

“Carnival” and the Canon

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THE OBSERVATIONS on the question of allegory that Wilson Harris makes in the preceding interview, and elsewhere in his prose writing,¹ suggest that all of his fictions — and not just *Carnival* — can fruitfully be read in relation to the tradition of allegorical thought and representation, especially in regards to the way in which the imaginative reworking of this canonical literary mode can actuate a “re-visioning” of history and thus initiate real change to those conditions of “frustration, anguish, jealousy, and violence” that occur everywhere in the post-colonial world. They also suggest a number of possibilities for reading *Carnival* itself; and in the following comments I want to situate one such reading in relation to the broader question of fictional reinscription and its political implications. My concern here is to examine the text’s own critical act of “reading” a work of literature, and to locate that reading within a wide-spread practice of discursive resistance that goes on across the post-colonial cultures. Such an approach, of course, overlooks many of the interview’s most interesting lines of inquiry; but Harris has always run miles ahead of his critics, and interviews such as the preceding one can perhaps best be seen as exercises in which Harris trains his readers in the art of speaking his own unique vocabulary. They are of a piece with his fictional output — in speech, as in writing, Harris’s narratives always escape closure.

The action of *Carnival* centres around the psychic journey of its narrator Jonathah Weyl, who under the guidance of his “interior guide” Everyman Masters travels back in time from his present-day domicile in the imperial centre, London, into the

"Inferno" of Guyanese History in the 1920s. He there witnesses a series of actions, each of which portrays emblematically one way in which the colonial encounter can be allegorized, but each of which, in itself, provides an inadequate "reading" of colonial history and the investments of power within it. To use the language of the novel itself, each separate action constitutes a "frame" within which at least two kinds of meaning operate. In the first instance, there is an absolutist and blinding meaning that "conscripts the imagination" (70) and binds the characters to some kind of overwhelming pattern of perception — fear, desire, anger, and so on — that seems imposed from an outside source. But behind this, there is a second kind of meaning that teases itself into the interstices of the narrative and that can be "glimpsed through barred gate and segmented mask" — the kind of meaning the text associates with the concept of "Carnival evolution" (41). Here, "sovereign" forms of perception that inhere in the hierarchical structures of tradition are shown to contain decentring or fissuring impulses that can erupt into consciousness and thus liberate vision from its material restraints into the imaginative reaches of what Harris calls "a kind of far viewing" (163). The two kinds of meaning are in dialectical relation to one another, each exerting pressure on the kinds of meanings Weyl, Masters, and the characters within the tableau-like episodes will derive; and because the two levels of meaning can never come together, there always remains a slippage of signification which engenders new characters, new episodes, and new meanings as the narrative proceeds. The pattern of the novel is thus incremental, each frame in the narrative generating new patterns of association that qualify the meanings of the preceding frames, and each in turn being modified and disrupted by the frames that develop out of it.²

The opening sequence of the journey back, for example, depicts the threatened rape of the "boy king" Everyman Masters (20) and his cousin Doubting Thomas by the "false shaman" of Memory on the "Orinocoque" (18) mudflats of Guyana's foreshore — the site of intersection between imposed and indigenous mythic traditions. The episode is too complicated to discuss in detail here, but in simple form it allegorizes the "rape" of colon-

ized cultures in the imperial encounter and deals with the psychic conditions that a history of violent imposition promulgates in colonized peoples. Such an allegorical reading is necessary to this scene, but even as the text implants this level of reading it works to undermine the cognitive processes that sustain it by breaching action and interpretation with a sense of "radical" difference (29). Weyl's cultural uncertainty, for example, becomes refracted through Masters into the episode he is witnessing, and Doubting Thomas, who allegorizes the condition of colonial ambivalence, flees from the scene and this shock of uncertainty, running inland towards the market-place where he collides with a market-woman carrying a basket of eggs — an action which produces *another* allegorization of colonial violence and the collision of cultures. Meanwhile Masters, physically in flight from "Memory's male persona" (24) but thematically in flight from the temptation to accept the allegory of cultural rape as "the absolute original" (25) of Caribbean cultural identity, races towards his mother. But instead of finding comfort there, he finds himself looking *through* her glass side into the colonial condition of cross-culturalism, a condition she experiences as a debilitating, annihilating access of humiliation. The "glass mother," as Memory's female persona, is in the process of considering whether or not to abort her illegitimate child of mixed race; and in this moment the colonial encounter becomes framed once again into an allegorical tableau; this time, as the reading of post-colonial culture as illegitimate, and as inchoate and unrealized in its cultural possibilities. And so on, throughout the text. In every one of the novel's many episodes, "multiple perspectives" (36) on the question of post-colonial identity come into play; an "absolute or sovereign" reading (48) is advanced, only to be undermined by a form of cognitive slippage that reveals the allegorical image to be at best partial. And in apprehending this partiality, the novel's readers are led to see through the side of historical determinism and "the bias of ageing institutions" (48) into "the potential that has always been there for mutual rebirth within conflicting, dying, hollow generations" (49). This potential for "far viewing" rebounds back on the kinds of finalist or absolutist allegorical readings the text catches us making, and thus our own acts of reading

become implicated within the transformative operations of the novel's dialectical pattern. In reading *Carnival* we are, as Harris says, both "within and without" the narrative—a situation which is itself an allegory for the condition of post-colonial cultures in relation to centrist concepts of history and the "phenomenal legacy" of tradition's ruling codes of recognition.

The process of reading, then, is precisely what *Carnival* is about. On the level of narrative, Weyl and Masters spend a great deal of time discussing the significance of allegorical episodes so that thematically, the narrative is marked by the same kind of development that has traditionally characterized allegorical works: the incremental advancement of the protagonist's education, represented here by Weyl's developing capacity to "read" or interpret the scenes he is led to witness. And on the performative level of the text, the kinds of interpretation the novel's readers must make—and unmake—become part of the base material upon which the narrative seeks to effect its "transformative scale." This dialectic of reading, clearly, has important implications for the kinds of interpretation *Carnival* seems to require (Slemon, "Revisioning Allegory"), but the question I want to consider here concerns the kind of "reading" that this text, itself an exercise in interpretation, works to perform. For whatever else it does, *Carnival* also sets out to provide an historically positioned and ideologically motivated "reading" and rewriting of Dante's *Divine Comedy*, its mode of narration reflecting Dante's allegorical language, its imagery continually evoking the Dantean "pretext,"³ and the structure of its action repeating in the decentred world of twentieth-century colonial displacement Dante's journey through the Inferno, Purgatorio, and Paradiso under the guidance of Virgil and, later, Beatrice.

Structurally, *Carnival's* rewriting of Dante's master narrative traces Weyl's progress through the Inferno of the colonial condition across a purgatorial sea-crossing from New World to Old, and it resolves in an image of paradisaical *coniunctio* in which Masters (like Virgil) departs, giving Weyl over to a Beatific vision that can potentially effect redemption within the fragmented colonial world. In the first instance, then, *Carnival* represents an attempt by Harris to draw on allegory's traditional

capacity to effect transformation through the agency of the informed imagination;⁴ but dialectically, such an impulse needs to be bracketed against allegory's historical investment in an absolutist "frame" of identification — that rigid hierarchy of culturally situated values that has served the imperial enterprise so effectively in providing a means by which the material conditions of all sorts of "exotic" cultures can be constituted as "units of knowledge" (Said 69) and thus positively "known" as terms within an always anterior "master code"⁵ of identification and control. In grappling with the material of "Dantean allegory," then, *Carnival* also engages directly with the question of authority — a question which takes on a specific valency within post-colonial societies (Zamora 338-39) because the locus of that authority, which arrogates to itself sole purchase on the arbitration of "truth," is always situated somewhere else and has historically underwritten a mode of cognitive apprehension that "reads" colonial experience as nothing other than a manifestation of or variant within an already articulated, already interpreted European code of values. Whatever remains outside such a finalist mode of interpretation will perforce be nullified, constituted as a tabula rasa upon which European powers can project their own hegemonic systems of knowledge and control,⁶ and in this way allegorical thinking has historically served to legitimize colonialist appropriation of the interpretive field (Slemon, "Post-Colonial Allegory") and to outlaw those refractory modes of recognition that might contest imperial patterns of cognition and release colonized subjects into decolonized ways of "reading" the world.⁷ "Dantean allegory," as *Carnival* frames it, thus represents not only a *literary* mode of enormous transformative potential, but also a *materially grounded* "canon of spectral detachment" (Harris, "Carnival Theatre" 41), an "absolutely sovereign theatre" (Harris, "Quest" 25) of cognition and representation that Dante, and his European heirs, quite literally exercised as "ruling pattern of the word" ("Interview," *Kas-Kas* 54). In terms of the text, allegory represents both "greatest peril and greatest promise" (171); and the "problem" that *Carnival* attempts to negotiate in its reinscription of the mode is to recuperate allegory's capacity to "put into reverse the obsolescences of

institutions, the obsolescences of dead languages . . . [and] false clarities" (90), without reactivating its tendency towards totalizing thinking and absolutist interpretation.

The process by which *Carnival* succeeds in effecting this recuperative/transformational operation is grounded in the actualizations of dialectic repetition, but before examining precisely how *Carnival* seeks to locate its own mode of fictive reinscription it is useful to identify just what it is that the novel is repeating. *Carnival* constitutes Dante's allegory not simply as a canonical text but also as a metonymic figure of an already dual tradition, one which can energize new forms of perception but which can also calcify into mono-cultural, absolutist codes. The novel also works, in some sense, to constitute its readers, who are systematically and progressively led to make allegorical "readings" which they will always have to qualify, just as the text thematically exposes all of its absolute images to be no more than partial figures that contain an energizing veridity as well as the capacity to terrorize and confuse (48). In each case, something is affirmed in the moment it is resisted, something effaced in the moment it is reinscribed. And thus *Carnival*, by directing its narrative structure towards an intertextual "reading," constitutes its internal discursive performance as a model for the interpretive process of its *own* readers. *Carnival* repeats a literary text, and in doing so it repeats the performance of its own reading; in other words, the novel thematizes its own act of enunciation. And so our act of reading a novel that "reads" a canonical text as a figure of tradition's "phenomenal legacy" becomes itself allegorical of the problem of post-colonial "authority" that *Carnival* seeks to address; and the paradox we must grapple with is that although the apparatus that enables transformational vision is always deferred, always somewhere else — in some lost and outmoded tradition, for example, or in the text of *Carnival* itself — it is also always, and *only*, within our own modes of perception, our own codes for "reading" the material conditions that surround us.

The kind of reading and rewriting that *Carnival* effects on the *Divine Comedy*, then, is at all points marked by a double movement of reinscription and of difference. Everyman Masters acts as Virgil to Weyl's Dante, and like Virgil he too is dead at the

beginning of the novel. But unlike Virgil, an actual historical figure, Masters enters the stage as wholly fictive and entirely contained within Weyl’s psychic makeup, a “living interior guide arising from the collective unconscious” (Harris, “Comedy” 1-2), and one who is never given a separate, organic identity. Instead, a series of figures occupy the site discursively organized under the nomenclature of “Everyman Masters” — Everyman Masters the 1st, the 2nd, and so forth. And as the action proceeds, the role of “guide” itself multiplies so that other characters — Doubting Thomas, Flatfoot Johnny, and just about all of the text’s female characters — act as guide figures, all of them operating concomitantly to lead Weyl towards a specifically *disunified* redemptive vision, one appropriate to the cross-cultural basis of post-colonial social experience.

In most of *Carnival*’s episodes, a doubling of some kind occurs — two Jane Fishers, two characters named Alice — and the effect is to destabilize the positive placement of character, event, or meaning within any single cognitive frame. In the ordered world of the *Divine Comedy*, Virgil can provide Dante with perfectly sound explanations as to why the traitorous Bocca should be frozen in the ninth circle of Hell whereas the merely wrathful are consigned to the fifth, but *Carnival* works to undermine such concepts of stability by marking all of its actions with some form of complexifying ambiguity. In the opening episode, for example, Masters is threatened by Memory’s male persona in *two* guises: as Harris says in the interview, “. . . running alongside the false shaman and rapist is a recognition of the true shaman who also strikes a blow — a blow of creative implications, not a disfiguring blow.” The argument being made allegorically here is that although the disfigurements of colonial history can never be ignored, they can never be taken as the whole of history either. Rather, a new, destabilizing concept of history is required, one that sees beyond the stultifying and violent “monuments” of historical achievement to the operations of a creative and liberating impulse still at work within tradition’s “phenomenal legacy.” This episode is marked by a *plural* inscription, and the ambiguity this produces is further complexified by the inscription of additional allegorizations of the colonial encounter in succeeding narrative episodes,

inscriptions which we read dialectically, in apposition to one another. Whereas Dante's text provides a series of events whose allegorical meanings interlock into an overarching and unified discourse, the allegory in *Carnival* remains intermittent and partial, each episode striking against the others in a way that prevents any single positive interpretation from taking hold.

In a word, the allegory in *Carnival*, on the level of narrative, is *differential*, the novel's separate episodes reiterating one another but at the same time modifying and destabilizing the specific meanings each seems to produce, and this differential aspect within the narrative carries over to the kind of reinscription *Carnival* makes of Dante's poem. "It is a question of how one breaks . . . with the obsession in the heart of imagination," claims Harris. For

there is no absolute Inferno, absolute Purgatorio, absolute Paradiso. All of these overlap and re-appear in each other to chasten one, undermine one's complacency, because of the intricacies of light. (Harris, "Adversarial Contexts" 128)

In other words, the kind of "reading" Harris deploys in *Carnival* is specifically designed to articulate *distance* from its canonical "pretext," but to do so in such a way that allows the "genuine intuitive forces at work" within tradition and the imagination to actuate. It recognizes that Dante's allegory functions not just as a creative work but also as a discursive practice,⁸ one which, in collaboration with specific institutional, social, and economic practices, functions to police cognitive inquiry in the moment that it initiates it. But this "reading" also recognizes that this discursive practice, and the social apparatus that surrounds it, can be fictively contested, and that whatever of value lies latent within it can be reappropriated towards the performance of a new kind of cultural work. Rewriting Dante, then, involves for Harris no less that "a genuine descent into tradition" (Harris, "On the Beach" 335), and it establishes a model for "reading" that governs not only *Carnival's* narrative structure but also the critical perspective the text seeks to authorize for its own readers.

Such a pattern of resistance and reinscription may on the surface seem to be quintessentially agnostic — an Oepidal "mis-reading" of the paternal tradition in an attempt to overcome the

“anxiety of influence” and to assert a Bloomian sense of individual identity — but the problematic that in my view marks Harris’s “reading” of the canon operates more closely to the mode of articulation Michel Foucault associates with the process of “commentary”:

. . . in what is broadly called commentary, the hierarchy between primary and secondary text plays two roles which are in solidarity with each other. On the one hand it allows the (endless) construction of new discourses: the dominance of the primary text, its permanence, its status as a discourse which can always be re-actualised, the multiple or hidden meanings with which it is credited, the essential reticence and richness which is attributed to it, all this is the basis for an open possibility of speaking. But on the other hand the commentary’s only role, whatever the techniques used, is to say at last what was silently articulated “beyond”, in the text. By a paradox which it always displaces but never escapes, the commentary must say for the first time what had, nonetheless, already been said, and must tirelessly repeat what has, however, never been said. . . . Commentary . . . allows us to say something other than the text itself, but on condition that it is this text itself which is said, and in a sense completed. . . . The new thing here lies not in what is said but in the event of its return. (Foucault 57-58)

Foucault’s point here is that commentary is inherently, and paradoxically, dialectical; that it exceeds its “pretext” in the moment that it reifies it — in short, that it initiates an incremental process that must always reach toward the future and its “beyond” even as it locates that future elsewhere; in the anterior text. And thus, the two texts at work within commentary will always generate a third, one which seeks to articulate the silent presence created in the gap between those two texts and to situate that presence in some originary “moment” — as happens, for example, when de Man reads Derrida reading Rousseau. In Harris’s conception of “the law of the frame” (113), every historical inscription can bleed into bias, and in the machinations of time that bias can become totalizing and absolute: a “framed” way of seeing that commands obedience, that locks both body and mind into hierarchies of privilege, and that constrains difference to the subordinate theatre of frustrated disavowal and blind, ineffective resistance. But in a countervailing impulse, the monuments of

history can also be discursively engaged, actuated to new vectors of signification and meaning and thus sundered from the biases to which they have become bound. Tradition and its monuments can always be “read,” redeployed to new inscriptions and re-written into new, “reversible” fictions (90), ones which generate their own commentaries even as they subject tradition to the transformative actuations of their own commentating activity. And by this transformative process there can emerge a mode of “fiction” — if that is the word for a dialectical writing practice which is itself a figure for a form of cognitive engagement with the manifestations of a totalizing tradition — that seeks to “consume its own biases” (Harris, “Adversarial Contexts” 127) by subjecting the “sovereign institutions” (48) of the past, and of its own discourse, to the regenerative articulations of its own commentary and of that commentary which inevitably succeeds it. It is an open-ended kind of fiction that *Carnival* initiates, one which employs the “writerly” demands allegory places on its readers in order to constitute a space within which the lineaments of a third “text” can begin to actuate upon it, and one which Harris’s next book — his most recent — gives name to: the fiction of “infinite rehearsal.”

The informing principle at work here, as the title of the novel tells us, is Carnival: the Trinidadian festival of masquerade in which figures from tradition are transformed into masks and taken dancing in the streets. The practice of Carnival articulates a double movement of obeisance and transgression,⁹ and in textualizing this double movement in his novel Harris seeks to engender that third text that can “illuminate a counterpoint between the ruler and the ruled, the exploiter and the exploited, between order and abandonment, between overt mask and hidden motivation” (Harris, “Carnival Theatre” 38). This triangulated process — reading tradition through the mediation of its masks, and thus generating a differential “text” of tradition — authorizes the kind of purchase *Carnival* seeks to obtain against the hegemony of European totalizing systems; and it also generates and authorizes the discursive reading that will actuate against it in some other place — such as in this present essay, which seeks to articulate what an interview about a literary text

has already said, but said silently, and “beyond.” There are always two voices at work in Harris’s text, and the horizon of utterance for both of them — expressed silently, in the allegory — is the voice of the third. And it is here, in the concept of “Carnival dialogue” (Harris, “Carnival Theatre” 40) that Harris’s fictions need to be located within a specific discursive context: the cultural and political dynamics of a present-day post-colonial experience.

Much of what takes place in Harris’s writing, or in his speech for that matter, seems baldly modernist: its gnomic obscurity, its search for “new” forms, its Romantic highbrowism, its syncretic drive, its apparent subjectivism — all of them elements which modernism’s detractors see as contributing to “a tyranny of the creative imagination over the public” (Merquior; Newman). Where such a profoundly unsocial characterization falls short in regards to Harris’s work is in the kind of cultural *work* his fictions, as *post-colonial* documents, seek to perform. The canonical centre, if nothing else, is *textual*, and as a site for the operations of a dominant discourse it has consistently worked to textualize or “prefigure”¹⁰ colonial space as a projection of its own metaphysical, social, and cognitive systems — that is, as a term within a European cultural thematics, unmarked by any measure of difference save that constituted by the concept of “lack.”¹¹ But by rewriting signs of the canon into fictive structures of *difference*, Harris’s text functions discursively as what Homi Bhabha identifies as a “hybrid object”: that is, as a peculiar agent of replication within which the authoritative symbol is both retained and resisted. Colonial power demands “that *the space it occupies be unbounded*,” writes Bhabha in “Signs,” “its reality *coincident* with the emergence of an imperialist narrative and history, its discourse *nondialogic*, its enunciation *unitary*, unmarked by the trace of difference . . .” (157). In reiterating Dante’s text as a figure of European cultural authority, *Carnival* — like the true and false shaman figures within it, whose immeasurable blows on the mudshore flats initiate the novel’s dialectical action — both *disfigures* and *refigures* the discursive space of power upon which tradition actuates. It reoccupies the theatre of textuality and replaces its authoritative signs with dialogic fictions whose narra-

tives, at even the minutest level of representation, are always double. And it subjects the absolutist monuments of history to the gaze of an ex-centric and non-complicit reading practice which seeks not only to transform inherited codes of recognition into new ways of “reading” tradition but also to deconstruct those monuments through the discursive reoccupation of the ground upon which their shadows fall. For 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. (24)

Far from actuating the “analytico-referential discourse” of modernism (Reiss), and its fundamental reliance on the sovereign and founding subject, then, *Carnival* operates in a specifically “disidentificatory”¹² fashion to energize a “counter-discourse”¹³ against the hegemonic colonialist practices which continue to inscribe themselves upon the post-colonial world, and to provide a deconstructive “reading” of the semiotic structures that figure those practices in an ethnocentric discourse of “presence.”¹⁴ Through its performance as “commentary,” *Carnival* articulates difference not only in its own distance from the canonical text whose discursive site it occupies and re/presents, but also through its deconstructive “reading” of differential play *within* the seemingly unified, univocal, and totalizing structure of “Dantean allegory,” and thus within the dominant discursive formation that this canonical structure metonymically represents. “Poetic writing is the most advanced and refined mode of deconstruction,” writes Paul de Man (“Allegories” 17); and in *Carnival* the matrix of enunciation that grounds Harris’s “poetic” fiction to a figural investment in deconstruction and the “allegory of reading” — the site from which it could only have been written — is the transgressive and transfigurative space of post-colonial heterodoxy. This is the site of unstable binaries, of reiteration and refutation, recuperation and resistance, a site of double vision and its incumbent depth perception where, as Homi Bhabha puts it, doubling becomes dislocation and mimicry becomes menace (“Of Mimicry” 129). This is the site of post-colonial cross-culturalism, the site of a pervasive and motivated anti-colonial discourse, and

one that this novel thematizes as the play of difference in the vibrant, fissuring practices of what Harris calls "Carnival tradition" (20).¹⁵

"I could not believe it," writes Harris in *The Infinite Rehearsal*,

"Ghost was speaking. No formal message. A repetition of familiar texts become however strangely cross-cultural, the strangest subversion, where one least suspected or expected to find it. . . ." (23)

In the dialectic of "commentary" which Harris's fictions actuate, such a statement acts — as I read it — as a "reading" of the narrative performance of *Carnival* itself, and it underscores the notion that it is the *subversive* elements in Harris's fictions which give them purchase in the transformative energetics of Carnival, the subversive elements in post-colonial cultures which energize Harris's transformative gaze. "No formal message" in *Carnival*, says Harris — at least not in the modernist sense of the term. And not in the lineaments of a post-colonial counter-discursive system either. Instead, the partial figurations of a destabilizing allegory define themselves in *struggle*, hammering against the absolutist contours of a tradition they reiterate, and refiguring that tradition in a semiotics of genuinely transformative capability. The beginning of change is discursive resistance; and it is in the complex troping of post-colonial counter-discourse that the hegemonic institutions of sovereign tradition are taken down into Carnival, transformed into street masks, and fractured into figures of a dialectical display. It is there where the dustbins of history are overturned and sounded, there where the strange new music of the steel drums tells of the coming parade.

NOTES

- ¹ In addition to his comments in the preceding *Ariel* interview, Harris discusses the question of allegory in "Interview," *Kas-Kas* (54); "On the Beach"; "Comedy and Modern Allegory"; "Adversarial Contexts"; and "Carnival Theatre." Unacknowledged quotations in this article are to the preceding interview; unattributed page citations are to *Carnival*.
- ² This reading is indebted to Shaw, who argues that this incremental pattern operates in the "cycle" of Harris's novels as a whole, and notes: "In dialectical terms, each succeeding stage may be said to cancel the

revelations of its predecessors, but it also preserves them and raises them to a higher level."

- 3 This term is developed by Quilligan, and it refers to the anterior, extra-textual "document" that underlies all allegorical representation. The *Divine Comedy*, of course, is not the only "pretext" to *Carnival*: the Waste Land myth, Pygmalion, and the Arawak Tree of Creation, to name just a few, all figure prominently in the text's pattern of allegory. But my argument here is that *Carnival systematically* evokes and "documents" Dante's poem through the pattern of its imagery, its themes, its individual episodes, and its cumulative narrative structure.
- 4 See Clifford, who argues that a belief in transformation is a basic feature of all allegorical writing.
- 5 Jameson in *The Political Unconscious* develops the concept of the allegorical "master code" (Ch. 1). The concept of allegory at work in this essay derives from de Man's "The Rhetoric of Temporality," which argues that the allegorical sign always refers to another sign that precedes it, and that "it is of the essence of this previous sign to be pure anteriority" (190).
- 6 Useful discussions of how this process operates are provided by Todorov, and Hulme, and in Barker and Gates.
- 7 Cf. Belsey on the task of ideology: "to present the position of the subject as fixed and unchangeable, an element in a given system of differences which is human nature and the world of human experience, and to show possible actions as an endless repetition of 'normal', familiar ones" (90).
- 8 The concept of discourse employed here derives from Foucault's theories of discursive formations, and it refers to the complexes of semiotic practices which operate alongside other practices to articulate social groups and to empower certain forms of "knowledge." A useful introduction to discourse theory is provided by Macdonell.
- 9 Pratt reads Latin American Carnival, "where slaves dress up as masters," as "simultaneously protesting and affirming the existence of the master-slave hierarchy." McDougall discusses the novel's use of Carnival motifs in some detail.
- 10 White writes of "prefigurative" constructions of objects of mental perception, noting that "before a given domain can be interpreted, it must first be constructed as a ground inhabited by discernible figures. The figures, in turn, must be conceived to be classifiable as distinctive orders, classes, genera, and species of phenomena" (30 ff.). This transformation of an objective field into such units of knowledge corresponds to the concept I wish to identify here in its specifically colonialist manifestation.
- 11 As Hearne notes: "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" (325-26).
- 12 Pêcheux uses the term "disidentification" to denote a transformation and displacement of the subject position interpellated by a dominant ideology (158).
- 13 Terdiman theorizes "counter-discourse" as the trace of historical potentiality for difference within a dominant discourse (343) and notes that

"situated as other, counter-discourses have the capacity to *situate*: to relativize the authority and stability of a dominant system of utterances which cannot even countenance their existence" (15-16). Terdiman's important thesis employs an Althusserian concept of "culture as a field of struggle" (25) in order to locate contestatory discursive practices — or in other words, to address the material basis of literary resistance in theoretical terms. The concept of "counter-discourse" can be extremely useful in reading post-colonial literary practices, especially in the ways in which they work to subvert the dominant discourse of colonialism, but Terdiman's reading of counter-discourses as practices that remain always in the margins of the dominant (73), as falling short of the genuinely revolutionary, needs to be regrounded and reworked to a specifically post-colonialist cultural dynamics.

- 14 This argument, of course, initiates another false binary: modernism versus post-colonialism. What motivates the argument, however, is my own "counter-discursive" enterprise here, which is to resist the "capture" of post-colonial texts to the universalist theatre of various textual "fields" such as modernism, a capture which works to silence the forms of cultural and political work these texts perform in *other* discursive spaces. Such an act of appropriation is just one of the ways in which disidentificatory practices are conscripted to the service of a canonical centre whose politics they seek to resist.
- 15 Jameson in "Third-World Literature" has argued that all third-world texts are necessarily "national allegories" because in the third world, where capitalism has not separated the sphere of the private from that of the public as it has in the first world, "the story of private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-world culture and society." Jameson's argument is extremely problematical, and useful challenges to it are mounted explicitly in Ahmad and implicitly in Spivak (241-68). Ahmad, by questioning Jameson's privileging of nationalism against other forms of collectivity and rejecting Jameson's totalizing three-worlds concept as failing to allow for the functional overdetermination of literary production, seeks to show that the concept of allegorical "typicality" which energises Jameson's argument is neither unique to "third-world" cultures nor uniform within them. And Spivak, in the context of Mahasweta Devi's short story "Stanadayini," argues that an allegorical reading similar to the kind that Jameson puts forward not only reduces the complexity of signals put up by the text but also abets discursively in the subordination and silencing of the subaltern. My own argument with Jameson's thesis, and one which I hope this recent reading has implicitly suggested, is that in some third-world or post-colonial literary texts there is a much greater sense of dialectic underwriting the production of allegorical narrative than Jameson's formulation would allow, and that such allegorical narratives actually work in a culturally performative sense to mobilise a fissuring, deconstructive *resistance* to the hegemonic impositions of imperial and colonising societies.

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