

Aspects of Peripheral Modernisms

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I.

Can we consider the possibility of detecting likenesses among the many peripheral modernisms, these understood as the aesthetic forms generated beyond capitalism's cores? In this project neither core nor periphery is perceived as a homogeneous or static geographical region, but as clusters of internally differentiated nation-states, the periphery existing in an asymmetrical relationship to the older imperialist centres which had pursued capitalism's unilateral intrusion into pre-capitalist worlds. I go on to suggest that if proper assessments are to be made of the plentiful and diverse literatures from the peripheries, discriminations are needed other than those entrenched in the existing criteria of both mainstream and marginalized literary discussion. I will therefore look at critical practices that could be consonant with understanding the formal peculiarities of writings produced within and encoding, material and cultural situations of a special type.

Any inquiry into the generic modes and stylistic mannerisms of modern peripheral literatures since the nineteenth century is inseparable from considering the distinctive experiences of *modernity* in spaces *outside* Western Europe and North America, but *within* an imperialist world-system. Early in the twentieth century Rosa Luxemburg had defined imperialism as "the political expression of the accumulation of capital in its competitive struggle for what remains still open of the non-capitalist environment" (446, 362). Shared by this environment were histories which to varying degrees of magnitude had been interrupted by imperialist expansion, whether through military conquest, occupation and direct or indirect rule, or by way of gun-boat diplomacy followed by economic penetration, or through the export of capital.

For materialist theorists of modernity the only satisfactory semantic meaning of modernity lies in its association with worldwide capitalism

(Jameson *Singular* 13). Thus the historian Harry Harootunian insists that the simultaneous experiences of change and upheaval precipitated trans-nationally by capitalism, even if at different speeds and to varying degrees, makes inappropriate “fashionable descriptions” such as “alternative,” since these imply the existence of an “original” that was formulated in Europe, followed by a series of “copies” and “lesser inflections.” Naming modernity as “a specific cultural form and a consciousness of lived historical time that differs according to social forms and practices,” Harootunian states that these varying inflections of the modern promised, “not alternative modernities, but coeval ... modernities or, better yet, peripheral modernities ... in which all societies shared a common reference provided by global capital and its requirements” (*History’s Disquiet* 62–63, 163). Or, as he writes elsewhere, “whatever and however a society develops,” its coeval modernity “is simply taking place as the same time as other modernities” (*Overcome* xvi).

It would then seem that the only legitimate usage of an “alternative modernity” is to signify a future post-capitalist, socialist modernity—the case for which has been made in the work of some contemporary Chinese critics who detect a propulsion towards but not an integration into the modern as this had been received by way of a predatory colonialism (Kang). According to Liu Kang, because the Chinese revolution was set in a Third-World country, it was inevitably anti-imperialist and nationalist, so that Chinese discourses on modernity registered a resistance to capitalist modernity and an aspiration to establish a socialist alternative.¹ For Wang Hui “discourse on China’s search for modernity” considered “how China’s modernization could avoid the multiple problems of Western capitalist modernity,” so that “inherent within the Chinese concept of modernization are tendencies towards socialist ideological content and values Mao’s socialism is both an ideology of modernization and a critique of Euro-American modernization itself” (13–14).

Since capitalist penetration was and remains global, the peripheries and semi-peripheries of core capitalism extended and still extend to a larger geo-political expanse than the colonized regions, all occupying a shared position of structural underdevelopment within an uneven and

unequal world system once dominated by the nation-states of North Western Europe, later overshadowed by the super-power of the USA, and now undergoing further reconfigurations. The value of understanding these spaces as being “the rest of the world” and including Eastern and Middle Europe, Turkey, Ireland, Scotland, Spain, Iceland *et cetera*, is that it facilitates the search for affinities among the many and different peripheral modernities, and by extension the experiences of these as re-presented in literature.

All the same, it seems to me necessary that we observe the extent and degree of the coercions visited on those societies that were seized for their natural and labour resources, or invaded for both material and political reasons. Such determinants inflected the singular accents of the modernisms in these locations, registering a consciousness of a violent imperialism that we will not expect to find in Eastern Europe or Portugal. Interestingly, scholars of China, Japan, Korea and the various tributaries of the disintegrated Chinese empire, which were not subjected to the colonial rule of Northern nation-states, have of late brought the colonial question into their historical enquiries (Barlow 364), with some retaining a historical memory of imperialist invasion and an ideological and political self-identity as belonging to the Third World (Kang, *Aesthetics and Marxism*).

It is also necessary to acknowledge that many of the regions once occupied by imperialism continue to constitute the hinterlands of capitalism’s power-centres, even where spectacular economic development is taking place. For Samir Amin there are nation-states in the South, which despite various degrees of industrialization, remain subject to “hyper-exploitation,” their industries largely in positions of being subcontractors, their economies in fee to the imperialist world-system (602).² In these areas too we will find social formations marked by extreme divisions between rich and poor, urban and agrarian, by the peculiarities of class formations, and the power of entrenched cultural affiliations. Furthermore, it remains the case that these populations constitute the majority of the world’s wholly dispossessed. As Neil Davidson has written: “In some cases, entire areas, most of which are in Africa, have been abandoned by capital in any economic sense,” resulting in

“the emergence and expansion of massive urban slum areas on the peripheries of the great Third World cities ... vast, improvised repositories of semi-surplus population, described in horrifying detail by Mike Davis in *Planet of Slums*” that are explosively volatile, and “involved in work mainly through what is politely referred to as the informal sector.”

While aware of imperialism’s exorbitant impact on the Third World, I will regard the peripheries and semi-peripheries as all societies that have been co-opted or coerced into capitalism’s world system, and therefore share paradoxical experiences of transformation. On studying Russian conditions in the early twentieth century, Trotsky observed that the imperialist powers had introduced into the non-capitalist world the most advanced means of production accompanied by capitalist relationships, while at the same time ensuring the continuation of “archaic forms of economic life.” The outcome of what he proposed as a theory of combined and uneven development, was a contradictory amalgam of archaic and modern institutions: “The most primitive beginnings and the latest European endings,” modern capitalist industry in an environment of economic backwardness; “the Belgian or American factory, and round about it settlements, villages of wood and straw, burning up every year, etc”; ... a proletariat “thrown into the factory cauldron snatched directly from the plough” (476).³

This perspective on the incongruous overlapping of social realities and experiences from radically different historical moments, re-emerged in the thinking of left liberation movements in the twentieth century, and continues to inform the work of contemporary scholars who observe that imperialism exported modern technology and fostered social backwardness. Liu Kang has commented that when capitalism penetrated China in the nineteenth century, it brought the latest techniques in production, transport, commerce and finance to centres like as Shanghai and Beijing over which the Euro-American powers exercised military and political control. At the same time, the agents of imperialist intervention propped up an archaic landholding system, and supported the comprador bourgeoisie as well as the landlords, officials and militarists in prolonging pre-capitalist forms of social organization. In a related vein, Mahmood Mamdani writing about Sub-Saharan Africa, points out

that the colonial state coercively installed new modes of production and imposed capitalist labour relations, while being deliberately deferential towards traditional hierarchies, forms and outlooks, and encouraging the survival of ethnically-based local power, “tribal” divisions and those indigenous cultural habits deemed conducive to promoting social stasis.

II.

The seismic effects of accelerated capitalist transformation in nineteenth-century Western Europe are graphically invoked in *The Communist Manifesto*:

Constant revolutionizing of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social relations, everlasting uncertainty and agitation distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all earlier ones. All fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient prejudices and opinions are swept aside, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air. (Marx and Engels 38)⁴

As Perry Anderson sometime ago pointed out, this cannot be read as implying an instantaneous and comprehensive upheaval eliminating the internal unevenness of the core capitalist realms, since Marx’s own conception of the historical time of the capitalist mode of production ... was of a complex and differential temporality, in which episodes or eras were discontinuous from each other, and heterogeneous within themselves” (101).

This understanding is especially pertinent to capitalist modernization in the peripheries, and especially in colonized worlds, where the disruption of the old, though no less traumatic, left swathes of long-established conditions in place. Here the bourgeois epoch was slow in arriving and incomplete in its arrival; here economic conditions and social formations pertaining to pre-, nascent and ‘classical’ capitalism were contiguous; here vast rural populations unabsorbed or only marginally absorbed into colonial capitalism, provided—and continue to provide—material ground for the persistence of earlier economic practices and collective

social arrangements, as well as for time-honoured customs and psychic dispositions.

Echoing but not citing Trotsky, Fredric Jameson has written that “Modernism must ... be seen as uniquely corresponding to an uneven moment of social development, or to what Ernst Bloch (addressing a very different situation) called the ‘simultaneity of the nonsimultaneous,’ the ‘synchronicity of the non-synchronous ... the coexistence of realities from radically different moments of history—handicrafts alongside the great cartels, peasant fields with the Krupp factories or the Ford plant in the distance’” (*Postmodernism* 307).⁵ Hence the suggestion that the “generic discontinuities” in the art forms of the peripheries demand attention to their ground in modernities where traditional and emergent social and cultural values coexisted and clashed, which appear to inhabit manifold material conditions and temporalities, and to be, as Neil Larsen puts it “both modern and traditional, both ‘ahead of’ and yet ‘behind the times’ at once, as if not one but two or multiple histories were being lived out in one and the same space” (139–40).

Critics have noted the improbable coexistence of the past and the contemporary in the literatures of societies subjected to imperialist intervention. The overused category of magic realism, which I concede does internalize the coexistence of the discrepant, has become inevitable in discussions of non-metropolitan writing and has now been assimilated into mainstream literary discourse as having brought newness to world literature. But sometimes before, sometimes concurrent with the best-selling novels in this mode, were articulations of Latin American and Caribbean aesthetics that are dazzling in their perceptions of a heritage of temporal and spatial unevenness.

Writing in 1949, Alejo Carpentier, the Cuban scholar, musicologist and novelist, distinguished between European surrealism and the styles of Latin American literature, insisting that any similarities were no more than superficial, stemming as each did from a different source: for whereas surrealism was a “literary ruse” to effect a manufactured assault on reality, the superficially similar trend in the literature and art of Latin America, emerged from the objective fact of the natural and social world itself: “Because of the virginity of the land, our upbringing,

our ontology, the Faustian presence of the Indian and the black man ... its fecund racial mixing [*mestizaje*], America is far from using up its wealth of mythologies. After all, what is the entire history of America if not a chronicle of a marvelous reality?" ("On the Marvelous Real" 88).⁶ Here the coexistence of layers of social time, the juxtapositions in the historical, material, cultural, social and existential conditions which to a metropolitan eye would seem as chaotic and incongruous, are celebrated for generating a new aesthetic.

Others have focused on broken histories: indigenous peoples subjugated, alienated and ultimately exterminated by early colonial conquest, African slaves sold to the new world, the dehumanizing conditions endured by East Indian and Chinese indentured labour on the plantations (Glissant *Caribbean* 221–22, 260)—situations making for creolized cultures (Bayle, Munro), a heady mix, bearing traces of “the pre-Columbian, the rubble of the extinct Carib past, Arawak icons, vestiges of Amerindian fable and legend, practices stemming from African vodun and limbo born on the slave ships of the Middle Passage” (Harris 30). But whereas aestheticians such as the Martinican Edouard Glissant and the Trinidadian Wilson Harris, are sensitive to the contradictions inherent in imperialist penetration of the South Americas, it is the Brazilian critic Roberto Schwarz who develops the connection between the social ground and the stylistics and literary devices of the peripheral novel form, enabling the insight that its formal qualities—whether realist, fabulist or avant-garde—can be read as transfiguring and estranging incommensurable material, cultural, social and existential conditions attendant on colonial and neo-colonial capitalism.

III.

There was a time when the literatures emerging from the peripheries of the metropolitan centres since the mid-nineteenth century, were in large relegated beyond the boundaries of Comparative Literature, as it was then constituted within the academy. Moreover, when not studied ethnographically as a fount of information about other societies, these writings were assumed to be necessarily lacking in the nuance of so-called Western literatures—a relegation that did not extend to the

nineteenth-century Russian novelists, or later to Kafka and Joyce, who, although they were also writing from outside of capitalism's centres, were assimilated by a literati enchanted or disturbed by their innovative stylistics. Since then and under the banners of World Literature, Cosmopolitanism, Literary Transnationalism, and New Comparativism, there have been moves to construct an inclusive frame incorporating the pioneering early novels and the contemporary fictions from locations beyond North Western Europe and North America.⁷ Given the present outflow of critical studies, we should note that more than two decades ago Fredric Jameson, in a footnote to his unjustly maligned essay "Third World Literature in the Age of Multinational Capitalism," had proposed "a literary and cultural comparativism of a new type," one that would conceive of Third-World literature as a unified field and thus enable juxtaposing "the study of the differences and similarities" of specific texts, with "a more typological analysis of the various socio-economic situations from which they spring and to which they constitute a distinct response" (86–87; note 5).

Among those prominent in the recent project of situating all literatures within a transnational context is Franco Moretti who has attempted to design a model for the literary field borrowed from the world-system school of economic history: this designates capitalism "as a system that is simultaneously *one* and *unequal*, with a core and a periphery (and a semi-periphery) ... all bound together in a relationship of growing inequality" ("Conjectures" 55–56). Whatever the flaws in Moretti's quaint maps and diagrams of world literatures (*Graphs, Maps, Trees*), his work is important in stressing that the disparate and heterogeneous literatures of peripheral cultures require attention to their conditions of possibility and the specificities of their forms and structures—which he sees as abstracts of social relationships and symbolic power.

By the mid-nineteenth century, novels were being written in India, Latin America, the Philippines,⁸ Japan, and China,⁹ and studies of the novel's beginnings in those places note that when faced with the problem of mediating volatile contemporary circumstances and mapping the changing shape of social space, writers from cultures with rich and plentiful traditions of prose, poetry and drama, were obliged to borrow

narrative discourses from elsewhere. These they found in the European novel and to a lesser extent, the short story.¹⁰ Because peripheral literatures were and are written in many different languages, any project concerned with their particularities is dependent on both translation and distant critical reading. The problems with translation have often been addressed; the problem with reliance on specialist studies is that the available glosses and analyses may be more concerned with identifying themes than with looking at literary codes and understanding these as inseparable from social space.

Whereas critics have observed the problems of using a narrative form privileging the values of a liberal ideology and individual choice in order to represent a tradition-bound society where life was mapped by family, community and the maintenance of social order, many commentators have tended to seek signs of *synthesis* and *negotiation* between these contradictions, or to detect the *marriage* of two cultures—the fables, myths and folktales of the native tradition *blended* with the traditions of realism found in the literatures of the ruling empires.¹¹ Here symbiosis is sought for and privileged as the destiny of the encounter between cultural modes. However, in a recent rejoinder to Christopher Prendergast's model of the "amalgamation" of different traditions as the source of cultural originality, Moretti argues that this does not monopolize the process of change, and suggests instead that major transformations occur when a device or genre enters a new cultural habitat.¹² This last position is exemplified by Roberto Schwarz who writes:

Sustained by its historical backwardness, Russia forced the bourgeois novel to face a more complex reality. The comic figure of the Westerner, Francophile or Germanophile... [T]he ideologies of progress, of liberalism, of reason, all these were ways of bringing into the foreground the modernization that came with Capital. These enlightened men proved themselves to be lunatics, thieves, opportunists, cruel, vain and parasitical. The system of ambiguities growing out of the local use of bourgeois ideas ... is not unlike the one we described for Brazil... In Russia too modernization would lose itself in the infinite

extent of territory and social inertia, and would clash with serfdom or its vestige. (3, 29)

Expanding on these observations, Schwarz observes that when the ideas and ideals of European liberalism were asserted in a society where social relationships were based on latifundia and the unfree labour of slaves, these reveal themselves as displaced, as not fitting the circumstances of Brazilian life. However, in “their quality of being improper, they will be material and a problem for literature” (*Misplaced Ideas* 29). *A Master on the Periphery of Capitalism*, Schwarz’s study of Machado de Assis’s 1889 novel *The Posthumous Memoirs of Brás Cubas*, examines “the possible correspondence between Machado’s style and the particularities of Brazilian society, slave-owning and bourgeois at the same time (3). In the literary form of the novel, he perceives that the structure of the country is captured and dramatized by changing “the Babel of literary mannerisms: styles, schools, techniques, genres, typographical devices” (17) borrowed from the European novel, the “mixture of classical and realist registers, to which other dictions will be added” being “part of the stylistic bazaar created in the nineteenth century by historicism” (15). To this can be added “modernist” registers. No wonder that a novel of the 1880s can appear to a present-day reader as anticipating the dislocated and absurd worlds of Eastern and Central Europe conjured up in the writings of the earlier decades of the twentieth century.

How then are we to read writings whose provenance and raw materials are so different from that of Western European and North American literatures, and do so without neglecting either the literariness or the worldliness of the texts? I have already alluded to the aesthetic theories of critics from the Caribbean. These are conceptually and idiomatically very different from the high levels of abstraction and the always-mandarin prose of Western Marxists. I am aware that Liu Kang in *Aesthetics and Marxism: Chinese Aesthetic Marxists and Their Western Contemporaries* laments what he perceives as the severance of the links between theory and revolutionary practice in metropolitan Marxist cultural studies.¹³ Yet because these theorists examine literary codes as grounded in, but not confined by, the real world, they restore the cogni-

tive dimension of the aesthetic. As Theodor Adorno wrote, “There is no material content, no formal category of artistic creation, however mysteriously transmitted and itself unaware of the process, which did not originate the empirical reality from which it breaks free” (“Brecht” 190); he also comments, “it is precisely as artefacts, as products of social labour, that they [artworks] also communicate with the empirical experience they reject and from which they draw their content” (*Aesthetic* 5, 255–56). Because the varied work on aesthetics produced by ‘Western Marxists’ is infused with a social vision and emancipatory desire, and art is understood as having the capacity for social critique and political intervention—to be retrieved from literary incarnations—their theories may be of value in attempting ways of reading commensurate with the peculiarities of peripheral writing.¹⁴

IV.

I have been speaking in generalities, and I now want to look at *Season of Migration to the North*, a novel from sub-Saharan Africa written in Arabic by the Sudanese writer Tayeb Salih, originally published in Beirut in 1967, and in an English translation in 1969. Within the widespread and varied critical literature the book has stimulated, much has come from commentators unfamiliar with the histories, cultures and literary traditions of the Arab worlds; and because access is through translation, nuances of language, allusion and much else will be lost in our readings—such as the repeated notations of time-spans of five, seven, thirty and one thousand years whose portent is implied but not specified,¹⁵ or the significance of passing references to Arabic eras and poets, or the connotations of the secular journey North as a thematic constant in modern Arabic writing.¹⁶

A profoundly political book, *Season* invites and frustrates a realist reading. Although critical views on an imperialist homeland, a pre-capitalist subordinated hinterland and the interactions between core and periphery are articulated, the critique is elaborated in the novel’s style. Thus the conflict between an imperialist centre and a distant colonial possession is made known by way of tropes, and the rhetoric animating the novel’s spatial and temporal locations construe a past when a

Southern world was locked into Empire, and separated from its rulers by incommensurable histories, experiences and aspirations.

According to Herbert Marcuse, “the radical qualities of art ... are grounded precisely in the dimensions where art transcends its social determination and emancipates itself from the given universe of discourse and behaviour while preserving its overwhelming presence” (*Aesthetic 6*). If this presence in *Season* can make itself known by references to actual events,¹⁷ it is the outlandish world invented by the novel that accommodates the excesses and deformations that are suppressed in the received discourses.

Significantly, the intermittent recourse to realist representation is called into question by narrative modes that undermine realism, as in the novel’s use of anachrony, prolepsis and analepsis: there is a discrepancy between the chronology of events and the order in which these are related; reference to future happenings are prematurely made, and there are recollections of moments that precede their telling. A more telling use of an alienation device is in the novel’s narrative form. The framing of the narrator’s tale within the hieratic oral manner of a *hakawati*, a public teller of tales in the Arab world (“It was, gentlemen, after a long absence ... that I returned to my people”)¹⁸ and a popular mode, is joined with mimicry of a sophisticated literary technique, *mu-arada* (or *mucdradab*). Barbara Harlow who has identified its usage in the novel, explains that it means opposition or contradiction in which at least two voices participate, the first composing a poem that the second will undo by writing along the same lines, but reversing the meaning. In this way the narrator (named as Mehimeed in the original, but nameless in the translation) tells two different stories, one of the a colonial subject (Mustafa Sa’eed) and the other of a postcolonial subject (the narrator himself), that hinge on their relationship to the coexistence and clash of customary and emergent social and cultural forms within a traditional society altered by imperialist penetration (Harlow).

The artifice of the whole is enhanced by a diegetic address in which the English-educated narrator relates a retrospect on his experiences and his perceptions of others’ experiences to a select audience of his peers. This closed circle of intimates appear to be fellow members of an elite,

connected to the local and the rural, conversant with the distant and the metropolitan, and able to recognize allusions to both Arabic and European literary sources, without the need for any gloss. These span, on the one hand, the poets Abu Nuwas and el-Abbas, a mythic figure El Kadr, and the golden age of Adad,¹⁹ and, on the other, the titles of the exclusively English books on Mustafa Sa'eed's shelves in the visible but secret wing of his village house (137). Yet beyond this audience is an implied larger readership to whose partial knowledge or total ignorance no concessions are made,²⁰ and from them the novel keeps secrets even while feigning the transparency of an artless tale.

Because of these estranging contrivances, *Season* inhibits a naïvely realist reading, its style signalling that the novel's realm is what Michael Löwy designates as the border space between reality and 'irreality'. This "irrealism" is substantiated by the juxtaposition of the mundane and the fantastic, the recognizable and the improbable, the seasonal and the eccentric, the earthborn and the fabulous, the legible and the oneiric, historically inflected and mystical states of consciousness. In a heat-induced delirium of confused thoughts and haphazard memories, the narrator experiences the sunburnt desert as both a void of Nothingness, and a fertile womb (105, 110, 113). Such proximity of discordant discourses and discrete narrative registers, can be seen as aesthetic forms that transcend their sources in the novel's social ground, becoming abstract significations of the incommensurable and the contradictory which are concurrent in the material and cultural worlds of a periphery.

This understanding does not conform with recent discussions of *Season* where colonialism is perceived as an encounter effecting cultural exchanges, rather than an affliction visited by expansionist imperialism. In these readings, modernity is detached from capitalism, and the focus is on the novel's figurations of hybridity and "the in-between" as the defining features of a new world modernism that is neither purely European nor purely indigenous. This is a return to the substance of Saree Makdisi's 1992 essay where he argued that the novel "shatters the very terms" of the opposition in the debate between "traditionalism" and "Westernism" in postcolonial Arab discourse, as it comes to occupy "a zone between cultures" (573). Writing subsequently, Wail S. Hassan

concur with Makdisi about the novel's intervention in the debate, adding the necessity of identifying "those entirely new conceptualizations presented by the novel ... the painful and difficult negotiation between old and new, north and south that erases the discursive boundaries within which each has been construed as a timeless essence" (82). For Hassan, *Season* deconstructs the stereotypes of colonial discourse itself, showing instead a variety of "in between states," and indicating a "hybridization" that undermines essentialist concepts of self and other (86, 126).²¹

Also foregrounding cross-fertilization and fusion is Susan Stanford Friedman's commentary which finds that *Season* stages mimetic cultural encounters, the intermix of the modern and traditional constituting "modernism itself in its different locations" (435), and the deconstruction of the binaries of West/Rest, modern/traditional and innovative/imitative, producing "a hybrid modernity" (437).²² In a different but related register, Patricia Geesey is concerned with the notions of "cultural hybridity, grafting and contamination" (128); these she argues "operate on symbolic and literal levels in the text" (139), presenting a positive message of bicultural, or cultural *grafting* as an antidote to the "germ" of cultural contagion that may be the negative by-product of European colonial endeavours.²³

These designations I find inadequate to the consciousness of political and cultural conflict permeating the novel, and which is substantive to my reading. Rather than valorize a zone between cultures, I see *Season* as questioning its very possibility within a situation poisoned by an imperialist connection. Indeed, in two meticulously described interiors, the book offers cruel parodies of transculturation: Mustapha Sa'eed's room in England, which he calls "a den of lethal lies" (146), is furnished with an amalgam of tawdry artefacts from an undifferentiated Africa-Arabia; attached to his village home where he had resettled after his seasons abroad is a simulacrum of an English-style bourgeois house built to hoard the ghoulish mementoes of his migration, its book-lined study containing "not a single Arab book" (137).

In a self-consciously literary novel, we can anticipate that the representation of space will exceed the limning of its physical characteristics and

will accrete political, cultural and metaphysical meanings. Sudan, “a stone’s throw from the equator” (60), marks a verifiable position on the map, and alludes to a fantasy in the imperial imagination: “Just because a man has been created on the equator some mad people regard him as a slave, others as a god” (108). The Nile is a real river that seasonally waters the crops grown on its banks; it is also a mythic waterway, a “snake god” hungry for victims (39), while the torsions of its “irrevocable journey” northwards (62, 69), across the immense expanse of a sun-scorched desert, follow the route of those passages to a destination that the novel situates as both desire and destiny for the ambitious from the South. A functional railway track “stretching out across the desert like a rope bridge between two savage mountains, with a vast bottomless abyss between them” (54) is one of many images configuring the gulf between a subordinated population and the imperial occupier, repeated in the account of an argument between an Englishman employed by the post-independence administration and a Sudanese university teacher about colonialism’s project and legacy: “They were not angry; they said such things to each other as they laughed, a stone’s throw from the Equator, with a bottomless historical chasm separating the two of them” (69).²⁴

The internal schisms and entanglements between Arabism and Africanism in Sudan²⁵ are made known in Mustapha Sa’eed’s genealogy, his mother a slave from the South, his father from a community living on the borders of Egypt; and in response to one of his English lovers who is confused by his appearance, Mustafa Sa’eed replies, “I’m like Othello—Arab-African” (38).²⁶ This benign construction conceals, as does the novel, the North-South divide within the Sudan, where the North—affluent, culturally Islamic, with ties to the Arab world—dominates and exploits a South rich in natural and mineral resources, ethnically African, in religion Muslim, Christian and animist, and regarded by the North as without civilization. But if little attention is drawn to this internal split, the North as privileged and the South as deprived, disadvantaged and abused silently feeds into the other major separation.

As with space, the multiple temporalities generated by the combined and uneven development of a periphery, are sometimes named and more often appear in metaphoric guises. Condensed in the “season” of

the title is the chronological system of the Muslim Hegira, or Hijra, marking the significant emigrations of early Islamic history,²⁷ the calendar of the Christian Era, the recurrent natural cycles regulating the rhythm of agrarian life, religious pilgrimages to the holy sites of Islam, and secular journeys to foreign lands. The distant past when an Islamic civilization flowered in Southern Europe from the seventh century CE is recalled, and the Crusaders' assaults on the treasures of the Eastern world are remembered—these marking the beginning of Europe's thousand-year project of invasion, culminating with modern imperialism. Mustafa Sa'eed's life-span coincides with the colonization of Sudan: born in 1898 when Anglo-Egyptian rule, which was effectively British domination, was imposed on Sudan after Kitchener's bloody victory over the Mahdi regime at Omdurman,²⁸ he disappears in 1956, the year in which Sudan after a long struggle had gained an incomplete and uncertain independence.

Co-existing with these allusions to the historical moments are voyages into an uncharted time zone. In one instance, this is geographically rooted; in another, it transcends its social ground. Travelling through the desert, the narrator endures a hallucinatory suspension of duration and a dissolution of rational consciousness: "The road is unending, and the sun merciless... The sun is the enemy ... And thus it will remain for hours without moving—or so it will seem to living creatures when even the stones groan, the trees weep, and the iron cries out for help" (108, 9, 10, 11).²⁹ Travelling in the realm of the senses (to which I will return) Mustafa Sa'eed possesses or is possessed by "rare moments" of ecstasy, which he recalls as "outside the bounds of time" (153) and "worth the whole of life" (61).

Where the novel suspends the "irrealist" mode is its engagement with the tension between rootedness and nomadism. For both Mustafa Sa'eed and the narrator who move from villages in the North of Sudan to London (for Mustafa Sa'eed the journey North is via Cairo) in pursuit of education and opportunity, London is the lodestar.³⁰ These passages, however, map different aspirations and effects, and because private experience is always historicized, one is about elective deracination and the ostensible embrace of all that is not the South, the other of affec-

tion for and a painful dislocation from tradition and community. On returning from his studies in England to a post-independence Sudan, Meheimed is delighted by the genius of his birth-place: he observes that “the sound of the wind passing through palm-trees is different from when it passes through fields of corn” (2), feels “a sense of stability ... I am continuous and integral” (5), is gratified at the organic composition of his grandfather’s house, built of mud, an extension of the field on which it stands (71), and concedes, “I must be one of those birds that exist only in one region of the world” (49). Initially charmed by the vibrant community-spirit and conviviality of the village, and reassured by its apparent stability, he observes with pleasure the reception, or better still, the appropriation of modern technology in the village.³¹ But while the reserves and energies of a rural Islamic society in Africa are made known by the narrator, so too are the constraints of its traditions, and having begun his story by reiterating “I am from here,” he comes to lament, “There is no room for me here” (130), his experience of the tragic coercions of custom and his acquaintance with the free-wheeling Mustafa Sa’eed effecting a disarray of his former dispositions.

Mustafa Sa’eed’s journey from the Sudan to London, however, is a tale of permanent dislocation, beginning with his detached status within Sudan, proceeding to alienation from the English, and a desire for revenge against the North. These experiences pieced together and reworked by the narrator from the spoken and written words of a tormented immoralist possessed by resentment, tells of a lust for Englishwomen that is inseparable from an urge to injure the imperialist nation. Born an orphan, uprooted from South and North, after a period of hopeful settlement in the village following the disasters of his season abroad, he submits to a natal nomadism and disappears: “Rationally I know what is right: my attempt at living in this village with these happy people. But mysterious things in my soul and in my blood impel me towards faraway places” (67).

The other aspect, which is pursued in realist mode, is the condition of post-independence Sudan. If the narrator is contemptuous of Africa’s corrupt new regimes,³² the ignominious rulers described by him as “smooth of face, lupine of mouth, their hands gleaming with rings

of precious stones" (118), he is appreciative of the people's capacities. The community of small farmers in the village on the Nile still situated within a pre-capitalist process of production, connected to vestiges of feudal society, and lacking a class outlook, resemble the peasant proprietors of Europe whom Marx (*The Eighteenth Brumaire*) and later Gramsci identified as locked into "unsocialized labour," lacking in class consciousness, and hence remaining an object and not agent of politics (unlike the two hegemonic, *socially* representative classes, bourgeoisie and proletariat.) In *Season*, however, this subordinate social group is shown as a community performing socialized agrarian labour and in process of developing class consciousness.

The exemplar is the narrator's childhood companion, Majoub, now a skilled farmer, prominent in the village cooperative, an activist who petitions and agitates for schools, hospitals and an agricultural college, and the local official of the National Democratic Socialist Party (121). This same Majoub continues to abide by the customary marriage arrangements whereby women have no autonomy; and in response to Meheimeed's comment that the world had changed—this following an unprecedented village tragedy contingent on the subordinate position of women—Majoub replies, "Some things have changed—pumps instead of water-wheels, iron ploughs instead of wooden ones, sending our daughters to school, radios, cars, learning to drink whisky and beer in stead of arak and millet wine—yet even so everything's as it was" (100). The narrator, however, in witnessing change, sees "progress": when observing the inhabitants of his home village inaugurating cooperative ventures and exercising local democracy, he reflects: "Are these the people who are called *peasants* in books?" (64), at a stroke releasing them from their designation as subaltern.

At the heart of the novel's "irrealism" is a melodrama of sado-masochistic hunger and its appeasement, performed on a stage abundantly furnished with signs of imperialism. I earlier referred to the historical gulf built into the narrative. During a lecture at the American University of Beirut in 1980, Salih remarked "one of the major themes of *Season* is the East/West confrontation ... I have re-defined the so-called East/West relationship as essentially one of conflict, while it had previously

been treated in romantic terms.” He went on to say that when he came under the influence of Freud’s theory of man as divided between Eros and the death-instinct, he recognized this duality from the Arab tradition, and later on in *Season* he “tried to dramatize the polarization” (qtd. in Amyuni 15). This enactment of conflict that joins the violence of imperialism and the farther shores of the erotic, and invests the historical chasms and entanglements of the imperialist connection in destructive love affairs, is for me the most obscure dimension of *Season* and one that has in large been circumvented or reduced in critical discussion.³³

The extravagance of the rhetoric recounting this drama signifies the febrile condition of an imperial imaginary inflamed by fantasies of sensual colonial places and licentious native peoples. Mustafa Sa’eed exploits his lovers’ delirious longings for the “tropical climes, cruel suns, purple horizons” (30) of an undifferentiated Africa and Arabia; and they perceive him in similarly inflammatory images: “Your tongue’s as crimson as a tropic sunset ... How marvellous your black colour is! ... the colour of magic and mystery and obscenities ... I want to have the smell of you in full—the smell of rotting leaves in the jungles of Africa, the smell of the mango and the pawpaw and tropical spices, the smell of rains in the deserts of Arabia” (139, 142). To designate this aspect of the novel as sensational is not a pejorative judgement, but rather an attempt to suggest that Salih’s enactment of the confluence of desire, violence and death within relationships governed by the imperialist connection, cannot be contained in conventional language (Murphy). Hence, when explaining that his seductions had awakened the urge to self-immolation in three lovers who killed themselves, Mustafa Sa’eed invokes images of pollution: “You, my lady, may not know, but you—like Carnarvon when he entered Tutankhamen’s tomb—have been infected with a deadly disease which has come from you know not where and which will bring about your destruction” (39).

The association of sickness and a heightened eroticism is a familiar trope of modernist literature (Thomas Mann’s *The Magic Mountain* and *Death in Venice*, Henry James’s *The Wings of the Dove*), and it is reiterated in *Season* when the narrator laments his own secret love for Hosna (Mustafa Sa’eed’s widow or abandoned wife) as evidence that he “like

millions of others was not immune from the germ of contagion that oozes from the body of the universe” (104). However, in a novel that evokes a present consciousness of time past, the refrain of a thousand-year-old lethal disease may allude to Europe’s long imperial history, beginning with Christian raids on the riches of the Islamic world, followed by imperialism’s conquest of the South and then by the “ferocious violence” (151) of the 1914–1918 war fought among the capitalist nations of Europe over the spoils of overseas empire and the exercise of global power. And indeed in his confessions, Mustafa Sa’eed not only conflates the pathology of this conflict with his own sexual quest, but in both an actual conversation with his interlocutor, the narrator, and an imagined address to the English, he attributes an infectious moral corruption to imperialism, thereby inverting the colonialist dread of defilement by colonial peoples and climes.

Commenting on de Sade, Georges Bataille drew attention to “this tormenting fact: the urge towards love, pushed to its limit, is an urge toward death” (*Eroticism* 42). In Mustafa Sa’eed’s liaison with Jean Morris,³⁴ a death-driven eroticism is joined to imperialist rage, the subordinated seeking vengeance, the powerful impelled by desire, contempt and the urge to control the subjugated. In the course of their murderous sexual games the Englishwoman expresses her passion by insulting her lover’s physical appearance, and destroys, amongst other valuable objects, a rare Arabic manuscript and an antique Isfahan prayer rug, both symbols of his culture.³⁵ A relationship dominated by psychic humiliation and the infliction of physical pain, reaches its climax when Mustafa Sa’eed in response to her entreaties and driven by his own frenzy, stabs Jean Morris, the sexually-consummated death remembered by him as a moment of ecstasy: “The sensation that, in an instant outside the bounds of time, I have bedded the goddess of Death and gazed out upon Hell from the aperture of her eyes ... The taste of that night stays on in my mouth, preventing me from savouring anything else” (153).³⁶

We can perhaps read the sado-masochist relationship as a representation that breaks free from its social ground and comes to signify a psycho-metaphysical drama of conflict and violence that can be mapped onto the novel’s critique of imperialism. If this interpretation is sus-

tainable, then the singularity of *Season*, which deals with pornographic matter without itself being pornographic, is in contemplating an intimate nexus between erotic ecstasy and imperialist extremity, conflating the patently political with the opacity of the psychopathological, inflecting history with histrionics. I have hesitated to call the novel's admixture of realist discourse and fantastic fabrication an allegory of empire's excess, but perhaps this is what it is.

But the novel does not end with this sensational drama, and at its close it returns to the social universe and a rest to the narrator's crisis that expresses itself in the assertion of a life-force. After the psychic disarray induced by his association with Mustafa Sa-eed, and intensified by viewing the contents of Sa-eed's secret apartment, he plunges into the actual and mystical river. Caught in its currents, "half-way between north and south ... unable to continue, unable to return" (167), he solicits rescue, electing, as he subsequently tells his auditors, to exist responsibly and positively within the limitations and possibilities of the real world of the Sudan: "I shall live because there are a few people I want to stay with for the longest possible time and because I have duties to discharge. It is not my concern whether or not life has meaning ... I shall live by force and cunning" (168). He repeats what he had said at the outset: "I want to take my rightful share of life by force" (5). There is no victor to the implicit debate between the voices, and no untroubled occupancy of an in-between ground. But, if the incongruities that give peripheral modernities their singularity remain unresolved in the present, there is an echo of the narrator's earlier allusion to another time and a different condition: "We shall pull down and we shall build, and we shall humble the sun to our will; and somehow we shall defeat poverty" (113). In this moment of optimism and as a gesture to a future, he had let it be known that had named his daughter Hope (112–3). Perhaps this gesture can be read as a pre-vision of a post-capitalist, socialist modernity.

Notes

- 1 Liu writes, "China's alternative modernity can be best grasped as an ongoing process replete with contradictions: its revolution aiming at constructing socialism in a third-world, unindustrialized economy is alternative to the Western

- capitalist modernity in political and economic senses, and its emphasis on cultural revolution is also alternative in a cultural sense.” To which he adds, “But Chinese revolution is an integral part of modernity that is at once fragmentary and unifying, heterogeneous and homogenizing. Its project of modernity is as incomplete as its vision is unfulfilled” (“Is There an Alternative?” 186).
- 2 According to Amin, the United States, Canada, Europe and Japan retain control of the five monopolies: technological innovation; control of financial flows; access to natural resources of the entire planet; control of means of information and communication and weapons of mass destruction (602).
 - 3 Trotsky writes, “Hence the absence of conservative tradition, absence of caste ... revolutionary freshness ... But hence also illiteracy, backwardness, absence of organisational habits, absence of system in labour, of cultural and technical education” (476).
 - 4 If this passage has been read as infused with a sense of exhilaration, it should be remembered that the writings of Marx and Engels are notable for recording and protesting the violence of expropriation, the systemized punishment and servitude that the entrenchment of capitalist social relations visited on both domestic and colonized populations.
 - 5 The terms are those of Bloch, but used by him with very different implications. In his account, the return during the Nazi era to earlier forces and past levels of consciousness, was a symptom and component of a morbid condition.
 - 6 The latter part of the essay first appeared as the Preface to Carpentier’s novel, *The Kingdom of this World* (1949), later expanded in 1967.
 - 7 For some out of many examples, see Casanova; Moretti; Prendergast; Elliott, Caton and Rhyne.
 - 8 “By mid-century ... the world-literary peripheries were on the move—the USA of Herman Melville (b. 1819, *Moby Dick*, 1851); the Russia of Ivan Goncharov (b. 1812, *Oblomov*, 1859), Ivan Turgenev (b. 1818, *Fathers and Sons*, 1862), Fyodor Dostoevsky (b. 1821, *Crime and Punishment*, 1866) and Leo Tolstoy (b. 1828, *War and Peace*, 1866); the Holland of Douwes Dekker (b. 1820, *Max Havelaar*, 1860); the Brazil of Machado de Assis (b. 1839, *Memorias póstumas de Bras Cubas*, 1882); the Bengal of Rabindranath Tagore (b. 1861, *Gora*, 1908); and the Japan of Natsume Soseki (b. 1897, *I am a cat*, 1905)—to mention only a few. In this perspective Rizal (1861–96) seems personally precocious but not in the least an isolated figure. He learned much from, and in, literary Paris, but he transformed a great deal of what he absorbed, almost always in a political direction. If I am right, Mallarmé’s aesthetic demon became the *demonio de las comparaciones* haunting the colonized intellectual, Dumas’s ‘sustained dialogues’ became urgent debates about the paths to freedom, Sue’s panorama of the social structure of Paris was changed into a synoptic diagnosis of colonial society, and so on. But nothing shows his creativity better than the manner in which the avant-garde aesthetic of Huysmans was borrowed from, and radically trans-

- formed, to stimulate the imaginations of young Filipino anticolonial nationalists to come” (Anderson “Nitroglycerine” 117).
- 9 See McKeon. The critical consensus is that the novel coincided with the historical emergence of the ‘centred subject’ and bourgeois class consciousness. This makes it a singularly rewarding site for looking at what happened to a modern European narrative genre, one distinct from other forms of narration, when it travelled to capitalism’s hinterlands where neither the material ground nor the ideology for the indigenous development of the novel had existed.
 - 10 For example, see Mukherjee, *Realism; Perishable Empire* and Hafez, *Genesis*. Counter-arguments have been made by scholars of Japanese and Chinese prose who detect autonomous stylistic processes prefiguring the novel in these literatures.
 - 11 In proposing a postcolonial “critical aesthetics,” Bahri notes, but without demonstrating, that postcolonial literature provides glimpses of the contradictions and unevenness of global social development in the atonality of two time-schemes. Her interest is in formal innovation of traditional form (*Native* 103), a reading that is in keeping with the rage for hybridity and transculturation in cultural studies where words like the bilingual and border-crossings abound. See also Heath’s contribution to the debate on World Literature, “The very idea of the study now of world literature is involved in the hybrid: reading not merely comparatively and generically, this novel from here next to that one from there, but migratorially and impurely, writings intermingled with one another, against the grain of ready—legitimate—identities. To look at genre politically is to read with just such a migrant’s-eye view, which is another definition of ‘world literature’, the newness its study makes” (74). Here the new is conflated with the hybrid and the hybrid conceals the singularities marking the literatures of the peripheries.
 - 12 Arguing for the correlation between space and style, Moretti refers to Ernst Mayr’s theory of allopathic speciation predicting that “all major transformations occur when the device enters a new cultural habitat,” a concept which posits that “a change in the environment encourages the spread of morphological novelties of which speciation is *the most significant* but not the only one” (78, 79).
 - 13 His claim is that in modern China “the aesthetic underwent a fundamental transformation from a bourgeois discourse into a revolutionary tool in struggles for state power” (2) as scholars and critics urged the development of a new revolutionary language and new aesthetic forms (69).
 - 14 See Marcuse (*Aesthetic Dimension*). For both Adorno and Marcuse, the political significance of aesthetic autonomy lay in its negative function of generating a critique of capitalism’s existent social order and ethos. Marcuse expounds Walter Benjamin’s discovery of a consciousness of crisis in the elitist, esoteric and decadent literature of Poe, Baudelaire, Proust and Valéry, citing Benjamin’s description of Baudelaire as “a secret agent, an agent of the secret discontent of

- his class with its own rule” (20). Adorno found this negative critique in Kafka and Beckett.
- 15 The lives of the two narrators are measured out in spans of years: the first narrator spends seven years of study in England, returning at age twenty-five; Mustafa Sa’eed’s migration to the North lasts for thirty years, his imprisonment for seven years, and his stay in the village, five years. The precise significance of the numerated years in which seven recurs, is not apparent to me but would no doubt be of interest to those who attribute metaphysical or magical properties to particular numbers. Note too the repetition of the thousand years of European aggression.
- 16 See Hassan, *Tayeb Salih* and Majid, who in a chapter entitled “The North as Apocalypse,” writes, “A dominant motif of canonical postcolonial works by Africans of Muslim descent is the young educated protagonist’s wrenching de-accination from his or her indigenous culture, followed by catastrophic, even suicidal, journeys to the Northern metropolises” (78).
- 17 Remembrance of colonialism is more overt in the comments about the schools the rulers had opened—and which the villagers feared as “a great evil that had come to them with the armies of occupation” (20)—the colleges established, the dams constructed and the railways built, undertakings which are differently construed by Mustafa Sa’eed and the narrator. For the former, a child of colonialism and anti-colonial nationalism, and author of anti-colonialist books who while in England is reputed to have been President of the Society for the Struggle for African Freedom, their cynical purpose is foremost: “The ships at first sailed down the Nile carrying guns not bread, and the railways were originally set up to transport troops; the schools were started so as to teach us how to say ‘Yes’ in their language” (95). A more pragmatic response is offered by the narrator, a product of the decolonizing era who while dissembling an ignorance of imperialism’s motivation, is at ease with the projects of modernization invasion had brought: “The fact that they came to our land, I know not why, does that mean that we should poison our present and our future? Sooner or later they will leave our country The railways, ships, hospitals, factories and schools will be ours and we’ll speak their language, without either a sense of guilt or a sense of gratitude” (49–50).
- 18 “Al-hakawati is a Syrian term for this poet, actor, comedian, historian and storyteller. Its root is hikayah, a fable or story, or haka, to tell a story; wati implies expertise in a popular street-art. The hakawati is neither a troubadour, who travels from place to place, nor a rawi, whose recitations are more formalized and less freely interpreted. The hakawati has popular counterparts in Egypt, where he is often called sha’ir, or poet, and where he accompanies his tales on a rababah, a simple stringed instrument. In Iraq he is known as qisa khoun” (Aziz). The traditional beginning, “You will recall, gentlemen...” is echoed by the narrator in the novel’s first line (“It was, gentlemen, after a long absence . . . that I returned to my people”), and repeated in the course of his recitation.

- 19 El Kadr is the 'green man' of the Islamic tradition, a supernatural being in folklore; Abu Nuwas is a poet of the 8th century CE influenced by Sufism and a celebrant of gay love; the age of Adad is the golden age of the Assyrians reputed to have lasted from 33 to 1300 CE; and the poet el-Abbas whose life spanned 1881–1963 was born in Egypt and attracted to the nomadic life of the Bedouin of western Sudan. These references appear in the novel, 107–110.
- 20 Allen examines the relations between addressing and reading as these impinge on the different conditions of address and reading for the metropolitan and the noncosmopolitan reader.
- 21 Hassan suggests that the novel pits against one another "several contending discourses—colonialist and Africanist, Arab (traditional and secularist), patriarchal (Western and Arab)" (82).
- 22 Friedman is concerned to challenge modernity as a Western invention and recognize "the creative agencies of colonial and postcolonial subjects as producers of modernity" (437).
- 23 Pursuing the problem of address, Allen finds that the novel deals "with a dislocation that results from the interstitial positioning between the Sudan and England" (18).
- 24 By this Hassan suggests, Salih, in contrast to other African-Arab writers, acknowledges the 'Africaness' of his Arab protagonists.
- 25 Sudan has been the site not only of social and economic conflict between North and South, but also of cultural exchange between Arabism and Africanism. See Wai.
- 26 Here too Salih acknowledges the 'Africaness' of his Arab protagonists. The significance of this reference to Othello signals Mustafa Sa'eed's murder of his English wife, although this and other allusions in the novel to canonical literature—*Heart of Darkness* and *A Passage to India* are other instances—do not form part of our discussion. See Peeled and Spivak, who reads *Season* as a transgressive reading of Conrad.
- 27 A footnote tells us this began in 622 CE. Said refers to the voyages narrated by the novel as being converted into a "sacralized hegira from the Sudanese countryside ... into the heart of Europe" (255). There are references to the journey taken by the narrator's grandfather to Egypt in 1306 of the Muslim calendar (1928 CE).
- 28 This was in revenge at the death of General Gordon at Khartoum during the Mahdi uprising of 1885, which had overthrown Anglo-Egyptian rule. Contemporary historians regard the Mahdi as an early form of anti-colonial nationalism. "As the Knight of Empire, Sir Herbert Kitchener, made final preparations to advance, against the flow of the river, upon the town that would soon be looted and burnt to honour his victory, Mustafa Sa'eed was born in one of its dark and apprehensive alleys ... It is around this bloody encounter and its aftermath, between an independent theocratic Sudan and an insatiable British

empire, between.... a messianic Islam and a missionary Christianity, that the entire destiny of Mustafa Sa'eed revolves" (Seikaly in Amyuni, 136).

Conscious of having inverted a subordinate Arab-African persona by taking on the role of an invader and colonizer from the South in his encounters with those Englishwomen he seduced and destroyed, Mustapha Sa'eed identifies with, while excoriating, Kitchener's insolent reprimand to the defeated and shackled Mahdi rebel, Mahmoud Wad Ahmed: "Why have you come to my country to lay waste and plunder?" It was the intruder who said this to the person whose land it was, and the owner of the land bowed his head and said nothing" (94).

- 29 Anyone with a mind to do so can compare this section with "Caves" in *A Passage to India*.
- 30 Majid refers to Cheikh Hamidou Kane's *Ambiguous Adventure* and Ken Bugul's *The Abandoned Baobab* as well as *Season*.
- 31 Doors fashioned from a whole tree by the local carpenter are replaced by mass-produced ones made of iron, the donkey is joined by the motor vehicle, and local political initiatives, such as the building of a hospital and schools, are visibly altering an antique but not timeless, landscape.
- 32 And indeed, the novel juxtaposes the grandiose plans for Africa's future being devised in ostentatious buildings, to the popular schemes implemented at a local level in cooperative ventures. This gap between the countryside and the modernized capital city Khartoum is imaged in the contrast of a dancing circle spontaneously formed in the desert by Bedouins and the narrator's crew on a journey north, and the Independence Hall in Khartoum "an imposing edifice ... constructed in the form of a complete circle," designed in London, using white marble imported from Italy and costing more than a million pounds (119).
- 33 On this aspect of the novel, see my "Reflections on The Excess of Empire in Tayib Salih's *Season of Migration to the North*."
- 34 Abu-Haydar refers to Salih's close friendship with the Palestinian poet Tawfiq Sayigh whose sado-masochistic love affair with English women is transfigured in his verse.
- 35 Sabry Hafez pointed this out to me. Interestingly, the cover photograph of the new Penguin edition displays not these items but the expensive Wedgwood vase, which Jean Morris also smashes, juxtaposed with a fabric of indeterminate floral design.
- 36 This recollected scene enacts "the terrifying convergence of pleasure and death," a phrase used by Marcuse in his gloss on Freud's theories of the bond between the life-instincts and the Nirvana principle (the instincts drawn into the orbit of death), a concurrence which has entered some analytic writing on eroticism as a normative rather than a deviant variety of sexual experience (*Eros* 23–24).

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