain had become involved in the wider world because of its imperial policies meant that both the coloniser and the colonised would continue to feel the repercussions of the connections that had been made under duress at an earlier phase of history. As always, literature continued to record imaginatively these repercussions. In Britain, for example, J.G. Farrell's *The Siege of Krishnapur* (1972) seems to have gone back to the Sepoy Mutiny to highlight the moment when the imperial idea received its first major jolt, as if to indicate that a postmortem of the end of empire must focus in the ironic mode on that climactic moment in English imperial history. The novels of Paul Scott look back at the end of empire in *The Raj Quartet* (1966-75) and

fictionalise the immediate aftermath of partition for the English men and women who had stayed behind in a novel like *Staying On* (1977), although perhaps from a too immediate and not sufficiently historical perspective.

Scott's steady stream of novels and the interest that they had aroused in the West, especially through their televised versions, reveal "Raj nostalgia" in a Britain that had lost its empire but could not stop thinking about the loss of the jewels in its crown; obviously, when one gets as involved in another world as did the British, it is impossible to get unstuck totally or leave the past completely behind or refrain from a longing look at national moments of glory. At the level of popular literature, there was thus the fiction of writers like John Masters who had written novels such as *The Nightrunners of Bengal* and *Bhowani Junction* (1954) that also fed the Raj nostalgia. It is this nostalgia that Salman Rushdie targets in the acerbic essay, "Outside the Whale," collected in his *Imaginary Homelands* (1991). Rushdie is scathing both about the relatively highbrow Scott (he will not grant him any kind of vision or class as a novelist and accuses him of retrograde sentiments) and the novels and films of popular culture that created what he dubs "the Raj revival" of the 1980s. As far as Rushdie is concerned, they all produce "false portraits" and stereotypes of the ruler and the ruled of the kind Edward Said had exposed and castigated in *Orientalism* (1978). These, he feels, are designed "to provide moral, cultural and artistic justification for imperialism and for its underpinning ideology, that of the racial superiority of the Caucasians over the Asiatic" (89). In this too, taking his cue from Edward Said's *Orientalism*, Rushdie asserts that Britain's involvement in sustaining empire is far from being over; as he puts it: "there can be little doubt that in Britain today the refurbishment of the Empire's tarnished image is under way" (91). Characteristically caustic, Rushdie concludes his comments on the Raj revival by observing that "the recrudescence of imperialist ideology and the popularity of Raj fictions put one in mind of the phantom twitchings of an amputated limb" (93). We can add in passing that Said for his part also saw a nexus between the revival of imperialism in Britain and the aggressive neo-imperialism of the United States in the same period. Ultimately, it can be said that the culture industry of both countries have been complicit in propagating empire in different ways even in the final decades of the twentieth century; there is, obviously, a lot still at stake in perpetuating images of imperial glory in the postcolonial world.

Rushdie, however, represents some other noteworthy dimensions of England's imperial entanglements. Firstly, he is part of the generation of diasporic South Asian authors who have settled in the West and have used the English language to produce fictional and nonfictional works to write back against empire with a vengeance from its heartlands, as the essay "Outside the Whale" illustrates. Secondly, he shows in his fiction, *a la* Fanon, the pitfalls of the nationalist consciousness, where a set of local tyrants replaces foreign ones after decolonisation. Thirdly, he takes up a key position through his polemical essays and his fiction as the standard bearer of diasporic writing dealing with themes typical of the experience of mass immigration:

loneliness, exile and the experience of expatriation; nostalgia for a lost homeland; continuous ghettoisation for some in the West or eventual assimilation for others in a brave new world. Fourthly, he and writers like him represent the stylistic and formal consequences of the counterflow resulting from Britain's imperial entanglements. Flamboyantly and with great inventiveness, he has demonstrated to a new generation of writers how to wield the English language in distinctive ways to depict the fortunes of South Asian immigrants who began settling in the West in significant numbers from the 1950s. In his seminal *Midnight's Children* (1981) and sections of his hugely controversial *Satanic Verses* (1989) he pioneered what the critic Michael Gorra has characterised in his book *After Empire: Scott, Naipaul, Rushdie* as a kind of "linguistic pluralism" that reflects a polyglot world. Fifthly, he has shown in his depictions of Bombay and London in these works how in both the imperial centres and the once colonised parts of the world, identities have become "multiple, overlapping, conflicting" (Gorra 121). Which is to say, the relations between Britain and South Asia, or the imperial centre and the provinces of empire appear to have been disturbed forever to an extent that neither the colonised nor the coloniser can remain unaltered or indifferent to the plurality, hybridity and impurity engendered by imperial entanglements. Finally, in his restlessness and continuous crisscrossing of boundaries, Rushdie illustrates how in the postimperial world the ordinary act of travelling across the globe to annex and exploit another world and the consequent counterflow of colonial citizens or newly decolonised people to the imperial centre has resulted in the emergence of a new breed of restless cosmopolitan postcolonial writers whose fate it seems to be to move back and forth across the globe to create texts that are woven out of the experience of displacement and loss. Kiran Desai's recent Booker Prize-winning novel, *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006), reaffirms the strengths of this tradition and also the continuing depressing consequences of colonialism in the subcontinent and the movement of populations back and forth consequent to it.

Perhaps the most surprising consequence of Britain's imperial entanglements for English literature has been that a new generation of writers has also emerged in the once colonised world of Asia and Africa who have opted to use the English language not to *write back* to the centre but to *write about* everyday life in the Subcontinent while staying there. Building further on the tradition consolidated by the likes of Narayan and Anand, these writers have begun to treat themes such as the endemic poverty of the region, class and caste prejudice as well as patriarchal injustice. They have focused on the underprivileged, marginalised or abused communities. Paradigmatic of such works is Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997), which is, of course, another Booker Prize winning novel. In complete contrast is the work of a writer like Upamanyu Chatterjee who in his brilliant *English August: An Indian Story* (1988) depicts the alienated consciousness of the English-speaking elite either cut off from mainstream life or in ironic embrace of it.

Clearly, no matter how problematic Britain's imperial involvement has been for the people affected by them over the centuries, it has been mostly productive for literature in English. Whether in mainstream English literature or the literatures written in English in once colonised regions, works of lasting value have been created right from the time England began to acquire an overseas empire in the seventeenth century through its consolidation in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and eventual dismantling in the twentieth century. But what, surely, is most remarkable is that even in a new century and decades after the end of the empire, both British writers and non-British ones from decolonised regions are continuing to use the English language effectively to write imaginatively about issues directly or indirectly connected to the rise and fall of the British empire and its lingering presence in our time.

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