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The Different Western Perception of the Oriental Moor in the Renaissance and the Twentieth Century:
Shakespeare’s *Othello* and Tayeb Salih’s *Season of Migration to the North*:
A Post-Colonial Critique

Hussein A. Alhawamdeh

The western perception of the Muslim Orient is always affected by the political, cultural, and economic factors. This paper aims at relocating the transformation of the discourse of Orientalism from the Renaissance, as represented by Shakespeare’s *Othello* (1604), to the post-eighteenth century, as represented by Salih’s *Season of Migration to the North* (1966). By contrasting the power relations difference between the West and the Crescent, this study highlights the historical difference of the western perception of the Orient from a coloniser, liberator, and guide to the West, as in Shakespeare’s *Othello*, to a colonised subject, as in the characters of Mustafa Sa’eed and the narrator in *Season of Migration to the North*. This paper bridges the gap left by modern scholarship which focuses on applying post-colonial theory on Salih’s novel and neglects its resonance to Shakespeare’s *Othello* in terms of power relations’ vantage. When comparing Shakespeare’s *Othello* and Salih’s *Season of Migration to the North*, this study assumes the impossibility of applying postcolonial theory simultaneously on the two literary masterpieces since the historical western perception of the Orient in each period—Renaissance and twentieth century—is different.¹ Salih’s novel laments, rather than deconstructs, the Renaissance Shakespearean powerful Moor, as represented by Othello in Shakespeare’s *Othello*.

Some modern scholarship, as the case with Laouyene and Harlow, does not take into consideration the difference between Renaissance and post-eighteenth century delineation of the Oriental Moor, as represented in Salih’s *Season of Migration* and Shakespeare’s *Othello*, in terms of the power relations’ stream. For example, in his article ‘‘I am no Othello. I am a lie’’: Shakespeare’s Moor and the Post-Exotic in Tayeb Salih’s *Season of Migration to the North*, Atef Laouyene asserts that Salih’s *Season of Migration* deconstructs the Renaissance stereotypical delineation of the Moorish character as represented by Shakespeare’s *Othello*: ‘In *Season of Migration*, appropriating Shakespeare involves a twofold process: a deconstructive cultural resistance to the Renaissance master code of Moorishness and a constructive understanding of postcolonial history within a less antihumanistic perceptual mode’.² Even though Laouyene brilliantly analyses the two literary pieces—namely, *Othello* and *Season of Migration*—he does not address, as represented in the two works, the issue of

¹ Nabil Matar in his book *Turks, Moors, and Englishmen in the Age of Discovery* (New York: Columbia UP, 1999), refers to the impossibility of applying post-colonial theory on Renaissance drama since ‘in the Elizabethan and early Stuart periods, England was not a colonial power – not in the imperial sense that followed in the eighteenth century’ (10). Since Matar’s analysis is restricted to the Renaissance period, I will extend the analysis to see how the Orient after the eighteenth century is different from the early modern one, as represented in Salih’s *Season of Migration to the North*.

² Atef Laouyene, ‘‘I am no Othello. I am a lie’’: Shakespeare’s Moor and the Post-Exotic in Tayeb Salih’s *Season of Migration to the North*, *Native Shakespeares: Indigenous Appropriations on Global Stage* ed. Craig Dionne and Parmita Kapadia (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2008) 213.
the transformation of the discourse of Orientalism from Renaissance to the twentieth century in terms of power relations difference. For example, Laouyene asserts ahistorically that Othello in Shakespeare is a ‘servant’ and ‘informant’ to the Venetians: ‘Sa’eed repudiates his Othelloness because, unlike Othello, he is a self-declared avenger of the West, not its informant. ... While the Moor of Venice remains a foreign soldier but a lifelong servant of his ‘reverent signiors,’ Sa’eed ... rebels against his European tutors.’

Laouyene’s reading of Shakespeare’s Othello is ahistorical since the Orient in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries constituted a cultural and political threat to the West. Othello is the master, liberator, and noble leader—rather than the ‘servant’ as assumed by Laouyene— to the Venetians against the Turkish invasion to Cyprus. In this sense, I posit that Sa’eed in Salih’s novel imitates and incarnates the powerful and noble Othello to dismantle the British colonisation to Sudan. Just as Othello defends Venice against the Turkish invasion to Cyprus, Sa’eed insists on liberating his country, Sudan, from the British colonial regime.

Also, in her article, ‘Sentimental Orientalism: Season of Migration to the North and Othello’, Barbara Harlow posits that Salih’s novel deconstructs what she calls, ‘the sentimental Orientalism’ of Othello, who is ‘governed by his passions and lust and irrational jealous desires that he fell victim to his baser nature’. Unlike Othello, Mustafa Sa’eed rejects the element of ‘pity’, which Othello seeks at the end of the play, since it gives justification to the ‘civilising mission’ and colonisation: ‘Mustafa Sa’eed sees in this pity a lie, the lie that might be taken as a hallmark of much of the imperialist and colonialist endeavors of the modern age, the era of the “civilizing mission”’. It seems to me that Harlow’s notion of the ‘sentimental Orientalism’ is applicable to Salih’s Season of Migration rather than to Shakespeare’s Othello. If the ‘civilizing mission’ intends to educate the savage, Othello plays the role of the teacher, leader, and liberator of the western Venetians, and not vice versa.

Other modern scholarship about Salih’s Season of Migration, as the case with Makdisi, Greesey, and Velez, focuses on applying postcolonial theory on the novel without taking into consideration Shakespeare’s Othello’s resonance and effect in Salih’s novel. In his article ‘The Empire Renarrated: Season of Migration to the North and the Reinvention of the Present’, Saree S. Makdisi explores, from a post-colonial vantage, Salih’s novel as an example of ‘writing back’ to the colonial power that once ruled Sudan. Unlike Conrad’s Heart of Darkness, which narrates the history of the colonised Africans from the coloniser’s point of view, Salih’s novel reinvents and reclaims the history of the African Sudanese people from the colonised’s point of view. However, Makdisi does not explore the echo and function of Shakespeare’s Othello in Salih’s novel.

Like Makdisi, in her article ‘Cultural Hybridity and Contamination in Tayeb Salih’s Mawsim al-hijraela al-shamal (Season of Migration to the North)’, Patricia Greesey

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3 Laouyene 226.
5 Harlow 76.
6 Harlow 77.
addresses, from a post-colonial vantage, the issue of the ‘cultural hybridity’ affecting the colonised subjects in post-colonial contexts. In Salih’s novel, Greesey, following Bhabha’s notion of hybridity as a means of resistance to the ‘eye of power’, posits that hybridity is not always negative curse upon the colonised since it can be transformed into a tool of counter-colonialism: ‘reversing the discursive practices of the colonizer’. Apart from Bhabha’s and Greesey’s notion of ‘hybridity’ of the colonial subject, I assume that Mustafa Sa’eed undergoes a new hybridity—a mixture of the Moorish present and past or the current Moorish submission to the colonial power in post-eighteenth century and the past Moorish Islamic glories in sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. However, Sa’eed’s hybridity falls apart when he perceives that he cannot restore the glories of Othello.

In his article ‘On Borderline Between Shores: Space and Place in Season of Migration to the North’, Mike Velez explores how the novel depicts the struggle of western-educated Sudanese intellectuals—namely, Mustafa Sa’eed and the narrator—between what he calls ‘place-sense’ and ‘place-relation’ tropes. For Velez, Sa’eed is irresolute to find his ‘home’ since London at one time is envisioned as his ‘home’ and, at other times, is the land of ‘Imperialism’. Developing Velez’s notion of the ‘place’ tropes in Salih’s novel, I assume that Sa’eed witnesses Othello-sense and Othello-relation dilemma since, at one time, he perceives himself as the powerful Shakespearean Othello, and, at other times, the imperfect incarnation of Othello.

However, Makdisi’s, Greesey’s, and Velez’s discussion of Salih’s novel restrains away from the resonance and relevance of Shakespeare’s Othello to Salih’s novel. The historical and cultural differentiation between the Muslim Orient in the Renaissance and after the eighteenth century is almost absent from their critiques. Laouyene and Harlow, however, remain valuable since they, at least, bring both of Shakespeare’s Othello and Salih’s Season of Migration to the North into discussion. Still, Laouyene’s and Harlow’s approach, which is the postcolonial theory application, leaves many unanswered questions—is the western perception in the early seventeenth century of the Renaissance Othello similar to the colonial and imperial West’s perception of Mustafa Sa’eed and the narrator, the main Moorish protagonists in Salih’s Season of Migration, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries? Is the power relation between the West and Muslim States, represented by the Turkish Empire and the Kingdom of Morocco, the same in the Renaissance and after the eighteenth century?

This paper intends to historicise the transformation of the discourse of Orientalism in two different periods—namely, Renaissance and after eighteenth century—to explore, as

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10Velez 196.
11The concept of the ‘Orient’ is broad; however, my study will focus on the Muslim Orient since not all Orients are Muslims. It is also important, as observed by Nabil Matar, to note that Renaissance writings did not distinguish between North African Muslims and what Matar calls ‘sub-Saharan’ Africans in the South. In his book Turks, Moors, and Englishmen in the Age of Discovery (New York: Columbia UP, 1999), Matar argues that ‘confutation of North Africans is misleading because England’s relations with sub-Saharan Africans were relations of power, domination, and slavery, while relations with the Muslims of North Africa and the Levant were of anxious quality and grudging emulation’ (7-8). Sa’eed in Salih’s Season of Migration, a Sudanese sub-Saharan Moor, always compares himself to Shakespeare’s Othello.

represented by Shakespeare’s *Othello* and Salih’s *Season of Migration*, the drastic change of the western perception of the Muslim Orient.

**Theoretical Approach**

The discourse of Orientalism, which is subject to modification and transformation, is not static formation or conceptualisation of the Orient. In this context, it is erroneous to assume that the discourse of Orientalism in Renaissance politics and popular culture was the same in post-eighteenth century. Nabil Matar and Daniel Vitkus, distinguished Renaissance scholars, reject the application of Edward Said’s definition of Orientalism on Renaissance literature and historiography. In his book *Turks, Moors, and Englishmen in the Age of Discovery*, Nabil Matar refers to the inaptness of Saidian theory to the Renaissance Orientalism: ‘If the Orientalism of the late eighteenth century, as Edward Said defines it, is colonialism as a form of discourse, then what the Renaissance English writers produced was merely a discourse – without colonialism.’

In other words, the Renaissance West was not able culturally nor militarily to colonise the Muslim Orient. Similarly, in his book *Turning Turk: English Theater and the Multicultural Mediterranean, 1570-1630*, Daniel Vitkus describes what he calls the ‘postcolonial fallacy’ and the impropriety of Said’s definition of Orientalism on Renaissance literature:

> When we seek a theoretical framework to help us analyze the early modern representation of Islamic or Mediterranean alterities, we find that Said’s postcolonial theory, which is based upon the historical experience of Western imperialism and colonization, must be deployed with caution, if at all.

For Vitkus, England during the Renaissance was not yet a colonial ‘empire’ to hegemonise the powerful Orient since Renaissance England lived ‘imperial fantasies’ rather than real ‘empire’ as a ‘conquering, colonizing power’.

While the theoretical approach of this study is postcolonial theory and Said’s definition of Orientalism, it applies them with caution. In his major book *Orientalism*, Edward Said describes Orientalism ‘as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient’. Even though Said reflects upon the ‘late eighteenth century’ as the time of establishing Orientalism as an organised discipline of discourse – ‘taking the late eighteenth century as a very roughly defined starting point Orientalism can be discussed and analyzed as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient’—many modern post-colonial critics misapply this definition to all western periods. It seems to me that Said partakes at this confusion since at some points of his book, the issue of Orientalism is left open to cover all periods of East-West relationships. For example, Said describes Orientalism, ‘from the Middle Ages on’, as ‘a closed system, in which objects are what they

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14Vitkus, Turning 6.
16Said 3.
are because they are what they are, for once, for all time, for ontological reasons that no empirical material can either dislodge or alter. Such general conceptualisation of Orientalism is criticised by some postcolonial critics. For example, in his article ‘Orientalism and Its Problems’, Dennis Porter observes the ‘continuous’ and unchangeable Saidian definition of Orientalism: ‘Said asserts the unified character of Western discourse on the Orient over some two millennia.’ In this perspective, while this study compares Shakespeare’s Othello and Salih’s Season of Migration to the North, it avoids analysing and critiquing the Orient as a timeless and unchangeable phenomenon. Rather, it looks deeply into the historical, political, and cultural perspectives that distinguish each period’s – in this case, Renaissance and after eighteenth century – perception of the Orient.

The sole application of Saidian theory of Orientalism simultaneously on the two different eras is reductive to the understanding of the mechanism of the evolution of the discourse of Orientalism and East-West relationships. Whereas Said’s argument of Orientalism can be consulted to analyse Salih’s Season of Migration, it should be circumvented in Shakespeare’s Othello. Whereas the former (Salih’s) includes a British colonisation to Sudan, the latter (Shakespeare’s) warns against an oriental Turkish invasion to Cyprus. While Othello in Shakespeare assists the Venetians against the Turkish invasion to Cyprus, Mustafa Sa’eed and the narrator in Salih’s novel utilise the western education to dismantle the British colonisation to their land, as the case with Sa’eed, or to serve their Sudanese people, as the case with the narrator. In this context, the journey of the Moors – namely, Othello in Shakespeare’s Othello and Mustafa Sa’eed and the narrator in Salih’s Season of Migration – to the West is different. Othello in Shakespeare does not need the western Venetian education to elevate his skills. Rather, it is the Venetians, who beg Othello’s military tactics to defeat the powerful Turks. Furthermore, since the power relation element of East-West confrontation is different in the Renaissance and after eighteenth century, postcolonial theory and Said’s theory of Orientalism should be traced carefully. Therefore, this study adopts careful selection of Nabil Matar’s and Daniel Vitkus’ historical theorisation of Orientalism in Renaissance and Said’s accounts in after-eighteenth century literature.

Lamentation of the Disintegration of the Shakespearean Noble and Powerful Othello in Salih’s Season of Migration to the North
While Shakespeare’s Othello reveals the invincibility and fortitude of the oriental Moor in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Salih’s Season of Migration to the North laments the Moorish cultural and political disintegration and deterioration in post-eighteenth century. In Salih’s novel, such cultural and political metamorphosis is represented by the transformation of the ‘turban’ into a ‘hat’. In the novel, the British coloniser mocks Mustafa Sa’eed’s remark that he wears a ‘turban’:


17Said 70.
The man laughed. ‘This isn’t a turban,’ he said. ‘It’s a hat.’ ‘When you grow up,’ the man said, ‘and leave school and become an official in the government, you’ll wear a hat like this’.20

The significance of the word ‘turban’, which is widely used by Renaissance writers, is to symbolise Islam and the Turks. In his book Islam in Britain, 1558-1685, Matar observes that the ‘turban’ was a well-known symbol of Islam in Renaissance context: ‘To the average Englishman, the turban was a sign of Islam’.21 For example, in Shakespeare’s Othello, a reference to the turban is made by Othello to describe the Turks: ‘Where a malignant and a turbaned Turk / Beat a Venetian and traduced the state’ (V.ii.362-63).22 In this context, Salih’s Season of Migration laments the displacement of the Islamic ‘turban’ with the coloniser’s ‘hat’.23

Whereas British citizens in the Renaissance period used to immigrate to North Africa (Barbary States) to seek financial, political, and cultural stability, Britons in the after-eighteenth century came to the oriental land as colonisers. In his ‘Introduction: England and Mediterranean Captivity, 1577-1704’, Matar observes the phenomenon of the westerners’ immigration in the Renaissance era to the oriental Islamic lands:

From the Elizabethan period until the end of the seventeenth century, thousands of English, Scottish, Welsh, and Irish men and women interacted directly with the North Africans of the Barbary States as sailors, traders, soldiers, craftsmen, and artisans who either went to North Africa in search of work and opportunity or were seized by privateers and subsequently settled there.24

Many western immigrants converted to Islam or ‘turned Turks’ over the oriental land in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Vitkus refers to the spread of conversion of many westerners in Renaissance to Islam: ‘It was much more common for Christians to turn Turk, and by the early seventeenth century, many English subjects had become renegades in North Africa and the Middle East’.25 The phrase ‘turn Turk’ was used by Renaissance writers to indicate the act of conversion to Islam. In his book Islam and the West (1993), Bernard Lewis comments on the use of the term: ‘Turk,’ the name of by far the most powerful and important of the Muslim states, even became a synonym for Muslim, and a convert to Islam was said to have “turned Turk” whenever the conversion took place’.26 In Shakespeare’s Othello, Othello

20Salih 20.
22All quotations from William Shakespeare’s Othello have been taken from The Norton Shakespeare ed. Stephen Greenblatt et al., 2nd ed (New York: Norton & Company, 2008) 2119-91. Acts, scenes, and line numbers are given in parentheses in the text.
23Even though ‘turban’ in modern contexts is often associated with Punjabis (Hinduism), it seems to me that Salih sticks to the Renaissance conceptualization and association between ‘turban’ and Islam since the novel is a rereading of the Renaissance Shakespearean Othello.
uses the phrase ‘turn Turk’ to warn his Venetian soldiers against conversion to Islam: ‘Are we turned Turks, and to ourselves do that / Which heaven hath forbid the Ottomites?’ (II.iii.153-54). The Islamic culture constituted a threat or what Vitkus calls in his article, ‘Early Modern Orientalism: Representations of Islam in Sixteenth-and-Seventeenth Century Europe’, the ‘West’s inferiority complex’ to Islam as represented by the Turkish Empire and the Kingdom of Morocco.28

In Salih’s Season of Migration, the Moor’s – namely, Mustafa Sa’eed’s – journey to London is a nostalgic experimentation of the heroism of Shakespearean Othello in Venice. In Shakespeare’s play, Othello’s Moorish military experience and tactics make him the savior in the eyes of the Venetians against the expected Turkish invasion to Cyprus. The Duke of Venice reveals Othello’s privileges to lead the Venetian army against the Turks:

The Turk with a most mighty preparation makes for 
Cyprus. Othello, the fortitude of the place is best known to 
you, and though we have there a substitute of most allowed 
sufficiency, yet opinion, a more sovereign mistress of effects, 
throws a more safer voice on you. (I.iii.220-24)

The ‘valiant’ (I.iii.48) Othello, as described by the Duke, is aware of the weakness and ineptitude of the Venetians to meet the powerful Turkish army. Even the Venetian Senators acknowledge the Turks as politically and militarily astute. One of the Venetian Senators refers to the skillfulness of the Turks: ‘We must not think the Turk is so unskillful’ (I.iii.28). In Shakespeare’s play, the Moor’s knowledge is superior to the westerners’ since he, in times of distress and chaos, plays the role of the trainer, guide, and leader to the Venetians. Othello is fully aware and confident of his important role in the decision-making arena of Venice: ‘I have done the state some service, and they know’t’ (V.ii.348).

Sa’eed is the imperfect incarnation of the Shakespearean noble Othello. In Salih’s novel, Sa’eed in London lives the illusion of being the powerful Othello. For example, Sa’eed associates himself to Othello: ‘I’m like Othello – Arab –African’.29 Sa’eed, a brilliant Arab Sudanese student, gets the admiration of the British colonisers teachers at ‘Gordon College’ in Sudan. He is later awarded by the British colonial regime with a scholarship to pursue his education at Cairo then at London. Therefore, he is described by his classmates as the ‘spoilt

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28 Also, in his article ‘Poisoned Figs, or “The Traveler’s Religion”: Travel, Trade, and Conversion in Early Modern English Culture’ Remapping the Mediterranean World in Early Modern English Writings ed. Goran V. Stanivukovic (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), Vitkus observes the influence and superiority of Islamic culture over British merchants and writers: ‘The general tendency toward ethnocentric reaction to foreignness remained powerful, but English writers also acknowledged that cultures such as those of the Ottoman Turks were far more prosperous, sophisticated, and powerful than theirs were’ (52). Also, Matar describes the ‘allure’ of Islam over Britons in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries: ‘Islam projected an allure that promised a common Briton social and political power, and turned a poor European soldier into a well-paid rais (corsair captain) it was the allure of an empire that changed an Englishman’s hat into a turban – with all the symbolism of strength associated with the Islamic headdress’ (Islam 15).
29 Salih 38.
child of the English’. To the Sudanese, Sa’eed is a convert to Englishness since he is called the ‘black Englishman’, and to the British, on other hands, he is the inferior and sensual Other. Despite of all Sa’eed’s academic achievements –as a ‘lecturer in economics at London University at the age of twenty-four’ and a brilliant author of many books and articles –he remains a product of western knowledge and patronage. In the eyes of the British, as expressed by his British teacher Professor Maxwell Foster-Keen, he is one of the outputs of the ‘civilising mission’ of the British colonisation to Sudan: ‘You, Mr Sa’eed, are the best example of the fact that our civilizing mission in Africa is of no avail. After all the efforts we’ve made to educate you, it’s as if you’d come out of the jungle for the first time’. Sa’eed deludes himself that he can revive the glories of Othello and gets celebrated by the British, as the case with Othello in Venice. In terms of power relations, the comparison is untenable since the weakness of the western Venetians in Shakespeare’s Othello against the invincible Turks is no longer available after the eighteenth century –the starting time of the rise of the European colonial project in the East and Africa.

Sa’eed not only tries to incarnate the Shakespearean Othello, but also the Muslim Moorish leader Tariq Ibn Ziyad, who led the Islamic conquest of Visigothic Hispania (Spain) in 711-718 A.D. Just as Muslim Arabs were able to conquer Spain, Sa’eed fancies himself that he can conquer London: ‘For a moment I imagined to myself the Arab soldiers’ first meeting with Spain.’ Isabella Seymour, a British woman of a ‘Spanish’ mother, is transformed in Sa’eed’s imagination into ‘Andalusia’. The conquered Iberian Peninsula and Septimania, or what was called, Al-Andalus, fell under Islamic rule from 711-1492 when it was only in 1492, during the reign of King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella, that the last phase of the Reconquista was achieved when the last Muslim ruler, Muhammad XII, known as Boabdil, was defeated and forced to cede Granada to the Spanish Catholic monarch, Ferdinand II of Aragon and Isabella I of Castile. The symbolic transfiguration of the feminine body of Seymour to a previously conquered land by Muslims is another nostalgic conceptualisation of Sa’eed’s fascination to refound Islamic expansion to Europe and overseas. Sa’eed lives on the past; however, his nostalgia to the past glories exists ironically and simultaneously with the British colonisation to his country, Sudan, in 1898. Sa’eed, who is neither Othello nor Tariq Ibn Ziyad, is the colonized Other, who resists the British colonial regime by reviving the glorious Islamic past.

The power equation was reversed since the fearful Muslim Orient transformed to a colonised subject in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The Muslim Orient, who was described by the Renaissance historian Richard Knolles (c. 1545-1610), in his book as

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30Salih 52.  
31Salih 53.  
32Salih 32.  
33Salih 93.  
34For more information about the Islamic conquest to Spain, see Roger Collins, The Arab Conquest of Spain 710-797 (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989).  
35Salih 42.  
36Salih 42.  
the ‘present terror of the world’, no longer constituted a threat to the West in post-eighteenth century context. Knolles’s book, which is the first English chronicle about the history of the Ottoman Empire, allegorises the Muslim Orient as a ‘greedie lyon lurking in his den’.39

This transformation of the perception of the Muslim Orient is highly reflected in Salih’s novel, which exhibits how the Orient is perceived by the British coloniser as a case or an object of study. Edward Said clarifies that the Orient after the eighteenth century became a subject of study:

The Orient during the period from the end of the eighteenth century, there emerged a complex Orient suitable for study in the academy, for display in the museum, for reconstruction in the colonial office, for theoretical illustration in anthropological, biological, linguistic, racial, and historical theses about mankind and the universe, for instances of economic and sociological theories of development, revolution, cultural personality, national or religious character.40

Mustafa Sa’eed explains that the trial scene is not concerned with his acquittal as much as with analysing him as a ‘case’ of study: ‘The lawyers were fighting over my body. It was not I who was important but the case.’ 41

Sa’eed, therefore, is a symbol rather than reality. For the British women – namely, Ann Hammond, Shelia Greenwood, Isabella Seymour, and Jean Morris – Sa’eed is an exotic oriental phenomenon which needs analysis, discovery, and evaluation. Ann Hammond, a student of ‘Oriental languages at Oxford’, establishes a relationship with Sa’eed to satisfy her curiosity and field of study about the Orient. Sa’eed describes Hammond’s interest in the exotic Orient: ‘Unlike me, she yearned for tropical climes, cruel suns, purple horizons. In her eyes I was a symbol of all her hankerings.’ 42 Shelia Greenwood, a ‘waitress in a Soho Restaurant’, is attracted to Sa’eed’s exotic oriental culture of the ‘smell of burning sandalwood and incense’.43 For Greenwood, Sa’eed is like a secret to be discovered and a hilarious adventure to be travelled to. Sa’eed describes the secret of Greenwood’s attraction to him: ‘It was my world, so novel to her, that attracted her.’44 Similarly, Isabella Seymour is not interested in the personal side of Sa’eed as much as in his cultural, oriental, and exotic background: ‘There came a moment when I felt I had been transformed in her eyes into a naked, primitive creature, a spear in one hand and arrows in the other, hunting elephants and

38 Richard Knolles, The Generall Historie of the Turkes from the First Beginning of that Nation to the Rising of the Ottoman Famillie: With all the Notable Expeditions of the Christians Princes against them. Together with the Lives and Conquests of the Othoman Kings and Emperours Faithfullie collected out of the best Histories, both Ancient and Modern, and Digested into one Continuata Historie Until this Present Year 1603 (London, 1603) 1.
39 Knolles (To the Reader).
40 Said 7-8.
41 Salih 93.
42 Salih 30.
43 Salih 35.
44 Salih 35.

‘The Different Western Perception of the Oriental Moor in the Renaissance and the Twentieth Century: Shakespeare’s Othello and Tayeb Salih’s Season of Migration to the North: A Post Colonial Critique.’ Hussein A. Alhawamdeh.
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lions in the jungles.’

Again, for Seymour, Sa’eed remains confined to the symbolic realisation: ‘She gazed hard and long at me as though seeing me as a symbol rather than reality’. Unlike Othello, Sa’eed tells the British woman ‘fabricated stories’ about his country to get her love – that is, ‘about deserts of golden sands and jungles where non-existent animals called out to one another’. Just as Othello charms Desdemona with his heroic adventures – that is:

Rough quarries, rocks, and hills whose heads touch heaven,
It was my hint to speak. Such was my process,
And of the cannibals that each other eat,
The Anthropophagi, and men whose heads
Do grow beneath their shoulders. These things to hear
Would Desdemona seriously incline (I.iii.140-45)

Sa’eed endeavors to win the love of Seymour. Laouyene comments on Sa’eed’s ‘self-betrayal’: ‘Sa’eed (the protagonist) beguiles the Desdemonas of England and lures them to his harem-like bedroom, where he carries out his ritualized sexual conquests’. In my point of view, the Shakespearean Othello, who is praised by the Duke, Venetian Senators, and soldiers, does not need to fabricate stories to win Desdemona’s love. Rather, his heroism and chivalry are well-known among Venetians. Sa’eed’s futile incarnation and imitation of the powerful and noble Othello does not elevate him from the symbolic to the realistic actualisation. In this context, while the Shakespearean Othello is a reality to the Venetians, Sa’eed is a symbol and an illusion to the British.

Unlike the nostalgic Sa’eed, the narrator decides to live on the post-colonial reality of Sudan. Even though the narrator, a Sudanese intellectual, pursues his higher education in English poetry in London, he does not seek revenge against the British colonisers. Rather, he seems to prefer the assistance of his countrymen in developing the educational system in Sudan: ‘I turned to my people. I learnt much and much passed me by’. However, the appearance of Sa’eed created a state of ‘obsession’, fear, confusion to him. The narrator is afraid of Sa’eed’s curse to fall upon him since he does not want the recurrence of Sa’eed’s model of living on the past glories of Othello: ‘Thus Mustafa Sa’eed has, against my will, become a part of my world, a thought in my brain, a phantom that does not want to take itself off.’ The narrator prefers adaptation with the post-colonial context since the new generations of Sudan need to look forward to the future not to the colonial past: ‘The fact that they [British colonisers] came to our land, I know not why, does that mean that we should poison our present and our future? Sooner or later they will leave our country, just as many people throughout history left many countries’. Furthermore, he does not prohibit the use of

45Salih 38.
46Salih 43.
47Salih 38.
48Salih 38.
49Laouyene 222.
50Salih 1.
51Salih 61.
52Salih 50.
53Salih 49.

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the coloniser’s education and language for the service of the colonised people’s community: 
‘The railways, ships, hospitals, factories and schools will be ours and we’ll speak their 
language without either a sense of guilt or a sense of gratitude.’53 Just as the Renaissance 
westerners resorted to the Orient’s knowledge, as represented in Shakespeare’s Othello, the 
twentieth-century Orient needs to utilise the western knowledge, a policy adopted by the 
narrator in Salih’s novel, to serve oriental communities.

Unlike the Renaissance Shakespearean Othello, Sa’eed is unable to lead or change the 
West. Sa’eed expresses his deficiency to achieve prominent change: ‘I seek not glory, for the 
likes of me do not seek glory’.54 Recognising his utter failure to revive the glories of 
Renaissance Othello and the legends of the oriental powerful ‘lyon’ in the sixteenth and 
seventeenth centuries, Sa’eed detaches himself from the present and the past. Sa’eed in a 
moment of pessimism and desperation declares that he no longer incarnates Othello: ‘I am no 
Othello. Othello was a lie’.55 Sa’eed’s reception in the West is different from Othello’s. 
Whereas the former is recognised among the Britons as a product of the British ‘civilising 
mission’ in Sudan, the latter is welcomed as a liberator, guide, and noble leader to the 
Venetians against the invincibility of the Turks. In this context, while this paper analyses the 
transformation of the discourse of Orientalism from the Renaissance, as represented by 
Shakespeare’s Othello, to the twentieth century as represented by Salih’s Season of Migration 
to the North, it reveals the difference of western perception of the Orient from the vantage of 
power relations. Recent post-colonial scholarship about the influence of Shakespeare’s 
Othello in Salih’s novel neglects, as the case with Makdisi, Greesey, and Velez, or confuses, 
as the case with Laouyene and Harlow, the shift of the element of power relations in the two 
periods—namely, Renaissance and twentieth century. The Muslim Orient in Shakespeare’s 
Othello is different from the one in Salih’s novel. Therefore, it is reductive to assume that the 
Muslim Orient is always subject to the western colonial hegemony from the Renaissance to 
the twentieth century. Salih’s novel laments the cultural and political dissolution of the 
Renaissance Moor in post-eighteenth century’s post-colonial contexts.

53 Salih 49-50.
54 Salih 120.
55 Salih 95.

‘The Different Western Perception of the Oriental Moor in the Renaissance and the Twentieth 
Century: Shakespeare’s Othello and Tayeb Salih’s Season of Migration to the North: A Post Colonial 
Critique.’ Hussein A. Alhawamdeh. 
TransnationalLiterature Vol. 5 no. 2, May 2013. 
‘My pen shall add a testimony to men noble and daring’; Poetry, Heroism and the Wreck of the SS Admella (1859)
Nicole Anae

The South Australian Register first coined the term ‘Admella poetry’ in November 1859, almost two months after the wreck of the inter-colonial steamer the SS Admella off the South Australian coast on 6 August 1859.¹ The vessel, a Clyde built screw-steamer of 478 tons and costing £15,000, broke into three parts and of the 113 passengers and crew, eighty-nine lost their lives, with the nineteen survivors huddling for eight days on the Admella’s storm ravaged and severely damaged after-deck.² Survivor James Miller later wrote in a letter, an extract of which was published in the Nelson Examiner and New Zealand Chronicle on 24 September 1859, that ‘For eight days, I may say I was face to face with “the King of Terrors,” but am yet alive by the blessing of God’ (3).

Miller’s letter was just one voice in the unparalleled surge of missives newspapers around the country received from local and international readers in response to the wreck. The outpouring of sympathy and support in the wake of the disaster was unprecedented. Never before had one single event mobilised colonial communities throughout Australia. ‘The calamity was one which afflicted all. Legislation was suspended, shops were empty, crowds stood in the street day and night for a week.’³ Parliamentary members were involved in relief efforts at a bureaucratic level, while communities local and interstate organised charity events, and popular visiting and local theatre stars of the period donated proceedings from performances to the cause. One report claimed that ‘the loss of the Admella has developed in a most marvellous manner the intense, though perhaps heretofore unsuspected sympathy which binds South Australian colonists together’.⁴ The report also doubted whether anyone could ‘call to mind an instance in which a whole community ... consented to yield up time, thought, feeling – all to the contemplation of one calamity’. Thus, domestic publications ensured that the British readership was kept especially well-informed; ‘The disaster of the Admella, and the suffering of the survivors created a profound sensation in the colony; and, in fact, in England subscriptions were liberally made for the survivors’.⁵

Many English journals and print reports ensured the transnational connection between the Admella disaster and the Imperial spirit.⁶ References in the British Millennial Harbinger

¹ South Australian Register 23 November 1859, 3; Adelaide Advertiser 8 August 1905, 5. Accounts described the Admella as ‘a magnificent specimen of naval architecture’, Portland Guardian and Normanby General Advertiser 7 April 1858, 2. See this issue for a lengthy description of the vessel.
² The vessel derived its name from the first syllables of the names of the major ports it serviced along the shipping trade route: Adelaide, Melbourne and Launceston. See E Angas Johnson, ‘The Admella Wreck,’ Register 28 January 1922, 10.
³ Register 15 August 1859.
⁴ New Zealand Daily Southern Cross 27 September 1859, 1.
⁵ South Australian Border Watch 20 November 1878, 2.

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of 1859 emerged in the form of two obituaries, both causalities of the *Admella* disaster: Edwin Chambers, ‘a very promising disciple [Latter Day Saints]’ and noted Adelaidian James Magarey.  

Two months after the wreck the English *Illustrated Times* related news of the wreck and the *Medical Times and Gazette* included the death notice of one of the *Admella*’s passengers, one James Vaux, ‘surgeon to the *Norfolk*’. The reference to the *Admella* in the 1861 edition of *Transaction of the Royal Scottish Society of the Arts* came in the form of Thomas Sheddon’s article ‘On the Construction of Iron Ships’. Sheddon’s contribution focussed on the structural integrity of the *Admella* and the question of cause. Other transnational connections between the *Admella* disaster’s aftermath and the Imperial spirit emerged in the expressions of valour conferred upon various seamen and volunteers by the Royal Humane Society, the Royal Benevolent Society, the Privy Council of the Board of Trade, and other English and Australian colonial associations.

The Wreck of the *SS Admella*

The inter-colonial steamer *SS Admella* wrecked on Carpenters Reef some nineteen miles north-west of Cape Northumberland on the morning of Friday 6 August 1859 as she made her journey from Port Adelaide, in South Australia, to the port of Melbourne, in Victoria. Initial reports claimed the cause of the wreck was the shifting of one of the three race horses the vessel carried as cargo (a theory later discredited although one oft-cited, even today). Later investigations established that a design fault caused the vessel to break into three parts. The first survivors to make it to the shore two days later were seamen John Leach and Robert Knapman. They navigated their way to the MacDonnell Lighthouse at Cape Northumberland believing they were the sole survivors. The lighthouse keeper, Benjamin Germein, then

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The three racehorses aboard the *Admella* included ‘Jupiter’, ’Shamrock’ and ‘Barber’. Reports vary concerning who owned which horse – some claim brothers Hurtle and George Fisher owned Jupiter, Robert Knapman, and William Filgate owned Barber (*Register* 23 January 1872, 4; *Perth Western Mail* 14 September 1939, 17). Others claim Shamrock and Barber were owned by William Filgate (*Perth Inquirer & Commercial News* 24 April 1896, 15). ‘“Shamrock” was killed. “Jupiter” reached the shore with a broken leg, and was destroyed. The third horse, “The Barber” gained the beach, apparently uninjured and was taken to Melbourne [to compete in the First Champion Sweepstakes]’, *Border Watch* 9 February 1923, 4. For Fisher’s obituary, see *Register* 1 July 1905, 7. For Filgate’s obituary see *Perth Inquirer & Commercial News* 24 April 1896, 15.

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3. Details published in the 1 December 1859 edition of the *British Millennial Harbinger* (661), via details written by one Henry Warren, Hindmarsh, South Australia, 16 September 1859.

4. *Medical Times and Gazette* 22 October 1859, 419.

5. Benjamin Germein (d. 1893) received a gold medal, and silver medals awarded to the surviving crew, with plans ‘to confer the honor of knighthood upon the Hon, J. H. Fisher President of the Legislative Council’ (*South Australian Advertiser* 6 July 1860, 2). Germein repaired the *Admella* lifeboat and five times attempted a rescue (the final, successfully although the vessel capsized three times) acting as coxswain among a crew numbering six. His efforts saved four survivors (see *Advertiser* 26 September 1893, 7; *Border Watch* 4 October, 1893, 4; *Advertiser* 26 April 1952, 6. For an account of his death by suicide, see *Register* 20 September 1893, 7). Captain James Fawthrop (d. 1878), who commandeered a lifeboat towed to the wreck by the *Lady-Bird* and rescued 19 survivors, also received a silver medal for gallantry from the English Board of Trade (*South Australian Border Watch* 20 November 1878, 2). The Shipwrecked Fisherman and Mariner’s Royal Benevolent Society awarded Germein a gold medal for bravery and humanity, and silver medals to his crew (Henry Smith, Charles Allmack, William Maben, Henry Wylie, Thomas Anderson and William Baker). Silver medals were also awarded to the ‘Pilot-Boat’s’ crew (Louis Thomas, Peter Smith, William Thomas, George Fowles, Uriah Marshall, and John Penny), as well as to John Leach and Robert Knapman. See *Advertiser* 6 July, 1860, 3.

6. The three racehorses aboard the *Admella* included ‘Jupiter’, ‘Shamrock’ and ‘Barber’. Reports vary concerning who owned which horse – some claim brothers Hurtle and George Fisher owned Jupiter and Shamrock, and William Filgate owned Barber (*Register* 23 January 1872, 4; *Perth Western Mail* 14 September 1939, 17). Others claim Shamrock and Barber were owned by William Filgate (*Perth Inquirer & Commercial News* 24 April 1896, 15). ‘“Shamrock” was killed. “Jupiter” reached the shore with a broken leg, and was destroyed. The third horse, “The Barber” gained the beach, apparently uninjured and was taken to Melbourne [to compete in the First Champion Sweepstakes]’, *Border Watch* 9 February 1923, 4. For Fisher’s obituary, see *Register* 1 July 1905, 7. For Filgate’s obituary see *Perth Inquirer & Commercial News* 24 April 1896, 15.
trekked to the nearest telegraph in Mount Gambier where the station-master raised the alarm with transmissions to Portland, 93 miles (150km) to the west, and Adelaide, some 280 miles (450km) north east. Two rescue vessels were launched from both centres, the *Ladybird* from the former, and the *Corio* from the latter. Initially, neither vessel successfully located the wreck given the horrendous weather conditions and poor navigational information. The wreck was also twice passed by unnoticed by two other vessels, the *Havilah* (just after dawn the morning the *Admella* struck) and P. & O.’s steamer the *Bombay* on Saturday evening. In fact, the *Corio* also passed the wreck without seeing it. It was eight days before the *Corio*, together with the *Admella’s* lifeboat commandeered by Germein, finally reached the wreck. The *Ladybird* also successfully towed the *Portland* lifeboat to the wreck, although by the time both lifeboats arrived, all fourteen children had perished as well as all nineteen female passengers with the exception of one: Bridget Ledwith. Cheering crowds in the thousands greeted the *Ladybird* as she ferried her complement of nineteen survivors into Melbourne Wharf on 18 August 1859.12

11 *Advertiser* 18 November 1859, 5; *Register* 20 August 1859, 2; *Portland Guardian and Normanby General Advertiser* 28 September 1859, 2.

12 The *SS Admella* and the *Ladybird* each attracted the interest of painters and artists. See *Advertiser* 18 October 1859, 4.


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The Significance of the Telegraph

"but for the telegraph, not a soul (Leach and Knappman excepted) would have been saved from the Admella."

Acclaimed in 1857 as ‘the wonderful annihilator of time and space,’ the inter-colonial electrical telegraph – which in 1859 was still a relatively new invention, at least in the colonies – played a vital role in disseminating information about the wreck with ‘telegraphic speed’ both within and beyond Australian settlements. Telegraphic exchanges performed a vital function in servicing public interest in the Admella disaster and typically provided highly graphic updates and accounts; ‘The scene was heartrending ; – bodies floating round the wreck, passengers clinging to the hull and frantically offering money, jewels, everything they possessed, to be safely carried ashore’. Newspapers printed columns of numerous up-to-date inter-colonial telegraphic exchanges relayed between signal towers, and those transmitted to and from stations directly to newspaper offices within and beyond South Australia: ‘We can see several living beings, but cannot distinguish them ... They have neither food nor water, nor have they had any since Friday’ (quoted three days after the wreck). ‘Hundreds met at unusual hours’, as telegraphic offices became assembly points for people to gather in the wake of the disaster: ‘The portico of the Exchange was crowded all day with friends of the passengers, and great anxiety was shown to get the latest news by telegraph’.

Another issue reported that; ‘At all hours of the day crowds of people were waiting round the doors of the telegraph-station’. The medium of the telegraph thus shaped the national mind-set in the experience of the disaster as a collective event of ‘loss and distress’; ‘the feelings of the whole community have, during these last few days, been acted upon as one mind by every throb of the telegraph which connects the city with the scene of despair on the seashore’.

One particular edition of the Register offers vital conclusions perhaps explaining why the wreck of the Admella had exerted such an unprecedented mobilising force upon the colonial consciousness in the claim; ‘the misery of our position is that it is one of lingering uncertainty – a terrible state of alternate hope and fear’. Yet another account identifies a source of this ‘lingering uncertainty’ in the claim that; ‘Hour by hour and day by day we have received piecemeal a narrative of horrors which even as a history of past events would appall

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14 Register 17 November 1859, 3.
15 Sydney Morning Herald 23 December 1857, 4.
16 Register 15 August 1859.
17 The price of sending a ten-word telegraph between Adelaide and Melbourne in 1859 was six shillings, and for press matter the initial cost of a penny a word for 300 miles increased to two-pence for every mile beyond that radius. See Sydney Morning Herald 23 December 1857, 4. The cost of transmission between Tasmania and New South Wales was nine shillings for ten words, with 6d (6 shillings) charged for each additional word. Press matter in the form of newspaper reports transmitted from Sydney to Tasmania cost 3d. (3 shillings) per word. See Maitland Mercury and Hunter River Advertiser 22 December 1859, 3.
18 Argus 10 August 1859, 5.
19 Advertiser 11 August 1859, 3.
20 Register 15 August 1859; Argus 10 August 1859, 5.
21 Register 18 August 1859, 6.
22 Register 13 August 1859.
23 Register 13 August 1859.

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Telegraphic exchanges recounting this real-life tragedy presented episodic and fragmentary narratives of the disaster which transformed the status of the telegraph as fundamentally paradoxical. While entrusted as a principle source of information, telegraph accounts also became prime sources of confusion and anxiety. Many newspapers noted ‘several contradictions’ in telegraphic missives,\(^{25}\) while other reports accounted for these discrepancies thus:

The greater part of these messages come in the name of the Mount Gambier telegraph-master, who is a very trustworthy and able officer, but who in these cases of contradiction must evidently be regarded as merely communicating to the citizens of Adelaide, information delivered to him by different persons who have gone down to the beach. As their impressions of the event and its consequences vary, so would their reports vary; and in the excitement of the occasion, and the transference of the news from one individual to another, it is not to be wondered at that what were originally mere conjectures, should ultimately be telegraphed as facts.\(^{26}\)

Perhaps most worrying accounts claimed that incorrect lists of the dead, and the survivors, were regularly transmitted from Mount Gambier station, within thirty-five miles of the wreck, to central exchanges where families gathered in prayer and hope. Many families and loved ones therefore received telegraphic exchanges as proof of life only to discover the information was erroneous:

Parents and spouse, child and sister, condemned almost to see the loved one perish inch by inch, as the electric wires noted for us each change that could be discerned of the wreck. The announcements hour after hour by the telegraph had a fearful interest ... With what terror the friends of those particularised looked forward to the next bulletin to see if they still survived, and with what feelings the kith and kin of the unmentioned rushed to learn whether the next lightening message would bring word of the objects of their solicitude being among ‘the recognised!’\(^{27}\)

The Observer attempted to offer assurances as to the verity of the telegraph by claiming that ‘These contractions, however, only show the difficulty of arriving at a satisfactory conclusion ... as to the cause of the wreck ... they do not in any way lessen our fears as to its results.’\(^{28}\)

And, after numerous, some almost fatal near-misses and botched rescue attempts, news of the survivors’ recovery finally ‘flew through the country with the speed of lightening, and for hours after our first publication of the telegrams, crowd succeeded crowd, of men, of women, and children, on foot, on horseback, and in vehicles, until the tidings of “twenty-two saved” were spread far and wide’.\(^{29}\)

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\(^{24}\) Register 13 August 1859.

\(^{25}\) Register 18 August 1859, 6.

\(^{26}\) Advertiser 18 August 1859, 6.

\(^{27}\) Age 17 August, via Sydney Morning Herald 26 August, 1859, 2.

\(^{28}\) Observer 13 August 1859.

\(^{29}\) Register 18 August 1859, 6; Advertiser 15 August 1859, 3.

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The telegraphic station at Cape Otway, Victoria regularly transmitted details of the Admella wreck to the Post-Master General. One of the Admella’s mailbags containing 200 letters was found by Cape Otway’s lighthouse-keeper in early September 1859.30

The other significant element influencing the unprecedented interest in the wreck of the Admella was the telegraph’s dominance in mobilising colonials in an emotionally-charged communal experience of spectatorship. The telegraph mediated and defined the nature and scope of communal sympathy in generating, according to one report ‘an electric sympathy which vibrated through every mind’.31 Another report connected telegraphic accounts directly with experiences of emotional unity by claiming; ‘Hearts beat responsive to every mysterious throb of the tiny instrument’.32 Crucially, even despite the reputed unreliability of telegraphic sources, those very sources made possible a wholly collective participation in the event, even by those not directly connected with the Admella shipwreck as a real-life tragedy:

With so much vividness have some of the scenes of this frightful drama been impressed upon the minds of colonists that never before, perhaps, were the horrors of a shipwreck so intensely realized by those who were not actual

30 Illustrated Sydney News 16 November 1865, 5; Register 7 September 1859, 2.
31 Register 23 August 1859, 2.
32 Register 23 August 1859, 3
sharers in them ... almost every emotion, whether of hope or dread, on the part of those engaged in the desperate struggle for life – were flashed along the electric wires.33

Despite, or perhaps even because of the fallibility of telegraphic accounts, this technology united colonials in a collective act of spectatorship in an event which was, according to one report, ‘a disaster that thrilled Australia.’34 Indeed, ‘thrilling’ was the term used by Admella writer Samuel Mossman to describe the impact of the disaster on the collective mind-set as a kind of pleasure: ‘There are circumstances attending the rescue of the survivors that exalt the subject to a higher position in the chronicles of humanity, the recital of which compose a drama of thrilling interest.’35

‘Admella’ Poetry

Existent ephemeron verifies a direct correlation between telegraphic narratives of the disaster and its impact on the body of verse termed ‘Admella poetry’: ‘They [Admella poems],’ claimed one account, ‘consist for the chief part of versifications of the public telegrams in which the incidents of the shipwreck have been recorded.’36 Another reviewer claimed that Mossman’s ‘Narrative of the Wreck of the Admella’ consisted largely ‘of the particulars of the wreck already published in the newspapers’.37 Poetry coalesced with telegraphic communications to chronicle the interplay between tragedy, communal grief and valourous ideology inspired by the ‘disaster that thrilled Australia’. The Admella poets, like many of the telegraphic sources from which they drew, engaged in ‘the articulation of desire’ using an ‘elegiac currency ... [of] words, tears, sighs’.38

33 Register 15 August 1859.
34 Argus 31 March 1906, 6.
35 Samuel Mossman, Narrative of the Shipwreck of the ’Admella,’ Inter-Colonial Steamer, on the Southern Coast of Australia: Drawn up from Authentic Statements Furnished by the Rescuers and Survivors (Melbourne: J. H. Moulines, 1859) 5.
36 Register 24 August 1859, 2.
37 Register 1 December 1859, 2. Mossman’s volume was ‘published under the auspices of the Melbourne Admella Relief Fund Committee’.
38 Kate Lilley, ‘To Dy in Writinge: Figure and Narrative in Masculine Elegy’, PhD thesis (London: University of London, 1988) 50.
The *Admella* poems straddle the two ‘movements’ in the ‘modes of expressing sympathy’ the South Australian *Register* identified as developing in the disaster’s immediate aftermath: ‘One of them is a civic, the other a colonial movement’.\(^{39}\) While eighteen days after the wreck the *Register* claimed ‘We should require an almost double supplement to find room for all the ‘poetry’ concerning the recent shipwreck,’ the sheer volume of poetry alone indicates that verse-form responses to the wreck occurred within a much larger ‘colonial movement’.\(^{40}\) The unprecedented body of poetry also tells us something very important about the utility of poetry to capture and accentuate the ideologies of heroism underpinning the telegraphic transmissions from which volumes of press editorials drew their narratives.\(^{41}\) The poems as a collection therefore appeared to attempt to unite individual civic expressions of grief in response to the social drama of the disaster within a broader colonial movement expressing collective trauma, mourning and cultural heroism.

While the works by amateur Admella poets under examination here include poems specifically crafted as literary expressions of heroism, it should be recognised that the Admella poems of amateur writers spanned a variety of topical themes associated with the wreck.\(^{42}\) Some works also played a pivotal role in contextualising the collection of ‘Admella

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\(^{39}\) *Register* 18 August 1859, 6.

\(^{40}\) *Register* 18 August 1859, 6.

\(^{41}\) *Register* 24 August 1859, 2.

\(^{42}\) J S’s ‘Lines Occasioned by the Wreck of the Admella off the Coast off Cape Northumberland,’ appearing almost two weeks after the tragedy, is another example of Admella poetry. See *Portland Guardian and Normanby General Advertiser* 19 August 1859, 3. ‘J S’ appears to be a regular contributor of original poetry and
poetry’ as a form, such as Barry’s poem *The Wreck of the Admella: A Metrical Narrative* (1859). This verse was published in book form given the sheer length of the composition: ‘consisting of some 400 lines, irrespective of the “Introduction” in verse’. An important contextualising agent in Barry’s work was the poet’s aim to unite the twin elements that motivated the emergence and development of Admella poetry generally. Barry contended that poetry was ‘better adapted for preservation [of the incidents of the disaster] than the columns of a daily or weekly newspaper’; and asserted that his verse-form, as a:

memorial of the circumstances . . . has been complied entirely from recollections of the telegram and occasional statements published in the daily journals relative to the disaster, the writer having been unable to procure any complete record of the incidents, or to communicate personally with any of the survivors.

What is also interesting about Barry’s poem is that its appearance inspired somewhat critical comments regarding other ‘Admella’ poems emerging in the wreck’s aftermath. A critic for the *Register* claimed that Barry had ‘made an attempt to rescue the “Admella poetry,” of which we lately had so much, from the character of insipidity which everywhere marked it’ and suggested it was ‘a very credible specimen of colonial made poetry’.

Ralph Crane (2001) contends that ‘in the early colonial poetry of Australia and New Zealand the center was privileged over the periphery to the extent that Australia and New Zealand are effectively absent, while Britain is omnipresent. Or at least discrete parts of it are’. Amateur Admella poems do illustrate the tensions between registering British poetic conventions while concentrating attention on a real-life Australian tragedy that must necessarily imagine a collective colonial consciousness. Rather than simply replicating the literary tradition of writing about, to coin John Macy, the ‘madly eloquent romance of the sea’ Admella poets emphasised the interplay between this specific colonial event and tropes of heroism as a trait of colonial identity. Particular Admella poets deployed modifications and distortions of style by exploiting and adjusting traditional poetic structures to memorialise in verse the colonial equivalent of a ‘wound culture,’ to use Graham Huggan’s term, in the aftermath of the *Admella* disaster of 1859.

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social commentary on poetry to a number of colonial newspapers. See ‘The Joys that Gild Life’s Latter Days,’ *Argus* 10 February 1851, 4; *Register* 6 June 1855, 2; *Argus* 15 August 1856, 4; ‘Sea-side Thoughts,’ *Portland Guardian and Normanby General Advertiser* 4 April 1859, 3; ‘On the Death of T***** B*****, JNR., Aged 20 Years,’ *Advertiser* 21 October 1868, 3. Another example of Admella poetry includes a lengthy verse by ‘Moral’ (a pseudonym). See Moral, ‘The Wreck of the Admella,’ *Portland Guardian* 25 September 1903, 3. Yet another is Theta’s ‘The Wreck of the Admella’ which appeared seven days after the event.

*Adviser* 18 November 1859, 2. For an abstract of the first verse of Barry’s poem, please see *Register* 23 November 1859, 3.

44 Barry 3 & 4.

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The Poetry of Heroism: ‘This hero tale of Austral-land’

The Admella poems valourising heroism examined here were timely responses published between two weeks to twelve months of the actual event. In fact, they were the first examples of their kind among the volumes of verse poetry and prose writing by the more recognisable semi-amateur and semi-professional writers that followed, such as Adam Lindsay Gordon’s poem ‘From the Wreck’ (c. 1869) among others.\(^49\) Heroism as a trope is clear in the poem ‘In Memoriam’ by Theta (no doubt a pseudonym) appearing fourteen days after the event. Heroism also underpins the only poem attributable to a non-anonymous female poet, Caroline Carleton’s ‘The Wreck of the Admella’ (1859) which appeared around three and a half months after the disaster, and also in George Angas’ ‘The Wreck of the Admella’, appearing almost a year-to-the-day of the event itself.\(^50\) Although Angas’ (1822–1886) poem is typically dismissed by critics as lacking literary merit, the work enjoyed widespread popularity among the general readership.\(^51\)

Theta’s elegiac poem, ‘In Memoriam’ is as much a lament for the death of thirty-seven year-old Captain Charles Wright Harris, former commander of the schooner Waitemata, and a passenger aboard the Admella, as it was an ode to his courage and fatal heroism:

\[
\text{IN MEMORIAM} \\
\text{Beneath the surging wave} \\
\text{There lie the young and brave.} \\
\text{God rest their souls - - and save!} \\
\text{One of common mould,} \\
\text{Like valiant knight of old,} \\
\text{HARRIS—the stanch and bold.}\(^52\)
\]

A starving band to save, 
He dived beneath the wave, 
And found at length—a grave!

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\(^50\) Portland Guardian and Normanby General Advertiser, 19 August 1859, 3. Caroline Carleton (nee Baynes) was born in 1811 (d. 1874).

\(^51\) Later, the Royal Geographical Society compiled a posthumous collection of Angas’ literary and artistic work. See Advertiser, 7 July 1909, 7. His nephew, one Dr E Angas Johnson, later claimed of his uncle ‘[he] was not as good a poet as he was a painter’, but other reports at the time of his death acknowledged George Angas as ‘beyond doubt, an author and an artist of no mean worth’. See Advertiser, 30 August 1913, 6. For Angas’ obituary see South Australian Register 18 October 1886, 25.


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For such brave daring done,
Let the bright setting sun
Glance o’er a trophy won.

Hoist, hoist the flag on high !
Let the death-signal fly.
Seen by each passer by.

And the red beacon’s glare,
A sad memento bear
O’er the wild breakers there.

Adelaide, August 20. Theta.53

The poem undoubtedly drew from print and telegraphic accounts lauding Harris’ heroism in diving ‘beneath the wave’ attempting to save the ‘starving band’ of Admella survivors by retrieving submerged provisions and food. The ‘grave’ alluded to in the poem represents a tragic metaphor intimating the price of Harris’ real-life efforts; death by exhaustion on the desolate deck of the Admella. Incidents in the verse replicate telegraphic and newspaper narratives glorifying Harris’ downfall as personifying the true spirit of colonial self-sacrifice:

Might not the name of that noble follow, Captain Harris (who by his exertions in diving for food lost his life) be handed down to posterity with honours equal at least to those it is intended to confer on the generous men who rescued the suffers of the wreck? … for it may be safely inferred that it was through the exertions of the brave Captain Harris so many now live to tell of his noble efforts to save the lives of others.54

Theta also drew from telegraphic accounts his recognisably ironic and tragic reference to the ‘red beacon’s flare’. The imagery alludes to the navigation lights of the P. & O. Steamer Bombay, seen by the Admella’s survivors as she passed-by the wreck unnoticed.55

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53 Advertiser 22 August 1859, page 2.
55 Register 5 August 1909, 7. P. & O.’s steamer the Bombay was one of the largest ocean-going ships afloat at the time.

My pen shall add a testimony to men noble and daring': Poetry, Heroism and the Wreck of the SS Admella (1859). Nicole Anae.
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In Theta’s ‘In Memorium’, while the narrator characterises Harris as ‘One of common mould’, the verse laments and indeed glorifies the singularity of Harris’ extraordinary heroism. This instance of poetic license appears in direct response to a number of reports naturalising bravery and self-sacrifice as a ‘common’ characteristic of colonial masculinity. Those ‘on board the Admella were after all,’ claimed one report ‘but common men [my italics].’ That these men represented ‘an average extract from this community’ became a particularly salient point in emphasising a vital colonial ideology; ‘facts’ of heroism and self-sacrifice ‘makes us proud of our kindred and our nature’ and served as ‘proof that the impulses which prompted them are not confined to the men who did them’. The ‘common man’ trope thus emphasised not only an innate sense of colonial self-sacrifice as a communal given, but accentuated that this ‘common herd of humanity’ also distilled a ‘fairly representative’ quality of the ‘character and spirit’ of the colonial community itself.

The utility of the ‘common man’ trope thus appeared two-fold. The expression mobilised the broader community into identifying with an ideology eulogising acts of heroism specific to the Admella disaster. Additionally, the ‘common man’ trope underscored innate heroism and self-sacrifice as inherent expressions of collective colonial masculinity.

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56 Illustration was also reprinted in the Register 5 August 1909, 7.
57 Register 23 August 1859, 2.
58 Register 23 August 1859, 2.
59 Register 23 August 1859, 2.
Many of the Admella poets therefore subtly modified culturally-embedded Imperial traditions defining the literary genre of verse valourising bravery and heroism to better align literary codes with the acts of colonial heroism specific to the wreck of the \textit{Admella}. This oscillation is clear in Angas’ ‘The Wreck of the Admella’:

\begin{quote}
Old England hath her heroes –  
Her sons of bold renown –  
But none were braver than the lad  
Who in that surf went down.\textsuperscript{60}
\end{quote}

Here, Angas appears to adjust the tradition of appraising heroism against the Imperial centre by applying a non-derivative treatment in the section of the poem that reads as an elegy to the bravery of Danish crewman Sorem Holm (\textit{Admella’s} foremast hand).\textsuperscript{61} This destabilization quite deliberately achieves twin literary/ideological aims. On the one hand, Angas accommodates his own desire to recognise the death of a non-British subject as a courageous act of self-sacrifice in its own right:

\begin{quote}
Glory to Soren Holm!  
Forgotten though he be;  
The angels watch him as he died  
Whilst struggling with the sea.
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
The name of Soren Holm  
In golden letters write,  
And grave it on a tablet-stone  
Of marble fair and white.
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
Brave youth, of Denmark’s land,  
In vain he hath not striven ;  
Though waves swept o’er his noble head,  
His spirit is in Heaven.\textsuperscript{62}
\end{quote}

On the other, the adjustment provides Angas as a means to effectively re-write Holm’s valour as more in keeping with validating the collective ideology of \textit{colonial} masculinity emphasised in press reports of the wreck itself:

\textsuperscript{60} George French Angas, ‘The Wreck of the Admella,’ \textit{South Australian Register} 7 August 1860, 2.
\textsuperscript{61} For an account of Soren Holm’s bravery and the tragedy of his death, see \textit{Argus} 5 September 1859, 1S and \textit{Register} 5 August 1909, 7. Holm was one of the \textit{Admella’s} foremast hands. He was instrumental in the rescue of one of the \textit{Admella’s} survivors, George Hills. See \textit{Advertiser} 6 June 1916, 4. The award of £50 bequeathed to the relatives of Soren Holm by the Admella Shipwreck Reward and Relief Fund Committee, announced at the meeting held in the Speaker’s rooms of the House of Assembly in Adelaide on Monday 6 December 1859 was, I believe, never claimed. See \textit{Advertiser} 6 December 1859, 3; \textit{Argus} 2 May 1861, 3 (‘not yet claimed’); \textit{Argus} 31 March 1906, 6 (‘if they could be found’).
\textsuperscript{62} \textit{Register} 27 March 1874, 5.
hearts beat high with excited hopes ... The anxiety is intense ... suddenly the person who had hold of the rope let it slip. A cry of horror arises ... their hopes are gone. It was with a feeling of unutterable agony that they saw this brave lad [Soren Holm] who had risked his life ['the rope given him was too short'\(^63\)] ... thus sacrificed by a careless accident.\(^64\)

The tragedy of Soren Holm’s death was, for Mossman, ‘perhaps the most affecting ... [a]mong the many painful incidents which strew the narration with mournful regret,’\(^65\) Acclaimed even half a century after his actual death as ‘One of the grandest of many examples of heroism in connection with the wreck’, the story of Sorem Holm survives as a vital narrative enforcing heroism as an innately masculine trait of the collective colonial self.\(^66\) In fact, Holm’s personification as an emblematic hero in Admella poetry embodied the potent significance of his feat as always ‘particularly mentioned in the narrative’ of the wreck, whatever the medium.\(^67\)

> Then out spoke Soren Holm –  
> ‘Find me a rope,’ cried he, 
> ‘And I will swim and gain yon boat  
> That’s drifting out to sea.’\(^68\)

This concentration on acknowledging valour and celebrating heroism in Admella poetry as a distinct expression and innate constituent of colonial masculinity accorded with the Australian mood in response to the wreck:

> There is no established means of rewarding their daring ... Theirs is the deed which society at large must reward by extraordinary modes ... When the world is wiser it will cherish this spirit of self-sacrifice among its most heroic possessions. It will erect monuments to a class of heroes whom it appreciates but imperfectly now, and will canonize men whom it in nowise ranks with saints under its present creed.\(^69\)

Caroline Carleton’s Admella poem, ‘The Wreck of the Admella’, emerged coincidentally with Philip Barry’s *The Wreck of the Admella: A Metrical Narrative* as a celebration of courageous masculinity and the noble ‘common man’ colonial self. In this Carleton’s work ‘comprises a tradition of social poetry’ in the body of contemporary women’s writing ‘concerned with public issues’.\(^70\) Yet what makes Carleton’s poem especially significant is the fact that while her poem deploys conventional British traditions in her treatment of

\(^{63}\) Not only was the rope given to him too short, but ‘another was fastened to it’ and while ‘he reached the boat in safety ... on hauling in the line, the bend not being securely fastened, gave way’ leaving Holm to drift out to sea. His body was later discovered on the beach nearby the upturned life boat. *Advertiser* 3 September 1859, 3.

\(^{64}\) *Advertiser* 20 December 1859, 5.

\(^{65}\) Mossman 96.

\(^{66}\) *Register* 5 August 1909, 7.

\(^{67}\) *Portland Guardian* via *Otago Witness* Issue 406, 10 September 1859, 6.

\(^{68}\) *Register* 27 March 1874, 5.

\(^{69}\) *Register* 18 August 1859, 6.


‘My pen shall add a testimony to men noble and daring’: Poetry, Heroism and the Wreck of the *SS Admella* (1859). Nicole Anae.  
*Transnational Literature* Vol. 5 no. 2, May 2013.  
valour, the work’s climax subverts a predicable dénouement to also emphasise heroism as an innately masculine characteristic of the collective colonial self. Take, for instance, the following stanza from Carleton’s ‘The Wreck of the Admella’:

O Britain, may the day ne’er rise  
In which thy sons shall cease to claim  
For noble deeds the high emprize,  
And add fresh lustre to thy name!

Bravery is appraised here according to tenets of Imperial heroism and the credit heroic acts confer upon British national identity. The heroic deed, like the poem’s structure, returns to the lyric and elegiac traditions of the Imperial centre. Yet, the final four lines of Carleton’s poem present a counterpoint to this motif. Her dénouement interposes Australian individualism and heroism into the conventional Imperial discourse of valour. Sacrifice is memorialised here not as an act of British nationalism but as a homily celebrating Australian colonial masculinity and the preservation and futurity of an oral folkloric tradition valourising Admella heroism. The reconfiguring allows ‘social memory’ to ‘be reworked into the fabric of a nation’s founding cultural myths’.71 Carlton’s verse reveals that the real, yet ‘common’, men behind their respective feats of bravery pass from telegraphic missives into Admella poetry as heroic yet mythological beings:

And though no proud memorial rise  
To tell the deeds of that brave band,  
Our sons shall hear, with glistening eyes,  
This hero tale of Austral-land.

Carleton’s triumph in winning the Gawler Institute’s competition for a ‘Patriotic Song’ in November 1859 with her ‘Song of Australia’ was significant given the timing of the Admella disaster just three months earlier. In fact, the debate over the legitimacy of Carleton’s verse as a ‘Patriotic Song’ occurred at precisely the time Phillip Barry published his ‘attempt to rescue the “Admella poetry”’.72 The aims of the Gawler prize therefore appeared coincidental with a colonial desire to embody the outpouring of state patriotism in the wake of the Admella catastrophe with a verse form attaining particular cultural significance. Carleton’s ‘Song of Australia’ appeals to ‘deeds of heroism in the hour of peril’ which was nothing if not a direct reference to the Admella tragedy.

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72 *South Australian Register* 23 November 1859, 3
Leon (2009) contends that ‘Meaning given to colonial experiences were usually derived from the colonisers’ own milieu and often these meanings bore no relation to the specific realities of the colonies’. The Admella poets grappled with the problem of representation and language, particularly given their use of telegraphic reports as prime sources of imagery. Significantly, the poems narrators claim an exceptionally close proximity to the event itself that gives their voices an air of authenticity, and even perhaps credibility as testimony. In this, Admella poems evoke personal responses to the calamity of the wreck as a real-life disaster while attempting to construct ‘a discourse of the self composed to preserve and authenticate the authority of the speaking subject’. Readers of the poems however have no way of knowing if indeed the poet actually witnessed the event firsthand, or, if the poet is calling to mind an imagined scene that is purely illusory and/or fictionalised based on second or third hand accounts. It is questionable, though not impossible, that some poets did indeed witness rescue attempts, but if not firsthand, then certainly observed the communal aftershock to the wreck as it played out as a real-time tragedy in telegraphic offices around the country. In fact, Carleton not only indicates a direct experience of receiving news about

73 Register 28 December 1894, 5 & 6.
75 I could not at the point of publication determine the real name of the poets writing under the pseudonyms ‘Theta’ and ‘Coll’. However, ‘Theta’ did write poems and criticism, including regular journalistic reports, social commentaries and letters to the editor. See Advertiser 22 July 1858, 3; Hobart Mercury 4 October 1882, 3; Mercury 14 November 1900 p 6; Western Mail 18 May 1917, 43.
the disaster firsthand, but makes express reference to the significance of the telegraph in shaping the colonial mindset in response to the tragedy itself:

What words of dire import are these
That flash along th’ electric line?
Why pales the cheek of him who sees
The meaning of that quiv’ring sign?
And why among th’ assembled crowd
Is heard the stifled sob and shriek
Of hearts with sudden anguish bow’d,
And woe too great for lips to speak?  

For Carlton, the mechanised instrument of the telegraph succeeds in articulating a degree of grief that debilitates the speaking subject. In this, Carlton both spoke to and contested the claim of one report, that; Admella “‘poetry’… altogether lack (sic) the startling vigour, the deep pathos, and the stirring appeals’ of telegraphic accounts. Poetry as a form clearly provided Admella poets a viable means of expressing grief, evoking a rousing sense of heroism, and interweaving information relayed via telegraphic narratives to communicate powerful sentiments of valour in the rescue of survivors, as we see interwoven in Angas’ verse:

To east and west the tidings fly,
Borne on the flashing wire;
And distant cities hear the cry
From that far reef of agony
And burning words of fire
Wake to the rescue all the land
To save them ere they die;
And many a noble bend,
With stout resolve and purpose high,
Go forth to save them, or – to die!  

Acclaimed in 1859 as ‘one of the most terrible maritime disasters on record’, the wreck of the Admella became the benchmark measuring tragedy itself. Accounts of the Burke and Wills tragedy a mere two years after the Admella catastrophe inspired the following social commentary in 1861; ‘Nothing since the wreck of the Admella has cast such a gloom here’. Indeed, the wreck of the SS Gothenburg off the South Australian coast in 1875 inspired similar comparisons. While accounts 67 years after the wreck claimed it as ‘the most appalling wreck in the annals of South Australian history’, more recent reports claim the

77 Register 11 August 1860, 3.
78 Register 24 August 1859, 2.
80 E. H. Derrington, Station Master, Moreton Bay Courier 31 Aug 1859, 4.
81 Hawke’s Bay Herald Volume 5, Issue 236, 10 December 1861, 5.
82 Register 27 March 1875, 4.
83 Border Watch 7 August 1926, 2.
Admella tragedy ‘has become one of the outstanding features of Australian history’, while another report published almost half a century after the incident distinguished ‘the classic’ importance of “‘The Story of the Admella’” thus; ‘Time will never stale the anguish, the hurrah, or the heroic kick that is in it’.

‘In the poem of the Ship-wreck,’ the poet Byron wondered; ‘is it the storm or the ship which most interests?’ While the Admella poems in many ways offer ambivalent responses to his conclusion; ‘Both much undoubtedly’, their significance as a collection responsive to the Admella tragedy as a real-life event seemingly accorded with Byron’s final observation ‘but without the vessel, what should we care for the tempest?’ Admella poems map George Landow’s contention that ‘existentially and culturally, the crisis of the shipwreck and death at sea is a metaphor for the human voyage through life, and stands at its centre’. This mapping also achieves a particular literary end; it prevents the Admella poems from ‘sinking’ into what Byron describes as ‘mere descriptive poetry’. In fact Admella poems document that as an event, the wreck of the SS Admella became a catalyst precipitating unprecedented cultural change binding colonials together in various narratives – telegraphic, poetic, folkloric – expressing cultural validation and idealising manifestations of an innately heroic colonial self; ‘The sterling heroes of the land/Who come, with glorious purpose high/Resolved to do or die’.

Admella poems to this day mark ‘the human voyage’ survivors and the greater community, then as now, navigated in the aftermath of this event. Poetic imagery drew on telegraphic accounts to ‘carry the reader as it were to the scene of the [Admella] wreck itself’. Even today, these visions of the wreck inspire coalesces between the past and present expressions of communal commemoration. Telegraphic accounts in part recreated the disater and brought the drama ‘as [if] it were face to face with us in this room, till we [begin] at last to feel as though we stood on the beach witnessing’. This technology also inspired Admella poets to take up in their own way the Register’s declaration respecting ‘the brave fellows who imperilled their own lives to save the rescued twenty-two.’ ‘Something should be done’ claimed the reporter ‘to compensate them for the risks they incurred ; and something to keep their glorious example before the public eye as a perpetual stimulus to like

87 Thomas Moore, Letters and Journals of Lord Byron: With Notices of his Life (New York: George Dearborn, 1837) 622.
89 E. H. Derrington, Station Master, Moreton Bay Courier 31 Aug 1859, 4.
91 Register 23 August 1859, 3
92 Register 16 August 1859.
heroism’. Yet the Admella poets also took up what Captain James Fawthorpe, the commander of the Portland lifeboat, memorialised as his own self-avowed mission; ‘The bravery of that boat’s crew cannot be too highly eulogised, and my pen shall add a testimony to men noble and daring in thus risking their lives for their fellow men’. 

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93 Register 16 August 1859.
Transnational Impulses as Simulation in Colin Johnson’s (Mudrooroo’s) Fiction
Clare Archer-Lean

Introduction
Mudrooroo is a black Australian writer who has ostensibly been focused on responding to particular national concerns, namely stories of first contact between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians and the need to restore Indigenous primacy to the creative rendering of that encounter. And yet the creative construction of this encounter in Mudrooroo’s writing is presented through a series of exorbitances; a string of across, through or beyond positions which exceed any source, so much so as to reveal the nationalist origin to be illusory. Post-colonial nationalist literature is always a paradoxical search for the originary, a desire to find an essence from the past that will reveal and define the nation in the present. As Ken Gelder has argued using J.M Coetzee’s Elizabeth Costello, while European literatures are activities in depth, writing for themselves, colonial national literatures attempt to ‘reveal’ the newly constructed nation to others.¹ In fact, all literature is simulation, a representation not the real. But the newly emerging national literature of the colonial state has much to prove. In the case of Australia – national myths and the early national literatures echoing such myths – were, in turn, drawn from colonial dystopian and utopian fantasies.² These included the fantasy of a land full of opportunity and involved a desire to continue the connection to the imperial motherland yet assert a new, vibrant and cohesive identity that belied the reality of Indigenous dispossession. In the process, early nationalist literatures can fail to acknowledge the illusory nature of the national myths that inform them and can make opaque their simulation and construction of identity.

In Mudrooroo’s works, transnational excess (in fact excesses of many forms) disrupt any presumption of originary nationalist clarity in a number of ways: these include recasting key figures in Australian colonialist and consequently nationalist literatures as consciously misrepresenting themselves; flooding the work with inter-textual allusions from diverse sources; and revelling in a form of magic realist play that is necessarily inconclusive and confounding mimetic logic. There are obvious problems with these excesses. In the postmodern disruption of colonialist and nationalist metanarratives the works destabilise Indigenous regional specificity through a bricolage of pan-Indigenous citations. This paper will explore Mudrooroo’s Master series in terms of its location on the line between postmodern disruption of nationalist monoliths and the ‘no place’ this evokes.

Textual Context to the Series
The Master Series is a grouping of five novels. It arguably begins with the realist historical fiction Doctor Wooreddy's Prescription for Enduring the Ending of the World³ – a text told from the perspective of Wooreddy, Trugernanni’s husband as he anthropologically critiques the shocking invasion of the Europeans in Tasmania. This novel repositions the historical

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figure George Augustus Robinson who was Chief Protector of the Aborigines in Tasmania and Victoria 1839-1849. Robinson is a figure who has appeared in many Australian literary works, including writings by Robert Drewe, Gary Crew and Richard Flanagan. Robinson’s prolific diaries have been seen as important historical insights into first contact Indigenous culture. In Mudrooroo’s rendering, the figure is exposed as self-serving, incompetent and lascivious, but simultaneously self-representing as benevolent and scholarly.

The second book *Master of the Ghost Dreaming* (often seen as the actual first in the *Master series*) rewrites the first story in what Mudrooroo termed maban realism. For the author, maban realism is akin to other forms of magic realism, but is informed by his conception of an Australian Indigenous world view. The implications of his particular use of magic realism in this series will be discussed further below. It is in *Master of the Ghost Dreaming* that we see the first movement from a specific attempt to redress and respond to a prior nationalist literary agenda and history to a more transnational turn. The biographical preface to Mudrooroo’s own website, is entitled The Global Nomad, here the author is quoted as saying:

‘When I was writing Wooreddy, I still considered my ego not large enough to tackle Australia’ – which elicits the question: ‘And now do you consider it large enough?’

‘After doing my *Master of the Ghost Dreaming* series, I consider it bigger than Australia, as big as the universe,’ he replies with a grin, which makes one doubt his words until one realises the extent of his travels.

It is clear from *Master of Ghost Dreaming* on; Mudrooroo is seeking to extend the scope of the creative project beyond national lines. The novels in the series are, from here, increasingly exorbitant in the mix of genre styles, extremity of event and use of citations. First there is the use of a style akin to South American magic realism with its conflation of temporalities and deployment of magic as nominally accepted within the real, juxtaposed with multifarious Indigenous and global citations. The textual space is one where nation is non-specific, temporality is cyclical and repetitive, tone is anti-colonial and space is pan-Indigenous, not regionally specific to country.

In *Master of the Ghost Dreaming*, Wooreddy is renamed Jungamuttuk and Truggernanni is renamed Ludjee. In fact, all the works are preoccupied with themes of naming and renaming and re-starting and repeating story. This preoccupation can be seen as evidence for the author’s deliberate attempt to exceed the national space and to reframe the literary act as a simulation not mimesis. In *Master of the Ghost Dreaming*, Ludjee and Jangamuttuk have a son, George, who the text suggests, is probably the biological son of George Augustus Robinson. The Indigenous characters travel on dreaming companions, totems, in their attempt to create a ceremony of healing and combat the colonial invasion of Australia at a mythic level, and they succeed in so far as they use totemic powers to shift environmental forces and destroy Robinson’s church.

Jangamuttuk, Ludjee, George and their companions’ escape from Robinson’s mission-style internship and death.\(^7\)

The next work in the series, *The Undying*\(^4\), is another first book of sorts, in that it is the first of what is sometimes called the Vampire Trilogy, the three books that complete the series. In these novels the magic realist style is fused with another genre, further adding to a sense of a fiction that is deliberating attempting to exceed boundaries. The final three novels use many tropes of Gothicism, such as monstrous creatures, violence and titillation.\(^9\) These later books are dominated by the vampiric character, Amelia Fraser. This character is referencing the real historical, ship wrecked character, Eliza Fraser, who preoccupied Australian national art, literature and film from the 1830s to the 1990s.\(^10\) Mudrooroo reconfigures her as the epitome of consumption, a vampire, making explicit both the violence and theft of the colonial endeavour and also of colonisation as a clash of representations and cultural stories. Amelia enslaves several Indigenous characters, including her insipid servant Galbol Wegdna (variously renamed by himself and Amelia as Spirit Master, Singer of Whales, Moma Cooper, Purritta Munda, People Killer, Renfield, Renfiel, the ferryman and Renfi). This ancillary character is interesting as an emblem that unites the author’s thematic preoccupation firstly with naming as simulating identity\(^11\) and secondly with multiple citations. Galbol Wegdna’s naming blends Indigenous motifs (of language and naming protocols), Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* and classical myth. The final three novels are all narrated in first person by George (and at times Amelia). George is now a shape-shifting Dingo and central protagonist, who is bound to Amelia by blood sharing, servile desire and fear. In *The Undying* Indigenous totems are no longer corporeally separate as the characters become shape shifters, evoking another genre convention, that of the trickster story.

*Underground*,\(^12\) the third novel sees Wadawaka captured by Amelia and George his attempted rescuer. In this novel, like *The Undying*, Jangamuttuk, Ludjee and their companions meet local Indigenous groups and repeat ceremonies to cleanse the world of the colonial invasion and of Amelia’s monstrous Moma presence. The final book, *The Promised Land*\(^13\) shifts the narrative to the gold rush fields. The characters seem to be immortal and timeless, rehearsing and repeating the story continually in a way that elides resolution. They are constantly on a ship floating indefinitely away from any specific sense of nation and history.

An important marker, then, of the textual tissue created by Mudrooroo is a collage of ‘stories’ from global referents. This is not simply answering back to colonial text, but a

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\(^10\) Eliza Fraser was famously shipwrecked on what is now known as Fraser Island off the coast of Queensland in 1836. Her story of survival amongst the Badtjala people became a colonial and then national preoccupation in Australian history, art, literature and film, see Kay Schaffer, *In the Wake of First Contact: The Eliza Fraser Stories* (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1995).


\(^12\) Mudrooroo, *Underground* (Pymble, N.S.W: Angus & Robertson, 1999).

fusion of narratives into a new spectral and floating transnational Australian consciousness. There are African markers, European canonical texts, and Classical texts. There is also allusion to Native North American texts, through the trickster figure and specific writings by Native American authors such as Gerald Vizenor. And while, the work is fundamentally transnational there are specific Australian historical and political incidents retold.

**Dis-placing Nation**
The ever-widening spheres of place in Mudrooroo’s fiction are evoked primarily by citation of significant historical, literary and ethnographic texts. The magic realist assemblage contests the veracity of national literatures and histories, exposing the threat such works pose as a horrific all-consuming monolith. Mudrooroo’s *Master* series meets and evades the genre conventions of magical realism in interesting ways. Mudrooroo is using a genre that deploys ambiguity, ambiguously. His use of magic realism exposes the way in which such national histories and literatures are simulations, not mimetic representations. In positioning representations of nation as *both* dangerous and simulated, the *Master* series offers no replacement ‘real’ but rather suggests such representations are simulacra which bear no relation to reality whatsoever. The excessive and ironic nature of the magic realist form suggests post-modern approaches to national ‘truths.’ The diverse local and transnational allusions construct a textually self-referential and hyperbolic relation to place which eliciting a disquieting of national presumptions. The textual pastiche of stories and places in the *Master* series presents an overtly textual world beyond national boundaries.

To suggest national representations of identity are simulations, or not ‘real,’ is to move the *Master* series out of debates over cultural accuracy and into the post-modern (which is concerned to show that ‘truth’ is never free of power distortions, whilst what is ‘real’ is always open to discussion and debate). Ontological explorations into selfhood have always been inflected with transience and the spectral in Mudrooroo’s oeuvre. In a recent article he states:

> We are not fixed static entities inhabiting a fixed static world or universe, but dynamic beings evolving along with as part of the universal flux. My identity is not real but imaginary assembled by the mind.

This is a deliberate call to existentialist understandings. The sense of identity – whether personal or national – as not real but rather a product of the social imagination in an unsettled world, also brings to mind Baudrillard’s notion of the simulacra. Baudrillard’s sense of the simulacra is introduced through Borges tale of the Empire that grew alongside its own...

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15 It is acknowledged that the author has made contrary essentialist claims, see Mudrooroo, *Milli Milli Wangka*.
16 In this same article, Mudrooroo *assembles and imagines* the death of his sister, Betty Polglaze.
18 Of course, the comment by the author is not only an existential concept of identity, which would incorporate conceptions of freedom of thought as connected to real world concerns. It can be read as a refusal to acknowledge some of the constructions of self-identity that he, himself, may have colluded in. The focus here is on light it sheds on Mudrooroo’s transnational literary impetus.
scale representative map, until the territory disappeared and only fragments of the map remained:

The territory no longer precedes the map, nor survives it. Henceforth, it is the map that precedes the territory – precession of simulacra – it is the map that engenders the territory.\footnote{Baudrillard 166.}

In the post-colonial sense, this is clarified by Benedict Andersen, who locates the genealogy of national imaginings in the colonial processes of measuring and imagining itself via museum artefacts, census and maps. Such records and categorisations inform the artefacts, imaginings and simulation of national history and literature\footnote{Benedict Anderson, \textit{Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism} (London; New York: Verso, 1991) 181.} to the exclusion of Aboriginal records, cultural categorisations, tribal language data and the like. Aboriginal epistemological approaches to land were/are quite different and not validated by the colonial process:

Aboriginal knowledge of country, from which a sense of place comes, constitutes particular stretches of land (including waterways) unified by a number of places set out along a track or number of tracks. These places may or may not be codified in the discourse of the \textit{bugarrigarra} [Dreaming]. Larger or smaller stretches of country are held through complex guardianship by communities and individuals.\footnote{Krim Benterrak, Stephen Muecke and Paddy Roe, \textit{Reading the Country: Introduction to Nomadology} (Fremantle W.A, Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1996) 274.}

Within colonial histories and literatures – as they do in Andersen’s illumination of museum artefacts, census and maps – key national tropes become the maps that precede the territory, forming the nation’s sense of itself and projection of itself to others. Early Australian censuses and maps constructed a ‘real’ that is absent of Indigenous presence. Other historical tropes such as Eliza Fraser as lost woman, among savages, become similar recurring simulations. These nationalist simulations are not neutral, rather they express ideas and values derived from, and justified by, the colonial system. The \textit{Master} series subjects them to magic realist irony.

Magic realism is traditionally defined as a genre that forces the reader to accept ‘incredible’ happenings as momentarily ordinary.\footnote{Jean Durix, \textit{Mimesis, Genres and Post-colonial: Deconstructing Magic Realism} (London: Macmillan Press Ltd 1998) 79.} But magic realism is also a genre that evokes contention. Within post-colonial frames, it risks losing its meaning as a synchronisation of forms when the Indigenous epistemology is deemed magical and the European realist and, by implication, superior.\footnote{Alison Ravenscroft, ‘Dreaming of Others: \textit{Carpentaria} and its Critics’, \textit{Cultural Studies Review} 18.2 (2010) 196.} Magic realism has been critiqued as an ‘anthropological’ vision of Indigenous cultures. It has been rejected as exoticism, a literary commodification of Indigenous cultures globally.\footnote{Maria Takolander, ‘Magic Realism and Fakery: After Carpentier’s “Marvellous Real” and Mudrooroo’s “Maban Reality”’ \textit{Antipodes} 24.2 (2010) 166.} But as Takolander illuminates, the form, and Mudrooroo’s use of it, is inherently ironic. It is deliberately presenting the unreal as
real, renelling in simulation, replicating the way we can only understand the value of ‘real’ through story, through maps. This has important post-modern effects for nationalist representations of place; as Takolander clarifies, ‘the mimetic basis for the nationalist project of ethnic representation, as a result of the ironic and rhetorical nature of the magic realist mode, is undermined.’ In the Master series the national project of representation is contested as simultaneously a voracious consumer of diversity and a simulation.

Structurally and thematically the works are excessive and hint at a continual simulation and rehearsal without origin. In fact, the Master of the Ghost Dreaming series negates expectations of a linear series. It can be considered as a group of five novels beginning with Doctor Wooreddy’s Prescription for Enduring the Ending of the World (1987), of 4 novels beginning with Master of the Ghost Dreaming (1991), or more recently as a Vampire Trilogy beginning with The Undying (1998). The series complicates any sense of an originary text, or of cause and effect. Excessive Gothic scenes and mimicry of Indigenous rituals are piled on top of one another with little explanation or connection. They do not reflect a clearly locatable pre-existent real in any way. The characters are immortal, timeless, and trans-human, rehearsing and repeating the story continually in a way that displaces dénouement. The events are excessive, with Star Wars-like sky battles occurring between totem shape-shifters armed with laser producing crystals.

Within this excessive and ironic use of the magic realist form, the Master series is preoccupied with two central nation-forming historical motifs. These two motifs have morphed continually in literature, art and history over the last 200 years. These are George Augustus Robinson – a simulacrum of the myth of Indigenous auto-genocide in the colonial encounter, and Eliza Frazer – a simulacrum of the myth of European purity and Indigenous savagery. Both figures recur across the series and demand their own distinction from other characters while consuming all.

Amelia, for example, insists she will ‘remain a virgin until…[her] ceasing’ but consumes and enslaves Indigenous and European characters throughout the texts. Amelia’s words are hyper-ironic, a deliberate construction of an illusion of innocence – or an absence of ‘experience’ – that her actions belie. In this way, she is allegorically a form of national artistic introspection that is both dangerously xenophobic and assimilationist while fraudulently masking its own simulated state. It is significant that the vampiric Amelia is an artist, choosing to locate the inception of her story in Victorian London, where she is producing cards depicting romanticised and erotic female forms. She seems to entice her Dracula-like master through her artistic imaging of the female body; he is attracted to the corruptibility her artistic representations evince. But Amelia recognises her art to be artifice and fraud in discussing her use of her sister Eliza as unknowing model:

25 Takolander, 165.
26 Takolander, 167.
27 Mudrooroo, Doctor Wooreddy’s Prescription for Enduring the Ending of the World.
29 Robinson is a figure referencing the historical Chief Protector of the Aborigines in Tasmanian in the early 1800s.
30 See above, footnote 13.
31 Mudrooroo, The Undying 66.

Although on occasion her pose was somewhat indecorous, especially when sleep claimed her, my swift sketches did away with such ungainliness. She was unaware of the uses I made of her …

Amelia, arguably, stands for fiction itself, an imaginary representation of the simulacrum without substantive origin at the heart of any national literature. She substitutes her sister Eliza Fraser – an historical figure who came to simulate a first contact ‘real’ for artists throughout Australian history. And she scripts herself into the narrative frames of *Vanity Fair* and *Dracula* as well as the history of George Augustus Robinson. Amelia is always a simulation, empty of origin, carrying her earth with her, attempting to consume and assimilate all she encounters, an allegory of nation and literature: the map that has become the real.

Amelia’s allegorical status also deconstructs colonial imaginings (and erasure) of Indigenous story. Her construction is as the vampiric /erotic shipwrecked European woman feeding on Indigenous characters such as George and Gunatinga. Both become servants to Amelia, the former is the son of protagonists Jangamuttuk and Ludjée (and the biological son of the character George Augustus Robinson) who shape shifts into a Dingo. Gunatinga is a pitiable and continually renamed character, searching for power through accidents that he interprets as omens. Amelia’s dominion over these two, along with other male characters, and her hyper-sexualisation and violence conjure the trope of the vagina détente. This portrayal, while deeply sexist is, in post-colonial terms, doubly allegorical, signifying the European simulation of Indigenous people through images from European Gothic fears and desires. Indigenous communities in the texts are blamed for Amelia’s acts of savagery and punished by further European acts of savagery. For example, the violent and boorish, local, colonial commander, Captain Torrens stumbles on the remnants of Amelia’s murderous consumption of a ship’s crew. He attributes the acts of ‘savagery’ to the local Indigenous people and conducts his own horrific retribution. In this way, Amelia as vampiric spectre demonstrates how the simulation of Indigenous savagery in first contact history, a history foundational to nation, replaced the real. To further complicate the narrative excesses, Captain Torrens is secretly a shape shifting Gothic werewolf. Such excesses in plot and character are reinforced through the strategic use of citations. These citations are textual simulations of earlier textual simulations: both of Indigenous and transnational stories.

**The role of the transnational**

Transnational citations characterise Mudrooroo’s work. Bruce Bennet defines Mudrooroo’s poem *Dalwurra: Black Bittern* as international and syncretic in its movement from Western Australia to Singapore, India, Scotland and England. Both India and, more recently, Nepal are obviously crucial sites of creative inspiration for the author. In *The Undying* the heavy use of the term ‘shaman’ and of shape-shifting evokes a new transnational influence, the First

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33 See nineteenth century historian John Curtis and twentieth century Australian writers and artists such as Patrick White and Sydney Nolan among others.
34 See Clark, ‘Terror’ 121-38.

Nations American trickster mythology. The trickster motif is referenced in the epigraph to *Underground*, the second volume of the vampire trilogy:

> We danced roundabout ... dressed in our breechcloths and academic sashes with all the animals and ghosts under the redwood trees ... the footdogs laughed and barked from the rim. Gerald Vizenor.\(^{37}\)

Mudrooroo prefaces this citation with a prequel to the text: ‘No reality where none intended.’\(^{38}\) Juxtaposition of these two statements suggests that Mudrooroo perceives the act of writing as a kind of trickery, a confounding of expectations and a preoccupation with the connection between nationalist literature, colonisation and simulacrum. The reference is significant also because Gerald Vizenor is a Native North American writer and a theorist, who discusses American literary representation of Indians as tragic ‘simulations.’\(^{39}\) Mudrooroo’s citation indicates a further evocation of post-modern simulation in identity forming processes. These intertextual allusions reveal the way nations are always simulations produced through stories, and the novels strategically juxtapose diverse stories to produce new understandings.

One important intertextual allusion in the *Master* series is the continual morphing and shape-shifting of an ‘African’ signifier, Wadawaka, who tells African oral stories, and brings knowledge of other silenced histories. Wadawaka is a transnational referent and shifts in signification continually. He is not a ‘real’ presence: at various points an escaped African American slave, a traveller, the ‘black gentleman’ highwayman John Summers and whaler Queequeg through the *Moby Dick* allusion.\(^{40}\) Like Amelia, Wadawaka’s shape shifting transgresses boundaries between historical and literary referents. While the ‘highwayman,’ black Englishman John Summers, is not an actual historical figure, he represents African bushrangers in Australia’s colonial past. This is combined with the works’ thematic incongruences; he is both a sexual predator of, and is psychically enslaved by, Amelia.

Throughout the vampire trilogy classical citations pervade but in the second novel, *Underground*, these become exorbitant. This is partly a satirical response to the historical George Augustus Robinson’s proclivity for renaming his Indigenous ‘wards’ after classical figures ‘since he considered some of us still pagans, he gleefully gave those ones heathen names: Jason, Hector, Hercules.’\(^{41}\) But it is also part of the author’s hyperbolic pastiche of citations. The primary narrator, George, likens his journey to that of Jason or Ulysses in its ceaselessness.\(^{42}\) Amelia, who intercepts George’s narration with her own, likens herself at different times to Kore (Persephone) in her sense of her voluptuous sexuality, her immortality, her underground inhabitancy and her need for sarcophagus.\(^{43}\) Amelia later cites the story of Medea, who takes retribution for her husband Jason’s betrayal and infidelity by murdering her own children. The citation then becomes enacted as inter-textual allusion when

\(^{37}\) Mudrooroo, *Underground* epigraph.

\(^{38}\) Mudrooroo, *The Undying* preface.


\(^{40}\) Clark, ‘Terror’ 132.


Amelia performs her own parallel act of ‘matricide’ in murdering the babies she has stolen. *Underground* also sees Wadawaka captured by Amelia and George (his attempted rescuer) in a complex re-gendering of *Orpheus and Eurydice*, with George evading the Giant Devil Dingo / Cerberus to search for his dearest mate, Wadawaka / Eurydice who is trapped in the underground domain of, not Hades but Amelia. These are not just transnational citations, but supranational, referents from beyond national specificity and temporality.

The general allusion to Dracula made in Amelia’s recollection of her transmogrification to vampiric state become specific when textual allusions to *Dracula* are added in the final book, *The Promised Land*. This novel opens with the noctambulism of a new character Lucy, being ameliorated by the thinly veiled homo-erotic support of her ‘chum’ Mina. This is until she marries a newly widowed George Augustus Robinson. This final novel also shifts the narrative to the gold rush fields; *Moby Dick* and *Vanity Fair*, among other texts, is woven in, with a revision of Becky Sharp intertwined into the mix of characters and Wadawaka’s history being extended to incorporate time on the *Pequod* as part of Ahab’s obsessive quest in *Moby Dick*. Such assemblage is a form of parataxis, juxtaposing English, American and classical literary texts with Australian historical tropes that have become literary. Ken Gelder draws on the reading practises of Wai Chee Dimock and Susan Stanford Friedman to illuminate such parataxis. He has described the impact of parataxis as rendering the different referents, and their connective tissues, as remote and proximate. The different classical, literary, and historical referents are proximate and their assemblage shed light on each other, revealing Australian national discourse is not written in mimetic isolation but is always produced in relation to other texts. But the excesses implicit in such assemblage mean there can be no mimetic logic of transmission of the Australian nation, as fixed or singularly ‘real’ – other than aesthetically, or discursively on the level of enacted fictive reality within the story of nationhood. The excessive combination can mean Australia is a kind of distant ‘trace woven into a larger, often incongruous transnational fabric.’

To further reinforce this idea, the textual citations selected are not simply literary and transnational. The works are flooded with transregional Indigenous ethnographic records and story. They come from regions as diverse as South Australia, Central Australia, Northern Territory, Tasmania, and the Gulf of Carpentaria in Northern Queensland. The Tasmanian element, vital to European stories of first contact, is present with reincarnations of Wooreddy and Truggernanni. For example, Mudrooroo selects ethnographic records such as those of T.G.H Strehlow who attributed major literary worth to the song cycles recorded. Strehlow’s transcription of Central Australian Aranda people’s *The Bandicoot Ancestor Song of Ilbalintja* features bandicoot digging through the earth, wounded and ostracised by the great ancestor spirit and inscribed with spiritual importance. This bandicoot is simulated as the ‘shaman’ Bandicoot in Mudrooroo’s novel, *Underground*, a shaman who is similarly ostracised, blamed for Amelia’s corruption of the land by his community, yet able to assist

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45 Mudrooroo, *Promised Land* 220.
46 Gelder 11.
47 Gelder.
48 Gelder 9.
49 It is important to acknowledge the many spellings for Truganini. Mudrooroo’s use of Truggernanna is not one of the common spellings.
50 Strehlow in Mudrooroo, *Milli Milli Wangka* 32.
Jangamuttuk and his allies with knowledge of the underground lairs Amelia inhabits. What is significant about the inclusion of many of these referents is that they appear to operate in two ways, similar to the historical European allusions to Eliza Fraser and George Augustus Robinson. Milyado, or Old Bandicoot is a restoration of Indigenous knowledge and worldview to a creative rendering of the colonial encounter, an act of proximity, in the same way that the re-construction of Eliza Frazer is an anti-colonial act. But this citation is also quite spectral and stammering. Milyado is at another level a plot device, providing information, but then destabilising his own surety:

Old Bandicoot’s eyes mightn’t be good anymore; but he doesn’t need them when he’s got the sun in the morning and the moon at night, except he can’t see them and often he can’t tell if its day or night – but forget all that, it’s only a carry on, he’s got a secret, you know. If he wants to, he can see all right; but why should he when he likes warm darkness.

This is not only a characterising of elderly ramblings, as many characters are voiced through this combination of soliloquy and shifting logic. Old Bandicoot is both present, asserting Indigenous presence, yet not quite present. He is openly sharing knowledge, yet immediately retracting it, a displacement of assertive identity itself.

Mudrooroo’s work draws on other published versions of traditional Aboriginal literature. The ‘mischievous crow’ is a key story collected by South Australian Ngarrindjeri elder David Unaipon in the early twentieth century. It tells of a figure whose attempts at game playing and trickery end up creating many positive elements in the physical world. He is both good and bad, making mistakes frequently. Mudrooroo’s adaptation of this textual referent follows a similar pattern, yet like Milyado is also continually engaging in ambiguous double talk, both evoking presence and hinting at his own entity as simulated representation within the Master series. There are also prominent inter-textual references from Dick Roughsey’s children’s stories. Roughsey’s first story, The Giant Devil Dingo, was published in 1973. The figure, Giant Devil Dingo, appears in Mudrooroo’s Undying and Underground, evoked through the narrator’s shape shifting to Dingo form. It is also reinforced by the seemingly random appearance of a specific ‘Giant Devil Dingo’ in Underground. This giant beast appears to menace George as he attempt to journey underground to save Wadawaka. Again there is the strong conjuring of Indigenous story to counter the colonial erasure combined with the destabilising sense that this Giant Devil Dingo is not grounded in country, but simulation from elsewhere, appearing at random within the complex fabric of the author’s stream of associations. In fact, its appearance at the entrance to an underground world, elsewhere in the novel likened to Hades, conflates this Lardil story with a classical reference to Cerberus, the three-headed hellhound that guards Hades.

51 Mudrooroo, Underground 61.
52 The crow is a significant figure because ‘The Mischievous Crow’ is the longest and most complicated of the stories collected and recorded by David Unaipon, one of the earliest published Aboriginal writers. See David Unaipon, Legendary tales of the Australian Aborigines, eds. Stephen Muecke and Adam Shoemaker (Carlton, VIC: Melbourne University Press, 2001).
53 Unaipon.
If not nation, where?
These references to recorded Indigenous stories are not simply a counter-discursive opposition to the presence of consumptive nationalist signifiers. It is a post-modern refusal to privilege white victory. But as with the transnational, North American, African, European and classical referents, they specifically draw on ‘recorded’ and published stories. They are abstracted and placed as one of many simulations in a transnational bricolage of stories. Here, they have currency to dispute nationalist and colonial imaginings yet they are dislocated from regional specificity. There are problems with this relocation of stories within a cosmos rather than a specific country or place. While the *Master* series is post-modern and does not claim-to-be representative, there is no recognisable ‘real’ place within the series at all.

In his critical writing, Mudrooroo has ‘maban reality’ as having ‘firm grounding in the earth or country, together with an acceptance of the supernatural as part of everyday reality.’ But, this stance has some inconsistencies. The earth-in which Mudrooroo grounds and sets his writing is not regionally specific. The precursor to the series, *Dr Woorreddy’s Prescription for Enduring the Ending of the World* (1983) is certainly set in Tasmania and *Master of the Ghost Dreaming* (1991) is mostly set on Bruny Island. But in *The Undying* (1998), *Underground* (1999) and *The Promised Land* (2000) such specificity of place is obfuscated. In fact, much action occurs on that universal metaphor for transnational community, the ship. When on land, references to weather or compass direction west, gold rush activity, colonial settlement towns, or the Fraser shipwreck are incongruent, they lead nowhere. There are few specifically regional land marks or specific textual cues in setting to locate a regional connection. The writing, then, presents a paradox, evoking story grounded in land while abrogating mimetic and realist evocations of the specific nation or region. This is not new to magic realist novels, in fact the genre is characterised by the inconclusive. The ability of the magic realist novel to realise this potential is a theme taken up in several of Salman Rushdie’s essays. The magic realist genre is always marked by a fictional necessity to tell stories that are hampered by ambiguous distancing, a desire to violate mimetic logic and undermine all claims to narrative ‘mastery.’

Conclusions
*The Master* series is an assemblage of simulations beyond the specifics of an individual nation. The structure, characters and events with the series are all marked by excess and morph continually, subjecting the notion of origin and the ‘real’ to magic realist irony. In fact, the nation is imaginary, a simulation, and through the allegorical positioning of Amelia and Robinson the texts evoke the spectral horror implicit in past ‘maps’ that would erase and consume diversity. The works suggest that it is a delusion to think that we have ‘pinned down’ the physical and cultural boundaries of nationality in the maps and artefacts of colonisation. Mudrooroo’s allusive and ironic *Master of the Ghost Dreaming Series* compiles Indigenous Australian with transcontinental stories and suggests that our imaginings – literary and historical – are maps that can replace the real in our relationships to place. The

56 Mudrooroo, *Master of the Ghost Dreaming*.
57 Mudrooroo, *The Promised Land*.

effects of dislocating Indigenous story from regional specificity are disregarded in this postmodern pastiche of stories.
Infinite Worlds:
Eighteenth-Century London, the Atlantic Ocean, and Post-Slavery in
S.I. Martin’s *Incomparable World*, Lawrence Hill’s *The Book of Negroes*, David
Dabydeen’s *A Harlot’s Progress*, and Thomas Wharton’s *Salamander*
John Clement Ball

In *Black London: Life before Emancipation*, Gretchen Holbrook Gerzina writes of how, on discovering that 15,000 people of African descent were living in London in 1768, she was struck by a vision of her present-day London as ‘suddenly occupied by two simultaneous centuries’1 – an eighteenth-century city of black pageboys and entertainers, of black beggars and prostitutes and autobiographers, overlaying the late twentieth-century one like a ghostly palimpsest. In the same decade as Gerzina was articulating these spectral imaginings, four prominent black British novelists were similarly looking back to the eighteenth century – to the final decades of the British slave trade, to the Atlantic Ocean across and around which it took place, and to London, where the abolitionist cause was advanced. Caryl Phillips, S.I. Martin, David Dabydeen, and Fred D’Aguiar all published novels in the 1990s that have black protagonists and are set entirely or partly in the eighteenth-century metropolis. In the subsequent decade, two Canadian novelists did likewise: Thomas Wharton and Lawrence Hill both published historical novels featuring female ex-slaves that end up in London after long and circuitous ocean journeys.2 Since historical novels are always prompted by present-tense obsessions and therefore frequently gaze at two centuries simultaneously, how does this outpouring of eighteenth-century-oriented narrative reflect and enhance our contemporary understanding of slavery, the Atlantic world, and London? What geographies and identities, what forms of mobility and dwelling, what personal quests and local or global communities do these novels imagine for the imperial capital’s black inhabitants at a time when the prevailing winds were blowing abolition and revolutionary political change across the Atlantic world? And how do these texts’ transhistorical, transnational, circum-Atlantic visions of London echo – or anticipate – other postcolonial writings about the world city of our time and the black person’s place in it?

The four novels examined in this essay – Martin’s *Incomparable World* (1996), Hill’s *The Book of Negroes* (2007), Dabydeen’s *A Harlot’s Progress* (1999), and Wharton’s *Salamander* (2001) – collectively offer a rich set of correspondences and contrasts in their portrayals of the black urban subject.3 Two of these texts are by black British authors (Martin and Dabydeen), and two are by Canadians (Hill and Wharton); two are written in a traditional realist mode (Martin and Hill), and two are postmodern metafictions that generate dizzyingly speculative ontologies (Dabydeen and Wharton); two are individual life stories modelled after the slave narrative genre (Hill and

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3 Page references to these novels in the text are: IW, BN, HP, S respectively.
Dabydeen), and two are adventure novels about small groups of people, with no single protagonist or focalizing consciousness (Martin and Wharton). However, none of those six pairings matches any of the others: a foursquare arrangement of the texts reveals multiple and complex similarities and contrasts between every possible pair. What does unite them all is that to varying degrees in all four books travel is constant: dislocation prevails over settlement (or unbelonging over belonging) and characters’ affiliations are intercontinental and transoceanic rather than local or national – though slavery being what it was, their internationalism is not by choice.

These relational aspects of narrative and identity are reinforced by three central elements common across the novels that become identified in them with such interrelated concepts as the boundless, the endless, the inclusive, and the infinite. First of these common elements is London itself; the port city and international gathering-point not only presided over a global empire on which the sun shone *ad infinitum*, but in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries London was seen to contain, in Peter Ackroyd’s words, ‘the great world itself’:

> The city Addison called ‘an aggregate of various nations’ included, it was imagined, ‘no less than everything.’

London’s perceived infinitude was a function not just of its physical size and the variety of peoples it contained but of the economic and political power that the empire’s intricate web of international affiliations brought to it; London was as global a city as the eighteenth century had to offer, and this idea of the metropolis as infinitely expansive, inclusive, and diverse has been a persistent trope ever since. For many ex-slaves going to London in the eighteenth century, as for their twentieth-century postcolonial counterparts, it seemed to offer the infinite hope and possibilities associated with freedom, opportunity, and access, even if the reality when they arrived was a far cry from any utopian imaginings.

The second image of the infinite central to the four novels is the sea on which their itinerant characters journey – the endless, boundary-defying oceans that separate but also connect their continental ‘worlds,’ which variously include Europe, Africa, the Caribbean, North and South America, and Asia. If London is a key site and symbol of imperial power, the ocean is another: the waves Britannia ruled, the literal ‘space-of-flows’ that enabled London to become a metaphorical ‘space-of-flows.’ Laura Brown, in an elegant survey of oceanic imagery in seventeenth – and eighteenth-century poetry, shows how the ocean was often employed, along with the River Thames that flows into it, as a figure for Britain’s expansionist destiny and benevolent global power, rhetorically figured as power over the unpopulated salt water rather than over inhabited lands. The popular image of ‘the empire of the sea,’ Brown argues, denoted a providential system of distribution and a proxy for British global power. Indeed, … the claims for the benevolence of that system depend on that movement of superimposition of sea and land that generates the displacement of power from the

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5 Ackroyd 701, 3.
'solid space' of the globe to the nonspace of the flowing, gliding, foaming ocean. The representation of the solid imperium cannot be so pacific. By displacing imperial violence in this way, the fable of torrents and seas performs an essential service to the ideology of the Pax Britannica, sanctioning its assertion of the peaceful imposition of empire on the world. The ocean was, of course, the space across which were borne many of the actors in the imperial drama, the goods that generated imperial wealth, and the ideas, images, and knowledges the imperial encounter produced. And as Derek Walcott’s poetry (e.g., ‘The Sea is History’) and D’Aguiar’s *Feeding the Ghosts* (whose first sentence is ‘The sea is slavery’) among other texts, remind us, the sea has a particular resonance for those who have experienced slavery. Indeed, the sea’s infinitude is symbolic for slaves and former slaves of the boundless, disorienting infinity into which slavery plunges them, unmooring and uprooting their identity and often prompting them, on acquiring literacy, to look to narrative as a way to ground their identity – to make it finite and defined – once again. It is paradoxical, therefore, that the third image of infinity, present in different forms in three of the four novels examined here, is a valorised book, a textual object of desire that promises to represent the seemingly unrepresentable or access the previously inaccessible, and that is either produced in London or leads to its supposedly endless possibilities. The infinite book that Wharton’s protagonist is challenged to create is the most obvious of these, but Hill’s historical *Book of Negroes* and Dabydeen’s multiplicitous postmodern text point to their own apparent infinities. Popular science writer John D. Barrow begins *The Infinite Book*, his fascinating account of humanity’s efforts to conceptualize infinity, with the following observation: There is something about infinity and books. Never-ending stories, libraries that contain all possible books, books that contain everything that has ever happened, and everything that hasn’t; books that write themselves, books about themselves, books about there being no books and books that end before they’ve begun. And while he goes on to examine the mathematical, philosophical, and religious implications of unbounded or never-ending numbers, temporalities, spatialities, lives, and more, he acknowledges that ‘infinity’ is also used as ‘a shorthand for “finite, but awfully big”’. The latter, looser, everyday meaning is at least as relevant to the books discussed here as the more elusive literal one. The three spaces and objects that, I argue, are associated in these novels with infinity, unboundedness, a kind of hyper-inclusive transnational worldliness – London, the sea, and the book – are important keys to their visions of eighteenth-century black

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10 Barrow 2-3.
identity. All four authors render London, and the inhabitation of the city by their black characters, in relation to an interconnected eighteenth-century Atlantic world, a world that historians and cultural theorists have advanced as an alternative to nation-based framings of history and identity. Most well known of these is Paul Gilroy, whose influential (if controversial) Black Atlantic articulates a transnational, intercultural, triangulated black cultural history for which the ocean is a conjoining centre, a defining space, rather than a yawning emptiness between the more consequential continents. Gilroy’s organizing image of ships crossing the Atlantic stands for a mobile, mutable, hybrid, fluid black identity characterized by its infinitely variable ‘double consciousness,’ a concept he adapts from W.E.B. Du Bois as a legacy of ‘the intimate association between modernity and slavery.’ Also relevant is the work of Atlantic historians such as Bernard Bailyn, Thomas Benjamin, and many others who gather the Americas, Europe, and Africa into an integrated and mutually constitutive (if Europe-dominated) Atlantic World that began with Columbus, ended when slavery ended, and reached its peak of interconnection and cross-pollination in the eighteenth century. In the words of Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, a ‘many-headed hydra’ of separate but intimately linked peoples emerged as a result of ‘the circular transmission of human experience from Europe to Africa to the Americas and back again’; all this movement created, ‘in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, … a new transatlantic economy’. In the same spirit, Felicity Nussbaum’s The Global Eighteenth Century suggests adding to the established concept of ‘a long eighteenth century’ that of a geographically ‘widened eighteenth century’ in which the origins of contemporary globalization can be traced. In making her case for a global and less Eurocentric view of the century, Nussbaum lists ‘the increased mobility of commodities and ideas, the unprecedented expansion of global trade, improved navigational techniques, and cultural and racial mixture’ that included ‘the period’s well-known diasporas of the black Atlantic’. For Bailyn, such historic interactions are best understood within an ‘inter-hemispheric, transnational perspective’.

These scholars all articulate relational models of the Atlantic and the lands, peoples, activities, and ideas located around its rim, including, of course, in London;

12 See, for instance, Bernard Bailyn, Atlantic History: Contexts and Contours (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2005) and Thomas Benjamin, The Atlantic World: Europeans, Africans, Indians and their Shared History, 1400-1900 (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2009), among other notable works by these historians. Elizabeth Mancke, another leading Atlantic historian, notes that the Seven Years’ War (1756-63) and the territorial acquisitions it brought about, ‘forced Britain to reassess the kind of empire it governed. For a century and a half, the government had pursued a policy of oceanic empire, emphasizing commercial regulation and the growth of a navy to defend shipping,’ but it now had to ‘shift from a blue-water empire to a territorial empire’. See Elizabeth Mancke, ‘Negotiagrting an Empire: Britain and Its Overseas Peripheries, c. 1550-1780,’ Negotiated Empires: Centers and Peripheries in the Americas, 1500-1820 ed. Christine Daniels and Michael V. Kennedy (New York and London: Routledge, 2002).
15 Nussbaum 8.

sometimes their purview extends beyond the Atlantic to incorporate Mediterranean, Indian Ocean, or Pacific worlds as well. The final scholarly text that frames this essay’s readings is Ian Baucom’s *Specters of the Atlantic: Finance Capital, Slavery, and the Philosophy of History*. Meticulously teasing out the implications of the notorious British slave ship *Zong* and its captain’s deliberate drowning of slaves for insurance purposes in 1781, Baucom places London and Liverpool at the heart of what he calls ‘the oceanic trade that had become fundamental to Britain’s prosperity even as it linked the nation’s capital culture to an extranational, circum-Atlantic geography of exchange’.17 London’s role as a dominant ‘space-of-flows’ – where ships, capital, commodities, and people continuously came and went – became, over the eighteenth century, diluted and multiplied; it was superseded by a decentralized ‘archipelago of flows’ scattered around the ocean, Baucom shows. His complex theory of finance capital underpins his concept of a long twentieth century that repeats and subsumes key elements of the long eighteenth century. Indeed, when Baucom talks about ‘a late-twentieth and early-twenty-first-century “now” that houses within itself an eighteenth-century “what-has-been”’, 18 and when he argues that our current era ‘inherits, repeats, and intensifies the late eighteenth century’ 19 he articulates something like the correspondences established by these recent fictions about slavery, the Black Atlantic, and eighteenth-century London.

S.I. Martin’s *Incomparable World*, set in 1786 among black loyalists promised freedom for fighting in the American Revolutionary war, focuses on a small community of male immigrants living hardscrabbling London lives of poverty, danger, and grand schemes, criminal and benign.20 The novel, lauded by Sukhdev Sandhu as ‘probably the best evocation of historic black London to date’, 21 uses detailed realism to evoke a neighbourhood (St Giles and Seven Dials) where ‘dark skin drew no second glances’, 22 but whose many African inhabitants risked re-enslavement or coerced resettlement in Sierra Leone as a result of growing ill-feeling toward the burgeoning black population. A kind of eighteenth-century counterpart to Sam Selvon’s classic novel about post-World War Two black immigrants, *The Lonely Londoners*, 23 Martin’s novel looks explicitly forward in time in passages that question whether black people would ever make London their own or instead remain, even two hundred years hence, ‘hovering by closed doors, waiting for scraps from the master’s table?’. 24 Together with passages referring back two hundred years to Queen Elizabeth I’s proclamation against blacks, 25 Leila Kamali reads such speculative, forward-looking visions as evoking a ‘cyclical’ history of ‘hostility

18 Baucom 32.
19 Baucom 41.
22 Martin 4.
23 Sam Selvon, *The Lonely Londoners* (New York: St Martin’s Press, 1956)
24 Martin 40.
25 In 1596 Elizabeth complained in a letter to civic authorities that ‘there are of late divers blackamoores brought into this realme, of which kinde of people there are already here to manie’ quoted in Peter Fryer, *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain* (London: Pluto, 1984)10.
In Martin’s version of historical simultaneity and double-consciousness, then, 1596 echoes through 1786, which, in turn, echoes through a variety of late twentieth-century moments, from the Notting Hill riots of 1958 to Margaret Thatcher’s Nationality Act of 1981.

Complementing this cyclical history is a circular geography; although *Incomparable World* is set almost entirely in London and, unlike the other novels discussed here, does not describe its characters’ sea-voyages, its black Londoners have been formed as much by the ocean as the city; they are denizens (if not exactly citizens) of the Black Atlantic as much as of Britain, and the indeterminate, unsettled nature of their identities is figured spatially in both urban and oceanic settings. Georgie George, King of Beggars, says he lives ‘Nowhere. And everywhere’ in London’ (IW 109); William is described as feeling, in London, ‘as cold and grey, as vague and as restless as the ocean that separated him from his kin’ (IW 59). The adjectives *cold, grey,* and *restless* could serve readily as descriptions of the metropolis, and indeed often do, but ‘an even colder, whiter country than this’ (IW 60), William notes, is the Nova Scotia colony to which he will eventually commit himself in preference to London or the perpetual in-betweenness of a transatlantic identity. Indeed, a defining moment for William finds him relaxing in that ocean after he has escaped London for coastal Brazil; floating in the South Atlantic, he imagines himself dying there, his body ‘drifting away … at the mercy of the tides, floating forever between the Old World and the New, never sinking, never rising, and never touching either shore’ (IW 159). He sees himself suspended infinitely in between, belonging nowhere and everywhere, dead to the terrestrial world until he finally opts for family and agrarian stability in Canada. The man who has been singing ‘London Bridge is falling down’ throughout the novel decides that ‘London Bridge could fall down without him’ (IW 170). Buckram, the other main character, also ends the narrative with hopes of leaving London for a reunion with family – in his case in Staffordshire, to which this ‘black man on a black horse’ rides ‘through the white of winter’ across Hampstead Heath (IW 178). But his racial identity is hidden beneath his winter clothing, suggesting infinite possibilities for reinvention: ‘With just his eyes visible,’ the narrator says, ‘he could have been anyone or nobody at all’ (IW 177).

Early in the novel, Buckram tells himself ‘sadly, slowly, *This is home: London*’ (IW 42); by the end, he and William are seeking new rural homes and newly domestic family lives as an escape from indeterminacy, although the novel concludes without revealing whether these hoped-for futures will work out. It is significant, however, that their decisions and desired futures project William and Buckram into non-metropolitan space: in the overseas colony or the overland British countryside that, as Raymond Williams has shown, had comparable structural relationships to London (as peripheries to its centre) during the age of empire. Kamali’s reading of Martin’s novel suggests that both William and Buckram ultimately turn their backs on the Black Atlantic cycle, seeking new positions outside ‘the centre-stage occupied by the drama of slavery and racism’; but it is important to note as well that the infinite possibilities the men imagine

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28 Kamali 158.
for themselves as settled terrestrial subjects are located outside the spaces they have known that are most associated with infinity: the metropolitan city and the Atlantic Ocean. The infinitude of those two spaces – whether perceived or actual – is too tainted by, on the one hand, the alienation and drift of the unanchored, uprooted self, and by, on the other hand, images and realities of confinement. London is, for Georgie, a ‘prison’ (IW 6), and the novel’s earliest images of London architecture, the tenements of St Giles – with their ‘numberless small chambers,’ ‘tidal waves of shrieks and coarse chatter,’ and odour of ‘human gong’ (IW 3) – look, sound, and smell remarkably like a slave ship, as if standing in for this otherwise unrepresented space. The London of Incomparable World can bring like-minded blacks together and provide a social and economic springboard to better worlds, but those worlds will not be found in the city itself. Through his detailed depiction of this previously little-known London history, Martin may hope to make the metropolis more habitable for blacks in his own time – our time. But two hundred years earlier, the metropolitan possibilities for his characters are finite.

Lawrence Hill’s The Book of Negroes begins and ends in London – its narrative frame has the ex-slave Aminata Diallo writing her memoirs for abolitionists in 1802 – but from the outset, her first-person narrative frames her life as much through the sea as the city. She introduces herself as ‘a broken-down old black woman who has crossed more water than I care to remember’ (BN 3), then warns readers: ‘Do not trust large bodies of water, and do not cross them’ (BN 7). The ocean, which she calls ‘a bottomless graveyard’ (BN 7), generates consistently negative associations throughout her narrative; captured as a girl in her inland West African village of Bayo, she knows only rivers, and when she first sees ‘the big water’ (BN 44), it therefore looks frighteningly as if a river has ‘expanded into eternity’; and ‘water had taken over the world’ (BN 49). The slave ship is ‘an animal in the water’ with ‘an endless appetite’ (BN 57), and as it sails she feels ‘lost in a world of water’ that resembles an ‘endless desert’ (BN 68). These images of infinity convey the disorientation of a locally rooted village life and identity violently displaced and, ultimately, unmoored into the vagaries of what the global meant to any eighteenth-century African unlucky enough to have it mean anything: a lottery of death or survival into enslavement, enforced mobility, and an unasked-for double consciousness.

‘The ones who survive the great river crossing are destined to live two lives,’ says the first African American that Amina meets, echoing (or anticipating) Du Bois and Gilroy; but Aminata steadfastly maintains that she does not want two lives, just ‘my real life back’ (BN 121). Hers is a tale of stubborn non-belonging, of disaffiliation, and although...

[29] Stephanie Smallwood in Saltwater Slavery: A Middle Passage from Africa to American Diaspora (Cambridge MA: Harvard UP, 2007) writes that, ‘in the early modern world any sailing vessel was an enclosed space, where it was impossible to create physical distance ... But the crowded conditions on slaving vessels made for a level of human density unmatched on other types of oceangoing vessels.’ (135-136).


[31] ‘As African captives confronted the problem of the European merchant ship, it presented them with challenges both physical and metaphysical. With regard to physical challenges, its cavernous form signaled an eerie emptiness demanding to be filled, a powerful and dangerous capacity to consume. As for the metaphysical aspect, the very habitat of the ship – the open sea – challenged African cosmographies, for the landless realm of the deep ocean did not figure in precolonial West African societies as a domain of human (as opposed to divine) activity…. In its guiding principle – the proposition that life can be lived at sea – the ship presented an oxymoron’ (Smallwood 124).


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she becomes a shrewd and adaptive survivor, when she tallies up her successive identities, the list suggests not relational, hybrid accumulation of multiple selves so much as misidentification and out-of-placeness. She says, ‘In South Carolina, I had been an African. In Nova Scotia, I had become known as a Loyalist, or a Negro, or both. And now, finally back in Africa, I was seen as a Nova Scotian, and in some respects thought of myself that way too’ (BN 385). Even there, in Freetown, she feels ‘as lost as I had been across the ocean’ (BN 395); ‘I felt that the colony we were establishing was neither one thing nor the other’ (BN 384).

In such passages, Aminata’s narrative reminds us that what the Atlantic historian or theorist may see as additive relational interconnection the slave, that most reluctant of participants in circum-Atlantic modernity, feels as subtractive loss. The British may have optimistically identified the global oceans with Britannia’s expansionist destiny to ‘rule the waves,’ but Aminata sees the ocean, London, and the lyrics to Rule Britannia (which she roundly critiques) rather differently. London, where she resigns herself to being buried to avoid further ocean crossings, she experiences as ‘an assault on my senses’ (BN 450): a damp place of suffering and indignity to many, of tasteless food, acrid air, and a colour palate limited to grey, where her solicitous but self-serving abolitionist hosts initially keep her away from other black people. (She does meet the King and Queen, but little comes of it.) However infinite and inclusive London may have seemed to many then and now, the city is limited and finite in its associations to the drained and disappointed Aminata. Reuniting with her stolen daughter, and writing her story to assist an abolitionist cause on the verge of success, are the most enabling things Aminata does in London, but even such positive developments bring less hope and possibility to this dying woman than reminders of the irrecoverable losses they both signify. It is no surprise, then, that the Book of Negroes she earlier helps write up in New York proves to be another tainted image of infinity and possibility. By presiding over this book of names and stories of those petitioning to emigrate, Aminata does feel newly connected to a community of black people with pasts like hers, and doing so makes her feel less isolated. But the hope that the Book of Negroes is supposed to represent for its transnational black Atlantic survivors proves severely compromised. The provision of liberty in return for loyalty that it represents is a will-o’-the-wisp: many listed in its pages are barred from leaving New York by prior claims of owners, including Aminata herself for a time; others will remain slaves in Nova Scotia or, if free, will struggle with racism, poverty, and betrayal on reaching the supposed promised land. Indeed, in a bitter irony, the parcels of land the freed slaves are promised by the British are never given, their delivery infinitely deferred.

Not surprisingly given its subject and narrator, then, Hill’s novel affirms a local, rooted identity – one left behind in Bayo and endlessly longed for thereafter – over the violent exigencies of circum-Atlantic travelling routes and the transnational, relational identities they generate. It posits Aminata as a type, even an archetype, of the enslaved casualties of the eighteenth century’s emergent Atlantic World, and her story as an antidote to any celebratory or complacently Eurocentric views of that newly globalizing world. Baucom suggests that there is a ‘violence’ in being seen as a ‘type’ – of person or nonperson, of commodity or property – that the slave trade exemplifies and that the realist novel, whose stock-in-trade is character types, manifests in a figurative way. The

32 Baucom 11.

Book of Negroes incorporates various kinds of violence – to the body, the psyche, the family, and the at-homeness of a rooted identity. In this realist novel, with its linear autobiographical narrative and debt to the slave narrative (a genre that originated in the eighteenth century), the breaking of that wholeness is an ushering of the black subject into the infinitely unsettled black Atlantic life – here lived by a character conceived of as the epitome or aggregate of the beleaguered slave. London provides a satisfactory end-point for Aminata in a way it does not for Martin’s characters, but only as a kind of last resort when other places and people have failed her – and particularly after she has aborted her journey from Freetown to Bayo upon realizing that her guide plans to betray her into slavery again. In contrast to Buckram and William’s experience in Incomparable World, then, for Aminata London is the best place – the only place – to escape the perils and disappointments of the Atlantic world.

Aminata insists on writing her own narrative rather than telling it to an abolitionist scribe; having had little control over her life, she will control its public representation. Another way of putting this is to say that, like many slaves or ex-slaves who wrote their life stories, she is drawn to narrative as a way to make finite and defined what has hitherto been damagningly infinite. Mungo, the generically named protagonist of David Dabydeen’s A Harlot’s Progress, is also an elderly former slave living in London after a peripatetic life, and the abolitionists are attracted to his story too. But unlike Hill’s heroine (as far as the reader can tell), Mungo asserts control over his narrative through highly selective editing and reimagining of his life experience. As he coyly says at the outset, ‘I can change memory, like I can change my posture’ (HP 2), and it becomes clear that the polyphonic mix of first-person and third-person narrative that he shares with the reader exceeds and complicates what this ‘oldest African inhabitant of London’ tells the abolitionist committee’s secretary, Mr Pringle (HP 3). A confusing mélange of the told and the untold, the spoken and the silently thought, his narrative is full of irresolvable contradictions; it captures what Elizabeth Kowaleski Wallace calls ‘the chaos of Mungo’s consciousness,’ which ‘defies logic, linearity, and reason’ as it freely blends ‘past and present, here and there, living and dead, truth and lies’.

Wallace’s and Pamela Albert’s detailed readings unpack these labyrinthine indeterminacies to support their similar conclusions that the novel ‘implicates everyone equally in the brutality and exploitation that comprised the slave trade’. Indeed, the novel’s speculative, unstable narrative so radically multiplies what happened or could have happened to Mungo that it becomes its own kind of infinite text. It seems that anything he or his abolitionist interlocutors or the reader can imagine is fair game for inclusion – a possible truth. Like the embedded narratives explaining the meaning behind the infinite number Pi branded into Mungo’s forehead – relayed in multiple versions that suggest, in Wallace’s words, that ‘he is simultaneously the product of the Greek marauders, his African forebears, and white


civilization." This parodic subversion of the slave narrative formula is a radically unstable, epistemologically flexible, oceanically fluid signifier.

As such, its relevance for the argument here is less in how it represents the eighteenth-century metropolitan scene – a conventional catalogue of smelly, noisy, visually overwhelming, and disorderly streets – than its use of London, as in The Book of Negroes, as a final destination for its protagonist and framing location for narrative. The centre of empire, of the abolitionist movement, and of Britain’s eighteenth-century black community is also, as both novels are clearly aware, the centre of English-language textuality: of publishing and disseminating ideas. Mungo does not believe (as Mr Pringle does) ‘that a single book will alter the course of history’ (HP 256), but his is not a single, unified book conveying a coherent truth any more than London is a single, unified city. A single text (a newspaper ad for a slave auction) may have prompted Mungo’s purchase as a boy by Lord Montague, but as strong a factor in the aristocrat’s impulsive decision to buy him is the completely contradictory accounts of the Thistlewood slave-drowning case (modelled after the Zong case) published in a dozen London newspapers. Concluding from those journalistic texts that ‘truth itself was … another commodity changing hands at a price’ (HP199), Montague decides to rescue the advertised boy, Mungo, from his own commodification. It is one of the novel’s cheeky ironies that Mungo’s own text is as epistemologically slippery as the newspaper accounts, which purport to get at the truth of an oceanic event for a metropolitan readership coming to terms with the slave trade just as his own narrative will purport to do. The London coffee house where Mungo is sold he recalls as being ‘as infernal as the slaveship’s hold’ (HP 163), and when he meets Lady Montague, to whom he is a gift, this ‘most esteemed hostess in London’ is wearing ‘blue clothes, ruffled like waves of the sea, little nips here and there like the beaks of fish’ (HP 186, 184). Not only is the ocean embedded in Dabydeen’s London imagery, but Mungo describes the city as a ‘cannibal region’ (HP 266); ‘What I know of London,’ he says, ‘is a jungle of poor white beasts with savage looks who will eat me’ (HP 239) – playfully reversing a common colonialist trope.

Wallace 249.

Mungo’s first impressions of London are described on pages 159–160, and include hints of the city’s seemingly infinite space in a passage such as the following: ‘But they continue to walk all morning, going down endless lanes and crossing countless squares, as if Betty [his minder] has no intention of arriving’ (160).

Lady Montague is intriguingly reminiscent of Lady Caroline in Kamala Markandaya’s novel Possession (London: Putnam, 1963), set in 1950s London. Both ladies acquire dark-skinned tropical boys as human pets, and both Mungo and Markandaya’s Valmiki are exotically but inauthentically dressed up in turbans for metropolitan display. Both are associated directly with pet monkeys. Dabydeen’s Lady Montague also may be modelled after Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, the eighteenth-century writer who, in a famous portrait that appears on the cover of a 1997 Penguin Classics edition of her Selected Letters, appears with a black boy servant in the background. Isobel Grundy, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu: Comet of the Enlightenment (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1999) a biography of Montagu, summarizes several theories as to why this writer, known mostly for her depictions of Turkish life and not elsewhere represented as having black servants, would be so portrayed (301–303); in her notes, Grundy references David Dabydeen, Hogarth’s Blacks: Images of Blacks in Eighteenth Century English Art (Mundelstrup, Denmark: Dangaroo, 1985), and specifically a section in which Dabydeen examines the eighteenth-century fashion for paintings of aristocratic white ladies posing with small black boys who look admiringly up at them (Hogarth’s 30–32), as in the portrait of Montagu. Thanks to one of Transnational Literature’s anonymous reviewers for encouraging me to explore this possible connection between the fictional Lady Montague and the historical Lady Montague.


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Conflating the places and spaces of the Atlantic world and the slave trade as freely as he does times, stories, and contradictory ‘truths,’ Mungo unites his worlds and their peoples in a shared complicity with slavery’s violence. That multiply located violence includes sexual violence; a shared implication in enslavement and abuse marks the otherwise separate locations of the African village (where Rima is a domestic slave in Mungo’s house by day and ‘giv[es] pleasure’ to his father by night [HP 35]), the slave ship (where the pederast Thistlewood frees Mungo from the infernal hold to facilitate his own pleasure), and Lady Montague’s house near London (where the servants Lizzie and Jane chain Mungo down and have sex with him nightly). He escapes this final situation and his identity as a slave by fleeing the Montague estate for urban London, where he works with dying prostitutes and later tells his story (or rather, stories) to Mr Pringle. London thus provides for Mungo what it did for Aminata but not for Martin’s characters: a place to escape from the oceanic indeterminacy and exploitive violence of Black Atlantic slavery, and to participate in a movement that will free future generations – potentially infinite numbers of fellow Africans – that would otherwise have faced similar fates.

Herb Wyile calls contemporary historical novels ‘speculative fictions’ because they so often foreground our partial and compromised knowledge of the past. A Harlot’s Progress does this to the nth degree: determining the veracity of Mungo’s contradictory and unstable text is a project of infinite and unverifiable speculation. Of course, ‘speculative fiction’ is more often used as a generic label for those close cousins of science fiction and fantasy novels that imagine alternative worlds in the past or present. Thomas Wharton’s Salamander, the fourth and final novel to be examined here, is a speculative fiction in that sense, as well as an historical one. More magic than realist, Salamander inhabits an eighteenth century overlaid not just by ours but by an alternative, parallel version of its own era filled with impossible objects and experiences that imaginatively extend that century’s technologies and curiosities. With its mechanical people, its castle with endlessly moving walls, its optically illusive ship, and the time-warping printing press with which its protagonist seeks to print ‘an infinite book’, Salamander’s differences from the previously discussed books are as notable as its similarities. It differs from them further in being written by a white author and in being the only one in which the slave or ex-slave character is not the protagonist. While the experiences of Buckram and William, Aminata, and Mungo were variously positioned as typical or representative of eighteenth-century black lives, their counterpart in Salamander, Amphitrite Snow, is as atypical and unlikely as most of what happens in Wharton’s fantastic, layered tale. This female ex-slave’s seafaring, swashbuckling ways may affiliate her more with Olaudah Equiano than Aminata Diallo, but she shares the latter’s intelligence, cunning, and determination, and she too ends up living and apparently dying in London. And while both Canadian novels discussed here include a major event in Canada’s eighteenth-century history – the 1759 Plains of Abraham battle in Salamander, the Black Loyalists’ arrival in Nova Scotia in 1783 in The Book of Negroes – they subordinate Canadian settings and themes to what Baucom calls ‘the


geographies of circulation’ of an increasingly global and relational modernity ushered in by the slave trade.\(^{41}\)

Purchased by a British navy admiral and renamed after a Greek sea goddess, *Salamander*’s Amphitrite Snow is shipped as cargo to the Bahamas but leads an all-female rebellion en route, taking over the ship and casting the crew adrift; introduced as a ‘NOTORIOUS FEMALE BUCCANEER’ (S 205), this unrooted black woman is as global in her orientation, and as seemingly accepting of her enforced mobility, as Aminata is not. Although she appears over halfway through and in a supporting role, Amphitrite exemplifies the spirit of perpetual motion, transformation, and reinvention that infuses Wharton’s novel, with its constantly moving bookshelves in the castle library and its magic printing press whose rippling ‘gooseflesh type’ generates new forms automatically and endlessly in pursuit of the infinite book (S 186). Set in Quebec, Slovakia, Venice, Alexandria, Macau, China, Ceylon, Cape Town, London, and the seas and oceans between, the novel abounds with images of the infinite and inclusive accessed through the solid and contained: ‘the spiral of a seashell, for instance, which is itself only a fragment of a greater spiral of increase’ (S 94); the tiny ship named the *Bee* that, like the castle, contains a vast and shifting labyrinth;\(^{42}\) the cosmic ‘web of connectedness’ that allows the ‘tiniest pebble’ to reflect ‘the entire Creation’ (S 107); the description of books as ‘fragile vessel[s] of cloth and paper’ that take readers ‘everywhere and nowhere’ (S 221), ‘wondrous box[es] of paper that could contain anything’ (S 309); and the novel’s final sentence describing the character Pica’s last piece of blank metal type as ‘infinity in her pocket, … the beginning of a new collection’ (S 368).

This idiosyncratic novel – which merges reality with fantasy, endings with beginnings, and eighteenth-century-novel conventions into a postmodern speculative fiction – also, like Dabydeen’s, posits similarities between city and ocean. London, where most of its characters end their globe-spanning quests, has ‘swampy heat’ that is ‘as suffocating as anything they had endured on their ocean crossing’ (S 304). Full of marvels, ‘London was every place they had been: the crowds and the murkiness of Venice. The heat of Alexandria. The many-tongued babble of Canton’ (S 292). It is a smoky, spectral place that has been transformed over time into something almost unrecognizable to the Londoner Nicholas Flood, its few familiar landmarks ‘like beckoning islands in an unfamiliar sea’ (S 291); ‘This was a city extending not so much in the familiar directions of the compass as in sundered zones of fortune and desolation, with hidden passageways that could transport you from one to the other in an eyeflash’ (S 287).

These various passages convey something of *Salamander*’s ontological fluidity, its obsession with infinity and with correspondences between the tangible and intangible, the materially contained and the expansively all-embracing. As a speculative metafiction, its genre facilitates such dizzying linkages and shifts between the minute and material local and the infinite, cosmic global in a way the other novels cannot. As it imagines an alternative, parallel, possible/impossible eighteenth century, Wharton’s novel generates

\(^{41}\) Baucom 36.
\(^{42}\) The castle’s own labyrinth is one whose inhabitants often appeared as if from nowhere and then ‘vanished with a ripple as concealed doors silently opened and closed like the valves of some giant underwater creature’ (S 31).

characters and incidents, philosophies and technologies that cumulatively reinforce its vision of a relational, global world – a ‘limitless world’ (S 131) in which the ocean is as much a centre as London, a book is as viable a route to the infinite as a global journey, and a black female slave is as capable of commandeering a ship as a white slave-master. Its sense of infinite transformative possibility is one element that makes Wharton’s novel seem to reflect a sensibility more of our age than the other three, as does its sense of a disorienting world that seems simultaneously (and paradoxically) both larger and smaller, more known and more unknown, than ever.

At one point, Amphitrite tells the others sailing on the Bee that ‘the one great law of the ocean’ is ‘Sooner or later you’re going to run into someone you know’ (S 230). As she takes a familiar idea from urban life and transplants it to an environment where such inevitability seems much less obvious, she establishes herself as a new kind of citizen for a new kind of eighteenth century. However sad at times her story and unfulfilled her quest, however dangerous and disorienting the ‘limitless world’ she is plunged into often proves to be, it is a world whose newness Amphitrite, like the Europeans on the Bee, accepts and functions in comfortably. These Europeans’ quests, unlike Aminata’s, are not for home, a notion in which none of them is terribly invested. As free-floating citizens of a globe whose strange and disorienting temporalities, geographies, and spatialities they are learning to navigate, these characters seem at home everywhere and nowhere. The oceanic modernity into which Aminata is dragged kicking and screaming is one to which they, however eccentrically, seem to belong.

One could see Wharton’s choice here as deracinating Amphitrite and affiliating her with the ‘cartography of celebratory journeys’ that Joan Dayan critiques Gilroy’s Black Atlantic for perpetrating.43 As she almost effortlessly trades a typically black seafaring identity (as slave) for a normally white one (as ship captain), Amphitrite joins the Bee as a kind of honorary European, with reminders of her blackness coming only occasionally – as when in London she disguises herself as a servant to avoid standing out. But as Katherine McKittrick writes in Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle, it is important to see the ship as more than a space of confinement and disempowerment for blacks. She writes:

Technologies of transportation [such as] the ship, while materially and ideologically enclosing black subjects, … also contribute to the formation of an oppositional geography: the ship as a location of black subjectivity and human terror, black resistance, and in some cases, black possession.44 And Amphitrite has to keep struggling; the captain she usurped chases her tirelessly round the globe in another ship and finally zeroes in on her and apparently kills her, at the end of the novel, on the Thames. But she goes down fighting, defending her ship in swashbuckling fashion because, she rhetorically asks, ‘Don’t you know how stories like mine have to end?’ (S 362). That she does this in London at the beginning of another

ocean voyage, just as her shipmate Nicholas Flood has finally printed the infinite book he has been struggling to make, is a measure of the complex ways in which Wharton’s speculative text positions the capital.

London, like the ship, is also the site of what McKitterick calls ‘an oppositional geography’ – a space of struggle, resistance, and incipient, tentative, insecure possession. As such, the eighteenth-century London of these four novels resembles that of the many dozens of postcolonial fictions of contemporary London, to which we might see the eighteenth-century ones, loosely speaking, as prequels. In the variety of experiences, of subject positions, and of reasons for the precarious purchase – the tentative traction – of their ex-slave characters, these novels both echo and anticipate the oceanic London still haunted by the legacy of slavery and racism that subsequent generations of black Londoners – from George Lamming and Sam Selvon to Buchi Emecheta and Joan Riley – have documented in fictions of the twentieth-century metropolis. As they speculatively and variously deploy images of the infinite city, the infinite ocean, and the infinite text, these novels, like palimpsests, add foundational, supplementary layers that overlay (or underlie) the uses of those images in dozens of other London novels written before them but set later.

The four contemporary novels of eighteenth-century post-slavery examined in this essay experiment with varied fictional forms but with the shared effect, among others, of teasing out the multiple infinities implied by black subject’s move from slavery to freedom, and from sea to city. As a group, moreover, these fictions respond to the paradox at the heart of the concept of infinity, the number that cannot be quantified, by showing how readily and paradoxically slaves and ex-slaves – and the maritime, urban, and textual worlds in which they find themselves – can oscillate between the infinite and the finite. Collectively, they suggest that the binary itself needs unshackling, because if the infinite can represent the hope of possibility to the ex-slave, to the newly enslaved it can prompt the dissolution of the self; and if the finite signifies on the one hand the shackled, immobilized self of slavery’s commodification and ‘social death’ (Smallwood 59), it also, on the other, points to the rooted, grounded self first lost to slavery, whose recovery is sought thereafter over the sea, in the city, through the book that tells one’s story.


46 Albert argues that contemporary writers’ transatlantic retrospections [back to the eighteenth century] can be understood on one level as trans-historical, cross-cultural dialogues enabling the authors to better understand and represent their distinct colonial histories and current encounters with neocolonialism and racism. At the same time they reflect the fact that, like those who produced the works they confront, contemporary writers are experimenting with different modes of representation to articulate and portray their experiences in a world that continues to be traumatized by political conflict and violence’ 5.

Author’s Note
This essay’s first incarnation took the form of a keynote address presented at Paris and London in Postcolonial Imagery, a conference held at London’s Insitut Français in June, 2009. My sincere thanks to Christina Horvath and her fellow organisers for inviting me, and to the other participants with whom I had stimulating exchanges there. This much-revised version has benefited in the meantime from conversations with my colleague Elizabeth Mancke and with my students in graduate seminars; I am also grateful for the helpful suggestions of Transnational Literature’s two readers.

15

If the Moon Smiles on the Mappers of Madness: A Critique of the Cartographers of Insanity in Chandani Lokugé’s If the Moon Smiled
Anway Mukhopadhyay

A girl bows to the Buddha amidst a crowd of lotuses and is asked to learn detachment. Petal by petal madness blooms and then mirror by mirror looks at other people’s madness. The moon smiles at those who have sought to map madness. And the smile takes the shape of words, words that are cancerous growths on silence.

Chandani Lokugé’s novel, If the Moon Smiled, grows under the shadow of this smile. If it is not totally unjust to identify the ‘dominant’ tropes of a text, we may say that, in Lokuge’s text, they are place and body. Manthri, the protagonist of Lokugé’s narrative, gradually becomes a schizophrenic personality, and one may be tempted to explain her tragedy in terms of the motif of ‘place and displacement,’ which is, as argue Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, ‘a major feature of post-colonial literatures.’ However, the predicament of Lokugé’s protagonist cannot be construed simply as the case of a failed immigrant. She is a Sri Lankan girl, brought by her authoritarian husband to Australia after marriage, without any effort on his part to understand whether his wife is a willing emigrant. Nevertheless, Manthri’s problem is not only that of an immigrant who lacks the capacity to adjust in an alien environment – it is deeply grounded in the issue of her gendered body, a body which is both a site of patriarchal inscription and a moving image of repetitive displacement – physical, ontological, and psychical. Again, the body is linked with the issue of the limitations of embodiedness, which also characterises the body politic.

The Buddhist culture in which Manthri grows up betrays a peculiar self-contradiction. It prescribes detachment in a situation where attachment is made necessary for women by the sexual division of labour. It teaches the Buddhist doctrine of universal impermanence and yet prepares the female body for a marital telos. Nirvana is not what the everyday world of this Buddhist society seeks; its pragmatic goals are ridiculously at odds with its ritual invocation of the trope of impermanence. Manthri, the little girl, ‘blends her voice with his (the father’s): “As these flowers must fade, so must my body towards destruction go.”’ However, just a few pages after, the mother, drawing on Yasodara’s devotion to the Buddha, announces that Manthri will be a ‘floral offering’ to her husband who is now metaphorically linked to the figure of ‘a deity.’ So, the impermanent body of the girl must be prepared as a permanent offering for the husband-shaped deity – an absurd contradiction in the ‘impermanence’-saturated discourse that is part of their everyday religious life.

When Mahendra, her husband, does not see any ‘stain’ on the ‘crushed white sheet’ after the coitus, he is appalled and the wife immediately becomes a ‘serpent’ in his misogynistic imagination. She tries to persuade him that she is innocent but he is rigidly fixed in his imagination of the woman’s profanity. While on a pilgrimage with her daughter-in-law, Manthri’s mother-in-law tells her, ‘Look at the creepers, entangling everything like

3 Lokugé 7.
4 Lokugé 35-36.
lustful cravings.’ She then goes on to allude to Manthri’s ‘crime’ that has ruined her ‘innocent’ son. What is more absurd is that this essentially sexist and patriarchal discourse on women’s ‘purity’ is clothed in the referential apparatus of the Buddhist religio-philosophical doctrine. The offended mother-in-law says glumly, ‘All is a maya.’5 Mahendra’s mother is unhappy that even the emigration of her son to Australia has not been able to repair the damage done by the impure daughter-in-law.

What is interesting here is that all these Buddhistic translations of essentially secular anxieties and dissatisfactions actually hide a deep-seated postcolonial bourgeois ideology. And it is here that a conventional reading of Manthri’s gendered body becomes problematic. Hermann Hesse writes in Steppenwolf:

He (the bourgeois) is ready to be virtuous, but likes to be easy and comfortable in this world as well. In short, his aim is to make a home for himself between two extremes in a temperate zone without violent storms and tempests; and in this he succeeds though it be at the cost of that intensity of life and feeling which an extreme life affords. A man cannot live intensely except at the cost of the self. Now the bourgeois treasures nothing more highly than the self (rudimentary as his may be). And so at the cost of intensity he achieves his own preservation and security.6

The central conflict in Lokuge’s novel is between the intense life Manthri desires but which is suppressed by the pseudo-Buddhist bourgeois doctrines of her family and community and the obsession with security that her husband and parents exemplify.

The Sri Lankan postcolonial Bourgeoisie is uncomfortable with the extremities of both passion and renunciation, both absolute asceticism and absolute pleasure of the senses. And it is not only an affair of the private sphere, but also the central ideology of the nation. On the one hand, the nation is the space of the Bourgeoisie’s safety and security. Outside it there are ‘violent storms and tempests.’ But that mythic outside is also reflected inside, within Manthri’s female body filled with the violent passions, the aggressive hunger for the intensity of life that must be controlled by perpetual references to a bourgeoisified Buddhism. The mechanisms of controlling the national space and those of controlling the female body are one. On the other hand, the over-renunciative impulses of Buddhist asceticism must be tamed so that reproduction-as-social-production is not hampered. It is true that the Buddha’s ‘Middle Way’ is also a compromise between theoretical and practical absolutes in the field of religious life, but it is certainly not the bourgeois middle way Hermann Hesse focuses on and the parents and in-laws of Manthri practise.

The Abhidharmika tradition of the Buddhist thought rejects ‘any claim by others to any kind of independent or persisting human selfhood.’7 However, the bourgeois Buddhism of Lokuge’s narrative universe cannot reject the essential self of the individual, as the bourgeois ‘treasures nothing more highly than the self.’ This leads to an exclusionary notion of belonging, an obsession with mapping and marginalising.

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5 Lokuge 122-125.
7 Sue Hamilton, Indian Philosophy, A Very Short Introduction (OUP, 2006) 90.

Without margins, no map is possible. That which has no margins cannot be mapped. Manthri’s body is mapped in ritualistic ways – there is the ceremony for her ‘auspicious entrance into womanhood,’ then there is the search for premarital purity in her body by Mahendra. The Sri Lankan nation-state, which drowns into the darkness of a civil war, is metonymically connected to her body. In *Natural Symbols*, Mary Douglas writes that ‘the body is a model which can stand for any bounded system. Its boundaries can represent any boundaries which are threatened or precarious.’ She goes on to explain, ‘all margins are dangerous. … We should expect the orifices of the body to symbolize its specially vulnerable points. … Each culture has its own special risks and problems. To which particular bodily margins its beliefs attribute power depends on what situation the body is mirroring.’

Manthri’s body, in the context of *If the Moon Smiled*, also stands for the ethnocentric national imaginary of postcolonial Sri Lanka. It is a plaything in the dominant power structure’s play of mapping and marginalisation, the two projects which always go hand in hand, to shore up the status quo.

Manthri’s body, however, unlike the geographic territory of the state, is not unconscious; it is a conscious, desiring body; it is open to violent inscriptions from outside, but also capable of a counter-inscription from within, something akin to Gayatri Spivak’s ‘subaltern writing.’ In fact, her resultant madness that concludes the novel can be seen as a radical counter-inscription to the mapping project of the bourgeois cartographers of madness. Her madness, precisely, questions the very notion that madness can be mapped and pinned like national territories. I will return to this point later, after exploring the issues of the body and the body politic.

While analysing the political situation of pre-civil-war Sri Lanka we may ponder over Adriana Cavarero’s observation of the paradox involved in the ‘metaphorical artifice’ of the *body politic*. Cavarero writes in *Stately Bodies*:

> The aspired perpetuation of a political form would represent itself from the beginning with the figure of a body that is, by definition, mortal. This is a crucial blindness, which the Greeks had somehow escaped by ‘psychologizing’ the body. … A paradox nests inside the metaphorical artifice that adopts a corruptible body in order to evoke a political order desired as stable and long-lasting."

A professedly Buddhist state that moves away from Abhidharmika anti-essentialism towards a rigidly ethnocentric political episteme takes the paradox Cavarero speaks of to its extreme. A religious culture based on the doctrine of universal impermanence attempts to make the body politic ‘stable and long-lasting’ by creating a seemingly permanent cultural map that marginalises the *other* narratives of the nation. This paradoxical project is metonymically reflected in the construction of the marital *telos* for the female body whose

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8Lokugé 19.

impermanence is continually asserted. Manthri’s body is transient, ‘corruptible.’ And yet it must remain ‘pure’ for the deity named ‘husband.’ In the same way, the purity of the peopled landscape of the nation-state must be preserved by mapping the category of the ‘people’ in such a way that the outcast individuals or groups produce by their exclusion an illusory demographic centre. Trinh T. Minh-ha writes, ‘The center itself is marginal … [H]ow possible is it to undertake a process of decentralization without being made aware of the margins within the center and the centers within the margin?’ If the centre is actually marginal it requires margins to map out its territory, to demarginalise and centralise itself. In a similar process, the body of Manthri is used as a ‘bounded system’ by the patriarchal bourgeois order to separate the corruptible boundaries of the body from the core essence of purity, the interiority of the non-profane. But if the human individual lacks a stable self, this essence becomes meaningless, as it is not constant. That is why, to preserve the mechanisms of the sexual subordination of women, the Buddhist teratology of purity must be associated with the bourgeois notion of sex as interior essence of which Michel Foucault has made us aware.

Embodying entail the pangs of existential closures. The body turns the human being into a limited existent. The body creates passions and yet prevents their explosive outbursts – it is, indeed, a ‘bounded system.’ As a bounded system, it creates human identities, just as the bounded system of a nation constructs identitarianistic closets. In her critique of the Greek ‘psychologization’ of the body, Cavarero says, ‘Overall we find suggested a symbolic system tied to the mind’s superiority, the impetuous nature of the heart’s passions, and the unruliness of sexual urges.’ Manthri is the victim of a symbolic system that, like that of the Greeks, tries to denigrate and marginalise ‘the heart’s passions’ and ‘the unruliness of sexual urges.’ But the kind of phallogocentric (a la Derrida) epistemic violence Manthri has to go through is characteristic of the bourgeois epistemology as Hesse interprets it. Denying the possibility of a unified, stable, singular self, Hesse’s narrator in Steppenwolf insists:

In reality, however, every ego, so far from being a unity is in the highest degree a manifold world, a constellated heaven, a chaos of forms, of states and stages, of inheritances and potentialities. … The delusion (of unity) rests simply upon a false analogy. As a body everyone is single, as a soul never.

Logocentric conceptualisations of the body are paradoxical in that while subordinating the body to the ‘soul,’ they still imagine a unified soul based on the model of singularity that the body offers. The bodily multiplicities – the passions, the perturbations, the ‘tempests’ of the body – are thus subordinated to the spatial singularity of the physical body, or, to put it another way, the body as map. A map cannot be mad, but madness lurks on its margins, troubling the cartographer.

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14 Cavarero 102.
15 Hesse 71-72.
Actually, in the logocentric imagination, the body and the soul are each other’s prison. The body-as-map fails to acknowledge the multiplicity of the bodily selves inhabiting it, and these plural selves struggling within the bodily map are panoptically normalised into the ‘bounded system’ of the singular ‘docile body’ (in Foucault’s sense of the terms). Douglas writes, ‘The social body constrains the way the physical body is perceived. The physical experience of the body, always modified by the social categories through which it is known, sustains a particular view of society.’ \(^{16}\) The social cartographers of the ‘natural’ body create the map of the body deterministically, just as the fundamentalist nationalists map the body of the nation by refusing to pay attention to the spasms of that body. Manthri’s body is mapped in the bourgeoise Buddhist episteme, but the non-epistemologisable perturbations of that body are not taken into account. As a result, the multiple psycho-physical selves in that rigidly mapped body rebel, leading to an implied condition called madness. In parallel, Sri Lanka, trying to enshrine a rigid cartography of its national demography, is driven towards a civil war, the ultimate outburst of the spasms of the national body that is not and cannot be ruled by a ‘soul.’ Here we may remember Ernest Renan’s comment: ‘A nation is a soul, a spiritual principle.’ \(^{17}\) In this bourgeoise construction of the nation as a soul, we find the echoes of both the logocentrism of the Greeks that Cavarero criticises and the ‘delusion’ Hesse focuses upon. When you say that the nation is a soul, you try to bring that soul into the realm of a ‘scientific’ and normalising cartography, thus betraying the circularity between a mappable soul and a mappable body.

_The nation is a plural body that is mapped as a soul._

Manthri names her daughter Nelum, after the lotus. Throughout the novel, the lotus’s co-figuration with Manthri’s body performs a metonymic, and not merely metaphoric, function. The lotus, which is associated in her father’s imagination with ‘purity,’ becomes a generator of physical passion for Manthri. Lokugé writes:

She would be a lotus. Which would she be – a pure white nelum or a blue manel?

But, do they talk together sometimes? Or kiss? Do they only meditate? They must get so lonely, as they reach alone into the great emptiness. She turns impatiently to touch, to smell, to see. She breaks off a blossom and breathes it. She brushes her lips on purplish-blue petal. Secretly, she touches the stamen with her tongue. She is aware of a luminous inward glow, of water stirring against thighs. \(^{18}\)

Thus it is that the sign-system of a dominant order can be secretly modified by a ‘subaltern writing.’ The body can come out of the prison of the _normalised_ soul, and the multiple selves can get rid of the prison-map of the body. The lotus is not just a symbol of purity; it also

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\(^{18}\) Lokugé 11.
emblematises a visible physical multiplicity. Unlike human flesh that gives the illusion of a fixed fleshy map, the petals are multiple, and ephemeral. And yet this ephemeral nature of the petals is not just associated with the ‘great emptiness’ in Manthri’s imagination, it is symptomatic of the momentary outbursts of passion as well. Besides, the stamen, even if it can be taken as the ‘centre’ of the flower, is a plural centre and not constrained to signify a phallogocentrically essentialisable core.

Again, in the specific cultural context of India and Sri Lanka, the lotus has other significance, as a common spiritual emblem in both Buddhism and Hinduism. The lotus is especially significant in the context of the Sri Lankan civil war which has often been seen as a conflict between Sinhalese Buddhists and Tamil Hindus, because it can carry dual meanings. However, If the Moon Smiled, unlike Yasmine Gooneratne’s A Change of Skies, deals with the ‘war’ only indirectly. But here too what is interesting is the difference between the ethical approach of the men towards the war and that of Manthri, the paradigmatic potential madwoman. The expatriates live in Australia, away from the violence and political madness of Sri Lanka, away from the terrorists and suicide bombers, secure in their diasporic existence. And yet, the news bombards them with images of violence – narratives of dismemberment (both literal and figurative) travel into their homes from abroad. ‘We are fortunate to be out of that bloody mess, Mahendra says loudly. Let us count our blessings. No one agrees or disagrees.’

It is the supreme instance of the ethical blindness and inhumanity that is fostered by the bourgeois hunger for safety and security, the typically bourgeois fear of ‘tempests’ and of losing the ‘self.’ However, the kind of situation that has emerged in civil war Sri Lanka is, to a great extent, the outcome of the petty-bourgeois postcolonial episteme, typified by Mahendra. The exclusionary cartographic project is afraid of itself when the seething underbelly of the seemingly stable map it has created erupts and begins to undermine the illusion of stability. Mahendra’s case is symptomatic of this more general bourgeois fear of the fragments of the nation, to use the expression of Partha Chatterjee—the madness of the margins. The bourgeois then looks for other maps, other images of stability. It is significant that Mahendra, despite his insensitive attitude to the civil war and its madnesses, cherishes a disturbing Sinhalese, Buddhist fundamentalism. He is dismissive of George Keyt’s paintings because, as he puts it, ‘Keyt is not reflecting our culture or religion here, he’s corrupting it.’ He is obsessed with his Sinhalese identity in his Australian diasporic existence, though his decision to migrate to Australia was an absolutely monologic one.

Mahendra was not willing to wait for Manthri’s consensus but rather coercively persuaded her to ‘move on’. His sole point was that ‘Australia is a land of opportunity.’ But when in the land of opportunity, he is dismissive of the ‘western influence’ that the Keyt painting exemplifies. He creates his own exclusionary maps even in the Other Country that he has chosen as his diasporic home, lured by the opportunities on offer. Opportunism is the kernel of fundamentalism. Mahendra, like the other Sinhalese ethnocentrists in Australia, is ever anxious to keep his offspring from becoming ‘Australian,’ and yet, his expectations of

19 Lokugé 68.
20 Lokugé 161.
21 Lokugé 44.

‘If the Moon Smiles on the Mappers of Madness: A Critique of the Cartographers of Insanity in Chandani Lokugé’s If the Moon Smiled’ Anway Mukhopadhyay.
Transnational Literature Vol. 5 no. 2, May 2013.
his son are purely bourgeois ones, and not based on any essentially Sinhalese or Buddhist 'structure of feeling' (à la Raymond Williams).

Manthri’s attitude to the civil war however is informed by what Carol Gilligan defines as the ‘ethic of care.’

She thinks that the diasporic Sinhalese are only trying to ‘cover up the guilt.’ She remembers the Jataka story where the Bodhisattva transformed into a hare and threw his body into the fire to feed a starving mendicant. Now she perceives that the bourgeois Buddhism of the diasporic Sinhalese has jettisoned the ethic of self-sacrifice and altruism: ‘but now, wallowing in our luxuries, we try to salve our conscience by sacrificing our second-hand clothes and excess wealth.’

Manthri can, thus, also contemplate the idea of bodily sacrifice, a process of dissolving the ‘bounded system’ of the body sacrificially, and not suicidally. The immolation and dismemberment of the body are two major symbolic topoi articulated throughout the narrative:

I jolt awake to a chaotic silence. I am a dismembered body. Here a breast, there a floating thigh and swelling lip. I spin a web of desire to entrap the body parts, but they escape and connect high up where I can’t reach … in my dreams I construct a pyre. I extinguish the phantom woman. I would burn with her.

But it is only a dream vision. In reality, the body must remain a bounded system – a living body cannot be without margins, unlimited. But it is also true that multiple selves can lend plurality to the consciousness of the ‘bounded’ body.

Manthri’s uncanny perception of the singular body as a dismembered multiplicity has both positive and negative symbolic implications. In a sense it is the dark mirror of the existential completion that is denied to her through her marriage. In terms of the macropolitical metonym, we can see this as the logical outcome of the obsession with mapping the nation and forgetting the incongruous margins. The margins do eventually turn against the centre and retaliate by dismembering and destabilising the bounded nation-state, through the painful revelation of the multiplicity of the nation’s ‘souls’ within the identifiable map of the body politic. It is the epiphanic, though macabre, moment of the unravelling of the ‘paradox’ Cavarero speaks of – the paradox of the imagination of a stable political order based on the model of the ephemeral, perishable body. The ‘psychologization’ of the body politic becomes ineffectual now through the manifestation of the psychic plurality of the body (politic). Suddenly the bourgeois nation finds its breast, thigh and lips hovering in a phantasmagoric limbo. Like Manthri the nation can only try to reunite its body parts through ‘a web of desire,’ a political eros of relating to the ‘fragments,’ the ‘margins.’

A nation is not an organic entity, neither a body nor a soul, but bodies and souls articulated, joined together in an essentially artificial fabric of cohesion. The fabric can be sustained only if the web of desire is strong enough, but when it breaks and the threads fall apart then the ‘soul’ of the nation has recourse to nothing but hatred and coercion to sustain it in unity. The body of the nation, unlike the Bodhisattva of the Jataka story, refuses to throw itself into the fire to fulfil its being through an altruistic sacrifice. The map of the nation

22 Carol Gilligan, In a Different Voice (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard U P, 1982; reprint, 1993) 73.
23 Lokugé 68.
24 Lokugé 42.

obstinately enshrines its illusory immutability, by reifying the margins as marginal forever. The margins are imagined as the unruly limbs of the national soul that must be normalised through the psychologistic, or psychiatric intervention of the ‘soul,’ that is, the state. But when the margins are rebellious the very ontology of the map is at stake.

Motifs of dismemberment and immolation can also reflect the power of multiple, obstreperous selves to tear apart the seemingly singular body of the nation-state, thereby changing a ‘bounded system’ into an open one and ushering in an emancipatory schizophrenia, the hope of undermining the body-as-map. In reconceptualising the body as a sacrificial object Manthri also presents a critique of Buddhism as it is practised in her contemporary Sri Lanka. Richard Gombrich observes that there is a submerged tradition of valorising violence within the Theravada Buddhism of Sri Lanka. In reference to a passage in the Mahavamsa, Gombrich remarks, ‘No humane person today can regard the monk’s statement to Dutthagamani that non-Buddhists are no better than animals without disgust.’ This kind of religious fundamentalism is challenged by Manthri’s ethic of care, when she ponders on the Jataka story on the Bodhisattva’s sacrifice. While the prevalent religious discourse is content to ritualistically dwell on the transitory nature of the human body, Manthri envisages the possibilities of finding for that ephemeral body a telos oriented towards others. And this teleology, which might be characterised as the Bodhisattvic teleology, is different from the petty bourgeois teleology of the happy home and hearth. Later, Manthri goes back to Sri Lanka and stays there to teach ‘the dhamma to some girls orphaned by the war.’ Her effort is directed towards a concrete materialisation of this Bodhisattvic ethic of care. Manthri however fails. She gradually realises that it is impossible for her to subsume her passionate Self into an altruistic vocation.

Manthri’s ‘detached’ world of self-deluding equanimity is troubled by the arrival of her daughter at the temple in Sri Lanka where she teaches the dhamma. Nelum has defied Mahendra’s dictatorial regime and has been living with her Australian boyfriend, David. Manthri is distracted and, propelled by an uncontrollable force, once again returns from ‘detachment’ to ‘desire.’ Now, in her imagination, Australia is the place of unfulfilled desires and Sri Lanka a metonym of her detachment. But she realises that this imagination too is self-deluding. She takes the doctrine of karma fatalistically and this fatalism throws her into perpetual melancholia. Of course, the change of places has a negative effect on her, but we need to note that she carries the seeds of madness from Sri Lanka to Australia where they blossom ultimately into absolute schizophrenia.

Madness, perhaps, does not travel from place to place but is everywhere, like the sky, like the intimations of the sea. Lokuge’s novel points to the absurdity of mapping madness and surreptitiously suggests that the ‘sane’ people are but the mad cartographers of an unmapable madness. In Australia too there are compulsive mappers of madness. The young missionaries come to map Manthri’s deviance, to cage her multiple selves into a converted ‘docile body’ (a la Michel Foucault). ‘They remind (her) about (her) soul and all that Jesus has sacrificed for it.’ But Manthri refuses to be disciplined any more. She also rejects the

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26 Lokuge 31.
27 Lokuge 182-188.
28 Lokuge 200.

Buddhist discipline that has suppressed her passions in the name of detachment, focussing on
the metaphoric purity of the lotus rather than the taste of its stamen. She muses, ‘Not my old
Buddhist texts. They gather dust on the shelves. When I have the time I will tear them apart
page by page. I don’t have the energy just now.’

Nelum, her daughter, is a successful careerist, unlike Devake, Manthri’s son. Nelum
can move towards a meaningful future, she is not trapped in the prison-house of memory as
Manthri is. But Manthri’s sympathy lies with her son, who is a failure, the other face of this
blooming madness. Devake has not become a doctor, he has failed in fulfilling his father’s
expectations. He is a non-son-like son of his sexist father for whom gender roles are not roles
but immutable ontological essences. While Manthri is trapped, due to her repressive
disciplining, into the labyrinthine circuits of oppressive memories and frustrated desires,
Mahendra, because of his extreme inflexibility, becomes the victim of a different kind of
entropy, the entropy of the emigrant whose windowless mental universe never lets him fully
arrive in the new land. The great patriarch becomes emotionally alienated from his family
and turns into a lonely old man in his diasporic home. Sri Lanka becomes a past to which he
cannot return. Nor is a nostos possible towards his wife. He has moved on, and cannot move
back now.

The whole novel foregrounds the way in which the mappers of madness try to conceal
their own intractable insanity. The discipliners of the passionate body, like the discipliners of
the passions of the body politic, exploit the elasticity of that desiring body to the point of
dismemberment. Dismemberment is seen by them as a disease and not as the rebellion of
multiplicity against the monovocal madness of the dominant episteme. Sri Lanka, the map of
a geopolitical territory, suddenly becomes an unmappable sea of madness, a dismembered
polity. Manthri, the docile girl, after the persistent denial of her bodily passions, gains a
peculiar bodily consciousness of dismemberment. And the mappers of madness are all blind
to their own insanities in the novel. Manthri’s parents fail to discern the acute self-
contradiction in their religious episteme and ethical praxis, Mahendra’s sexism blinds him to
the extent of insanity. The Sri Lankan state tries to discipline the madness of its margins and
remains uncritical of its own ethnocentric madness. Madness is nothing but the attempt to
map out madness—a project that is perpetually unsuccessful because there are no margins to
define human madness. This bleak truth becomes evident through the cartographers of
insanity that constellate around Manthri. The reason of state is but the unreason of state, the
stability of the bourgeois family or nation is nothing but the instability of togetherness.

While discussing Julia Kristeva’s Women’s Time, Homi Bhabha says, ‘The borders of
the nation are, Kristeva claims, constantly faced with a double temporality: the process of
identity constituted by historical sedimentation (the pedagogical); and the loss of identity in
the signifying process of cultural identification (the performative).’

We may argue that Manthri’s madness occupies the no-man’s-land between these two processes of construction
and loss of identity. This no-man’s-land becomes the semantically productive space of the
madwoman’s land. And this is madness as land, non-belonging as the motherland par
excellence, the condition of simultaneously living and dying in the non-territory of the

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29 Lokugé 200.
30 Homi K. Bhabha, ‘DissemiNation: Time, Narrative, and the Margins of the Modern Nation’, Nation and

‘If the Moon Smiles on the Mappers of Madness: A Critique of the Cartographers of Insanity in
Chandani Lokugé’s If the Moon Smiled,’ Anway Mukhopadhyay.
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Kristevan *chora*. It is not something that can be unproblematically celebrated – nevertheless, it points to the other possibilities of imagining space, of defying the tyranny of the cartographic dominance of the pedagogical over the performative. The madness of a destructive performance at the margins is organically linked to the unreason of the pedagogical at the centre.

Hesse writes:

And if ever the suspicion of their manifold being dawns upon men of unusual powers and of unusually delicate perceptions, so that, as all genius must, they break through the illusion of the unity of the personality and perceive that the self is made up of a bundle of selves, they have only to say so and at once the majority puts them under lock and key, calls science to aid, establishes schizophrenia and protects humanity from the necessity of hearing the cry of truth from the lips of these unfortunate persons.\(^{31}\)

The bourgeoisie cannot accept the ‘bundle of selves’ as this bundle is unmappable. The bourgeois body is a map overlapping with another map called the soul. But when the map is destroyed and only fragmented, dismembered margins remain, the bourgeoisie is afraid of monsters. The map of the body and the map of the nation are gods with monsters on their margins, passions lurking behind the furniture of sanity. But Lokuge’s novel shows us an instance of ‘subaltern writing,’ the epistemic agency of a dissolving agent. Foucault writes:

It is at this point that the mirror, as an accomplice, becomes an agent of demystification. … this, then, is the phase of abasement: presumptuously identified with the object of his delirium, the madman recognizes himself as in a mirror in this madness whose absurd pretensions he has denounced; his solid sovereignty as a subject dissolves in this object he has demystified by accepting it. He is now pitilessly observed by himself. And in the silence of those who represent reason, and who have done nothing but hold up the perilous mirror, he recognizes himself as objectively mad.\(^{32}\)

Foucault writes in masculine terms. However, Manthri never becomes ‘objectively mad.’ She too has a mirror in her asylum, but she, unlike Foucault’s madman, has never cherished a solid and sovereign subjectivity and hence even the ‘perilous mirror’ cannot make her recognise herself as ‘objectively mad.’ Rather, she can now see through the other people around her: her daughter who visits her, the asylum attendants, the priests. She can figure out the way in which they would try to appropriate the madwoman through their discursive construction of her madness. It is a crucial moment in the novel when madness, rather than seeing itself in the mirror, holds up a mirror to the mappers of madness – and their own madness, couched in the discourse of reason, is left radically unravelled. Manthri’s isolation in the asylum provides her with a critical consciousness to be doubtful of and eventually defy the disciplinary discourses imposed on her.

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\(^{31}\)Hesse 71.


In this novel the topos of the body as place and that of place as body crisscross in an intricate fashion. The mapping of the individual’s body and soul reflects that of the polis and vice versa. Cavarero says that in Plato’s Republic we find ‘a conflict between reason and the impulses, which must be resolved within a hierarchical model containing subordinate and superior parts. This is as true for the individual as it is for the polis.’ This essentially Western model of political fabrication, thanks to the colonial epistemic mediation, is enshrined in the postcolonial nation-states in South Asia. The dichotomisation of madness and sanity, reason and impulse, functions to prop up the hierarchical socio-political structures of these nations. The passionate anti-state violence of the ‘ultras’ (i.e., the so called political extremists) and their barbaric normalisation by the nation states are a phenomenon that is construed by the statist ideology from the perspective of this discourse of madness and sanity that travels from psychology to politics, covering a broad range of conformist ideology.

Cavarero observes that with Plato there emerged a new kind of idea of medicine which was bound with political philosophy in a relationship of cross-fertilisation:

Thus a system of metaphorical exchanges is set up between the two disciplines, in which hierarchical order is defined as health and any disturbance of hierarchy is considered a disease. … This view marginalizes corporeality and attempts to dominate it, only to find the body constantly within the folds of language and among order’s obsessions, lurking in the nightmare of nocturnal impulses that upset not only the Platonic tyrant. These nighttime monsters only seem to be tamed by Aristotle, who models the body definitively on a virile, logical and political specimen, while as always expelling the female body from the city as a failed male, naturally illogical and therefore unpolitical.

I would like to argue that Lokugé deliberately takes up the figure of an excluded female body to question its categorisation as a ‘failed male.’ In the diasporic context, she is a failed immigrant, but this failure is used by the author to question Mahendra’s success in the political realm. The ‘nightmare of nocturnal impulses’ that troubles the bourgeois ‘soul’ of a postcolonial polity is what confronts the mappers of madness, the postcolonial nationalists. A map metaphysicises the physical, reifies a piece of land into a pictorial abstraction. Cartography’s marginalisation of corporeality has manifested itself most gruesomely in the case of the African continent. But it is no less horrible (though perhaps less spectacular) in the South Asian context. The nation was often conceived of as a female body, the so called motherland, by the nationalists during the colonial period. But in the postcolonial nation we see a crafty expulsion of the physical body of the motherland from the cartographic political imaginary, just as the female body is excluded as ‘failed male.’ Maps defy multiplicity, turning existence into a bounded system. And hence, when the moon smiles upon the mappers of madness, it becomes a figure for the excluded woman with her ethic of care, or the ‘motherland’ that vanishes under the geo-political map of the ‘Nation.’

33Cavarero 103.
34Cavarero 103.

A Special Note:
In a paper (‘Curry, Mod Oz Style: South Asian-Australian Identities and the Imaginary Homeland’) presented at the international conference on ‘Globalisation and Postcolonial Writing: An Australia-India Exchange,’ organised by the School of English, Communications and Performance Studies, Monash University, Nilanjana Deb, my teacher at Jadavpur University, Kolkata, India, offered a nuanced discussion of the religious motifs in this novel by Lokuge. Nevertheless, my approach to the same topos in this article is different from hers in that I try to show how the novel deftly deconstructs a religious culture (semantically as well as semiotically) from the perspective of an ostensibly ‘mad’ woman. The abstract of Deb’s paper can be accessed using this link: http://arts.monash.edu.au/ecps/assets/docs/abstracts-globalisation-postcolonial-writing.pdf.

I am thankful to the anonymous peer reviewers of my essay whose advice and suggestions I have followed to modify the preliminary draft of this essay.

‘If the Moon Smiles on the Mappers of Madness: A Critique of the Cartographers of Insanity in Chandani Lokugé’s If the Moon Smiled’ Anway Mukhopadhyay. 
*Transnational Literature* Vol. 5 no. 2, May 2013. 
Cinderella’s Lessons on Footbinding: How Tiny Feet Found their Way into the Chinese Cinderella Story
Tyler Scott Smith

Cinderella: Bound To China
Shoes, slippers, feet and sandals play one of the most pivotal roles in the prominent Cinderella stories through the tale’s history. Tracing versions of the tale geographically as it spread throughout Central Asia and then throughout the globe can exemplify the different traditions and mores a society entrusts to the story. However, feet and their coverings survive all of these retellings after a certain point. Footbinding and the spread of early versions of the Cinderella tale share the same time periods in the ninth-century, and the tradition of footbinding makes a lasting impact on the story once it begins moving from southern China.¹

Review of the Literature
The popularly agreed upon origin for the tale is in southern China and is thought to have been recorded by Duan Chengshi in the early ninth-century. He is credited with recording the tale of Yeh-Shen, a mistreated stepchild who is subjected to hardship but later is elevated by her selection for a marriage into power and affluence. The most extensive research on the tale’s origin is authored by Marian Cox who catalogued and classified over three-hundred variants of the tale throughout the world, in her book Cinderella: Three Hundred and Forty-five Variants of Cinderella, Catskin, and Cap O’Rushes.² She explains the motifs required in the construction of a Cinderella tale. Cox states that the ‘Type A motif,’ the most common in Cinderella tales, is made up of two key elements, an ‘ill-treated heroine’ and her ‘recognition by means of a shoe.’³ These same motifs are utilized by Anna Birgitta Rooth, who updates and augments the work of Cox by bringing another 300 versions of the tale to the attention of researchers in her work, The Cinderella Cycle.⁴ Alan Dundes compiles the scholarship of both Cox and Rooth, along with many others, in his book, Cinderella, A Casebook.⁵ The variants pointed out by Rooth, Cox and Dundes display that the tales which reach Europe maintain the shoe motif. Charles Perrault’s recording the Little Glass Slipper in 1697 made the impact on the westernization of the story. However Perrault’s version allows for Cinderella to be noticed for her beauty and elegance, and even adds a meeting between the Prince and Cinderella before their marriage. These aspects are missing from Yeh-Shen.⁶ Later, in 1812, the Brothers Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm published their collection of stories; they also maintained the shoe motif and also allow for a meeting between Cinderella and the

¹ The time periods cited for this observation are derived from data collected and published by Dorothy Ko. Ko’s work explains the development of footbinding, which is compared in this paper to the emergence of the Cinderella tale in correlative regions.
³ Cox, xxv.

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prince before his obtaining her slipper. These two well-known European versions of the story represent the versions after their journey through China.

Yeh-Shen was brought to the attention of the scholarly community in 1947 when Arthur Waley published his paper, *The Chinese Cinderella Story.* His translation of the folktale recorded by Duan Chengshi in the ninth-century became the definitive text for the story. Waley credits the roots of his version of the story with the ‘aborigines in the extreme south of China.’ The evidence of geography and the time period point to the ‘aborigines’ Waley spoke of as the people of the Yungchow Clan. Duan Chengshi actually stated in his original text that the story was obtained by his servant, Li Shih Yuan, who was from the Yungchow familial group in the region.

Although the story is widely regarded as having its roots in the southern most part of China, Wayne Schlepp argues that a version of the tale of Ye Shen can be found in Tibet and it predates the Chengshi record. He cites the Tibetan collection tales, *The Twenty-five Stories of the Magic Corpse,* in which similar motifs from the story Yeh-Shen are observed. In the translated tale presented by Schlepp the main character is tricked into killing her own mother and then moves in with two ogresses who mistreat her. When she is granted wishes from her mother, who has been reincarnated as a cow, she attends a local fair and there catches the eye of a prince. The girl flees the fair for fear of the ogres and leaves her slipper which is how she is then confirmed to be the beautiful girl at the fair. If Schlepp is correct in his analysis of the text, it would mean that story travelled along the Tang Dynasty’s Tea-Horse road. The road is likely how the tale travelled from Schlepp’s Tibet to China.

Gary Sigley’s 2010 article on Chinese cultural heritage points to the two major trade roads of ancient China. The first of those trade routes being the well-known Silk Road, which was the main channel of trade to Europe. The second was the lesser-known Tea Horse Road. Sigley describes the Tea Horse Road as being the main route that ran from Tibet into China, reaching its peak of use during the rule of Tang Dynasty. Shi Shou, a professor and researcher at the Center for Tibetan Studies of Sichuan University confirms Sigley’s description of the Tea Horse Road. Shou explains that the road was ‘not only a channel for ancestors’ migration and also a key tunnel for ancient intercultural communication among these regions.’

If Schlepp is correct in his assertion that the story of Yeh-Shen is from Tibet, then the version he translates would be unaffected by the southern Chinese tradition of footbinding. Schlepp himself notes that although the story contains a shoe, it is ‘not protracted and seems

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8 Waley 226.
13 Sigley 536.
almost matter of fact by comparison.’ He goes on to state that the Tibetan authors were likely concerned with things other than the shoes. 15

It should be said, that Schlepp does not touch upon the possibility of the monogenesis spread of the tale. Stith Thompson argues that Lang, who wrote Cox’s introduction, believed the tale was not one of polygenesis. 16 Thompson also cites the criticisms of a polygenesis theory being applied to the story of Yeh-Shen. He says that this theory is based on ‘the presumption of a parallel development of culture everywhere, a parallelism which would manifest itself in analogous tales’. 17 Gerald Gresseth agrees with Thompson’s assessment. He analyzes Rooth’s text and explains the likelihood of the tale having a stationary origin and traveling in various cultures. 18 The agreement of Thompson and Gresseth makes the tale traveling along the Tea-Horse road entirely probable.

Yeh-Shen and Cinderella

In Waley’s translation, Chengshi tells the story of a young girl, who is adopted by her stepmother after the death of her mother and father. The girl finds a fish in a nearby pond. The fish is an incarnation of her mother and she feeds the fish. The stepmother finds out who the fish is and promptly kills and eats it. Yeh-Shen finds the remains, which grant her wishes. Yeh-Shen attends a royal gathering in a kingfisher cloak and she wears shoes of gold. Yeh-Shen grows fearful of her stepmother finding her at the gathering so she flees, leaving behind a gold slipper. The king obtains the slipper and sets out to find the original wearer. He orders all of the women in the kingdom to try it on, but none of their feet were small enough to fit the shoe. Finally the king finds a woman with small enough feet to fit, Yeh-Shen. The king marries Yeh-Shen and they return to his court with the fish bones from her mother. The king misuses the bones and suffers a mutiny by his soldiers. 19

The variants for comparison show an interesting trend with the shoe motif. The three variants with which to compare Yeh-Shen are the Tibetan Cinderella presented by Schlepp, the Cinderella tale written by Perrault and finally the Brothers Grimm and their story retelling. All of the stories have the structure of a young girl separated from her biological parents and being abused by her new caretakers. All of the variants also offer a magic being who helps the Cinderella character to attend a celebration of some kind. Where the stories lack congruency is that in Schlepp, Perrault and Grimm the prince/headman is in attendance at the celebration. In Yeh-Shen the ruler is nowhere on the premises. In Schlepp’s retelling the girl goes to the fair and sees the prince:

The girl went to the fair; she circled the crowd to the right and saw that those two were begging for something to eat. She then circled against the direction of the sun and there saw a great prince who was most handsome of all. She enjoyed herself very much looking at all the things at the fair. Before the crowd dispersed, she hurried

15 Schlepp 138.
17 Thompson 380.
18 Gerald Gresseth, ‘The Odyssey and the Nalopakhyana,’ Transactions of the American Philological Association 109 (1979) 71
19 Waley 227-9.

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home but on the way back she lost one of her slippers while jumping across a stream. When she got home she hid away all her clothes and jewelry.  

The prince upon being presented with the shoe lost by the girl remembers her, having seen her during the fair:

When the prince’s horse keeper went out to water the horses, the bay horses did not drink but instead wandered upstream and the keeper followed after it. The horse sniffed out a beautiful slipper, which the keeper picked up, and when the horses were watered, he led them back and gave the slipper to the prince and reported the matter. The prince said, ‘Yesterday among the crowd was a girl about fifteen years old who had all the signs and marks of a goddess. If she comes again today, since I have found her through [the good offices of] this fine horse, I shall make her my queen and take her into the palace.’  

It is clear that the prince was enamored of her, describing her as having marks of a goddess. In his description of her though he does not mention her shoes, only her beauty, his only interest in the shoe is that will be a useful tool in identifying the young lady he saw. Marian Cox, Anna B. Rooth and Alan Dundes all identify that one of the most common motifs of all variants of the Cinderella story is her identification by her shoe. Rooth, who built heavily on the research done by Cox, defines the loss of a foot covering as a ‘Type A’ Cinderella motif because of its frequency and associative nature to the story. Perrault’s version of the tale has a similar sequence of events to Schlepp’s. The girl goes to the event and finds her true love who sees her as a beauty:

The king’s son, who was told that a great princess, whom nobody knew, had arrived, ran out to receive her. He gave her his hand as she alighted from the coach, and led her into the hall, among all the company. There was immediately a profound silence. Everyone stopped dancing, and the violins ceased to play, so entranced was everyone with the singular beauties of the unknown newcomer.

Nothing was then heard but a confused noise of, ‘How beautiful she is! How beautiful she is!’ …

She jumped up and fled, as nimble as a deer. The prince followed, but could not overtake her. She left behind one of her glass slippers, which the prince picked up most carefully. She reached home, but quite out of breath, and in her nasty old clothes, having nothing left of all her finery but one of the little slippers, the mate to the one that she had dropped.
The consistent trend being that the prince is aware of the girl, he sees her and is aware of her beauty. It is only after he is in love and aware of her beauty that the shoe makes an important showing in the story. The Grimm story, though more grizzly with the identification process has the same order of importance. First the prince notices the girl, falls in love because of her beauty and then uses the shoe to find the girl he fell in love with:

Then the bird threw a gold and silver dress down to her, and slippers embroidered with silk and silver. She quickly put on the dress and went to the festival. …

The prince approached her, took her by the hand, and danced with her. Furthermore, he would dance with no one else. He never let go of her hand, and whenever anyone else came and asked her to dance, he would say, ‘She is my dance partner.’ …

When evening came Cinderella wanted to leave, and the prince tried to escort her, but she ran away from him so quickly that he could not follow her. The prince, however, had set a trap. He had had the entire stairway smeared with pitch. When she ran down the stairs, her left slipper stuck in the pitch. The prince picked it up. It was small and dainty, and of pure gold.

The next morning, he went with it to the man, and said to him, ‘No one shall be my wife except for the one whose foot fits this golden shoe.’

All of these versions contradict the order of events in Yeh-Shen. With the aforementioned variants she is noted as a beauty and the shoe is later found by a by a passer-by and the shoe is subsequently sent to a king. The king loves the shoe’s small size and goes to great lengths to find the person who can fit into it, despite never having seen her:

When the time came for the cave-festival, the step-mother went, leaving the girl to keep watch over the fruit-trees in the garden. She waited till the step-mother was some way off, and then went herself, wearing a cloak of stuff spun from kingfisher feathers and shoes of gold. Her step-sister recognized her and said to the step-mother, ‘That’s very like my sister.’ The step-mother suspected the same thing. The girl was aware of this and went away in such a hurry that she lost one shoe. It was picked up by one of the people of the cave. When the step-mother got home, she found the girl asleep, with her arms round one of the trees in the garden, and thought no more about it. This cave was near to an island in the sea. On this island was a kingdom called T'o-han. Its soldiers had subdued twenty or thirty other islands and it had a coastline of several thousand leagues. The caveman sold the shoe in T'o-han, and the ruler of T'o-han got it. He told those about him to put it on; but it was an inch too small even for the one among them that had the smallest foot. He ordered all the women in his kingdom to try it on; but there was not one that it fitted. It was light as down and made no noise even when treading on stone. The king of T'o-han thought the caveman had got it unlawfully. He put him in prison and tortured him, but did not end by

finding out where it had come from. So he threw it down at the wayside. Then they went everywhere, through all the people’s houses and arrested them. If there was a woman’s shoe, they arrested them and told the king of T’o-han. He thought it strange, searched the inner-rooms and found Yeh-Shen. He made her put on the shoe, and it was true.²⁵

The heroine of the story, is identified and propelled into wealth and power by marrying the king because of the size of her feet, whereas in the other variants the shoe is used solely as a form of finding her. In Yeh-Shen the king has never even seen the girl who wore the shoe, his mad crusade to find the owner is fueled only by his love of the slipper and the assumption that the wearer must be beautiful because of the shoes small size. This ‘Type A’ storyline is found first in China. The development of the slipper or shoe motif is also derived from the Chinese influence on the story. Rooth states that the shoe motif survives into the other variants that leave southern China after the shoe component is added and continue on into the European and Near Eastern versions.²⁶ Her beauty and worth were all based on the fact that she was the only girl in the kingdom with feet small enough to fit the slipper. This is evidence that rather than the ‘love at first sight’ motif that the western Cinderella is renowned for, Yeh-Shen is not fallen in love with because of her aesthetics. She is still only recognized and appreciated by the king for the size of her feet, not her beauty.

**Footbinding and Yeh-Shen**

Less than one-hundred years after the recording of Chengshi’s tale, southern China saw the emergence of the custom known as footbinding. While the timeline presented here for footbinding puts the recording of the tale prior to there being static evidence of footbinding, it is widely believed by researchers that the custom had been in practice for centuries before the story came to China. The congruence of these two events in history is more than coincidental. By following the Tea-Horse Road from Tibet into southern China, the story was shared by tradesmen or travellers as they transported their goods. In the story, the Tibetan authors and storytellers treat shoes indifferently, however in the southern Chinese version in the early ninth-century it becomes a tale that decides the protagonist’s fate on her shoes and foot size. As southern Chinese traditions infiltrated the story, it was also moving across the country, making its way north and west along the trade routes. It follows the same path that saw the development of foot binding and did so in less than a century before the custom became standard. The embedded motif of small feet and shoes became so indoctrinated to the story that even centuries later, in a continent away, the smallest feet in the kingdom still resulted in royal marriage.

The history of footbinding was long thought to have its roots in the court of the Tang Dynasty (618 – 907 CE). While court was being held at the city of Nanjing, the dancing girls are commented on because of having ‘bow-shoes’ giving their feet the look of being very

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²⁵ Waley 228-9.
²⁶ Waley 192.
small and beautiful. The central dancing girl mentioned is Yaoniang, and she danced for the ruler of the Southern Tang Dynasty, Li Yu.  

Dorothy Ko whose book, *Cinderella’s Sisters: A Revisionist History of Footbinding*, supplies the most comprehensive study on the subject, presents the most recent and accurate retelling of Yaoniang and Li Yu (937-78 CE). Ko translates from the text of Zhou Mi, an eleventh-century scholar, that Yaoniang’s feet were wrapped with silk to make them small and slim. So enticing were her tiny feet that Li Yu constructed a six-foot tall golden lotus statue in her honor. It is believed likely that Yaoniang never existed, but the statue and Yu’s desire for small feet are a fact of the story.  

The story also alludes to the connection between beauty in the form of small feet and the acquisition of increased social and economic status attained through the use of them as a sexual object.

Ko cites two lesser known stories that share similarities with the Yaoniang legend. She explains that the sources for the two ‘origin’ stories are not concrete, which is why they are often ignored by scholars. Both the story of the Duke of Donghun’s spouse, Consort Pan, and the story of Consort Yang are indicated as footbinding records that predate the Zhou Mi writings. Consort Pan, dated in the sixth-century and Yang dated in the mid eight-century, make no direct specific indication of bound feet. It is the lack of this specificity that causes them to be discredited as sources.

In a search for textual evidence of footbinding that is considered decisively dependable, Valerie Hansen, in her book *The Open Empire: A History of China to 1600*, looks to Zongyi Tao’s *Nancun chuo eng lu* translating his notes to read,

…one can know [that] flattened feet began only since the Five Dynasties (907-60 CE). Before the Xining (1068-77 CE) and Yuanfeng (1077-86 CE) reigns, the practice was rare. Recently people have copied each other and no longer feel shame.

Hansen views this excerpt as the most dependable, textual evidence of the origination of footbinding. She points out that most researchers of the subject still consider the Tang poetic descriptions of court dancers binding their feet to be the evidential key, however, she explains that it is not grounded in recorded text and therefore should be carefully used as a source.

Footbinding was a custom unique to the southern regions of China, spreading most aggressively during the Southern Song dynasty (1127–1279 CE). The custom did not become adopted in northern China until the Yuan dynasty (1279–1368 CE). The custom itself was

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29 Ko 114.
30 Ko 112-14.
32 Zongyi Tao, *Nancun chuo eng lu*, (Beijing: Zhonghua shu ju : Xin hua shu dian Beijing fa xing suo fa xing, 1360).
33 Hansen 286-7.
rooted in the southern regions during the Tang Dynasty.\textsuperscript{34} For over three hundred years, the people of the north did not wrap or bind their feet. It was considered to be a southern custom well into the fourteenth century.\textsuperscript{35}

**Conclusion**

Yeh-Shen did not bind her feet, nor did Cinderella; however they both became emblematic for the custom of footbinding. By perpetuating the belief that small feet will allow a potential bride to marry well, these stories embody the cultural custom of footbinding and validate it through folklore. The time periods, geographical spread and manipulation of variants all are evidence that footbinding found its roots in the southern tale of a girl with the smallest feet in the kingdom.

\textsuperscript{34} Ko 114.
\textsuperscript{35} Gamble 181.