

# *An Introduction: Uncommon Genealogies*

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THIS SPECIAL ISSUE ON “Institutionalizing English Studies: The Postcolonial/Postindependence Challenge” appears at a critical juncture in the disciplinary development of English, which has now behind it at least two decades of scholarship establishing the imperatives of colonialism and decolonization in its formation. Perhaps the most significant effect of postcolonial studies, with all its inadequacies, self-deceptions, and metropolitan parochialisms, is that the curricular study of English can no longer be studied innocently or inattentively to the deeper contexts of imperialism, transnationalism, and globalization in which it first articulated its mission. It is no small matter that Caliban competes *de rigueur* with his creator Shakespeare as the canonical expression of late twentieth century English studies. The archetypal figure of colonial subjugation and subversion underwrites a revisionist view of English studies as a composite of discordant voices, rather than the sweet, harmonious blend of mellow tones that Matthew Arnold envisaged as the ultimate triumph of English culture. Yet even Caliban has marked his limits in driving English studies into a revisionist mode, as other forms of imaginative expression beyond reactive resistance are explored in the process of self-definition.

Among the questions driving the various articles in this issue is whether postcolonial developments have undermined the study of English (and effectively made it irrelevant) or whether, by deploying the creative resources of literature to enable new assertions of identities, they have contributed to a wider redefinition of its function in the late twentieth century. Retelling the history of English, it turns out, not only makes visible the presence of previously occluded peoples; it also reveals

their role in extending the range of imaginative possibilities in literary study to include their own histories, as the articles by Cameron McCarthy and Greg Dimitriadis, Christine Prentice, and John P. McCombe in this issue illustrate. What Simon During describes as “literature’s heterodox potential” has served the postcolonial imagination well, transforming academic critique of colonial ideologies into a rewriting of the works that comprise the institution of English. Yet, as Andrew Shipe points out in his essay on the Irish Revival, such rewriting or appropriation of canonical texts and authors does not necessarily result in a new stance from which a truly liberated postcolonial subjectivity can be forged, which would jettison the hierarchies and inequities characterizing colonial rule. The use of Shakespeare in cultural nationalism is a case in point. Yeats’ conflicting views on Shakespeare dramatize the tensions in English studies between empowerment and regulation. On the one hand, expressivity is a means of bringing people into an informed public sphere, where they may both shape and receive ideas determining their future. On the other hand, canonical ideals place limits on who can speak and what can be uttered, so that self-selection still governs access to power and the distribution of cultural resources. Regardless of its self-description as a Caliban writing back to the empire, postcolonialism’s intervention in English studies is incomplete as long as the structures of hierarchy and power remain virtually unchanged in decolonization, as Len Findlay reminds us in his piercing essay on imagining an Indigenized future.

How English became a university subject has probably one of the most convoluted histories of any discipline we know today. No two accounts are similar, which is no doubt an acknowledgment of the field’s prodigious narrative capacity. Yet oddly there is more convergence in the *manner* of telling the story of English than its *matter*. A number of critics have drawn attention to such varied topics as popular democracy (Doyle), moral and social missionizing (Baldick), Christian hermeneutics (Hunter “Literary Theory”), colonial management (Viswanathan *Masks*), governmental control (Hunter *Culture and Government*), linguistic and cultural assimilation (Court; Crawford *Devolving*), and

credentialization (Graff) as major motivations in the growth of English studies since the nineteenth century. At best, these are given as discrete issues affecting English literary instruction from its inception. Relative to each other, these developments would have to be understood as responses either to various historical pressures or changing social demands. This view emerges most sharply in Chris Baldick's *The Social Mission of English Criticism* (1983), an early work integrating literary criticism and educational history. Baldick's work set a certain style for writing the history of English studies whose allure has also been entrapping. Its chronological mode of narration and institutional focus notwithstanding, its reading of literary education as primarily a history of English criticism has kept discussion focused squarely on the fate of texts in the context of shifting schools of thought. As a result, the discipline's cultural origins have been subsumed within the current debates on canonical value. Even though it is true the entry of new social groups into education has made the debates possible in the first place, the present-day orientation of the canon wars, while obviously crucial, deflects from an equally important focus on the historical processes by which these groups emerged from being the objects of moral pedagogy to becoming subjects of their own history. Tracking this process is impossible without reference to the shift from representation to representational politics. In the long view, this involves relating the domestic and international circumstances shaping the discipline to readers' insertion into — and their subsequent reclamation of — the civil structures of participatory democracy.

There is a vast distance between a literary pedagogy that depends on a view of readers as inherently deficient and an educational agenda that expects literature to reflect social diversity. In the first instance "representation" refers to an assessment of the moral status of readers, on the basis of which literary study develops functions enhancing readers' moral sensibilities through a process of discrimination and evaluation. This meaning persisted even with the advent of democratic mass society. Indeed, the moral function became even more pronounced when the English working classes entered mainstream educa-

tion, as literature became a powerful tool for the containment of lower-class agitation. Matthew Arnold understood this all too clearly, and by presenting political restiveness as a symptom of cultural anarchy, he extended the tradition of projecting literary goals as a response to the moral deficiencies of the citizenry. That he could include the "savage" Irish in this project just as effortlessly as he did the English working classes showed how flexible was this meaning of representation. Significantly, Arnold reinforced the idea of literature as moral education at a time when the working classes were demanding the franchise and the Irish were agitating for rights of self-determination. This conjunction of developments suggests how close is the slippage between literature's representation of its constituency of readers and its transformation into a political demand for readers' rightful inclusion in the social world it portrays. In fact, the depiction of readers' inadequacies is not a finite activity, an early phase of literary education followed by a later moment, a second phase, when readers assert their political presence. Rather, representation of moral insufficiencies must be considered as an ongoing response to readers' claims to self-determination. This is clear in Chinua Achebe's famous denunciation of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* for perpetuating racist portrayals of Africans. Achebe's critique exposes the colonial pedagogy of the novel, disputing the argument that the work questions the validity of the colonial enterprise. Achebe's criticism suggests that Conrad's physical representation of African natives holds the key to his politics: by depicting them as long-limbed and langorous, he neutralizes the threatening restiveness of Africans. An incipient agitation that would soon lead to independence movements all over the continent is turned into inert passivity, as the physical details of Conrad's descriptions rob his supposedly critical narrative of an "alternative frame of reference" by which to judge the actions of his characters (Achebe 256). Achebe's own reading therefore can be said to be political in this vital sense: it restores the context of upheaval and resistance to colonial rule by exposing Conrad's racialized language and dismantling its structure of racist stereotypes.

The meaning of representation as a purely political idea, referring to the presence of social groups in the decision-making democratic process, cannot easily be transferred to the literary curriculum, which can never presume to encompass the total social fabric or advance the interests of all its members simultaneously. At best it can reflect the presence of social groups *in the educational institution* (a crucial distinction), but demographic diversity in education cannot be equated with political representation. Nonetheless, the curriculum is newly marked for its potential to bear different class, gender, and racial interests, thus breaking the back of the Arnoldian curriculum, which, following Macaulay's Filtration Theory, asserts that education exists to filter the values of a dominant class downward to other classes. In part, the spread of class, gender, ethnic, and other interests cuts into literature's historical role as a shaper and producer of moral selves, as the relativism of values dismisses the possibility that there can be such a thing as a consensual moral self. After all, whose values are to be disseminated when there are competing groups represented in the curriculum?

These opposed tendencies in literary pedagogy convince me more than ever that we need a workable theory of representation bridging two radically different conceptions of the reader. On one hand, we must contend with the historical genealogy of English literary study from its religious origins: that is, the construction of readers of English literature as inheritors of a scriptural legacy of original sin, which posits literary study as an instrument of moral elevation, if not redemption. On the other hand, the second conception of readers, who are regarded as encompassing the full range of social diversity, follows from the rise of the nation-state, and it requires the interpellation of readers as members of a community increasingly defined on national rather than religious or ethnic lines. The movement from *representation* to *representational politics* adduces a contingent relationship between literary education and its universe of readers often lost sight of when texts are deemed to be the sole source of value. Indeed, by this calculation it should be possible to relocate value from texts to the enhanced bargaining power

of readers, based on their access to the civil structures of participatory democracy.

To illustrate this, I offer a reading of a contemporary memoir authored by a woman belonging to India's untouchable, or *dalit*, class. Kumud Pawde's "The Story of My Sanskrit" (1992) is a remarkable work for several reasons. The memoir appeared at a time when untouchables in India, like other minority groups in America and elsewhere, were mobilizing themselves around a cultural identity to undo the erasure of their existence by their caste oppressors. Central to the act of self-reclamation were critiques of brahminical literature as a cause of untouchables' oppression. In this context it would appear that the route to dalit empowerment is a proportional devaluation of the literature produced by their antagonists, who are members of the upper castes. But interestingly, "The Story of My Sanskrit" traces a reverse trajectory, untypical though it may have been of other dalit writings. It describes the class aspirations of a dalit woman who persists in mastering Sanskrit, traditionally considered to be the preserve of India's uppercaste Brahmins. Therefore, when a dalit woman, the "lowest of the low" whom "religion has considered vermin" (Pawde 97), masters the language and literature so successfully as to earn professional credentials to teach it, she attracts both admiration (from her fellow dalits) and denunciation (by the upper castes). The admiration from her caste-fellows stems from their understandable pride in seeing one of their own gain access to forbidden knowledge. Yet their satisfaction is not simply because Pawde achieves the impossible and demonstrates superior literary skills, on a par with those who jealously guard Sanskrit. Rather, they see her access to Sanskrit as driven by the same momentum spurring dalits to gain entry into Hindu temples, assert claims to civic amenities such as common drinking water, and other such attempts to fight caste restrictions. Through Sanskrit, Pawde encouraged dalits to believe that, by disrupting Sanskrit's alignment with a select social group, she had paved the way for them to enter other forbidden spaces. So that even though Pawde's great desire to learn Sanskrit may appear assimilationist, she asserted the voice of a newly enfranchised untouchable community by

thwarting Sanskrit's identification with the upper castes. And by staking her own claims to Sanskrit as an outcaste woman, she denied the boundaries that preserved Sanskrit in all its purity. In other words, she disentangled Sanskrit from the social group whose values it was supposed to reflect but did not do so more than any other language. The power of a new voice like Pawde's is that it presents a challenge to negative representations, not by throwing out the literature by which caste oppression is maintained, but by refuting its identification with an elite social group. Pawde's memoir suggests that if the object of the dalit struggle remained confined to discarding brahminical literature, it would not necessarily make any difference in the power relations between the upper castes and the untouchables. Indeed, it is very likely that the various social groups would remain intact in their separate spheres. As an ultimate gesture of non-essentialism, Pawde's desire to learn Sanskrit refuses the label of self-hating assimilationism.

John Guillory rightly points out that the canon debate in the US has derailed educational reform from its real objective — ensuring equal access to cultural capital — by focusing exclusively on competing social representations. In our contemporary preoccupation with making the curriculum as inclusive as possible to match the growing numbers of social groups entering education, we have opted for a curricular version of affirmative action, without the social goals of affirmative action. We have settled for representative coverage rather than aiming for social transformation through equitable distribution of educational resources, including cultural capital. When the curriculum is conceived as a micro-model of pluralist society, social heterogeneity is valued to the extent that it can be mirrored in the content of literary instruction. But representational claims suggest that literature — and institutionalized study of it — can only be a simulacrum of social realities, not the site of social struggle itself nor the struggle for rights, whose attainment marks the full inclusion of diverse social groups in civil society and the nation-state. Indeed, by a paradoxical quirk, when full rights are obtained, it becomes a moot question whether various social groups would turn to literature as the place where

they would pursue the path to social equality and justice. In the realm of actual realization of rights, the function of literary education would itself be transformed, as a site perhaps of the historical memory of struggle.

Charting the transformations in English studies is not an easy task, as the very nature of change is to produce new forms whose relation to earlier ones is rarely self-evident and indeed often so opaque as to counteract any suggestion of connection or systematic development. The difficulty is compounded by the fact that the multiple genealogies of English are effaced at the moment when English enters the syllabus, becomes part of the credentializing of citizens and subjects, and is established as the certifiable basis of heritage and competence. One of the great challenges in writing the history of English studies is the sheer mass of detail confronting the critic and historian, who is obliged to attend simultaneously to policies, institutional requirements, curricular content, the universe of learners, pressures of the market place (including publishing), and distribution systems, not to mention the vagaries of fashion and shifting standards of value. Correspondingly, the historian of English studies cannot simply invoke whatever theoretical approach happens to have currency at the time, but rather must enlist the help of a wide range of disciplines, including sociology, aesthetics, philosophy, literary criticism, pedagogy, politics, and history, in order to make sense of unpatterned developments in the field. Nor is the problem made any easier by the fact that the professional study of education (which attempts the integration of the above-named approaches in some form or the other) still remains somewhat outside the pale of scholarly attention in many disciplines.

This is not to say that, within English studies, the last decade has not witnessed impressive new work forcing an introspective gaze on the origins and growth of the field. As a number of critics have noted, English studies is a relatively young discipline with barely a hundred and fifty years behind it. But despite its youth, the beginnings of the discipline have always seemed somewhat opaque in the popular memory, as if English studies stretched back languorously to an origin identical with

England's. There is no reason why English scholars should be surprised that English study has a colonial connection, among other motivations, or that it might be implicated in the cultural management of other societies, including other parts of Greater Britain (Crawford *Scottish Invention*). Yet what seems to some a fairly unexceptional finding has the blatant force of heresy for many others.

The resistance to studying the development of English in an international frame produces genealogies that confine "English" to England and confer on it a national identity which is belied, however, by the transcontinental movements and derivations of the discipline. By contrast, the authors in this collection of essays refuse monochromatic accounts in which intersecting histories and crosscurrents are turned into mere context or background. Instead, they offer multiple genealogies of a discipline whose origin is as indeterminate as its future shape. By illuminating a persistently shifting focus in the sites of cultural production and institutionalization, they dissolve apparent distinctions between center and periphery and leave huge question marks around the national attributes of literature, interrogating the appropriateness of even such commonly accepted designations as "English studies" or "American studies."

The denationalizing of English or American studies raises an interesting question about nomenclature. Particularly in decolonizing societies but no less relevant in the Anglo-American academy, it is worth asking whether there will come a time when English studies will be known simply as postcolonial studies, contested though the latter term may now be and at times even disavowed by its most illustrious practitioners (Spivak). Or is the now ubiquitous term "global studies" going to be the vogue of the future? I was struck by the recent renaming of the American Studies Research Centre in Hyderabad, India — a major resource center supporting research and teaching — as the Indo-American Centre for International Studies. The renaming was done in the spirit of acknowledging topics of "global significance" for which the rubric of American studies was seen as too limited ("American Studies Research Centre Gets a New Name" 11). If this is intended to gesture that American

national identity no longer has the power to define a field of study which has become broadly international in its reach, it also has the effect of conveying the idea that the world can be contained in America as a matter of course. As a number of authors in this issue remark, but most particularly Tim Watson, Alys Weinbaum, and Brent Edwards, Americanization and globalization have become interchangeable terms, notwithstanding the fact that what appears as globalization from the American perspective will be read more realistically as Americanization from another site in the world. Even as there are concerted attempts to engage in post-national reorganization of the discipline, English and American studies seem incapable of escaping the organizing rubric of nationhood. The strongest challenge has indeed come from postcolonial studies, and it comes in the form of questioning the sites of literary production as the first step toward denationalization of literary studies.

Precisely where is English literature produced? Two or three decades ago this question might have been answered with numbing certainty: in England, of course. But the scholarship since then has produced startling new insights that challenge such self-evident conclusions and force a larger, global perspective into view. If, as Salman Rushdie once remarked, Britons remain oblivious of their own history because so much of it occurred elsewhere, much the same can be said about English studies. The uncommon genealogies of the discipline invariably begin and end at a point extending far beyond England's borders. Often they involve three-way movements. Take, for instance, the history of English in Canada. As Sarah Phillips Casteel shows in her contribution, the migration of Scots to Canada was fueled by the Scots' desire for autonomy from England, even as they sought to deprovincialize themselves in the North American colony through assimilation to English cultural norms. The Scots' avid pursuit of English literature to break out of a deadening cultural isolation, even more extreme in Canada than Scotland, contributed to an earlier Arnoldian emphasis in Canadian English studies, in contrast to the situation across the border in the US where rhetoric remained dominant. The Scottish intervention illustrates how difficult it is to

explain the different emphases in curriculum and pedagogy exclusively in terms of internal developments in the US and Canada. England remains a point of reference, to be sure, but always in relation to other social and religious groups brought within its orbit of influence, be they the Irish, Scots, and Welsh reorganized by the acts of unification (Crawford *Devolving*), or the Jews, Dissenters, and Catholics incorporated into the nation by the lifting of restrictive disabilities legislation (Viswanathan *Outside the Fold*), or colonial subjects inducted into the colonial administration through English education (Viswanathan *Masks*; Sharpe; Suleri). All these various assimilations unify the concept of "England" and "English studies," but primarily through the impact of groups considered external to it. It is from this "other" place, this place of religious dissent, border nations, and colonies, that the history of English must be reexamined and reconstituted.

Contemporary developments follow a pattern similar to the early history of English studies. For instance, consider the modern history of Commonwealth studies, commonly understood as the progenitor of postcolonial studies. Tim Watson reveals its stunning institutional development, not in England but in the US academy, a development that he suggests grows out of the encounter between postwar US globalization and the declining British empire. This genealogy obviates straightforward narrative accounts of disciplinary formations, which are more likely to follow oblique routes and crisscrossing patterns obliging the critic to adopt a transnational perspective in order to track them. Moreover, it also reveals that fields emerge in relation to each other at particular historical conjunctures. Far from developing apart from postcolonial interests as commonly believed, American studies dovetails with Commonwealth studies in a Cold War era that saw the demise of the great European empires, only to be succeeded by a new set of global power relations. The American role in Commonwealth and later postcolonial studies has provoked strong reactions in some quarters, such as marking off Commonwealth studies as a logical (and legitimate) extension of English studies which remains more or less constant in norms, standards, and critical methods

carried over from the parent discipline. Moreover, the American intervention has given grounds to separate Commonwealth studies from postcolonial studies. The former is held to be the “authentic” expression of postcolonial societies, still united by cultural ties to the empire that ruled them, whereas the latter is presumed to bear a professionalized identity matching the migration of Third World intellectuals to the west, for whom access to the academy is the route to social mobility (Ahmad; Dirlik). Not only is a pernicious politics of authenticity set in place by these genealogical divisions, but they fail to acknowledge that both Commonwealth and postcolonial studies are equally products of empire’s decline and the new power equations that succeeded it, which perforce include America and the culture of global capital. Rather than view Commonwealth and postcolonial studies through the lenses of authenticity, it would be more productive to examine the three-way relationships among America, Britain, and the colonies that are now part of the new global markets, and their effects on the subsequent divide between Commonwealth and postcolonial studies, as well as the denationalizing of “English” or “American” studies.

If it is unclear where “English literature” is produced, the question of where “Indian literature” or “African literature” is produced is no less complex, no less indeterminate in its relation to national history. Through statistical analysis, Bernth Lindfors shows that the content of African literature scholarship differs depending on where it is produced. The fortunes of the Big Three African writers — Soyinka, Achebe, and Ngugi — vary according to where literary criticism of their work is published: Whereas these canonical figures dominate doctoral research and publication in the US, it is not till very recently that these writers figure in any prominent way in African universities. If this is the case, what does it mean even to use the term “African literature” when it obviously has such different valences in different locales? Today there may be more students and scholars of these writers in the African countries, but Lindfors points out the huge disparities in postcolonial understandings that arise when the non-African world is the primary site for production of work about African writers, with little concern for the

African readerships themselves. If we refer again to Shipe's article, this pattern is in stark contrast to the history of Shakespeare criticism, which reveals the importance of non-institutional sites for its production. If the professionalized reader never overtook the reader for pleasure when it came to Shakespeare, the uneven sites of postcolonial scholarship suggest, on the other hand, the ascendancy of a more professionalized marketplace that competes with, if it does not altogether displace, a more broad-based readership for postcolonial works, especially one that is cohesively linked with the cultural contexts and situations which provide the material for these works.

Similarly, in examining the marketplace, Arnab Chakladar concludes that what goes by the name of "Indian literature" in the west is narrowly defined as writing in English by predominantly metropolitan, diasporic, English-educated Indians, whose notion of India may very well be mediated by the west (through an updated version of Orientalism, for example).<sup>1</sup> The category of Indian literature has a long and complex history of which a significant part is the negotiation of an intricate caste and power structure, resulting in the valorization of Sanskrit as the privileged literary language and the subsequent marginalization of *bhasa* or vernacular literatures rooted in the linguistic cultures of various regions.<sup>2</sup> In its modern, globalized forms, however, "Indian literature" is also produced as a subset of Commonwealth (and now postcolonial) studies, with a self-selecting canon designed for international consumption. Apart from rank subservience to a capricious global marketplace, one of the most pernicious outcomes of this selective study is that the reaction against it has spawned a politics of authenticity, a philosophy and an aesthetics of nativism that redraws boundaries around nation and ethnicity as the defining features of "Indian" literatures. The nativist response to globalization takes recourse to essentializing notions no less aggressively than the global spread of western ideas it opposes (Said 332).

To explore the historical and ideological conditions in which the study of English literature emerged is also to understand the production of new forms of knowledge. Rita Raley correctly

points out that because colonial educational policies continually wavered between aesthetic and utilitarian rationales, the indecision contributed to a longer life for English as a humanistic, civilizing branch of study, even as English was projected as a language of material advancement. Yet it is equally possible to see this deliberate oscillation as the source of English studies' tyrannical hold over decolonizing societies like India. For if the high-minded values of English humanism no longer pertain, the utilitarian importance of English as the language of globalization and economic expansion consolidates its presence in postcolonial societies, acting as a sturdy backup to a failed civilizing mission. The threat to the development of vernacular languages and literatures is its most pernicious effect.

This brings us back to our earlier observation about the widening gap in literary studies between reading as an end in itself and reading as institutionalized behavior. This distance parallels the persistent tension between academic criticism and the literature it purports to study, with postcolonial studies being particularly susceptible to the charge that it is an Anglo-American consumer item, and not a true reflection or acknowledgment of the creative expressions of decolonizing societies. The essay by McCarthy and Dimitriadis attempts to correct this perception by offering an alternative approach to ideological criticism, by looking at the postcolonial imagination in literature and art as driven by energies not reducible to Caliban "writing back." Cursing in the language of the colonizer makes the decolonized subject pathetically dependent on the structures of knowledge and feeling normalized by colonial education, and further work on the nature of postcolonial imagination is needed to understand the transformation of those structures in postcolonial education. Nonetheless, the charge persists that literary expressivity is devalued in postcolonial studies in order to further a political agenda. Even the shifts from Commonwealth to postcolonial studies reveal these fissures, as politicized readings take over more formalistic or culturalist approaches to Anglophone literature.

Postcolonialism is often understood to be grounded in a politicized subjectivity. Yet for all the revisionist understanding of

postcoloniality, its impact on English studies has yet to be studied from a perspective that examines the emergence of new notions of literary subjectivity. These new conceptions cannot simply be understood in the reductive terms of Caliban writing back, nor of hybridity, mimicry, or other such notions of secular, urban cosmopolitanism that still imply an anchoring in the institutional spaces created by colonialism. Defining subjectivity as a return to the past and to the self, Simon During makes the provocative argument that English studies retains a commitment to literary subjectivity which is not encompassed by political criticism, as borne out by the still evolving field of postcolonial studies. To talk about literature as a retreat into self-scrutiny may appear a regressive move, not befitting the political agenda of postcolonial studies (Hunter "Literary Theory"). After all, the traditional view of literature as apolitical has given humanism its abiding exclusivity, with its premise that literature influences public life when it is most withdrawn from politics, public life being defined in terms of morality and civility. Of course, we need no reminder that, translated into colonial employment, this is also the sphere of public access to which the British administration wished to restrict its subjects through English education.

Does an apolitical literature then signify a return to the values of humanism? That would seem to be the obvious conclusion. But During turns humanism on its head by showing, through his subtle reading of Peter Carey's *Oscar and Lucinda*, that when literature retreats from politics and is marginalized because of its presumed ineffectualness and devaluation in society, what it loses is not so much an engagement with the world but rather its institutional base. The formalized world of the institution contains a paralyzed politics, even as it appears to open up a space for asserting the claims of identity through its agency. Marginalized and devalued, literature paradoxically reinforces literary subjectivity in what During describes as the fantasy spaces of wonder. Wonder, unlike tradition, has no institutional home, no anchoring mechanism that channels its expression in determinate ways. It does not require a structure of reference and intertextuality to construe its meaning —

indeed, it thwarts all identification with systematized forms of knowledge. It is from this non-institutional site that postcolonial criticism can perhaps be its most vigorous and emancipatory, its driving force being an imagination put in the service of crafting a new literary subjectivity that includes, but also at the same time goes beyond, ideological critique.

This may seem a strange conclusion to reach after the confrontational polemics of the eighties and nineties. It might even appear reactionary after the interventions made in the academy, which have resulted in a widening of the curriculum to include the works of marginalized groups. Yet as we begin the twenty-first century, what I see occurring is an attempt by critics, including some in this special issue, to disengage literature from humanism, while at the same time resisting reducing it to a purely sociological entity subordinate to the compulsions of identity-politics. The search for a postcolonial subjectivity beyond the recalcitrant Caliban is certainly part of that attempt. But even more insistent is a will to repair the divide between imagination and criticism that has split the field of postcolonial studies, not to speak of the ensuing bifurcation between Commonwealth and postcolonial studies. We would do well to recall that the psychological scars postcolonial studies now bear are similar to those borne by English studies in its formative years, when literary function vacillated between society and self as the primary object of study. The institutional history of the discipline reveals that, in the growing utilitarian pressures to make literature responsive to practical social needs, literature acquired a role complementing history as a form of knowledge about social process and event. On the principle of that association, the superiority of English literature received an added boost, with the claim that other non-European literatures failed to retain a sobering connection to social concerns (Viswanathan, *Masks* 120-25). Indeed, the European dismissal of "Oriental" literature for its fancifulness and sentiment was a peculiarly mordant response to literary subjectivity, and was motivated by a will to make literature as empirical and rule-governed as science.

We are back now to the point where imagination is once again contested as a reliable key to social knowledge. If the structure of postcolonial imagination is itself part of a sensibility shaped by colonial education, is the knowledge it produces defined by the parameters of *colonial* knowledge? This is surely a question we cannot escape from as we contemplate the future of English studies, not just *from* a postcolonial or post-independence perspective but *as* a significant part of the shared history of both metropolitan and postcolonial societies. One reason why it becomes so important to look at the processes of institutionalization is that we may also learn the points at which unaccommodated experiential knowledge is disciplined into literary sensibilities creating a particular conception of selfhood and society. It becomes imperative first to focus on the work of education — involving reader *and* text, as well as the social world imagined in acts of interpretation taking place in the classroom — before we can even begin to talk about literary value. How to appreciate a daffodil, even if one is not likely ever to see one, is often pointed out as the quintessential tyranny of colonial education. In this issue, Christine Prentice examines the teaching of the Wordsworth poem, “I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud,” as part of the civilizing mission to convert the “I” of the poem into the interiorized — and alienated — subjectivity of the Antiguan reader. The interiorization clearly breaks down when the character in Jamaica Kincaid’s novel, appropriately named Lucy, finally encounters daffodils for the first time in the United States only to identify them with conquest and subjection, not beauty and pleasure. But the issue, to my mind, is not merely that these are alien literary experiences which involve a splitting of self, two halves ranged against each other for whom the battle against the colonizer turns into an inner struggle (Nandy). Rather, readers are asked to master literary skills as if they *are* world experiences, and in this substitution one begins to see the power of institutional study, which turns the text into a metonymy of the world, and the reader’s relation to it as the ground of sensibility. To regain the world through other imaginings that recapture texts from a point out-

side the institution offers a challenge to English studies that its postcolonial offshoot is peculiarly fitted to undertake.<sup>3</sup>

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> The enduring appeal of novels like Gita Mehta's *Karma Cola*, Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine*, or more recently Sanjay Nigam's *The Snake Charmer* in the Anglo-American marketplace suggests that the Orientalizing of India is not confined to a John Masters or a Paul Scott. Even the steady stream of Indian novels in the mode of magical realism, which ostensibly began with Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* and continued with Vikram Chandra's *Red Earth and Pouring Rain*, depends on images of a fantastical India, full of miraculous events and on mythological sensibility.
- <sup>2</sup> See the reviews of *Of Many Heroes* and *Nativism* in this issue.
- <sup>3</sup> I thank Victor J. Ramraj for inviting me to assemble this special issue, and I am grateful to him, Pat Srebrnik, Mavis Page, and other editorial staff of *ARIEL* for their assistance.

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