

Post-colonial  
Literatures in  
English

*History Language Theory*



Dennis Walder



**Post-colonial  
Literatures  
in English**  
*History Language Theory*



**I**N THIS ORIGINAL AND ACCESSIBLE introduction to post-colonial literatures in English, Dennis Walder guides the reader through the historical, linguistic and theoretical issues that inform post-colonial literary study. He then goes on to provide three detailed case studies, focusing upon Indian fiction in English, Caribbean and Black British poetry, and contemporary South African literature.

In a searching final chapter he considers, through a focus upon work by Ariel Dorfman, V. S. Naipaul and Michael Ondaatje, the questions of what might follow 'After Post-Colonialism'. Among the writers and theorists discussed are: Achebe, Brathwaite, Bhabha, Gordimer, Fanon, Freud, Henry Louis Gates, Jr, C. L. R. James, Marx, Mhophe, Miller, Narayan, Ngugi, Nichols, Said, Sahgal, Sartre, Spivak, Trivedi and Walcott.

The book provides a clear and provocative path through the texts and debates of a major and exciting new area of literary studies.

**Dennis Walder**

Born in South Africa and educated at the universities of Cape Town and Edinburgh, the author is Head of the Literature Department at the Open University. Among his numerous books and articles on nineteenth- and twentieth-century literature are: *Athol Fugard* (1984) and the bestselling edited volume *Literature in the Modern World* (1990).

Cover illustration: Aubrey Williams, *Shostakovich Quartet No. 7*, Opus 108, 1980, reproduced by kind permission of Mrs Eve Williams.

Cover design by Designers & Partners, Oxford

Printed in Great Britain

Visit our website at <http://www.blackwellpublishers.co.uk>

**B** BLACKWELL  
Publishers

ISBN 0-631-19492-4



9 780631 194927

# Walden Journal Post-colonial Literatures in English

# Post-Colonial Literatures in English

*History, Language, Theory*

Dennis Walder

 **BLACKWELL**  
*P u b l i s h e r s*

Copyright © Dennis Walder 1998

The right of Dennis Walder to be identified as author of this work has been asserted in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

First published 1998  
Transferred to Digital print 2003

Blackwell Publishers Ltd  
108 Cowley Road  
Oxford OX4 1JF  
UK

Blackwell Publishers Inc.  
350 Main Street  
Malden, Massachusetts 02148  
USA

All rights reserved. Except for the quotation of short passages for the purposes of criticism and review, no part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the publisher.

Except in the United States of America, this book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, resold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form of binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

*British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data*

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

*Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data*

Walder, Dennis.

Post-colonial literatures in English : history, language, theory /  
Dennis Walder.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-631-19491-6. — ISBN 0-631-19492-4 (pbk)

1. Commonwealth literature (English) — History and criticism.  
2. Literature and society — Commonwealth countries — History — 20th  
century. 3. Decolonization in literature. 4. Colonies in  
literature. 5. Blacks in literature. I. Title

PR9080.W25 1998

820.9'9171241—dc21

97-42235

CIP

Typeset in 10½ on 12½ pt Bembo by Ace Filmsetting Ltd, Frome, Somerset

Printed and bound in Great Britain by  
Marston Lindsay Ross International Ltd,  
Oxfordshire

# Post-Colonial Literatures in English





## *Preface and Acknowledgements*

Much of the most exciting and important creative writing in English in recent decades has its origins in former British colonies, all independent nation states which, in one way or another, retain political, cultural and linguistic ties with Britain, itself now increasingly understood to be a construct of varying identities – including, for the time being and most contentiously, that of the north of Ireland. Many people have now come across such writing, or at least have heard of the work of Nobel Prizewinners such as Wole Soyinka of Nigeria, Nadine Gordimer of South Africa and Derek Walcott of St Lucia – and indeed, who can have escaped knowing about the unfortunate Salman Rushdie? An increasing number of educational institutions worldwide (including non English-speaking countries), are adopting texts by writers from the English-speaking diaspora, not only on English Literature courses traditionally conceived, but as part of World Literature, Area or Cultural Studies courses. There is no question of the large and growing interest in Literatures in English (as the subject should now be described) and of the influence they exert.

The aim of this book is to engage with this relatively new and fast-growing area of literary endeavour, and the criticism or 'theory' which increasingly – with varying degrees of success – attends it. I do not pretend to offer an objective, or even agreed approach. I have my own agenda, as an ex-colonial (South African) long based in the UK, with particular links in Southern Africa, India and South East Asia. Nor am I trying to speak on behalf of others; rather, I want to suggest what one position, developed I hope with a proper sense of its limitations as well as advantages, may provide. I also see it as part of my brief to alert the reader to the most well-



known or current trends, insofar as they strike me as relevant; while I attempt to generate new thinking about the nature and practice of literary study today. The parochial, ethnocentric if not merely unexamined nature of what passes for literary study in many quarters makes me feel some justification in going over ground that will be familiar to fellow toilers in the field; my hope is that what I have to say, and the way I have set out on this occasion to say it, will remind them – as it has reminded me – of some of the basics we are liable to forget in the heat of debate.

The contemporary nature of what have come to be called ‘post-colonial’ literatures in English, their focus upon matters of broad yet immediate interest – matters of history, language, race, gender, identity, migration and cultural exchange – has ensured a dramatic impact upon traditional literary studies, despite the apparent lateness of their arrival. I say ‘apparent’ because not only do the writings which may be thought of as post-colonial go back a long way (some claim to the first moment of colonization); but also because the roots of thinking about or ‘theorizing’ the post-colonial go back some distance too – certainly further than the work of the three most well-known representatives of that theorizing, Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak and Homi Bhabha. A mere glance at, for example, Aimé Césaire’s *Discourse on Colonialism*, first published in 1955 and one of the most powerful accounts of the barbarism of the colonizer, and the unhappiness of the colonized, I have ever read, should lead those who begin their study of the subject with the aforementioned threesome to look a little further back.

I do not have the space to do so here, although I do go back to Frantz Fanon, who raised most of the important questions, even if he did not stay to answer them. I have organized this book as follows. After providing an Introduction to the shift in perspective these writings demand, based on a reading of Achebe’s great novel *Things Fall Apart* (1958), I develop an approach to the relevant strands of history, language and theory, which I have separated out into three chapters, as Part I. The second Part introduces a range of literary texts by means of three case studies, each focusing on a different cultural-geographic area and genre or group of genres, organized to suggest an accumulating complexity of debate around a number of central issues. The idea of a case study is familiar as an educational and ethnographical tool; my use of it here is intended to balance inductive generalizations from my chosen texts on the one hand, with an awareness of the unavoidability of pre-knowledge on the other.

All three studies draw on the issues of history, language and theory broached in Part I: the first study, of Indian fiction in English, suggests how the historic question of authority is dealt with by fictions which engage

with the most serious crisis of the post-independence state, the 1975 emergency in India; the chapter (6) on Caribbean and Black British Poetry inevitably foregrounds language; while South African Literature in the Interregnum, including fiction, poetry and drama, offers a position designed to expose the fuller understanding of history, language and theory which using the term 'post-colonial' in relation to literatures in English now demands. I conclude with 'After Post-Colonialism?' since, even if we accept the periodization implicit in the term, it is no longer possible to pretend that its defining moment of resistance and transformation has left us with a stable signifier. Rather, the literary products which now appear to supersede while implicating post-colonialism – texts as diverse as V.S. Naipaul's *The Enigma of Arrival* (1987) or Ariel Dorfman's *Death and the Maiden* (1991) – propose emerging and new representations of power relations which suggest that the post-colonial is what Stuart Hall calls 'an episteme-in-formation'.<sup>1</sup> In other words, a kind of knowledge-inducing, but changing, historicist paradigm.

My case studies deliberately focus on a number of more or less widely available texts or anthologies, from Nadine Gordimer's *The Conservationist* (1974) to R.K. Narayan's *The Painter of Signs* (1976), from Gcina Mhlophe's *Have You Seen Zandile?* (1988) to E.A. Markham's *Hinterland: Caribbean Poetry from the West Indies and Britain* (1989). In such a relatively new area of study, however, literary and critical material has not always made its way sufficiently for such purposes, and I refer to many other, less easily available texts. Those of us who have long pursued Commonwealth (as they used to be, and sometimes still are called) or post-colonial literatures in English, are familiar with the obscure corners of libraries and bookshops, are used to relying upon friends' and writers' generosity. Like others, I have had to persuade publishers to publish, or allow me to edit for publication, the texts I wish to read, or make available. Things are improving, with the growth of interest worldwide, and publishers (intermittently) responding; hence the arrival of books like Victor Ramraj's *Concert of Voices: An Anthology of World Writing in English* (Broadview Press, 1995), or John Thieme's more hefty collection of (all too brief) extracts, *The Arnold Anthology of Post-Colonial Literatures in English* (Arnold, 1996). These are at best tasters.

I have eschewed the globalizing ambitions of many who have entered this field, although it is impossible to avoid some very large generalizations, given the enormous range and variety of writings. I think it is time to be both more selective and text-based. In any case, the uneven pace and development of colonialism from one place to the next, as well as the different intensities of decolonization in those places, have important consequences in terms of the kind of writing – the form, language and

genre – that is produced. Unlike the Australian authors of the first critical-theoretical book to consider the ‘post-colonial’ rubric adequately, Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin’s *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures* (Routledge, 1989), my use of the term involves writings in English from peoples whose experience of colonization is relatively recent; excluding the Americans, Irish (although arguably their experience of colonization continues) or Scots; but including Indians, Trinidadians, South Africans – and, within the post-colonial nation from which this is written, Black Britons – insofar as these labels are accepted or acceptable to those who inhabit them. I use ‘post-colonial’ to identify recent writings in English which have come into being as part of the processes of decolonization. This is not to suggest that the works of, say, Toni Morrison, Brian Friel or Ian Crichton Smith are not relevant in this context; rather, that my chosen areas enable me to develop an approach which can best be clarified without following them up.

Finally, I should add that the structure of this book and the selection of material, is derived to some extent from a course I designed and have run since 1992 for Open University students, many with diasporic backgrounds, whose responses and comments have been invaluable. I would also like here to acknowledge the advice of colleagues who helped write the material for that course, Cicely Palser Havelly and Michael Rossington (now of the University of Newcastle), as well as that of the course assessor, Lyn Innes of the University of Kent. I have benefited from specific discussions with members of my Post-Colonial Literatures Research Group, especially Richard Allen, Marcia Blumberg, Ban Kah Choon, Ganeswar Mishra, Mpalive Msiska, Vrinda Nabar, Rajeev Patke and Stephen Regan (who also read the book through in draft for me). The presence of Fatima Dike and Jack Mapanje as Writers in Residence in 1996 and 1997 ensured I would not forget where writers see themselves coming from. I dedicate this book to the memory of Paul Edwards, who introduced me to the pleasures of the post-colonial at Edinburgh University long before the term had been heard of.

### Note

- 1 ‘When was “the post-colonial”? Thinking at the limit’, *The Post-Colonial Question*, eds Iain Chambers and Lidia Curti (Routledge, 1996), p. 255.

Literature is necessary to politics above all when it gives a voice to whatever is without a voice, when it gives a name to what as yet has no name, especially to what the language of politics excludes or attempts to exclude.

Italo Calvino, 'Right and wrong political uses of literature', *The Uses of Literature: Essays*, 1982, transl. Patrick Creagh

despite your Empire's wrong,  
I made my first communion  
there, with the English tongue

Derek Walcott, 'Eulogy to W.H. Auden', *The Arkansas Testament*, 1988

There are powerful winds blowing through English literature. English is being assaulted by cross-currents of racial experience, by a vast expansion of its frame of reference, by new uses of imagination and language.

Nayantara Sahgal, 'The schizophrenic imagination', Silver Jubilee Conference of the Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies, University of Kent, Canterbury, 1989

My own preference is for a story which is kaleidoscopic, with a number of different voices rather than one character speaking for the entire novel. I suppose it may be a post-colonial viewpoint.

Fred D'Aguiar, interview, *Independent on Sunday*, 23 July 1995



# Contents

Preface and Acknowledgements	ix
<b>1 Introducing the Post-Colonial</b>	<b>1</b>
<i>The Arrival of the Post(-Colonial)</i>	1
<i>Changing Perspective: Things Fall Apart</i>	6
<i>Language, Audience and Genre</i>	10
<i>Culture and Identity</i>	14
<i>The Gender Agenda</i>	16
<i>Summary</i>	18
 <b>Part I Studying Post-Colonial Literatures</b>	
<b>2 History</b>	<b>23</b>
<i>Making History</i>	23
<i>Whose History?</i>	26
<i>The 'Other' View</i>	29
<i>Slavery and the 'Civilizing Mission'</i>	33
<i>The 'New Imperialism' and Resistance</i>	36
<i>From Empire to Commonwealth</i>	38
<i>Summary</i>	40
 <b>3 Language</b>	 <b>42</b>
<i>A Language That Is Not One's Own</i>	42
<i>Pidgins, Creoles and 'Nation Language'</i>	45

<i>Pomfrets and Patois</i>	48
<i>Decolonizing the Mind</i>	52
<i>Summary</i>	54
<b>4 Theory</b>	56
<i>Why Theory?</i>	56
<i>The Arrival of Theory</i>	57
<i>Why Post-Colonial Theory?</i>	59
<i>The Commonwealth Project</i>	61
<i>New Writings</i>	64
<i>The Arrival of the Post-Colonial</i>	66
<i>The Said Enterprise: Reading the Other</i>	70
<i>Back to Fanon: Recovering the Material from the Textual</i>	72
<i>Nervous Conditions: From Fanon to Bhabha and Spivak</i>	78
<i>Summary</i>	81
 <b>Part II Case Studies</b>	
<b>5 Indo-Anglian Fiction: Narayan and Sahgal</b>	87
<i>Authority and Creativity</i>	87
<i>The Right to Write: The Language of Indo-Anglian Literature</i>	89
<i>Imagining Place: The Making of Malgudi</i>	94
<i>Signs of the Times: Myth and Modernity</i>	97
<i>Reclaiming the Flow of History</i>	102
<i>Can the Subaltern Speak?</i>	109
<i>Summary</i>	113
 <b>6 Caribbean and Black British Poetry</b>	116
<i>A Diaspora Aesthetic</i>	116
<i>Walcott: 'Either I'm Nobody, or I'm a Nation'</i>	121
<i>Brathwaite: Caliban at the Carnival?</i>	130
<i>New Voices, New Memories: Johnson, Berry and Nichols</i>	140
<i>Summary</i>	148
 <b>7 South African Literature in the Interregnum</b>	152
<i>Colonial or Post-Colonial?</i>	152
<i>What is South African Literature?</i>	156
<i>Decolonizing the Colonial Imagination: The Conservationist</i>	159
<i>Other Voices: Poetry and its Formation</i>	169
<i>Other Voices: Drama and its Formation</i>	179
<i>Summary</i>	186

<b>8 After Post-Colonialism?</b>	189
<i>Where are 'We' Now</i>	189
<i>Producing the Post-Colonial Text</i>	191
<i>Others Again: Citizens of the World or Arrivants?</i>	196
<i>The Cultural Mediation of the Post-Colonial Text</i>	202
<i>Summary and Conclusion</i>	207
 Select Bibliography	 210
Index	220



