New Literatures of Old
New Literatures of Old:
Dialogues of Tradition and Innovation
in Anglophone Literature

Edited by

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and Dídac Llorens Cubedo

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Literature’s evolution emerges from the ongoing dialogue between the past and the present, understood as a means of self-evaluation and renewal of form, function, definition, or scope. Such a renewal of the literary field would be closely related to the exploration of new textualities that combine the purely literary with the dominant visual and information technology models associated with globalization. Consequently, the strategies reflecting the interaction between past and present modes of literary production, (plain rejection and substitution of exhausted or previous models; rewriting; adaptation; recontextualization, ironic parody; hybridization; etc.), play a decisive part as active agents of literary intervention in creating the spaces of dialogue and confrontation when establishing the identities and cultural specificity of a certain society or community.

This book is the result of the debates that took place in November 2006 at Universitat Jaume I, Spain, in the context of an International Conference exploring the interaction between tradition and innovation in Anglophone literature. As such I would like to thank all the participants for their contributions to and insights into the issues derived from the discussions held there.

The following pages constitute a selection of the various topics dealt with, which we have grouped in three broad categories that reflect the concerns that kept surfacing regarding the analysis of the processes involved in the production of original works of art and literature. “Part I: The Canon, Creativity and Reconceptualization” delves into the various ways in which tradition and the past have been received by later generations of critics and writers, and revised and adapted according to their own frameworks of thought, aesthetic colloraries or social conditionings. Resorting to the past indistinctly results in appropriation and reelaboration (reconceptualization) for reasons that may range from the ideological (canons) to the literary (originality). This part explores the theoretical foundations on which the interactions between tradition and innovation lie in the current moment of literary and artistic production.

“Part II: Re-writing Genre, Re-writing Tradition” explores the techniques most widely used in order to make such dialogue possible in
specific literary modes which range from the modern to the postmodern; the postcolonial; the regional; the popular; and women’s fiction.

“Part III: The Visual” is dedicated to the interface and hybridization of artistic fields, and how the interaction of literature with other modes of artistic presentation becomes one of the trends forwards in the revitalization, both of literature and the Arts, by borrowing and cross-fertilization.

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INTRODUCTION

THE POLITICS OF INTERCULTURALISM, INTERTEXTUALITY AND HYBRIDIZATION

JOSÉ RAMÓN PRADO-PÉREZ
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If anything, literature has disclosed systematically its own versatility in adapting to the changing conditions of culture, history, society, art, aesthetics, remaining in a state of permanent flux which would put this creative practice in a privileged position to start a dialogue across disciplines: the poliedric nature of literature would mirror that of life, favouring interdisciplinarity in its composition as well as in its study.

Human beings need “stories” in order to structure their vital experience, or at least they need the fiction of a structure so as to be able to grasp the everyday. The structure, “story”, or “narrative” give sense to our chaotic apprehension of experiences, thus, making them acceptable or unacceptable but above all recognizable. As such, narrating stories imposes an order to experience which differs from any natural order of existence. In the end it is for the reader to negotiate in a symbolic way such experiences that literature provides in the realms of creativity and the imagination, appropriating them to his/her specific circumstances of being and reception. In fact, the Modernist literary movement aimed at discovering and at times imposing a mythic structure to the literary experience which would transcend the external chaos of reality. On the other hand, the postmodern project, while sharing similar assumptions about order and chaos, adopted the opposite pole of relativism and extended it to all areas of experience, whether artistic, scientific or other discourses, which would be subjected to a process of “narrativization” blurring and questioning their truth-value. Harper’s (1994, 27) description of the contradictory nature of the postmodern aesthetic would summarize the ways in which texts work ideologically through narrativization, and the dangers implicit in such workings:
human beings’ attempts to impose order upon a chaotic universe through
the creation of fictions that imbue it with meaning, and the danger of
forgetting the fictive nature of these constructs and thus becoming trapped
in the very mythologies we have created.

To avoid being caught in a self-created mythology, or to expose the
construction and imposition of mythologies by the sources of power, will
be a primary objective of self-conscious narratives aiming at their own
desnarrativization by hybridization, either parodically or ironically.

An example of such a literary trend could be found in 1980s British
fiction, re-read as a response to conservative attempts in Margaret
Thatcher’s period of office to impose a constructed historical mythology
which used as its point of reference a nostalgic return to the 1950s. Such a
period would signal the greatness of Great Britain not yet corrupted by the
following decades of economic and political turmoil. Equally, canonical
works of art became victim to a process of deification that converted them
in museum pieces to be revered, thus, suppressing the possibility of any
critical view about them. This was termed the “heritage industry”
(Hewison 1987), which attempted to transform culture into a commodity,
following the logic of a monolithic worldview without fissures and the
dictates of neoliberal economic policies. The cultural trend described by
Hewison and others can be traced down to the proliferation of costume
dramas and BBC adaptations of the so called classics, from *Brideshead
Revisited* and *I, Claudius*, to Jane Austen adaptations for the wide screen.

As Robert Hewison (1987, 135) would put it:

> Post-modernism and the heritage industry are linked, in that they both
> conspire to create a shallow screen that intervenes between our present
> lives, and our history. We have no understanding of history in depth, but
> instead are offered a contemporary creation, more costume drama and re-
> enactment than critical discourse. We are, as Jameson writes, “condemned
to seek History by way of our own pop images and simulacra of that
history, which itself remains for ever out of reach.”

The representation of any given culture follows two opposite but
complementary processes: on the one hand, there is a tendency to the

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1 The contradiction inherent in such a vision would be made apparent in the
attempt of the New Right to rewrite recent history: the fact that the decline of
the British Empire as such starts rather in the 1950s with the Suez conflict is obviated
so as to place the blame on the “a’immoral” period of the 1960s. So it is the
“idyllic” fifties, as reconceptualised by Thatcherite ideology that would become
the most ready available reference for the recovery of traditional values.
universalization of the notion of culture which is normally implemented by resorting to myth and ceremony; on the other, the process involves the recognition of plurality and the cultural diversity of minorities, subcultures, collectivities, individualities, and their potential for attracting the collective imaginary of the social groups embedded in the subaltern cultures. The second option in the representation of culture explores the phenomenon of social hybridization from a critical stand which acknowledges its potential for resistance, subversion or the promotion of alternative identities in a constant state of flux and development. Such a polarization between monoculturalism and multiculturalism is to be resolved by the adoption of intercultural dialogue as a source and foundation of cultural identity building, seeking a balance between maximalist positions, translated in the form of a cultural essentialism that imposes one dominant and genuine cultural identity, and the dangers of an excessive relativism based on heterogeneity and cultural collage. Thus, intercultural positions would constitute both the balance and the element of control between extremes. Beacco and Byram (2003, 68) state it so in relation to the educational context, though it could be applied to other areas of human experience, in particular the Arts and literature:

> the ability to suspend one’s judgement and neutralise one’s representations about others, and detach oneself from one’s own culture (by explaining what is implicit or questioning consensus views) so as to perceive it from a (fictive) external point of view comparable to the way those foreign to the community view it …

Giddens tackles the question of identity in terms that would be similar to those proposed by Said for the post-colonial subject: a model of identity building that could be considered positive since it does not emanate from the creation of an opponent other, moving away from the binary oppositions and definitions in the negative of structuralism. Giddens (1994, 253) suggests the way forward:

> On the reverse side are the shared values that come from a situation of interdependence, organized via the cosmopolitan acceptance of difference. A world with no others is one where – as a matter of principle – we all share common interests, just as we face common risks.

In that sense, agency, or the awareness of the potential for agency and for exercising it in what could be regarded as a rehearsal of the potentialities of real life, is achieved symbolically. Tutelage in the process must be
regarded as, what in pedagogical terms is called, “facilitating” autonomy and awareness.

Such would be the position held by a number of postcolonial artists. Chicano writer Alberto Álvaro Ríos explains the process of acquiring such intercultural competence when referring to his adolescent years:

I grew upon the border in regards to all kinds of metaphorical borders: in between countries, languages, cultures, decades. In essence, all of this adds up to using binoculars, using two lenses to bring something closer in which you see it better and understand it more. In which you understand everything has more than one meaning. (López 1993, 42)

Similarly, Sandra Cisneros describes of her position as a writer in-between cultures with the specific aim of creating an intercultural dialogue acceptable for both dominant and subaltern cultures:

I want to write about us so that there is communication between the cultures. That’s political work: making communication happen between cultures”. (López 1993, 156)

Bakhtin’s theoretical model of heteroglossia, dialogism and the carnival structure has become one of the most appealing orientations in tackling the issues articulated by these authors, since the contradictory nature of the terms, difference and identity, at the bottom of any process of identity construction can be resolved by moving towards pluralist critical approaches where no one term becomes explicitly or implicitly dominant. This “survival politics”, where difference and identity remain at the same level of interaction, emphasises the shift towards agency that has inspired the adoption of micropolitics as an effective alternative to counteract the excesses of globalizing processes that dilute any potential for qualified action. Equally, it allows the coexistence of contradictions not resolved by appealing to centripetal processes of positive dissemination close to Hal Foster’s classification of progressive and conservative postmodern trends in the Arts. Cultural anthropologist Paul Rabinow had advanced similar positions in his adaptation of anthropology to the trends of poststructuralism. He understands culture in a dialogic manner, as an open and creative dialogue with the potential to challenge the historical and

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2 Hal Foster has distinguished between a neoconservative postmodernism and a progressive poststructuralist postmodernism. The latter he defines as a critique of representation: “it questions the truth content of visual representation, whether realist, symbolic or abstract, and explores the regimes of meaning and order that these different codes support” (Foster 1985: 121).
cultural totalization of dominant discourses and ideologies. Rabinow ([1977] 1992, 119) describes ethnographic interaction thus:

> Cada vez que un antropólogo penetra en una cultura, entrena a la gente para objetivar para él su mundo de vida. ... El antropólogo crea un desdoblamiento de la conciencia. Por lo tanto, el análisis antropológico debe incorporar dos hechos: primero, que nosotros mismos estamos historicamente situados a través de las preguntas que hacemos y de las maneras en que buscamos comprender y experimentar el mundo; y el segundo, que lo que recibimos de nuestros informantes son interpretaciones, igualmente mediadas por la historia y la cultura.

His stance opens the ground for interesting areas of exploration, all pervasive in the cultural analysis of artistic and literary texts, such as “a middle ground between cultures” or “the beginnings of a hybrid and transcultural object”.

Anthony Giddens (1994, 250) states the contradictory nature of the political ground which subaltern or experimental modes of literature encounter in the context of an increasingly globalized culture, when he describes some of the key features of radical politics:

> Social movements play a significant role in radical politics, not just because of what they try to achieve, but because they dramatize what might otherwise go largely unnoticed. Yet it would be wrong to give social movements, or self-groups for that matter, too much prominence as the carriers of radical programmes.

It is interesting to notice that Giddens acknowledges the importance of social movements by ascribing them the power to dramatize, that is, to present in fictional form or rather in a manner that is dislocated from performance or practical attainment of any objective that might be established. In that sense, Giddens ascribes these movements the capability for protest, while denying them any actual control over the sources of power. It is in fact one of the dangers implicit in the process of “narrativization” presented above: the inability to find an external reference that is not itself embedded into a “narrative” or “fictional” superstructure, at a time when, as Giddens (1994, 252-53) points out,

> a world dominated by the influences of globalization and social reflexivity might seem one of hopeless fragmentation and contextuality… We are now in a world where there are many others; but also where there are no others.
The point of departure is then to create a sense of community where there was none, but where the potential for it exists, in order to avoid invisibility through excessive exposure to fragmentation and uncontrolled visibility. Novel aesthetic movements and literary trends that seek to engage in micropolitics must face the uncertainty of whether their local interventions can engage in a positive and effective wider-scale dialogue with the major political structures or traditional ideological divisions, influencing them without being incorporated.

The polarization and transcendence laid out above in relation to the representation and negotiation of culture and its by-products such as literature, whether in its dimension of aesthetic object or consumer good, or both, are apparent in the taxonomy of literary generations or movements, as well as in the critical battles among the various factions of literary theory.

Catherine Belsey (1994, 2) advances the directions of the current critical models by providing a negative definition of literature, or it might be said, the non-definition of literature, since “the common sense view of literature”, as she terms it, constitutes an effort at invisibility:

Common sense assumes that valuable literary texts, those which are in a special way worth reading, tell truths–about the period which produced them, about the world in general or about human nature–and that in doing so they express the particular perceptions, the individual insights, of their authors.

Common sense also offers this way of approaching literature not as a self-conscious and deliberate practice, a method based on a reasoned theoretical position, but as the “obvious” mode of reading, the “natural” way of approaching literary works.

By naturalizing literature and the reading of it, those who claim such “common-sense view” can hide the ideological constructions reproduced in it, as well as their intention to promote a certain set of values and ideas by claiming the universality of their particular social and cultural group. In fact, the paradox of globalization has proved very fruitful in the case of literature. National literatures have been displaced in favour of minority, identity, local group interests, who address their own communities or peer groups, but whose exposure to the wider public is more ready available, thus the effects of “glocalization” or the idea of “the global village” become the engine for the exploration of new forms of expression and engagement with the readership. At any rate, if we assume literature to be just another artistic manifestation, the emphasis should shift from the common sense view towards a more self-conscious approach which would
deal with what confers it the public’s recognition and acceptance, as well as the aesthetic pleasure of its consumption.

Roland Barthes, in *Critique et vérité [Criticism and Truth]* (1966) had suggested this poststructuralist trend by differentiating between literary theory and criticism. Criticism would substitute the literary text by another, both different and complementary to the original literary one. Criticism would be affected then by the process of “narrativization”, whose authority and moral value would be relativized and problematised from the start as a projection of the literary event itself. On the other hand, theory would deal with deciphering the conditions of production and the forms of the literary text, rather than providing an exegesis of its meaning.

Patrice Pavis (1992, 52) argues a similar case as Belsey’s:

The classical text is spontaneously ideological: behind the homogeneous façade of a clear and compelling plot, of writing which avoids any drop of tension within the various discourses of the speakers, it hides the codes and mechanisms that keep it going. The perfect and bounded qualities of classical writing make one forget the codes governing its production to the extent to which they become the purely evaluative criteria of classicism: a text whose formal perfection is such that one forgets that it is a text situated in history.

Belsey and Pavis are positioning themselves against those critical voices that were attempting a revival of the New Criticism as a reaction against the more committed trends of critical theory current from the 1980s onwards, which were displacing what could be called the literary establishment of critics and professors. Such a return to tradition had been stated by Wimsatt very convincingly in relation to the concept of the “affective fallacy”, the defence of textual autonomy to overcome the subjectivity of both writer and reader alike:

We enquire now not about origins, nor about effects, but about the work so far as it can be considered by itself as a body of meaning. Neither the qualities of the author’s mind nor the effects of a poem upon a reader’s mind should be confused with the moral quality of the meaning expressed by the poem itself. (Wimsatt 1970, 87)

For Wimsatt, however, there is still a moral or transcendental meaning recoverable from the text, thus advocating an elitist view of literature by which only those with the appropriate tools would be able to decipher its meanings. In fact, such an attitude would be close to the origins of literature as a university discipline, that is, as a detachment and departure
from Biblical exegesis. T. S. Eliot (1920: x) would follow the same
direction:

We can only say that a poem, in some sense, has its own life; that its parts
form something quite different from a body of neatly ordered biographical
data; that the feeling, or emotion, or vision, resulting from the poem is
something different from the feeling or emotion or vision in the mind of
the poet.

the main aim would be to create a community of readers, sharing similar
interpretive frameworks, capable of becoming an educated elite that may
promote the virtues of literature.

Decontextualising literature in such a manner brings to the surface a
basic contradiction (from which the ideological construct behind the whole
project may be inferred): as with museums (the physical place where the
object of art is exhibited, and whose function is to indicate that what they
contain is art; actually, the museum or art gallery contextualise the object
of art as something to be appreciated as art rather than as something else),
the fact that for historical, cultural and social reasons printed matter has
acquired a higher status than oral language or other communicative
practices via artistic categorization, makes books and literature be placed
in an unreachable position rather than being considered as a cultural
phenomenon. However, in contexts where literary appreciation is readily
available through compulsory education, and the circulation of books
makes literature a consumer good easily accessible, whether through
purchase or public lending, there seems no apparent reason to continue to
hold such exclusive views, opening then the ground for the current debate
about the role of the popular and the questioning of the divisions between
high and low forms of culture.

Edward Said (1983, 156), in consonance with Belsey, proposed a
cultural approach to literary texts which, while preserving their linguistic
autonomous nature, would have a more basic democratic projection by not
subordinating the whole literary experience to that feature alone:

I see no particular use in insisting that a poem is a solitary object existing
independent of any context: for clearly it is not. Each poem or poet is
involuntarily the expression of collectivities. What becomes an interesting
theoretical problem for criticism is to determine how, or when, or where,
the poet or poem can be said to be a voluntary (personal and intentional)
expression of difference and of community.
Additionally, Said puts forward a mode of intertextuality based on the cultural analysis of literature and what he calls the “affiliative” nature of the text, that is, its dynamic relation with other texts, these being cultural ones and not exclusively linguistic or printed:

Perhaps one way of imagining the critical issue of aesthetic genesis is to view the text as a dynamic field, rather than as a static block, of words. This field has a certain range of reference, a system of tentacles (which I have been calling affiliative) partly potential, partly actual: to the author, to the reader, to a historical situation, to other texts, to the past and present. In one sense no text is finished, since its potential range is always being extended by every additional reader... one’s study is directed carefully toward the text as a vital aesthetic and cultural whole. (Said 1983, 157)

Thus, we are moving again within the dialogic conception of culture advocated by Rabinow, and away from the monoculturalist and dominant positions of the New Critics and Modernist aesthetics in general. Foucault (1980: 138), to whom Said is clearly indebted, had established the questions to be asked of a cultural text in substitution of the former approaches:

No longer the tiresome repetitions:
“Who is the real author?”
“Have we proof of his authenticity and originality?”
“What has he revealed of his most profound self in his language?”

New questions will be heard:
“What are the modes of existence of this discourse?”
“Where does it come from; how is it circulated; who controls it?”
“What placements are determined for possible subjects?”
“Who can fulfill these diverse functions of the subject?”

This shift in focus encourages a type of interdisciplinarity that Said calls “interference”, again another mode of intertextuality which might restore the political potential of literature. Understood as a complement to the assumed objectivity of journalism, even when journalism and the construction of information are subject to the same “narrativization” as literature in a covert fashion, Said proposes a cross-fertilization among discursive fields (using the specific examples of journalism and literature) that may recover the power for critique in literature by foregrounding its subjective “narrative” and “narrativized” form (1986, 232).3

3 Foucault’s and Said’s positions could be traced back to Sartre’s 1948 work What is Literature?.

Correspondingly, Patrice Pavis (1992, 35) formulates his own model of cultural intertextuality for dramatic texts, also applicable to literary ones:

The text ... can only be understood intertextually, when confronted with the discursive and ideological structures of a period in time or a corpus of texts. ... Texts must be considered in relation to the Social Context, i.e. other texts and discourses about reality produced by society. This relationship being the most fragile and variable imaginable, the same ... text readily produces an infinite number of readings. This last question adds to our perspective the social inscription of the text, its link with history via the unbroken chain of other texts. Mise en scène [and literature] can thus also be understood as a social practice, as an ideological mechanism capable of deciphering as much as reflecting historical reality (even if fiction claims precisely to negate reality).

The canon in such a context can never be a naive or innocent attempt to respond to the cognitive need of human beings to catalogue, classify and eventually establish an order in the chaos of everyday life experience. Such a process of classification implies a parallel act of evaluation, where the ideological issues become apparent so as to reflect the various positions and stances of the social group that set out to create it, whether overtly or covertly. Thus, canons, though necessary, must be understood in a dynamic fashion, not as a way of excluding or ranking the works and authors themselves, but rather as the means to achieve the necessary tension and state of flux in the field of literary creation: facilitating the materialization of such conditions may trigger the debate and struggle within the field, that may in turn shake the foundations of the literary establishment and start a process of adaptation to the ever shifting social and cultural conditions of production. The symbolic struggle between non-canonical, emergent artists with the canon provides a complementary source for the explanation and understanding of the canonical works in question, by indicating the principles or rules used in order to make the selection. It is not a matter of displacing an established canon with a new emergent one, but rather to interact with it in order to enrich its nature. Eagleton (1995, 212) articulates this type of self-referentiality in relation to the sort of literary criticism that he terms as political:

Socialist and feminist criticism are, of course, concerned with developing theories and methods appropriate to their aims... They will also want to claim that these theories are more powerfully explanatory than others. ... These forms of criticism differ from others because they define the object of analysis differently, have different values, beliefs and goals, and thus offer different kinds of strategy for the realizing of these goals... On other
occasions what might prove more useful will not be the criticism or enjoyment of other people’s discourse but the production of one’s own… You may want to stage your own signifying practices to enrich, combat, modify or transform the effects which others’ practices produce.

The dichotomy canon / margin articulates the field of literary production, following Bordieu ([1994] 1999), by creating a mode of intertextuality where innovations are conditioned by the specific history of the field itself, and not by the external contemporary events taking place in the social space (economic, political conditions, etc.). This would constitute the myth of the autonomous nature of the literary field precognised by formalist art: the historical process which has allowed the formalist rejection of the external social and cultural conditioning is what in fact determines the space of possibilities for it to expand. These struggles for power in the field of production are articulated in terms of a return to purity and origins, or to the essence of the literary, which limits the possibilities of the new aesthetic. The reinscription of the historical as intertext is what would differentiate modernist aesthetics from the postmodern one. Whereas Modernism claims that purity of origins in an ahistorical manner, or formalist aesthetic way, the postmodern does so by resorting to a type of intertextuality that is constantly trying to incorporate the historical (i.e. social) as a form of critical periodization that may challenge the modernist universalizing enterprise. The result is that the margin acquires a voice and visibility that had been previously denied it, not only in the social field but in the literary one as well.

The parodic rewriting made by postcolonial or feminist writers of canonical texts, as well as the parodic rewriting of popular genres by established postmodern writers constitutes the attempt to emerge, becoming visible within the dominant field of literary production, thus accepting the constraints of the field but subverting it at the same time. The divergence between each of these groups is their position in the field, thus those not belonging to socially subaltern or oppressed groups operate in the area of mass literature, reproducing the mechanisms inherent to power struggles. Rewriting genre parodically implies opposing the market laws of mass production in literature (best-sellers and popular literature) by appealing to the social composition of the readership, a more intellectual audience than the one presupposed by mass literature, and to quality. However, this practice also presupposes accepting the logic of the market as to becoming popular and “readable” (in Barthes’s definition in
Le Plaisir du texte), and sellable. In such a way, the era of “pulp fiction” is both superseded and reinvented to meet the social conditions of the current readership. In the case of subaltern groups, the subfield of struggle would be determined by their social conditions of invisibility. The subfield of restricted production would be rewriting the canon to appeal, not only to their own communities but to the wider public not belonging to their social group, nor sharing their social conditions. Their struggle is not just for internal consumption, otherwise they would not leave their status of invisibility, since they are made to accept the restrictions of the dominant field of production, which they must also negotiate: for instance, the dilemmas in postcolonial writing about adopting English or the native languages as the vehicle for literature would belong in this double structure.

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Following Umberto Eco in his Reflections on The Name of the Rose (1985), postmodernism cannot claim to cancel or discard the modernist movement, to which it is clearly indebted, without resulting in silence. Modernism could be regarded as the implementation and end-result of the project started in the Enlightenment, and as such Modernity had to suffer as a privileged witness the absurdity and contradictions that it led to. Postmodernism, as a result, rejects any appeal to universality and embraces various degrees of relativism and problematization.

In the British literary scene, the 1960s is the period where postmodernism can be said to have acquired its initial relevance by importing the innovations coming from the Continent, particularly France and the literary experiments of the nouveau roman, of which faithful followers would be B. S. Johnson and Christine Brooke-Rose. Since the dominating mode then was that of social realism identified with the Angry generation, emergent types of fiction had to follow the example of foreign

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4 The argument rests on the assumption that there is a general more affluent readership who share a standard level of education, catering for a roughly homogenous framework of literary reference, consequently having direct access to cultural goods and products both intellectually and economically.

5 Samuel Beckett’s artistic evolution would constitute an interesting example of the exploration of the aesthetics of silence and exhaustion brought to its final consequences by showing the dissociation of speech from human agency and volition paradoxically, to the point of signalling silence / meaninglessness through the impossibility to stop continuous speech.
models or move towards the areas of pop and teen culture in order to find a frame of reference. B. S. Johnson argues for this new aesthetics:

The novelist cannot legitimately or successfully embody present-day reality in exhausted forms. If he is serious, he will be making a statement which attempts to change society towards a condition he conceives to be better, and he will be making at least implicitly a statement of faith in the evolution of the form in which he is working. … Novelists must evolve (by inventing, borrowing, stealing or cobbling from other media) forms which will more or less satisfactorily contain an ever-changing reality, their own reality and not Dickens’s reality or Hardy’s reality or even James Joyce’s reality. (Bradbury 1977, 155-56)

Fabulation, intertextuality, parody, interdisciplinarity, hybridization of form, all established tropes of the postmodern aesthetic are enumerated by Johnson as the tools to narrate the new social and cultural conditions of the British affluent society, “inventing, borrowing, stealing or cobbling from other media”. And he justifies the turn in direction due to the impact of television, itself a carbon copy argument as that invoked by the avant-garde and the Modernists for adopting abstraction with the advent of new technological forms of representation. As such, the crisis in the current modes of representation seems to be at the bottom of these two movements, Johnson argues:

The last thirty years have seen the storytelling function pass on yet again. Now anyone who wants simply to be told a story has the need satisfied by television: serials like Coronation Street and so on do very little more than answer the question ‘What happens next?’”. (Bradbury 1977, 153)

Self-reflexivity and metafiction are aimed at challenging the structural foundations of the novel by focusing on the act of writing the particular novel the reader is reading. This is the case of A Clockwork Orange (1962) by Anthony Burgess, the title of the novel being that of a political pamphlet written by one of the characters against the government in reaction to the deteriorating social events and violence. Since it may be argued that postmodern fiction in the 1960s sets to break away from the politization exerted through the social realism dominant in the 1950s, this novel opens a new path in the consideration of the axis politics/art, problematizing the whole issue thanks to the double coding of parody that includes the very concept subject to demystification. The book itself becomes a projection of the fictional protest manifesto, exposing the fictionalization of as opposed to the reality of day to day human existence. Also, the metafictional device avoids the danger of glamourizing violence,
a key theme in the novel, by contextualizing it in a complex many-sided fashion.

The use of historiographic metafiction is apparent in John Fowles’ *The French Lieutenant’s Woman* (1969). The reader is confronted with a Victorian novel, or what seems a historical novel set in Victorian times. While the main characters present the psychology of the 1960s, the rest of characters and situations appear trapped in the Victorian setting and the limitations of their stereotypical Victorian nature. But it is when the fictional author engages in a discussion with the reader about the features of literary fiction and its open-ended quality that the parody is extended even to the *novae roman* model adopted by Fowles, thus achieving the level of postmodern irony that would clearly differentiate it from any Modernist metafictional counterpart. In a clever ironic way, the writer locates the historical part of the novel at a time when the new scientific discoveries start undermining the old assumptions about reality and the world, thus indicating via Eco the postmodernity of the novel itself. *The French Lieutenant’s Woman* seems to be indebted to the seminal essay about the new writing, “The Literature of Exhaustion” (1967), by John Barth, where he stated:

A good many current novelists write turn-of-the-century-type novels, only in more or less mid-twentieth-century language and about contemporary people and topics; this makes them considerably less interesting (to me) than excellent writers who are also technically contemporary: Joyce and Kafka, for instance.

Fowles seems to have translated Barth’s statement in parodic fictional form.

Another example of self-conscious fiction in the 1970s is John Berger’s *G*, winner of the Booker prize for literature in 1972. Here, the fictional author becomes the voice to undermine its own discourse and that of the novel. In fact, the evolution in the main character is paralleled by the identity crisis of the author, whose consciousness surfaces as an integral part of the novel, in order to signal the impossibility of controlling the narrative, and to reinforce the artificiality of the text as pure fabulation.

Berger also sets his fiction in the eve of historical revolutions in the Italy of the late nineteenth century, drawing parallels with the social revolutions which had taken place in the 1960s. That contextualization interacts with the novel’s intertext (the story of Don Giovanni rewritten from a present day perspective) to problematise the relationship between politics and art: the ultimate aim, however, is not to find a new way of
engagement or commitment, but to show ironically that such relationships cannot and should not be easily simplified into any polarization.

The following is an example of the fictional author in *G. A Novel*:

Some say of my writing that it is too overburdened with metaphor and simile: that nothing is ever what it is but is always like something else. This is true, but why is it so? Whatever I perceive or imagine amazes me by its particularity. … I am deeply struck by the uniqueness of each event. From this arises my difficulty as a writer – perhaps the magnificent impossibility of my being a writer. … The relations which I perceive between things – and these often include casual and historical relations – tend to form in my mind a complex synchronic pattern. I see fields where others see chapters. And so I am forced to use another method to try to place and define events. A method which searches for co-ordinates extensively in space, rather than consequentially in time… One of the ways in which I establish co-ordinates extensively is by likening aspect with aspect, by way of metaphor. I do not wish to become a prisoner of the nominal, believing that things are what I name them. On the bed they were not such prisoners. (136-37)

Berger is presenting in fictional form the “death of the author” as theorised by Roland Barthes, by the ironic repositioning of its figure. The author loses its authority precisely because he discards the mystery around the act of creation: by explaining it, the author is killed and reanimated at the same time, in yet another instance of double coding. Following Barth in the “Literature of Exhaustion”, this passage reasserts that it is impossible to write an original work, concluding that the parodic imitation of literature is the only way to reinvigorate fictional writing. This paradox is at the heart of 1960s and 1970s British postmodern fiction: the only way to recover writing is by exploring its impossibility, as Berger states in the above quote.

Peter Ackroyd’s fictions would constitute part of a process of popularisation intermingled with aspects of intellectualism. *Hawksmoor* (1985) combines and mixes the modes of the thriller, the detective story, and the terror story, in order to compose a picture of the disintegration of personality and individuality, as endured by the main character. Hawksmoor, a policeman, is trying to solve a number of strange murders in the present time, which are related to similar ones having occurred in the 18th century. In alternate chapters we are shown the story of the murders in the 18th century and their projection into the 20th century; and how the policeman and the murderer become one and the same progressively.
If this is a postmodern novel it is because it denies the reader the pleasures of narrative closure that the popular genres cater for by resorting to formulas that are well-known and that the public expects, resulting in the reaffirmation of mainstream beliefs and assumptions. Ackroyd does indeed raise these expectations but never fulfils them, blurring the distinctions between fiction and reality so as to conflate the subjectivity of literature and history. What emerges clearly from the parallel lives of the 18th and 20th century main characters is the sense of uniformity and direction of the former, in contrast with the chaotic and disoriented nature of the latter: the architect Nicholas Dyer has a project which he follows with mathematical precision; Hawksmoor, on the contrary, does not conform with the detective stereotype since he does not seem to pursue the solving of the crime; nor is he interested in finding the truth. In fact, the truth is unattainable as the text suggests. As it were, modernity and postmodernity are embodied in these two characters allegorically. Their lives form a continuum that crosses beyond the boundaries of time and space to reflect Said’s “affiliative” intertextuality.

*England, England* (1998) by Julian Barnes fictionalises in a comic manner the ultimate consequences of applying postmodern theories to the British Isles. “England, England” is the name of a thematic park that provides the full experience of England in a sanitised form by relying on a burden of stereotypes. The list would include: the Royal Family; Big Ben; Westminster; Manchester United; the class system; English pubs; Robin Hood; cricket; the Dover cliffs; imperialism; the Union Jack; snobism; “God save the Queen”; BBC; the West End, *The Times*; Shakespeare; etc. Chapter 2 begins with a parody of architectonic postmodernism by calling it “ironic post-post-modernism”. Sir Jack, the deviser of this thematic park, paraphrases Baudrillard to assert his power over his employees and justify that they can be fired at any time. Such a misreading and appropriation of Baudrillard and postmodernism becomes a possibility to be acknowledged, particularly due to the ambiguous and unstable nature of postmodernism itself. Barnes is certainly parodying in the old and traditional sense of the word, not in its postmodern sense, the uses and abuses of the term and theories of postmodernism.

A three page parody of Jean Baudrillard himself, depicted as an intellectual dressed fashionably in patches from various countries, could be regarded as a comic reelaboration of the impact of globalization in the dissolution of identities and the fragmentation of personality. So, this French intellectual, who is to explain the philosophical groundings behind the thematic park, wears: an English tweed jacket, an American cotton shirt, an Italian tie, international grey woollen trousers and a pair of French
moccasins. Yet the parody would not be complete without a reference also to intertextuality, when describing how he presented his theory: Pascal led to Saussure through Laurence Sterne; Rousseau to Baudrillard by way of Edgar Allan Poe, the Marquis de Sade, Jerry Lewis, Dexter Gordon, Bernard Hinault and the first works by Anne Sylvestre; Lévi-Strauss led to Lévi-Strauss.

Barnes cleverly recovers the genre of satire in order to create a parody of the parodic mode of postmodernism. Besides relying on satire to construct his playful criticism of current philosophical and political trends, at the intertextual level, Barnes draws on a well-established literary tradition to which More’s *Utopia*, Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels*, or Orwell’s *1984* would belong. Equally, he also satirizes the state of the nation after the Thatcherite politics of heritage. The world of simulacra becomes a place without feelings and emotions where everything is analysed in terms of profit making. This amoral world, of course, will present a number of incongruities and absurdities which will feed the comic orientation of the novel.

What happens eventually is that “England, England” will take over the real Britain. In such a way, the prophecy of the simulacrum replacing or preceding its original, as well as the impossibility of recovering any historical reference, are realised in the thematic park: “England, England” relegates the actual England to a preindustrial state which adopts the name of Anglia, somehow ironically outlaying the issue of postmodern nostalgia as well.

To conclude I will resort to the words of Hutcheon in her description of the postmodern aesthetic:

Postmodernism is a fundamentally contradictory enterprise: its art forms (and its theory) at once use and abuse, install and then destabilize convention in parodic ways, self-consciously pointing both to their own inherent paradoxes and provisionality and, of course, to their critical or ironic re-reading of the art of the past. (Hutcheon 1988, 23)

The novelists discussed above, as well as others sharing generation and aesthetic principles, would conform to Hutcheon’s definition, while also resorting to what Belsey (1980, 91-92) calls the interrogative text, as opposed to the declarative text, typical of the classic realist genre. The interrogative text

disrupts the unity of the reader by discouraging identification with the unified subject of the enunciation. The position of the “author” inscribed in the text, if it can be located at all, is seen as questioning or as literally
contradictory. … If the interrogative text is illusionist it also tends to employ devices to undermine the illusion, to draw attention to its own textuality. … [It] brings points of view into unresolved collision or contradiction… no authorial or authoritative discourse points to a single position which is the place of the coherence of meaning.

The articulation of the dialogue between past and present, tradition and innovation, appears as the attempt to decenter discourse and thus power as produced by narratives. By openly baring the device to the reader, he is always aware of the “story-telling” nature of the fictions that he is consuming. And if the “desnarrativization” proposed by Said is not completely possible due to the intrinsic narrative quality of fiction, at least it is made available to the reader for evaluation.

References


PART I:

THE CANON, CREATIVITY
AND RECONCEPTUALIZATION
There is something wrong with my title. It is not merely too global to say anything meaningful about marginalization, the canon, national literature, the condition of the age, or globalization, but it is also about forty years too late to make a contribution to these issues. Of all the attacks by the 68ers on “the establishment”, one of the most effective was their critique of the canon. Today it seems that their assault on national literature is one of their few directly verifiable social legacies. The history of the ensuing debate in literary studies about what constitutes its proper subject, waged from the early 1970s to the late 1990s, is well known. Structuralism, semiotics, grammatology, theory, even grand theory have run their course; what remains of all these strategies today is the all-encompassing post-modern category of postcolonialism. Yet, even for this ongoing movement, my title seems to come too late as postcolonial theory has been a well-established orthodoxy, at least in Anglo-American institutions, since the early 1980s. And as the graduates of these institutions assume roles in the literary marketplaces, post-colonialism has also left its marks there. Since the late 1980s, Commonwealth writers have done well in Britain. This year too, the Man Booker Prize, awarded to Kiran Desai, goes to a writer from a Commonwealth country.¹ Although France was remarkably late in recognizing its “foreign” Francophone writers (and the reasons for this lateness will become apparent in the course of this discussion), four of the six prestigious book prizes in 2006

¹ The Indian writer Kiran Desai’s novel The Inheritance of Loss won out over such home-grown fiction as Edward St. Aubyn’s Mother’s Milk, “a tragicomic novel about addiction, the legacy of abuse and the struggles of raising children in an aristocratic British family fallen on hard times” (www.iht.com/arts).