

# Contested Identities



# Contested Identities:

## *Literary Negotiations in Time and Place*

Edited by

Roger Nicholson,  
Claudia Marquis  
and Gertrud Szamosi

Selected Essays from the Fourteenth International  
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## PREFACE

The Fourteenth International Conference on the Literature of Region and Nation was held at the University of Pécs, in 20-24 June 2012. The first university in Hungary came into being in 1367, when Louis the Great initiated the establishment of a university in the episcopal city of Pécs. In due course, as a result of an integration process that passed through several stages, the University of Pécs was founded and it has become one of the most famous and prestigious institutions, with a leading role in regional education. It has ten faculties that cover the full spectrum of high-quality higher education.

The RNLA conference was hosted by the Department of Literatures and Cultures of the Institute of English Studies. We were honoured to organise and host the events of a conference that looks back on a history of thirty years. RNLA embodies a truly global community with representative members from different European countries, Africa, The United States, Asia and New Zealand.

Special thanks to the guest speakers of the conference, for their memorable presentations: Professor Antal Bókay on “The Fin de Siècle—Great Years of a Lost Region,” Professor Enikő Bollobás on “America: from Metaphor to Catachresis” and Silke Stroh on “Postcolonialism, Celticity, and the Nation-state: Interrogating Old and New Multiculturalisms in Europe and Beyond.” I would also like to thank our American and Hungarian colleagues and friends Dona Potts, András Gerevich and Mónika Mesterházy, for their highly inspiring poetry reading night.

The conference was supported by the University of Pécs and the Faculty of Humanities of the University of Pécs. Hereby I would like to thank my home institution for their generosity.

This volume includes fifteen papers selected from the programme of the conference. The editors of the volume are grateful to the many colleagues who were generous with their time and expertise in reviewing contributions to the volume. Finally, we wish to thank the contributors themselves, for their participation at the conference, but also both for submitting their papers and for preparing them for the purposes of the present collection of essays.

Gertrud Szamosi, Organiser of RNLA conference, 2012  
University of Pécs, Hungary



## INTRODUCTION

A person's identity is not to be found in behaviour, nor—important though this is—in the reactions of others, but in the *capacity to keep a particular narrative going*.

(Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self Identity*, 54)

The essays collected in this volume deal variously with cultural difference, especially in relation to questions of identity. Difference often figures here as a literary subject in itself; as often, it proves to be a mechanism by which the literary text goes about its business. Accordingly, essays investigate the significance of the borders that delimit territories or social spaces—including the complex space of a personal world. They take up issues of difference and identity in analysing texts that construct narrative lives within such socio-cultural or ideological frames. Not infrequently, they demonstrate how focusing on difference actually serves to make us aware of associations between texts, in clarifying definition of self and other, or, paradoxically, in registering the affective intensity that border-relationships contribute to the formation of textual subjects.

In their considerable variety, then, the essays in this collection offer a response to the observation by Anthony Giddens that serves as epigraph to this introduction, posing a consequential question: what does it mean to “keep a particular narrative going”? Does literature promote this desire for identity, in the broad reach of its narrative practices? Does it bind narrative to identity as a mode of interpellation, as Louis Althusser suggests? Does it reflect the more complicated sense of experience described by Zygmunt Bauman as “liquid modernity”?<sup>1</sup> If the latter, might one not argue that personal narrative—in or out of literature—strives to keep going a capacity to articulate not one but a range of cultural identities, without, in

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<sup>1</sup> See especially Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity, 2000). Also *Identity: Conversations with Benedetto Vecchi* (Cambridge: Polity, 2004), where Bauman refers to the modern “longing for identity” as ambiguous: however exhilarating, it does mean we float “in a poorly defined space, in a stubbornly, vexingly ‘betwixt-and-between’ location . . . an unnerving and anxiety-prone condition” (29).

consequence, losing that sense of a self which invests a life with coherence? The essays that follow, in taking up texts by different authors from a range of very different places, geographically determined, collectively argue for an appreciation of cultural location that demands awareness of such questions.

Each of the essays began its life in presentation to a conference of the Region and Nation Literature Association held in Pécs, Hungary, in 2012. In so far as the RNLA was established primarily in order to promote study of national and regional aspects of literatures in English—in relation to each other, both in the United Kingdom and in the larger world—a first interest in textual difference is perhaps unsurprising. The collective force of these papers, however, as revised for this volume, clearly brings cultural and textual difference into view as an object of discussion, rather than merely its ground. They address issues of cultural and literary identity in a great range of regional and national contexts. In general, they display acute interest in issues of textual identity, especially where the literary text itself is contested internally. In their sum, in addressing difference in its various states, these studies actively explore and test identity, often discovering in alterity the grounding principle of a useful, if paradoxical, sense of personal or textual integrity.

Difference, raised to alterity, demands firstly that we accord value to the other; at the very least, it moves discussion along, in clarifying where, for the moment, we ourselves stand. In these terms, Homi Bhabha properly distinguishes cultural difference from cultural diversity. The latter is prone to investment in maintaining, in fact, a “universalist framework”; on the other hand, “cultural difference is a process of signification through which statements of culture, or on culture, differentiate, discriminate, or authorize the production of fields of force, reference, applicability and capacity.”<sup>2</sup> At the level of personal or textual agency, cultural difference both contests and effects identity. This difference often proves instrumental, furthermore, in re-charging our sense of the literary text’s cultural valence. Individual studies, here, instantiate the collection’s general concerns not only by their specific, interpretative practices, but also—most unusually—by their extensive cultural and social reach. They draw texts into relation with each other, not least because they are mostly written in English. Without exception, nevertheless, they prove to be

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<sup>2</sup> See “The Commitment to Theory,” *new formations* 5 (Summer, 1988): 18. Bhabha revisits the question of cultural diversity and cultural difference in his interview with Jonathan Rutherford, “The Third Space,” in *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, edited by Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence Wishart, 1990), 207-21.

powerfully attached to distinct situations and/or locations, often far removed from the familiar, metropolitan centres of an English-speaking world: England, Scotland, Wales, the United States of America, but also Ethiopia, Sudan, Somalia, Italy, Hungary, Canada, Poland, the Caribbean, South Africa and New Zealand. In this respect, then, the collection draws on and contributes to current, academic interest in postcolonialism, globalisation and transnational relationships that, however loosely, structure a worldwide cultural enterprise—in which, of course, English plays a part.

For the purposes of the contributors to this volume, difference largely signifies within familiar frames identified by the terms region and nation, although, in some cases, region and nation are themselves in dispute. Borders, which identify a regional population as a state formed by an imagined accord, centred on some sense of political community, may prove problematic: the boundary may be in dispute, in fact; the community that it seems to define may actually be constructed by the boundary, rather than proving, in itself, responsible for the border's formation.<sup>3</sup> Avtar Brah writes powerfully about border experience and what she calls "border textualities," in phrases that tally with the express concerns of a number of the essays in this selection:

Borders: arbitrary dividing lines that are simultaneously social, cultural and psychic; territories to be patrolled against those whom they construct as outsiders, aliens, the others; forms of demarcation where the very act of prohibition inscribes transgression; zones where fear of the Other is the fear of the self; places where claims to ownership—claims to "mine," "yours" and "theirs"—are staked out, contested, defended and fought over.<sup>4</sup>

If there seems little engagement with literary "negotiation" here, these lines do clearly articulate a sense of situation and condition to which the literary text may respond. Brah notes, "Each border embodies a unique narrative, even while it resonates with common themes with other borders."<sup>5</sup> What interests us in reading border writing in this collection, furthermore, is the sense that, by virtue of their very arbitrariness, borders

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<sup>3</sup> The distinction is often presented in terms of the imposition of political will and/or the force of communal, emotional solidarity; both are represented in this collection.

<sup>4</sup> See Avtar Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities* (London: Routledge, 1996), 198.

<sup>5</sup> These borders may be geographical, but they may also be analytical (Brah, *Cartographies*, 203).

“are always metaphors.” What then does the border in the literary text effect? What border does the text negotiate?

Increasingly, of course, where we expect any passage between regions to call personal identity into question, or at least to challenge it, personal identity may well accommodate such passages, proving us simultaneous subjects in different communities, although perhaps at the cost of an historical sense of social and cultural distinctions connected to territorial origins. As Derrick McClure has noted, one instance of cultural unsettlement—exile—is a familiar state of being for English speakers like many of those who figure in essays presented here.<sup>6</sup> Not infrequently, exile converts us into diasporic communities, delivering yet another turn to a notion of cultural identity that would otherwise seem to offer support for regional or national stabilities. For Stuart Hall, this material experience is so obvious that he insists, in a much anthologised essay, on redefining cultural identity:

Identity is not as transparent or unproblematic as we think. Perhaps instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact, which the new cultural practices then represent, we should think, instead, of identity as a “production,” which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation.<sup>7</sup>

Globalisation, in fact, with which Hall has also been concerned, offers a new set of socially valent relations that may seem more indicative of the character of our experience than do the regional differences that we tend to feel hold enduring significance. Concepts of identification and difference, then, are frequently contested by experience; that experience, in contest, often gets taken up, in turn, in literary texts that challenge the settled concepts and discursive practices that structure our sense of our personal, social and cultural situations.

In this volume, we have sought to point up affinities and affiliations between different essays, by organising the collection around key concepts or issues. The volume is divided broadly into two sections, each of which is divided again. Essays in the first half, Part I, “Textual Identities,” take stock of the lived world of the text itself, as it were, perceptible in the dialogic relationships it organises between author and reader. This half includes a group of essays—“Texts in Transit”—that discuss the specific

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<sup>6</sup> “*What Country’s This? And Whither Are We Gone?*”, ed. J. Derrick McClure, Karoline Szatek-Tudor and Rosa E. Penna (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010), 4.

<sup>7</sup> “Cultural Identity and Diaspora,” in *Identity*, ed. Rutherford, 222.

mode of cultural performance carried out when texts are engaged in the cultural business of translation, adaptation and/or appropriation. Essays in the second major section, Part II, “Personal and Cultural Identities,” deal with texts that address issues of identity and cultural difference more or less directly. In a sense, then, this section depends on a perceived relationship between narrative and ethics.

The extent of the challenge that essays in this volume recognise—and, indeed, collectively constitute—is indicated emphatically by the first piece, Silke Stroh’s essay, “Postcolonialism, Celticity, and the Nation-state: Interrogating old and New Multiculturalisms in Europe and Beyond,” in which a dominant, current mode of explaining culture—including literature—is re-examined.

Silke Stroh offers, in effect, a history and critique of contemporary postcolonial theory, by radically enlarging the site of the colony to include peripheral regions within Europe itself—especially in England—and by extending the period of colonisation to include the pre-modern. The effect is to complicate the *postcolonial*, as a concept, but also to bring into view aspects of the nation state that have tended to escape scholarly attention. Stroh’s first interest is in Britain’s “Celtic Fringe,” especially Scottish, which, from the late medieval period onwards, reflected English emphasis on assimilation and its correlative marginalisation of the Gaelic-speaking Other. As Stroh demonstrates, this history extends into the nineteenth century, running most powerfully from Johnson and Boswell to Matthew Arnold. In this context, the “civilising mission” that marked much later colonial enterprise was anticipated in the anglicisation of Scotland. A key question for Stroh is the margin’s response to the centre’s sustained demand and, in particular, the alignment of this response with that of later colonial societies, beyond the borders of Europe. She finds earlier Scottish literature engaged in a “postcolonial” counter-mission, “rewriting the history of internal colonialism from the perspective of its victims.” In its many turns, Stroh argues, this history properly calls for pluralistic concepts of national and cultural identities within the United Kingdom, paralleling those that figure widely in postcolonial analyses—which, correlatively, complicates current postcolonial thinking.

In an essay on Nadine Gordimer and J. M. Coetzee, Michael Chapman likewise takes up colonial/postcolonial experience, although he turns his attention towards reception of the literary text. Chapman tracks the complex routes literature itself takes, when its value is fixed by the interests of particular communities of readers. He carries out this analysis by investigating the cases made for the novels of Gordimer and Coetzee. Gordimer expressly identified the power of the text with its connection to

the particulars of the historical moment; Coetzee proved much less willing to endorse the value of a “societal or collective drive” in the text. For both authors the critical, historical moment arrives at the end of the twentieth century and its place is South Africa, immediately post-apartheid. Literary value in this context, however, is also defined extrinsically, in the ambiguous criteria employed in awarding the Nobel Prize for literature, notable for the appreciation accorded to social idealism, as realised in the literary text. The very different character of the novels by these two South African writers—and their very different experience as local, South African intellectuals, but also as Nobel prize-winners—drives Chapman to recognise distinct responses to bounded, local experience and, therefore to appreciate the different, but nonetheless acutely political forms taken by the “literary imagination.” Critical judgement, accordingly, is properly sensitive to the distinct forms in which region and nation function in the work of different authors, writing within a “heterogeneous nation and world.”

Anne McKim, too, raises questions about textual identity, in so far as that identity seems most distinctly figured in the literary work by its representation of a specific culture. Does this cultural dimension limit the work’s capacity to engage an audience only to the extent that it can imagine a local readership for itself? Or does critical judgement properly discount the locally cultural in favour of issues and values that accord with the attention of an audience that is not locally circumscribed. Identity, then, is strictly an issue for the writer, seeking an audience. McKim’s exploration of this question is worked through an extended investigation of James Robertson’s recent novel *The Testament of Gideon Mack*, which imagines a fictive world that is unabashedly Scottish, in its recuperation of Scottish folklore and the dialectal turns that its language takes. Scottishness, however, raises questions, in that the value of the distinctively Scottish text has recently been much in debate among Scottish authors and cultural commentators. While Robertson assumes that the Scottish dimension in his writing poses no barrier to its appreciation or understanding for international readers, McKim asks whether the issue of a text’s cultural identity might not be more properly conceived along lines familiar to students of world literature: how does the migrating text fare, when it is assimilated to the diverse cultural interests of a global target audience? To what extent is the force of its difference blunted?

For Karolyn Szatek-Tudor, popular fascination with birds, in lore and tale, is so evident in the early modern period in Europe that it proves appropriate to read very different kinds of text with this common interest in mind. In consequence, Szatek-Tudor suggests, a larger argument about



place and identity might be made. She challenges quick assumptions about the importance of national identities within larger regions—Hungary and England, at opposite ends of Europe—reporting intellectual, political and cultural exchanges that speak of an abiding core of shared notions about lived experience, in both narrative and nature. On this basis, she provides an analysis of bird references in Shakespeare's plays that reflects a trans-national, European cultural imaginary that operates by, among other ways, registering in birds a significance that arises from a common nexus of scientific beliefs and evolving histories. The consequence is illustrative readings of particular textual moments in both Shakespeare's history plays and Hungarian folktales, geared towards pointing up the singular, experiential force of the text, in ways that, correlatively, underscore the capacity of story-telling to carry and give expression to cultural experience.

For Robert Kusek, the critical focus is not on cultural, but personal identity, since narrative often seems designed to carry this particular ethical burden. He turns attention to life-writing, in particular to relatively recent developments in this field in Poland, where conceptually sophisticated narrativisation of the self has emerged under the influence of practice and theory in Western Europe and North America. For Kusek, the peculiar interest of this mode lies in its defeat of long-established categories of fact and fiction that consign life-writing to the region of history, allowing a literary dimension only in the life-text's rhetorical practice. The life-writer, Kusek points out, inevitably incorporates the factual in forms of fiction, narrative and character; conversely, the life-writer's work insists on philosophical reluctance to credit the claim that facts are ever free of a complicating, subjective perception. Life-writing, then, engages with an artfulness that allies this mode with other literary modes in which fiction provides the interpretative ground. For Kusek, quoting Georges Gusdorf, life-writing represents "the paradox of being simultaneously the same and different." In part this registers the asymptote-like character of the autobiographical, in which writing can never exactly make contact with the life, not least because it can never reach the same end.

In the second set of essays in Part I, "Texts in Transit," cultural difference is faced in examinations of the situation of the literary text, in so far as these pieces deal with translation, where texts move between widely separated places and historical moments. For Derrick McClure, this transfer is performed between eighteenth-century France and twenty-first century Edinburgh; for Carlos Mingo, the gap covered by translation is a good deal wider, between early medieval Wales and modern Britain; for

Roger Nicholson, the distance bridged by translation is Europe-wide, but also runs between ancient Rome and the modern world of the medieval poet's Scotland. In this context, it is worth noting Homi Bhabha's remaking of cultural difference itself as "cultural translation," grounded in culture's "signifying or symbolic activity": "the articulation of cultures is possible not because of the familiarity of contents, but because all cultures are symbol-forming and subject constituting, interpellative practices."<sup>8</sup>

Derrick McClure's essay reads Liz Lochhead's contemporary rewritings of plays by Molière in relation to a double, modern history of Scottish drama and Scottish translations of classic European plays. Lochhead exemplifies this complex, in taking up Molière's plays and transferring them to Edinburgh; in this, she enlarges the scope of the translator, in line with Bhabha's claim for the cultural play of translation. She registers the pleasure of the European and classic text, but turns the text decidedly local and fits it for a modern, Scottish theatre, making new sense of Molière's plays ("we might go a bit light on the philosophy, but at least in Scotland Molière is funny"), since they provide a powerful lens through which to view contemporary Edinburgh. McClure offers acute, detailed readings of Molière originals, *Tartuffe* and *Le Misanthrope*, as taken up in Lochhead's Scottish re-versions, finding in the intelligence and aggressive energy of the modern text a "tribute to the original," rather than subversion. The extraordinary vigour of Lochhead's *Miseryguts*, for instance, prompts a contrast between Molière's concern with "the quirks of human nature" and her compelling interest in political criticism and satirical commentary. McClure takes stock of Lochhead's satiric resources in targeting modern political society, but he also draws attention to her Scottishness in the functional mix of her "dialects, sociolects, registers and individual idiosyncrasies."

For McClure, Liz Lochhead's work is fascinating in itself, but also instructive for the way in which it edges an art of translation towards the seriously recreative work of adaptation, while stopping short of appropriation. Carlos Mingo, likewise, extends modern critical and theoretical work on adaptation, implicitly, by his detailed reading of the reworking of the "Mabinogian" tale of Branwen by Owen Shears in his recent novel *White Ravens*. Mingo notes that, both as text and as an act of translation, this novel relates to an earlier history of English translations of Welsh literature, specifically in the works of Charlotte Guest. Like much earlier translation from the Welsh, this version finds new, wholly modern forms for its representation of the characters, scenes and societies of the

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<sup>8</sup> See "The Third Space," in *Identity*, ed. Rutherford, 209.

medieval tale, even though the medieval tale still animates its modern successor. In this case the typical transfer of the original into the modern period is anchored in a significant change of scene: Wales and Ireland become Ireland and the United Kingdom, locked in a relationship of dependency and hostility. Hereby, a culturally specific narrative quits its original setting—irrevocably—yet, by virtue of its sensational inheritance, as a modern tale, it turns parabolic.

Arguably, that is to say, *White Ravens* is bound to its predecessor “Mabinogian” tale by a complex play of intertextuality; translation now operates especially at the level of plot and character development, rather than at the level of the word. Intertextuality calls into the modern text the patterned action of the medieval original and something of the cultural pressures to which it gave expression. In literary appropriation like this, a cultural game is involved. In his essay on the “Morall Fabillis” of the fifteenth-century Scottish poet Robert Henryson, Roger Nicholson argues likewise that translation undertakes a marked cultural initiative, in representing brief, ancient, Aesopic fables for a highly literate, late medieval, English-speaking, Scottish society.

In the long tradition of the Aesopic fable, translation has been carried out constantly between languages, literary modes, countries and cultures. Nicholson points out that in Robert Henryson’s re-presentation of a selection of fables, the business of the translator is emphatically foregrounded. In the play between ancient author and modern “makar,” Henryson, again, registers the cultural and political force of the languages he works with and between: in this case, the dominance and prestige of Latin is acknowledged, while the subjection of the vernacular, a “hamelie language,” is assumed, although implicitly questioned in the poet’s performance. Henryson marks his appropriation of a privileged social vision and practice, since not only is his Aesop born of “gentil blude,” but Roman, and versed in the theory and practice of civil law. So, while these “morall” fables engage in flexible, modernising translation, they also work at a different level: *translatio studii*. This is a form of the classical *translatio imperii*—pre-modern imperialism, as it were—putting pressure on medieval-modern society to invest in a culture that is valued for its intellectual and ideological stability. Nevertheless, Scottish society, the Aesopic text’s target, does have a bearing on the text’s form; translation may be an instrument of cultural renovation, but it is carried out with impressive irony, grounded in local experience. In this case, if literature is indeed one of the agents of interpellation, as Louis Althusser argues, interpellation is an exceedingly complex operation.

In Part II, “Personal and Cultural Identities,” essays are again grouped in two sets, each focused on a particular issue that bears on formation of identity. In the first of these, under the heading “The Limits of Culture,” our authors trace the emergence of literary texts in periods or places of acute social and political conflict. These pieces comprise an assessment of work by recent, African women writers, by Annie Gagiano, an analysis of two transnational texts by Ileana Dimitriu, Claudia Marquis’s investigation of recent, post-Caribbean writing and Shreya Bhattacharji’s review of the experience of the Partition of India and Pakistan. In these instances, the text is shown to be working out an aspect of a larger cultural story, offering a different kind of social history. In each, furthermore, the authors are generally women, speaking first of women’s experience—or social and political experience at a national level, as viewed by women.

Claudia Marquis examines what happens to privileged Western modes of writing—novel, poem and short story—when they are taken up by those who formerly would have been simply part of the cultural scene, possessing no agency. These are texts that reflect a cultural experience of devastating loss. In the British West Indies, for most of the last five hundred years, English history has authenticated Caribbean lives, effectively denying the “migratory West Indian” (Walcott) a history of her own, especially in so far as Caribbean identity has necessarily been grounded in slavery. Marquis works through what this means for the very latest Caribbean generation, following independence and the remarkable, post-War migration from the West Indies to the United Kingdom. She focuses on fictional “slave narratives” by three modern, Caribbean women writers, Grace Nichols, June Henfrey and Andrea Levy, all of whom live, or have mostly lived in the United Kingdom, but whose work in effect serves to set in place a new, Caribbean, historical subject. For all three, cultural memory functions as a painful reworking, bringing together the fragments of a dismembered past in order to make sense of the present. Marquis’s concern, then, following the work of Marianne Hirsch on diasporic narratives, is with a wayward, West Indian post-memory—the recovery of a past that is grounded in trauma, recuperated not only at a generational remove, but also in a different country.

For Annie Gagiano, likewise, the presence of the woman writing of women’s experience defines an authorial strategy, but also grounds an argument about the character of cultural identity realised in the literary text. Who gets to write the nation’s story? Gagiano sets high value on literature that tells, in Achebe’s words, “the story of the land.” For these women, a sense of their own situation results in a different order of political writing from that dominated by men, for whom politics has

tended to bind with war and social conflict. Gagiano chooses to discuss in detail works by two recent women writers, Maaza Mengiste and Cristina Ali Farah, who exemplify the capacity of authors of domestic fiction. Both writers embed narrative in an insistently local society, but deal with periods of national crisis, conveying to the reader a distinctive sense of the larger scene by their acute, affecting family fictions. In effect, this practice is dialogic, in Bakhtin's sense of the word, offering "analysis from within." Mengiste's *Beneath the Lion's Gaze* deals with the revolutionary horrors that followed the collapse of Haile Selassie's quasi-feudal regime in Ethiopia. For Farah, likewise, in *Little Mother*, the family romance is resited in Europe, where a Somali diasporic community's experience recapitulates that of its native land. The term Gagiano employs to insist on the fierce, political loyalty of this diasporic community—"indissoluble connectedness"—might properly be used of diasporic writing in itself.

The order of writing opened up for discussion by Claudia Marquis and Anne Gagiano illustrates the predicament of those in conflict or exile, whose experience nevertheless cannot be reduced to the political allegory that criticism, supported by Frederic Jameson's well-known essay, too readily discovers in third world literature. For Ileana Dimitriu, reading Aboulela's novels *The Translator* and *Minaret*, the flattening of cultural differences into a standard range of interpretative possibilities is opposed by a very different narrative history, centred on the lives of characters whose identity is both challenged and informed by cultural orders constructed in their past. This requires of the critic a "multiple critique" that acknowledges the force of different sets of cultural ambitions (especially faith), and calls for "affective responsiveness." Identity in the case of *The Translator* is firstly personal, and achieved in contest. Diaspora—Muslim, Sudanese, in Britain—may offer something other than the "alienation and loss" with which it is commonly associated; it may open up new fields of action, suggesting new forms of agency. In Dimitriu's view, rootedness—close to the centre of debates on identity—is particularly true of those who are driven to maintain religious faith in the new worlds of their exile. This essay, then, tests borders of distinctly different kinds: national, cultural, conceptual, requiring that identity be patched together out of diverse practices and dispositions. For Dimitriu, Aboulela's novels, like the criticism they call for, provide key instances of a recent "spiritual turn" in theory and practice, re-drawing the range of conditions that seem most potent in forming a sense of self.

The translator in Aboulela's novel, in effecting the transfer of textualised experiences between regions and times, figures the kind of undertaking that interests the authors of most of the essays in this volume,

not least in negotiating a passage between differences. Its relation to those that deal with translated texts in Part I, “Texts in Transit”, clearly is of particular interest, in so far as the work of translation is meshed with the transfer of cultural practice, across national borders, as cultural difference. In her essay, Shreya Bhattacharji tackles cultural difference in formation, across a border, viewed at the very moment of its creation, the “Partition” that established neighbouring states, India and Pakistan, out of one—the India dominated by imperial Britain throughout the nineteenth century and much of the twentieth. This initiative provided an arbitrary solution to a vexing political question at the point of India’s independence, in 1947: how to distribute an authority to govern to a political class that, in its divisions, dangerously reflected the religious divide in larger society. The answer to this problem worked out by the departing, imperial British was reached, in practice, at an enormous cost in Indian lives. In this account, official, celebratory narratives of Independence fail to represent adequately the experience of the dispossessed and socially oppressed, women in particular, who suffered grossly. In line with a gender ideology common to both new societies, Bhattacharji claims, the value of the emergent state depended on political dominance represented hideously in sexual violence. This grotesque instance of political and cultural difference has found belated realisation in the novels and films of recent writers (Khushwant Singh, Bapsi Sidhwa, Saadat Hasan Manto) and film-makers (Sabiha Sumar). Their concern with giving a voice to women silenced by official discourse, may display cultural identity in the very process of formation.

In the final group of essays in Part II, under the rubric “Text, Place and Location,” authors respond variously to cultural difference in forming identities in new places, or faced by something new, the other. In the first of these essays, Monika Fodor reports on the narratives employed to different ends by recent Hungarian immigrants in the United States. If most essays in this collection engage with literary narrative, Fodor’s study reports on narrative that entirely eschews literary ambition or practice, in detailing Hungarian new-immigrant experience. Identity in this case is largely cultural or ethnic, before it becomes a personal question for individual storytellers. In this complex social situation, as Fodor demonstrates, the border is no longer cultural, but manifestly converts into a geographical limit, determining place but guaranteeing no sense of a collective identity. It demands, therefore, singular initiatives aimed at negotiating an appropriate sense of self. For the immigrant, America offers a “liminal existence,” in the first instance, a state of in-betweenness, neither Hungarian nor American, but something of both, offering either an

empowering expansion of cultural knowledge, or the reduction of inherited practice and conceptions, in the interest of rapid cultural assimilation. In effect, Fodor shows, narrativisation of experience serves to construct spaces where the migrant storyteller and his/her audience create, in Jerome Bruner's telling phrase for the function of narratives of cultural identity, a "sense of homeland." For Fodor's purposes, narrative also functions at a different level, as a more precise mode for explaining immigrant experience than that provided by traditional forms of cultural analysis.

Something of this same predicament—how to make sense of the pressures exerted by alternative cultures—formed a well-known subject for Henry James in his novels of American and European cultural identities, displayed in characters who "migrate" from one Atlantic society to the other. For Madalina Stanesco, analysing James's paired short stories of Aurora Church and her mother—"The Pension Beau Repas" and "The Point of View"—there is a third party in this negotiation. As she points out, James's narratives are based in late nineteenth-century maritime developments that converted the Atlantic from a massive, dangerous boundary into a site of relatively common, social experience. This site, however, by virtue of its oceanic character and history, literally constitutes an in-between world, unsettling cultural norms, whether in the part transatlantic travel plays in the story's marriage initiatives, or in loosening notions of cultural propriety. Identity, especially cultural identity, becomes fluid; by virtue of its peculiar force, the ocean raises doubts about cultural legitimacy and legitimate conduct. In this sense, Stanesco argues, for James the ocean itself might properly be regarded less as a border than as a liminal space, precisely because of the way it unfixes categories, calling normed social thinking into question.

The question of identity was asked of literature itself by Northrop Frye, in a Canadian context, as Gertrud Szamosi reminds us. Her essay, like those by Monika Fodor and Madalina Stanesco, focuses on writers and texts that deal variously with cultural constructions of place. Szamosi shows how Frye's question is asked again—and emphatically answered—by both Margaret Atwood and, especially, Margaret Laurence, who have been intensely interested in the critically important cultural definition of identity that literature can develop. If this becomes a central issue in Laurence's fiction, Szamosi shows how it is staged more openly and dramatically in her travel writing, where the traveller's questing proves to be a figure for the writer's search for self. So, in *Heart of a Stranger*, Laurence's essays record and reflect on her experiences in Africa and Europe. For Laurence, a Canadian writer, to engage with other cultures was also to become more sharply conscious of her own, as "a small town

prairie person”; identity proves to be that sense of belonging that couples one’s self with a specific cultural situation and history. The writer’s quest extended in this case to the close association Laurence recognised between the history of the Métis and her own Scottish ancestors, since both were evicted from the land by imperial forces. For Szamosi, then, Laurence’s travel writing, openly investigating self, points up the capacity of literature to engage in complex negotiations between self and culture, history and place. For Laurence, this is an issue of “survival.”

Throughout this introduction, we emphasise the role of difference for an understanding of identity, whether cultural or personal. Yet, to read the essays themselves is to be struck by the force of the plural form employed in this volume’s title—contested identities. It is not just a matter of assembling a crowd of identities in this selection of essays (a form of cultural diversity?); by virtue of the analytical business in which our various contributors engage, these essays compose a sense of entangled identities that correlates with our common experience of a difficult selfhood. Zygmunt Bauman reports with some sympathy a comment by Agnes Heller, friend and fellow-in-exile (having shared “quite a degree of life predicament”): “[she] complained once that being a woman, a Hungarian, a Jew, an American, a philosopher, she was saddled with rather too many identities for one person.” It is hard not to share Bauman’s sympathy. Often enough, as we see, literature plays out such dramas in characterization and narration.

In their range and focus, the essays collected in this volume tackle literature’s power to carry out radical analysis of the conditions of selfhood and difference that commonly organise discussion of identity—personal or communal. What we hope to have made clear in this introduction is the importance that contributors to the volume discover in the analysis and production of identity in and through literature—not just, say, in a common literary interest in character, but more profoundly in the larger, cultural differences that paradoxically bring identity into view. The argument that a permanent identity eludes us is central to much sociological and post-Freudian psychoanalytical discussion of selfhood and agency, but has not figured widely in discussion of literature. That the argument is made so graphically here, by authors from an unusually wide range of societies, implicitly stages its significance for an appreciation of the literary text and the cultural work the literary text typically performs.

Roger Nicholson and Claudia Marquis



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**PART I**

**TEXTUAL IDENTITIES**

**A:**

***TEXTUAL BORDERS***



## CHAPTER ONE

# POSTCOLONIALISM, CELTICITY, AND THE NATION STATE: INTERROGATING OLD AND NEW MULTICULTURALISMS IN EUROPE AND BEYOND

SILKE STROH

This essay discusses whether the analytical paradigms of Postcolonial Studies can be usefully applied to regional and national cultural identities—and power imbalances—beyond the field’s core context of former European overseas colonies and their diasporas. In recent years, this question has been debated with regard to a range of (principally white) margins, cultural minorities, and small nations within Europe, the Middle East and Central Asia. I will briefly survey various fields in which such “new” postcolonialisms have emerged, before giving a more detailed case study of how colonial and postcolonial alignments play out in one of these areas, namely the construction of Celtic, British, and Scottish identities. This will illustrate several wider issues which also inform other “new” postcolonialisms, as possible starting points for comparisons across national and linguistic boundaries. The essay also charts some benefits and drawbacks which the application of postcolonial ideas can entail for the study of regional, ethno-cultural, and national identities in Europe and beyond. Conversely, it also considers how the “new” postcolonialisms can modify our understanding of postcolonialism in general. Finally, these issues are related to contemporary revisions of British and other European national identities after recent increases in (often non-white) immigration, multiculturalism, and transnationalism. Here, several interventions have brought “old” and “new” postcolonial perspectives together in search of a more pluralist, convivial conception of nationality and a more cosmopolitan consciousness.

## “New” postcolonialisms: a very brief survey

As postcolonialism has developed a rich set of tools for the analysis of regional, national, and transnational cultural phenomena, it is little wonder that these tools are increasingly applied beyond their original frameworks, i.e., outside the former European overseas colonies and their diasporas. One of these “new” postcolonialisms has emerged in Slavonic, Eastern European, and Post-Soviet Studies. The concept of “internal colonialism” is of key importance here. It has been used in various contexts to denote significant power imbalances within one and the same state, for instance in early capitalist Russia (as analysed by Lenin),<sup>1</sup> later in the Italian *mezzogiorno* (as analysed by Gramsci), in Latin American states (concerning the position of Native Americans), and in the USA (with regard to African Americans and other racially or culturally marginalised groups).<sup>2</sup> In postcolonial Eastern European Studies, the concept features in studies of both the Habsburg Empire and the Soviet state, concerning the position of non-German and non-Russian ethnic and national groups respectively.<sup>3</sup> Other postcolonial approaches ask if parts of Eastern Europe can be regarded as an intra-European Other that is constructed along the

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<sup>1</sup> Vladimir Il'ich Lenin, *Развитие капитализма в России* (*The Development of Capitalism in Russia*, 1899), 2nd ed. 1908; English translated in Lenin, *Collected Works*, vol. 3 (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing / Progress Publishers, 1960). In Lenin's study, the concept of “home colonisation” (562, 581) refers to thinly populated, peripheral regions within Russian state territory that experienced the influx of settlers from elsewhere (e.g., more central parts of Russia), the process by which increasing chunks of these peripheral regions were taken into agricultural cultivation, the destruction of local industries, and the one-sided development of these areas into producers of agricultural raw materials and buyers of processed goods produced in the more central areas (13, 257, 592-95). Lenin expressly compares some of these intra-Russian phenomena to overseas colonial ventures, i.e., “German exploits in Africa” (258).

<sup>2</sup> On the history, implications and applications of the concept of internal colonialism, see, e.g., Michael Hechter, *Internal Colonialism: The Celtic Fringe in British National Development 1536-1966* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975), xv-xvi, 8-9; Edward E. Knipe and Helen Matthews Lewis, “The Colonialism Model: The Appalachian Case,” in *Colonialism in Modern America: The Appalachian Case*, edited by Helen Lewis, Linda Johnson, and Donald Askins (Boone, NC: Appalachian Consortium Press, 1978); and Bud B. Khleif, *Language, Ethnicity, and Education in Wales* (Le Hague: Mouton, 1980), 15-17, 22.

<sup>3</sup> E.g., Moritz Csáky, Johannes Feichtinger, and Ursula Prutsch, ed. *Habsburg postkolonial. Machtstrukturen und kollektives Gedächtnis* (*Habsburg postcolonial. Power structures and collective memory*) (Innsbruck: StudienVerlag, 2003); Violeta Kelertas, *Baltic Postcolonialism* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006).