

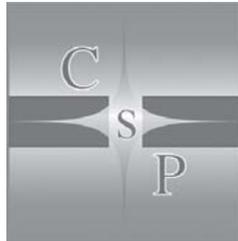
# POSTCOLONIALISM



POSTCOLONIALISM:  
SOUTH/AFRICAN PERSPECTIVES

Edited by

Michael Chapman



Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Postcolonialism: South/African Perspectives, Edited by Michael Chapman

This book first published 2008 by

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

15 Angerton Gardens, Newcastle, NE5 2JA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

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

Copyright © 2008 by Michael Chapman and contributors

All rights for this book reserved. No part of this book 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 copyright owner.

ISBN (10): 1-84718-599-1, ISBN (13): 9781847185990

## CONTENTS

Preface and Acknowledgements .....	vii
Introduction	
Postcolonialism: A Literary Turn	
Michael Chapman .....	1
Unsettling Settler Identity: Thomas Pringle's Troubled Landscapes	
Matthew Shum .....	16
Indigenous Gardening, Belonging, and Bewilderment: On Becoming South African	
Sally-Ann Murray .....	40
Revolutionaries or Sell-Outs? African Intellectuals and the <i>Voice of Africa</i>	
Corinne Sandwith .....	61
Self-translation, Untranslatability: the Autobiographies of Mpho Nthunya and Agnes Lottering	
M.J. Daymond .....	84
Waiting for the Russians: Coetzee's <i>The Master of Petersburg</i> and the Logic of Late Postcolonialism	
Monica Popescu .....	106
Deplorations: Coetzee, Costello and Doubling the N	
Michael Green .....	125
"Which World? Whose World?": Postcolonialising Gordimer	
Ileana Dimitriu .....	149
Barbara Adair's <i>In Tangier We Killed the Blue Parrot</i> : A Queer Reading	
Cheryl Stobie .....	171

Living in the World of ‘Others’:  
Interview with Robert J.C. Young in South Africa  
Michael Chapman ..... 189

Contributors ..... 197

Index ..... 199

## PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This collection of essays is concerned, explicitly and implicitly, with two particular issues in postcolonial studies: first, the shaping by northern institutions of a field located experientially and materially in the South of the world; second, a tendency of postcolonial studies to elevate theory or, at least, symptomatic analysis over and above attention to the subjective expression—the literary expression—of people’s actual lives.

The essays focus on South Africa in relation to both Africa and the West. It is suggested that a global epoch in the new millennium requires not the binary oppositions of empires writing back to the centre (Rushdie’s formulation), but more complicated interactions of South and North. We are reminded that Said’s *Orientalism* (1978)—the text marked by the North as the beginning of postcolonial studies—was anticipated by several critical contributions from the peripheries including Achebe’s attack on racial stereotyping in Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*.

With a literary turn lending coherence to South/African perspectives the essays, which are summarised in the Introduction, range from the difficulties and challenges of settler identity, through the emergence of independent (or compromised?) African and diasporic voices, to the ‘postcolonialising’ of Nobel laureates Nadine Gordimer and J.M. Coetzee.

Apart from Popescu’s essay, which appeared in *Current Writing* (19.1.2007), the other essays—some with slightly different titles—originally appeared in *English in Africa* (19.1.2006). Acknowledgment is accorded both journals.



## INTRODUCTION

### POSTCOLONIALISM: A LITERARY TURN

MICHAEL CHAPMAN

Is there a role for literature—or, to be specific, imaginative literature, or the literary—in postcolonial studies? And where may one locate South Africa in a field delineated by northern institutional purposes, practices, paradigms and, more pragmatically, career/publishing opportunities? Such questions, provoked by a project on postcolonialism from South/African perspectives, have eventuated in this selection of essays.

Having developed as a set of conceptual and perceptual resources for the study of the effects on people's lives of colonial modernity—from its Renaissance expansions to contemporary manifestations of global capital—postcolonialism has come to describe heterogeneous, though linked, groupings of critical enterprises: a critique of Western totalising narratives; a revision of the Marxian class project; utilisation of both poststructural enquiry (the displaced linguistic subject) and postmodern pursuit (scepticism of the truth claims of Cartesian individualism); the condition of both nativist longing for independence from the metropolitan power and recognition of the failure of the decolonisation trajectory; a marker for voices of pronouncement by non-resident, 'Third-World' intellectual cadres in 'First-World' universities. More positively from the perspective of the South—if, indeed, postcolonialism, as Robert J.C. Young has it, is a mark of "the West's own undoing" (2001: 65)—there is a focusing of the ethical and imaginative lens on expression, writing, and testimony outside of, or in tangential relation to, the metropolitan centre-space. Such a focus, in curricular design, involves new selections of texts and revised reading practices prompted by what was earlier called Commonwealth literature or, more recently, new literatures in English or, simply, the new englishes.

I refer lastly in the above list to literary matters. For postcolonialism identifies its priorities not as literary, but as political or ideological. Again

to quote Young, who visited South Africa under the auspices of this project:

The assumption of postcolonial studies is that many of the wrongs, if not crimes, against humanity are a product of the economic dominance of the north over the south. In this way, the historical role of Marxism in the history of anti-colonial resistance remains paramount as a fundamental framework of postcolonial thinking. Postcolonial theory operates within the historical legacy of Marxist critique...which it simultaneously transforms according to the precedent of the greatest tricontinental anti-colonial intellectual politicians. (2001:6)

With tricontinental referring here to Africa, Asia, and Latin America, it is indeed political figures, or at least philosophical spokespersons, not literary people, who feature most prominently in Young's monumental *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (2001), from which the above passage is taken.

There is seemingly a paradox here. For postcolonialism has sought to accord value to the personal or human dimension—the effects on people's lives—of asymmetrical power relations between North and South. The field—however mixed in its material and cultural presuppositions—has struck, continues to strike, a chord in literature departments which, as Young has noted, constitute the “solitary space within academic institutions where subjective forms of knowledge were taken seriously” (2001: 64). Yet a literary turn—my qualifier to the title of this Introduction—requires defence not only because of its marginalisation in postcolonial political mapping and revisionism, but also because of its status in the field as handmaiden to theory. In its discursive categorisations—its Foucauldian acts of enunciation by which the postcolonial formulates the condition of its own possibility (see Foucault 1970)—postcolonial theory predominates as sense-maker, or event-maker, over and above the experiential terrain to which its theory directs its diagnostic or emblematic or, too often, its obscurantist pronouncements. After twenty-five years of northern institutional postcolonialism—its beginning is usually tied to the publication of Edward W. Said's entirely lucid study, *Orientalism* (1978)—we encounter a repetitious opposition between the ‘framework ideas’, principally, of Said, Spivak and Bhabha, designated compositely as the linguistic-cultural or poststructural turn, and the ‘conflict ideas’ of a persistent Marxist materialism in, among others, Ahmad and San Juan Jr.<sup>1</sup> In what too often is reminiscent of binary argument, the theory or methodology stands the danger of replicating the very power positions

it wishes to challenge: “the West and the rest of us”.<sup>2</sup>

The ordering of the questions, in consequence, has led to scepticisms emanating from those of ‘South’ identity. Such scepticisms are summarised in Kwame Anthony Appiah’s wicked parody—does he, ensconced in the northern university, include himself in his parody?—of postcoloniality as “the condition of a relatively small western-style, western-trained group of writers and thinkers, who mediate the trade in cultural commodities of world capitalism at the periphery” (1992: 63). What constitutes a nation; what, an ethnic group; what, the new world order; what may oppose the hegemony of US imperialism? These questions characterise the utopian agenda of postcolonialism: the aim being a just social or, more precisely, a socialist world, in which class is again granted significant explanatory power, and in which the issues of race, gender, and the translation of cultures are posited upon the value of difference. In such an agenda, difference, or *différance* (see Derrida 1978), does not confirm division, but transforms ‘othering’ from negative to positive premise.

The utopian model, however, may be as totalising in its configuration as the narrative of Enlightenment-modernity against which, in almost mantra-like reaction (race, class, the unfinished business of gender), postcolonialism regularly pits its opposition. Its cultural materialist tendency seeks to resurrect a Leftish programme of social action in the wake of Thatcherism and, now, in reaction to US capitalist and military adventurism.<sup>3</sup> The emphasis on difference opposes what in neo-liberal global-speak is termed the convergence of markets. That the study of postcolonial literature has not in itself pushed the boundaries, to quote Tariq Ali (1993), of “market realism”—a preference for the elite work in English that is not entirely alien to the suppositions and conventions of Western modernist or postmodernist genre or style—represents an irony of an anti-metropole endeavour located within the corridors of the metropolitan institution.

Where or how do critics of literature position themselves in a project which elevates sociological or economic analysis, or the discourses of philosophy or politics, over and above literary intervention, and in which literature, when it does engage attention, is subjected to issue-driven interpretation. As E. San Juan Jr phrases it, literature is regarded as “an instance of concrete political practice which reflects the dynamic process of the national democratic revolution in the developing countries” (1998: 254).

This formulation promises little more than a return to earlier economic base/superstructure rigidity. To which a critic of the linguistic turn—Homi

K. Bhabha, for example—might respond that, no, the literary text, indeed the subject in its subjectivity, is characterised not simply as materialist reflection, but as rhetorical, performative act. Accordingly, meaning emerges in the textual palimpsest, deconstructively, or against the grain of full intent, in the slippages, in the “in-between”, the “liminal”, or “Third Space”. It is here that coloniser and colonised interact: not in the binary oppositions of master and slave, but in more intricate, more devious sparrings. In the “sly civilities” of the hybridised encounter—we are told, following Heidegger’s insight that a boundary is not where matters stop, but where newness is possible—new social and cultural forms of resistance, or even exchange, find their “presencing” (Bhabha 1994). If the subaltern, as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1985) maintains, cannot speak, she or he can at least mimic the coloniser, ridicule and thus undermine the authoritarian substance and manner. To which the cynic might retort, or simply confirm the coloniser’s view that the colonial babu in his wheedling and winking remains—well!—a babu.

Here is a conundrum. It is a conundrum that for the last decade or more has characterised post- debate. Our investment in a common human enterprise is qualified by our investment in the dignity of our different selves. The conundrum, nonetheless, is more intractable when located in the large categories of conflict-oriented or framework-oriented postcolonial theory than when located in the experiential purchase of literary works, or in the analysis of individual texts, or—dare one say it—in the aesthetic appreciations of a literary turn.

It is widely agreed, for example, that a considerable output of the most exciting contemporary literature emanates from non-metropolitan sources of creativity and concern. Let me permit Salman Rushdie his colourful response to George Steiner’s complaint that literary energy is being generated not in the metropolis, but at the edges of the world: “What does it matter...? What is this flat earth on which the good professor lives, with jaded Romans at the centre and frightfully gifted Hottentots at the edges” (Rushdie 1996). We—that is, we in the academy, who have taken the post-challenge seriously— no longer think of Achebe or Gordimer or Coetzee as writing, in reaction, back to the centre. If we are willing to grant Achebe his initial project of re-inserting the African human being in the heart of darkness, then his critical as well as his creative writing—are the two easily separable?—has offered telling adjustments to dominant perspectives on the Western canon, in which the novelist has been always an artist before, as recast by Achebe, a teacher (1988 [1965]). Is Conrad or Bunyan or Shakespeare unifocally a metropolitan writer? Is the Third World writer

merely the doppelgänger of the metropolitan counterpart? We may wish to read Toni Morrison as postcolonial, or J.M. Coetzee as both South African and international, or—through his recent work (Coetzee 2005)—as exploratory of the postcolonial as a settler-colony identification: Canberra, or previously Cape Town, placed somewhere ‘in-between’ London and Lagos.

As I have said, the focus in postcolonial literary studies has remained attached to the elite work in new englishes by the emigré or multicultural metropolitan author (the Salman Rushdie or the Zadie Smith). The oral or indigenous voice, or popular expression on the periphery (African praises, say, or Onitsha market literature), has had limited impact so far on post-debate, where the tendency has been to replace Western canons with Third-World canons (instead of Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, we have Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*) or where the tendency has been to re-appraise metropolitan ‘touchstones’ through the telescope of alternative modernities (Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* or Bunyan’s *The Pilgrim’s Progress* in the New World). Such ‘elite’ constrictions notwithstanding, a literary influence may be fruitfully pursued. It is an influence that can be identified, more recently, even in critics whose interest is principally philosophical, political or ideological.

Although he retains his Marxist predilection for class analysis in his denigration of postmodern sceptics of truth, unity and progress, for example, Terry Eagleton in *After Theory* (2003) suggests a consideration of truth categories—virtue, evil, morality, pleasure, death—which have been in short supply in ideological critique, but which constitute the truth of poetry as opposed to the truth of history (to invoke an Aristotelian distinction). For Robert J.C. Young (2001: 409), to whom I have already referred, literary texts—he names *Passage to India*, *King Solomon’s Mines* and *Kim*—are not an expression of higher or more complex truth, but an aspect of discourse no greater in import than the private letter as evidence in a law court as part of legal discourse: discourse being not the direct or indirect representation or misrepresentation of experience, but a system of statements, or rules, that governs institutional practice. (In Young’s attention the practice, of course, is colonialism.) Such a line of argument might seem unpropitious of a literary turn; Young reminds us, nevertheless, that postcolonialism as a spur to thought and activity predates Said, Bhabha and Spivak, the ‘holy trinity’ of the northern university. Rather, the postcolonial has long had important voices on the peripheries; that, in fact, peripheries may be an inappropriate descriptive term, as perhaps is postcolonial itself, Young preferring tricontinental in

its internationalist ambition. Not only was Gandhi an influential presence—a kind of embodied creative text, to be interpreted in multiple contexts of imaginative and ethical challenge—but it is significant that what shaped those thinkers whose work is synonymous with post- debate—Foucault and Derrida—was their experience in colonial Tunisia and Algeria, respectively.<sup>4</sup>

Closer to a literary turn, Bart Moore-Gilbert (1997)—like Ato Quayson (2000), another critic who has sustained a literary interest<sup>5</sup>—distinguishes between postcolonial theory and postcolonial practice, and includes as formative influences not only philosophical and political thinkers, but also the ‘first wave’ of Caribbean and African writer-critics of the decolonisation years. We are reminded that Achebe’s landmark essay, “An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*” (1988 [1975]), was published three years prior to Said’s *Orientalism*; that Ngũgĩ’s “decolonising the mind” (1981)—the phrase had been coined earlier by Es’kia Mphahlele (1962) in his response to *Negritude*—anticipated the agitation of Spivak, in particular, for curricular reform; and that both E.K. Brathwaite’s theory of “creolisation” (1971) and Wilson Harris’s neologism of “the in-between” (1967:8) (a means to figure a position between cultures) anticipated Bhabha’s conception of the Third Space. Harris well before Bhabha, in fact, had defined “the void” as the element which, as in Bhabha, complicates full translation: the void prevents cultures or cultural forms, which are being negotiated, from attaining the easy commerce of equivalence or synthesis, Harris notes, while at the same time the void—the apparent paradox is key to Bhabha’s hybridity—is a place which allows cultures to mix not by erasing differences, but by “endorsing difference yet creatively undermining biases” (Harris 1992 [1967]: 20).

I mention the insights of so-called Third World literary figures not to score ‘South’ points against the North, but to remind us that what we now refer to as the postcolonial is, spatially and temporally, an entanglement of the colony with modernity, in which—as Said (1993) has argued—no cultures are pure and in which the philosophical home may not be the nation but the world. Not only in Bhabha or in Harris, but in observations dating back to Roman and Christian encounters, we may identify—to return to my earlier point—a post- conundrum: a narrative of causality suggesting both progress (one stage to the next) and imposition (a dominating story); or a local story susceptible, also, to its own paradoxes of difference, as both identity-recognition and ethnicity-identification. It is a conundrum which, in granting respect for ‘my story’, may trigger in ‘your story’ vicious regional competition, as in the Balkan wars of the

1990s: why your story and not my story? Or, whose story has authority? Or, according to post- 'dissensus', is cultural understanding or literary history desirable, or even possible?

Given a rhetoric that is able to paralyse claims of rationality or ethical choice, it is not really surprising to note impulsions to greater nuance and complexity in either/or scenarios. The physical sciences, for example, point out that as in scientific experimentation so in social life, we artificially construct our conjunctures of events. These hypothetical models chart causality according to provisional patterns while subjecting such patterns—which are, after all, constructed patterns—to ever more challenging observation in the pursuit of truer or, at least more invariant, accounts of reality. (See Potter and López 2001) Or, to turn to economics, Immanuel Wallerstein's world systems theory (1974; 1991) in its narration of modernity is not as singular as literary critics of Enlightenment tend to find convenient. While attached to European and now US global expansion, capitalism overlaps differently, at different times and in different spaces, with the intrusions—not simply the passivities—of decolonisation and neocolonialism. (It is not a new observation that South Africa's development invokes the consideration of colonialism of a special kind.)

Such tensions between global universalism—or a *mélange* of cultural production in US sweatshops at the edges of the world—and the identity politics of regions, even nations, provoke several essays in the collection, *Postcolonial Studies and Beyond* (Loomba et al 2005). The conclusion of the editors, in their Introduction, is that in an era of globalisation debate must move beyond the 'conundrum'—consensus or dissensus—of the past decade, and seek a "new critical language for articulating the linkage between local, lived experience and the broadest structures of global economic and political power" (19). It is not as Said suggests in what for him is an unusual flourish to popular effect that "stone-throwing Palestinian youths or swaying dancing South African groups or wall-traversing East Germans" (1993: 396) by their actions alone collapsed the relevant tyrannies. Rather, it is that metanarratives, as Kelwyn Sole (2005) argues in *Postcolonial Studies and Beyond*, must not be erased, but must be qualified by scrupulous attention to local conditions. Sole illustrates his point in an analysis of the "quotidian experience"—the everyday, as a category—in contemporary South African poetry, which questions the "pseudo freedoms" bred and licensed by neoliberalism in the new South Africa.

At the same time, Sole—alert to the danger of racial division—cannot contemplate a future progressive South Africa simply as an accumulation

of discrete observations detached from the trace of a trajectory: a trajectory urging citizens towards a community of awareness. The concept, community of awareness, is Fanon's (1961): his synthesis beyond the antithesis of native resistance. It is quoted approvingly by Said (1993: 262); and it is endorsed by Young in his conclusion as to why, even though he himself prefers the term tricontinental, postcolonialism retains its definitional purpose in globalised times. Postcolonialism marks the fact that, despite setbacks to decolonisation, human beings require a return to what has come to be known as a radical humanitarian tradition. (See Fanon 1961: 315-6, and Young 2001: 67-8)

We touch again on the terrain of the literary, where explorations of the subjective and imaginative life should seek the gradations that are too often erased in the abstractions of postcolonial theory. Sole is unlikely to label himself a postcolonial critic. His caution bears, perhaps, on Said's observation (1993: 264) outside his flourish about stone-throwing youths and toyi-toying (swaying-singing) crowds: the postcolonial paradigm—the West's turning its gaze on its ex-colonies—is least applicable to the topographies, both imaginative and developmental, of countries with particularly complicated relationships to a colonising/anti-colonising dialectic. Said's examples are Algeria, Guinea, sections of the Islamic and Arab worlds, and Palestine and South Africa; and at the conference at Wits University (Johannesburg) in 1996 on "Post-Colonial Shakespeares" Jonathan Dollimore sought both precariously and elegantly to tackle a certain hostility among South African participants to a postcolonial discourse:

There was, for example, distrust of 'metropolitan' theory, including by myself; a sense that this theory which gestured so much towards difference as a fundamental philosophical premise, disregarded its material realities. But what struck me, as an outsider, as the most hostile divide of all, was that between a materialist tradition of criticism and subsequent developments conveniently (though again reductively) lumped together as "the" postmodern. (1997: 259-60)

How to avoid the either/or dichotomy, or the divide—implicit in northern institutional postcolonialism, despite its best intentions—between a still confident West as the framer of the discourse and the silent, or winking, or rebellious native subjects of the South? As far as academic enquiry is concerned, the response to the travelling theorist cannot be the indigene who, in the blood and the bones, *knows* the local story, and Dollimore's conclusion, even as it feels compelled to retain the European thinker as

measure, shifts either/or to both/and:

I reconsider the place of pessimism within the political project in the spirit of Gramsci's familiar yet never more apposite remark: "Pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will." (1997: 260)

Optimism of the will reinforces a literary turn, even if such a turn refuses to follow David Punter's own imaginative, sometimes quirky attempt in his study *Postcolonial Imaginings* (2000) to redirect postcolonial theory towards the substance of his subtitle, "Fictions of a New World Order". Instead of postcolonial criticism's "establishing a ground"—what are the forms of colonialism, what is a comprador formation, etc.?—the question, according to Punter, is how to respond to the pressures under which the postcolonial experience is felt, how the narrative, recursive, struggling forward, burdened by setbacks, emerges in image, in speech, in the shocks of its insights, in the complexity of its human interactions. It is an imagination which Punter, in his attempt to turn to the literary, can identify only in "melancholy, ruin, loss" (2000: 186): an imagination (defined by Punter as postcolonial) of violent geographics, displacement, of ghosts in the history house, in which the freight of centuries of colonisation can never be erased.

In the postcolony, however—if South Africa may be designated, tentatively, as a postcolony—the "spectral" (Punter 2002) does not necessarily negate the energies of renewal, even as the in-between space presents an ongoing challenge. How then may the literary intervene? According to Wilson Harris

the possibility exists for the literary work to involve us in perspectives on renaissance which can bring into play a figurative meaning beyond an apparently real world or prison of history.... I believe a philosophy of history may well be buried in the arts of the imagination. (1970: 8)

Or, more recently, according to Hanif Kureishi,

the only patriotism possible is one that refuses the banality of taking either side, and continues the arduous conversation. That is why we have literature, the theatre, newspapers—a culture... (2005:19)

\* \* \*

The essays that follow offer independent contributions to postcolonial debate. Insights that have been influential in the definition of the field are neither ignored nor permitted to 'overwrite' the texts of imaginative

experience. Matthew Shum's reading of Thomas Pringle, for example, avoids the theoretical formulations that dominate northern institutional postcolonial study. Pringle's settler identity is seen to be less than contained by a landscape poem which, in its local place, requires an adjustment of standard European-Romantic categories of tutored and untutored nature. A close reading is not utilised, in consequence, to entirely deconstructive purposes—to reveal the limits of Pringle's radicalism—as might be the familiar postcolonial manoeuvre. Instead, the close reading returns value to the poem; the complexity of settler identity is captured in Pringle's subjective response to the strange, discomfiting experience.

In Sally-Ann Murray's tilling of the suburban garden, or the garden as text, white South Africans emerge neither as "colonists who will" (Memmi's settlers of conservation or conservatism) nor "colonists who won't" (Memmi's settlers of guilty conscience).<sup>6</sup> If suburban gardening in its importation of hybrid species reveals by analogy jittery identities, gardening reveals also the pleasurable pursuits of settler belonging. If indigeneity has not come naturally to ex-Europeans in Africa, neither will these settlers of over one hundred years vanish in any retreat to a mythical motherland: a motherland now more alien to them than the adopted African soil. There may be potential, therefore, for the forging of new identities beyond nature or nurture. What, after all, is nature, what nurture, in a space that since the Dutch landings in 1652 has experienced translations of Africa and the West?

The anxieties of identity in multiple racial and social contexts are examined, in different ways, by Corinne Sandwith and M.J. Daymond. In a heterogeneous society, class and race identifications raise questions about the authenticity of any discourse: questions that Sandwith pursues in her focus on *The Voice* (1949-52), a little-known black 'township' broadsheet which included the early contributions of writers such as Es'kia Mphahlele. It is the translatability or untranslatability of cultures<sup>7</sup> that Daymond pursues in the interstices of written and oral life stories, English or englishes, or tradition and modernity, or women's voices in patriarchal community. If in Daymond's essay the two subjects of their stories—Mpho Nthunya and Agnes Lottering—occupy Bhabha's Third Space of in-betweenness, then there is no certainty of presencing. When older belief systems encounter Christian teaching in the contact zone, there may be silence, but a silence resonant, paradoxically, of the struggle of incommensurability between contesting worlds. Does academic enquiry probe or respect the otherness?

A scrupulous refusal to inhabit ‘otherness’ is a mark of J.M. Coetzee’s fiction. Monica Popescu asks why Coetzee in 1994, amid momentous change in South Africa, set *The Master of Petersburg* in nineteenth-century Russia. Her enquiry leads to a category shift from ‘postcolonial’ as vertical-axis consideration of metropolis and colony to “late postcolonialism”: a triangulation, or complex interaction, not a turning away from, but an analogous placing of, South Africa’s transition in a nuanced, global picture.

Such triangulation also informs the remaining contributions. It is Michael Green’s concern that J.M. Coetzee’s “Lesson”, in *Elizabeth Costello* (2003), on “The Humanities in Africa”, glosses stories that in accumulated particularities of time and place may suggest a multifaceted truth of human and spiritual interaction, a reality of Africa and the West. Sweeping generalisations by the two characters in the “Lesson”, whether on the nature of African Christianity or Greek classicism, risk evading the needs of actual people. Instead of story yielding the truth of the subject in the landscape, story—as so often in postcolonial discussion—may be manipulated into the service of preferred ideologies. Where does Coetzee, the arch-fictionalist, stand in relation to the characters to whom he gives voice? The question—an intricate question—is posited by Green through a Coetzeean device: a lecture which, as in Elizabeth Costello’s “Lesson”, invites the reader to participate in the making of meaning.

The making of meaning, as Ileana Dimitriu points out in Ato Quayson’s study *Postcolonialism* (2000), shifts from consideration of the postcolonial as a set of conditions *out there* to the postcolonial as ongoing process: a coming into being of the new millennium as “a postcolonializing” world (Quayson 2000:8). This suggests increasing migrancy, increasing movements of all kinds across increasingly porous borders, of margins located in centres, and vice versa. As a spectator of a UEFA football match might observe in the composition of the ‘multi-ethnic’ teams, the ramparts of Fortress Europe have already been breached. Or, more crucially, as a viewer in South Africa of BBC World will see, France in November 2005 experienced the violence of its failure to understand, creatively, its own postcolonialising “presencing”. It is the metaphor of postcolonialising that summarises Nadine Gordimer’s recent critical and creative writing, and Dimitriu identifies in the diverse landscapes of Gordimer’s *The Pick-up* and *Loot* neither metropolitan centres nor African nor Asian nor Latin-American, nor indeed East European peripheries, but multiple margins and centres that are imbued with different degrees of significance. Cheryl Stobie, for her part, turns Barbara Adair’s novel of life in a decadent

Tangier to significance in the South Africa of today, in which post-apartheid times have presented the possibilities of challenging new relationships not only across race, but also across gender. Challenges in South Africa, finally, direct Chapman's interview with Robert J.C. Young.

What the contributions have in common is what I have termed a literary turn. Unlike San Juan Jr, the contributors do not regard the imaginative work as an "instance of concrete political practice reflecting the process of national democratic revolution". The new South Africa has not complied in predictable ways with the revolutionary vision: the national democratic movement—if one may still attach the label to the ANC government—has had to adjust its socialist ideals to the complexities of multiple centres and margins within economic and cultural life not only in South Africa, but also in South Africa's relation to Africa and the world. The contributors might be prepared to agree with Derek Attridge (2004: 126-31) that literature defines its "singularity" in its resistance to the all-encompassing frame or idea; that literature although a cultural product is rarely self-contained by the culture; and that whatever its effect or affect on our experience, a literary turn is unlikely either to fast track into power any New Social Movement or to save our souls.

What literature might achieve is its own apprehension of otherness; its capacity to offer surprising articulations of, and insights into, the complexity of human potential and conduct. Despite the utopian pronouncements of many postcolonial projects, the current collection of essays heeds Ania Loomba's more realistic purpose: we academics "should at the very least place our discussions of postcoloniality in the context of our own educational institutions and practices" (1998: 258). The objective is to stimulate our students, and ourselves, to see afresh, and comparatively, across worlds. In this, a literary turn may achieve an ethical dimension.

## Notes

1. See Ahmad (1992), San Juan Jr (1998). Also, Fanon (1961), Ali (1993) and Parry (2004).
2. See Chinweizu (1975).
3. See Young (2001), Lazarus (2004), and Loomba et al (2005).
4. See Young (2001), for chapters on "Gandhi's Counter-modernity", "Foucault in Tunisia" and "Subjectivity in History: Derrida in Algeria".
5. For studies that devote greater attention to literary criticism than to theory or political commentary see, also, Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (1989),

- Bassnett and Trivedi (1999), Boehmer (1995), Gilroy (1993), Japtok (2003), King et al (1995), Punter (2000) and Walder (1998).
6. See Memmi (1965).
  7. See Budick and Iser (1996).

## References

- Achebe, Chinua. 1958. *Things Fall Apart*. London: Heinemann Educational.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1988 [1965]. "The Novelist as Teacher." In: *Hopes and Impediments: Selected Essays 1965-87*. London and Ibadan: Heinemann International: 27-31.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1988 [1975]. "An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*." In: *Hopes and Impediments: Selected Essays 1965-87*. London and Ibadan: Heinemann International: 1-13.
- Ahmad, Aijaz. 1992. *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures*. London: Verso.
- Ali, Tariq. 1993. "Literature and Market Realism." *New Left Review* 199: 140-5.
- Appiah, Kwame Anthony. 1992. *In My Father's House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture*. London: Methuen.
- Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin. 1989. *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-colonial Literatures*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Attridge, Derek. 2004. *The Singularity of Literature*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Bassnett, Susan, and Harish Trivedi (eds). 1999. *Post-Colonial Translation: Theory and Practice*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Boehmer, Elleke. 1995. *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature*. Oxford: OUP.
- Bhabha, Homi K. 1994. *The Location of Culture*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Brathwaite, E.K. 1971. *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica 1770-1820*. Oxford: Clarendon.
- Budick, Sanford, and Wolfgang Iser (eds). 1996. *The Translatability of Cultures: Figurations of the Space Between*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Bunyan, John. 1987 [1678]. *The Pilgrim's Progress*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Chinweizu. 1975. *The West and the Rest of Us: White Predators, Black Slavers and the African Elite*. New York: Vintage.
- Coetzee, J.M. 2005. *Slow Man*. London: Secker and Warburg.
- Conrad, Joseph. 1994 [1902]. *Heart of Darkness*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

- Derrida, Jacques. 1978. *Writing and Difference*. Translated from the French by Alan Bass. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Dollimore, Jonathan. 1998. "Shakespeare and Theory." In: A. Loomba and M. Orkin (eds). *Post-Colonial Shakespeares*. London and New York: Routledge: 259-76.
- Eagleton, Terry. 2003. *After Theory*. London: Allen Lane.
- Fanon, Franz. 1961. *The Wretched of the Earth*. Translated from the French by Constance Farrington. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Foucault, Michel. 1970. *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*. Translated from the French by A.M. Sheridan. New York: Pantheon.
- Gilroy, Paul. 1993. *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. London: Verso.
- Harris, Wilson. 1967. *Tradition, the Writer and Society*. London: New Beacon.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1970. *History, Fable and Myth in the Caribbean and Guianas*. Georgetown: Ministry of Information and Culture. Reprinted: Harris. 1981. *Explorations: A Selection of Talks and Articles*, edited by H. Maes-Jelinek. Mundelstrup: Dangaroo Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1992. "Judgement and Dream." In: A. Riach and M. Williams (eds). *The Radical Imagination: Lectures and Talks by Wilson Harris*. Liège: Département d'Anglais, Université de Liège.
- Japtok, Martin (ed.). 2003. *Postcolonial Perspectives on Women Writers: From Africa, the Caribbean, and the U.S.* Trenton (N.J.) and Asmara: Africa World Press, Inc.
- King, Russell et al. 1995. *Writing across Worlds: Literature and Migration*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Kureishi, Hanif. 2005. "The Arduous Conversation Will Continue." *The Guardian* (19 July):19.
- Lazarus, Neil (ed.). 2004. *The Cambridge Companion to Postcolonial Studies*. Cambridge: CUP.
- Loomba, Ania. 1998. *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Loomba, Ania et al. 2005. *Postcolonial Studies and Beyond*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.
- Memmi, Albert. 1965 [1957]. *The Coloniser and the Colonised*. New York: Orion Press.
- Moore-Gilbert, Bart. 1997. *Postcolonial Theory: Contexts, Practices, Politics*. London: Verso.
- Mphahlele, Ezekiel [Es'kia]. 1962. *The African Image*. London: Faber and Faber: 19-55.

- Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o. 1981. *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*. London: James Currey.
- Parry, Benita. 2004. *Postcolonial Studies: A Materialist Critique*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Potter, Garry and José López. 2001. "After Postmodernism: The New Millennium." In: J. López and G. Potter (eds). *After Postmodernism: An Introduction to Critical Realism*. London: The Athlone Press: 3-16.
- Punter, David. 2000. *Postcolonial Imaginings: Fictions of a New World Order*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2002. "Spectral Criticism." In: J. Wolfreys (ed.). *Introducing Criticism at the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press: 259-78.
- Quayson, Ato. 2000. *Postcolonialism: Theory, Practice or Process?* Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Rushdie, Salman. 1996. "The Novel's Not Yet Dead...It's Just Buried." *Mail and Guardian Review of Books* (September).
- Said, Edward W. 1978. *Orientalism: Western Representation of the Orient*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1993. *Culture and Imperialism*. London: Vintage.
- San Juan Jr, E. 1998. *Beyond Postcolonial Theory*. New York and London: St Martin's Press.
- Shakespeare, William. 1997 [1623]. *The Tempest*. The Riverside Shakespeare. Boston: Houghton.
- Sole, Kelwyn. 2005. "The Deep Thoughts the One in Need Falls Into: Quotidian Experience and the Perspectives of Poetry in Postliberation South Africa." In: A. Loomba et al. (eds). *Postcolonial Studies and Beyond*. Durham and London: Duke University Press: 182-205.
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. 1985. "Can the Subaltern Speak? Speculations on Widow Sacrifice." *Wedge* 7/8: 120-30.
- Walder, Dennis. 1998. *Post-colonial Literatures in English: History, Language, Theory*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Wallerstein, Immanuel. 1974. *The Modern World System: Capitalist Agriculture and the Origin of the European World Economy in the Sixteenth Century*. New York: Academic Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1991. *Geopolitics and Geoculture: Essays on the Changing World System*. Cambridge: CUP.
- Young, Robert J.C. 2001. *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction*. Oxford: Blackwell.

## UNSETTLING SETTLER IDENTITY

### THOMAS PRINGLE'S TROUBLED LANDSCAPES

MATTHEW SHUM

Postcolonial criticism, like its theoretical predecessor colonial discourse analysis, is rarely sympathetic to settler literature, and then only when this literature registers, in some explicit way, opposition to the colonial enterprise. Such an undifferentiated association of colonial writing, especially that of the first phase of settlement, with what Aijaz Ahmad has called “aggressive identity formation” (1992:78), often assumes that the act of enunciation, aesthetic or otherwise, mirrors the processes of material appropriation which establish the colonial state. The assumptions apply particularly, perhaps, to landscape poetry, where the very subject-matter is saturated with implication of the most obvious sort. Even within the metropolitan context, late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century loco-descriptive poetry and painting has been subjected to vigorous critique for its occlusion of the labouring poor, its aestheticisation of political intent, its naturalisation of class interest and so forth. While I do not wish to deny the cogency of these approaches, they have tended to add critical weight to colonial and postcolonial appraisals of landscape depiction as fully implicated in imperial processes. In this paper I take as an example of colonial landscape description Thomas Pringle’s “Evening Rambles”, a poem first published in London in 1828, but which was in large part composed on the Eastern frontier of the Cape Colony in 1821. In my reading—a close reading, which attempts to respect the dynamics of the text and its complex particularity rather than encode it in a pre-formulated theory—the poem offers a conflicted and uncertain understanding of colonial landscape as a site that both invites and resists the imposition of European schemas. Such a reading goes entirely against the grain of contemporary critical responses to “Evening Rambles”, which are united in their disparagement of its derivative intent: the poem is, such readings assert, a transparent attempt to work colonial landscape into imperial paradigms.

The tone is set in J.M. Coetzee's groundbreaking essays on colonial landscape in *White Writing* (1989). While conceding in one essay that the poem's technical achievements (he is discussing the traverses that allow spatial excursus through the landscape) "are accomplished with a fair amount of art" (47), Coetzee returns in another essay to declare the poem no more than an exercise in imperial domestication: "[T]he familiar trot of iambic-tetrameter couplets reassuringly domesticates the foreign content. The underlying argument of the poem, from beginning to end is that, since the African wilderness clearly does not strain the capacities of the English language or even of English verse, it can be contained within the European category of the exotic" (1989: 164). Malvern van Wyk Smith is similarly unforgiving: in his view the poem is a "relaxed domestic contemplation" (2000:28), in which a culpably "selective innocence" (29) enables Pringle to conduct a "controlled and magisterial survey ... confirming ... the operation of the imperial imagination" (29). David Bunn, while locating the poem in a larger argument about colonial landscape, reads in it similarly appropriative intents the fundamental motivation of which is "ideological containment" (1994: 139). Against these assumptions I argue that while Pringle's poem is indeed hinged on certain assumptions about landscape and its representation which are demonstrably British in provenance, and that these assumptions have an inherently imperial character in that they seek to trope colonial landscape into certain regimens of representation, this is by no means the whole story. Far from accomplishing a seamless or untroubled annexure of the African landscape into the generic boundaries of metropolitan representation, the poem, in my reading, problematises this process to the point where such boundaries lose their bearing, and enacts something like the collapse of its informing conventions rather than their imposition. In order to arrive at this reading, however, it is necessary to situate the poem within the numerous descriptions of colonial landscape in the 'frontier' chapters of Pringle's *Narrative of a Residence in South Africa* (1834), descriptions to which the poem does at times allude and descriptions which are indispensable to locating the poem in its proper context.

In those early chapters of the *Narrative* which describe the first years of British settlement on the frontier, we encounter the usual heterogeneous mixture of landscape description, a taxonomy of fauna and flora, observations on animal behaviour, details of progress on the settlement, and a medley of anecdotal accounts of historical and other events. The chapter subheadings, with their telegraphed condensations of content separated by dashes, might offer the appearance of coherence or

susceptibility to summary, but the paratactic yoking of discrete particulars (“Valley of the White River—Moravian Settlement of Enon—Anecdotes of the Kaffir Wars”) very often indicates something different: the inability to cast the narrative into a containing or generically stable structure. The *Narrative* is not really a narrative at all: it is something more like an eclectic catalogue of events, sights, incidents, observations, anecdotes and polemical interventions strung together along a loose temporal line. This generic eclecticism points towards the difficulty of finding ways to fit the colonial into received templates of representation: a difficulty particularly evident in the descriptions of landscape, where Pringle, as we shall see, often registers reactions that are fraught with ambivalence and, at times, fear. We should bear in mind that for Pringle landscape description is not a matter of mere topographical detail: it is at the deepest level an investment in—or a divestment of—identity itself. Landscape, or the “face of the country” as travel writers of the period called it, as though it were a physiognomy whose decipherment would lead to a revelation of inner character, must be made habitable for the coloniser not only through acts of material transformation or classificatory control, but also through acts of imaginative reclamation whose “shaping perception ... makes the difference between raw matter and landscape” (Schama 1996:10).

The first extended depiction of landscape in the *Narrative* is a ship deck view of the Eastern Cape coast, just beyond the Knysna lagoon—approximately the territory in which the settlers were to be placed:

This [the ship’s tacking off the coast] gave us an excellent opportunity of surveying the coast scenery of Auteniqualand and Zitzikamma, which is of a very striking character. The land rises abruptly from the shore in massive mountain ridges, clothed with forests of large timber, and swelling into the back ground into lofty serrated peaks of naked rock. As we passed headland after headland, the sylvan recesses of the bays and mountains opened successively to our gaze, like a magnificent panorama, continually unfolding new features, or exhibiting new combinations of scenery, in which the soft and the stupendous, the monotonous and the picturesque, were strangely blended. The aspect of the whole was impressive, but somber; beautiful, but somewhat savage. There was the grandeur and the grace of nature, majestic and untamed; and there was likewise that air of *loneliness* and dreary *wildness*, which a country unmarked by the traces of human industry or of human residence seldom fails to exhibit to the view of civilized man ... the sublimely stern aspect of the country, so different from the rich tameness of ordinary English scenery, seemed to strike many of the *Southron* [English] with a degree of awe approaching to consternation. The Scotch, on the contrary, as the stirring recollections

of their native land were vividly called up by the rugged peaks and shaggy declivities of this wild coast, were strongly affected, like all true mountaineers on such occasions. Some were excited to extravagant spirits; others silently shed tears. (1966:6-7)

In this first sighting or “surveying” of landscape Pringle employs the two standard tropes of landscape description, the sublime and the picturesque, along with their usual connotations. They are, however, “strangely blended”, somehow not the usual sum of their parts: “[I]mpressive, but somber; beautiful, but somewhat savage”. We might gloss the oxymoronic uneasiness of the above description as sublime but productive of the sombre rather than an exhilarating sense of the illimitable, and beautiful or picturesque but lacking ordered containment. Similarly, the “grandeur and grace of nature” is offset by (“there was likewise”) a simultaneous sense of the strongly scored “*loneliness*” and “*wildness*”. Despite these complications there is an imperious presumptiveness in the very syntax of these observations: the landscape offers itself to Pringle’s gaze with a passive allure—“opening”, “unfolding” and “exhibiting”—as though it were a vast and empty “panorama” laid out for survey by “civilized man” rather than another country with geographical and other features appropriate to its own social organisation. Though Pringle’s gaze over the colonial landscape will often be directed by the imperious expectation that it is there to be commanded or mapped onto the co-ordinates of the ways of seeing he has brought with him, the landscape—as this passage already demonstrates—will in equal and sometimes greater measure also disturb these expectations.

In Pringle’s subsequent experience as a settler, these initial apprehensions about the “aspect” of the country he was entering do not fully abate. In his first venture into the interior—as he rides towards the London Missionary Society station at Bethelsdorp—he complains of the emptiness and monotony of a landscape “unenlivened” by human presence, the blankness of its features “relieved” only by some “lofty and picturesque mountains” in the distance. The fact that Pringle immediately establishes such a polarity—let us call it a polarity between the monotonous and the picturesque—is a clear indication that the latter category possesses for him an associational significance that goes beyond mere ‘pleasure’. It is as though Pringle were eagerly scanning the surrounding country for sights—and sites—that will offer the legible differentiations of the picturesque rather than the unreadable blankness of landscape that is merely “monotonous”. As Pringle’s party journeys towards the land

allocated to them, he continues to read landscape in terms which emphasise privation – “a country so waste and lonesome that it seemed almost totally devoid of inhabitants” (1966:27)—occasionally punctuated by more picturesque detail. In the following short passage we see the often abrupt transition between the two types of landscape: “The features of the country changed alternately from dark jungle to rich park-like scenery, embellished with graceful clumps of evergreens; and from that again to the desolate sterility of savage mountains, or of parched and desert plains ...” (26). Pringle’s use of the term “picturesque” is not definitionally specific; in general application it exists mainly as an antonym to the predominantly “waste” or “sterile” or “savage” character of the landscape. Its substantive applications are varied, as the following passage illustrates:

The scenery of the upper part of the dell is very picturesque. Accompanying the course of a stream, as it meanders through the meadows, you have, on the right, lofty hills covered with woods of evergreens, and broken by *kloofs* or subsidiary dells, filled with large forest timber. On the left the hills are lower, but also covered with copsewood, and in many places diversified by rocks and cliffs of deep red and other lively colours. ... At every turn the outline of the hills varies, presenting new points of picturesque scenery; while, scattered through the meadows, or bending over the river margin, appear little clumps of evergreens, willows, and acacias; and sometimes groves of lofty forest-trees ... enrich the vale with a stately beauty not always met with in South African landscape. This combination of the wild, the grand and the beautiful, is heightened in its effect by the exotic appearance of the vegetation. The meadows, too, or savannahs along the river banks, are richly embellished ... with large purple flowers. ... (1966:84-5)

There is a painterly attention to detail in this passage most evident in verbs which serve a compositional purpose by evoking variation in perspective (“At every turn the outlines of the hills *varies*, *presenting* new points ...”) or verbs (“diversified by”, “enrich”, “heightened”, “embellished”) which emphasise textural nuance. Pringle responds to this scene, which he acknowledges as atypical, with a lyricism of particularity rare in his descriptions of South African landscape. In contrastive terms, this is a veritable sanctuary of the picturesque, rich in the “variety, ornamentation, and detail” (Birmingham 1994:87) typical of picturesque taste. Even here, however, in what is the most extended picturesque description in the *Narrative*, this is not a made-to-order metropolitan picturesque but a colonial hybrid, a “combination of the wild, the grand, and the beautiful” even further “heightened” by the “exotic”. The very fact that Pringle

'composes' this passage with such detail is an indication that such a landscape has a significance that goes beyond its topographical features: it is a landscape whose differentiated detail, despite its excess, can be read as responsive to European aesthetic categories. The colonial landscape becomes picturesque when it resembles, however imperfectly, those metropolitan landscapes which the picturesque is typically thought to describe.

In March 1821, barely a year after his arrival, Pringle left the settlement at Glen Lynden to accompany Robert Hart, the superintendent of a government farm in Somerset East, "on a journey which he had occasion to make through a part of the country very seldom traversed even by the colonists" (1966:77). This journey was to take Pringle into mountainous and wooded territory that was both visually spectacular and, a decade earlier, the scene of violent conflict between the Xhosa and colonial forces. The first leg of the journey was to a Moravian mission at Enon and required an ascent of the successive ridges of the Zureberg (Suurberg) mountains. The initial stages are described by Pringle in terms already familiar to us: the landscape is "monotonous" and "enlivened only now and then" by the presence of indigenous fauna. As the ascent continues, Pringle finds distraction in the scattered novelty of bird, plant and animal life even though, typically, he recognises that the terrain has no productive capacity and is "unprofitable for the occupation of civilised man". Then, as if to counter this recognition, or at least to soften its implications, he invokes the religious language of providential design, the "beneficent arrangements of a creation where nothing—not even the sterile desert or naked rock—is placed without design, or left utterly unproductive" (80). Pringle then goes on to liken what he calls the "climate and productions" of the region to "ancient Palestine" and quotes from the psalms to corroborate this comparison. As it happens, exactly the same sentiments were expressed by Pringle shortly after the arrival at Glen Lynden where he observes that: "On this and other occasions the scenery and productions of the country reminded us in the most forcible manner of the imagery of the Hebrew Scriptures" (38) before quoting again from the psalms. In both these descriptions it is as though Pringle, denied the productive associations of the picturesque, must go back to an older biblical template to map or make sense of the barrenness of the country. It is all the more curious, then, that immediately after Pringle appeals to providential design as evidence that the Zureberg is not simply a useless excrescence of nature, he should encounter a scene that entirely baffles his imagination. The occasion is a forced ascent to the top of a mountain ridge:

Here my companion had told me that an extraordinary prospect awaited us: but all my previous conceptions fell infinitely short of the reality. On the left, a billowy chaos of naked mountains, rocks, precipices, and yawning abysses, that looked as if hurled together by some prodigious convulsion of nature, appalled and bewildered the imagination. It seemed as if this congeries of gigantic crags, or rather the eternal hills themselves, had been tumultuously uptorn and heaved together, in some pre-adamite conflict of angelic hosts, with all the veins and strata of their deep foundations disrupted, bent, and twisted in the struggle into a thousand fantastic shapes; while, over the lower declivities and deep-sunk dells, a dark impenetrable forest spread its shaggy skirts, and added to the whole a character of still more wild and savage sublimity. (1966:81)

This extraordinary passage, which splices back in time to the elemental or pre-human, traumatically disrupts the referential schemas into which Pringle has hitherto transcribed his experience of landscape. The usual perceptual or phenomenological distance between viewer and viewed evident in Pringle's other landscape descriptions undergoes a bewildering reversal: here the colossal, demonic landscape overwhelms the viewer, forcing him to confront it on terms which are entirely its own. The "imagination" which in the picturesque mode is transformative, working on the landscape, is "appalled and bewildered", stunned into passivity; and though Pringle does not allude to this, the appeal to providential "design" in the preceding paragraph is made to appear wishful. When Pringle eventually gropes for a suitable descriptive epithet for this convulsive disturbance of the earth itself, he does so by using a sexualised metaphor that renders the scene before him even more disturbing: "while over the lower declivities and deep-sunk dells, a dark and impenetrable forest spread its shaggy skirts, and added to the whole a character of still more wild and savage sublimity". This autochthonous or indigenous sublime both threatens and abases the imagination; it is unnerving, infernal; its intensities carry the threat of self-dissolution. Why, we must ask, does the sublime, so productive an aesthetic category in its European context, become utterly unbearable when evoked by the experience of a South African landscape, where it becomes a sublime of terror in which nature itself seems unnatural? I shall work through other aspects of Pringle's response to a local sublime before returning to this question.

Finally, there are those occasions when landscape is viewed not solely as the terrain of nature and its "scenes and productions" but as bearing the imprint of the historical; these configurations or superimpositions of landscape and history are unfailingly disturbing. In a passage in the same