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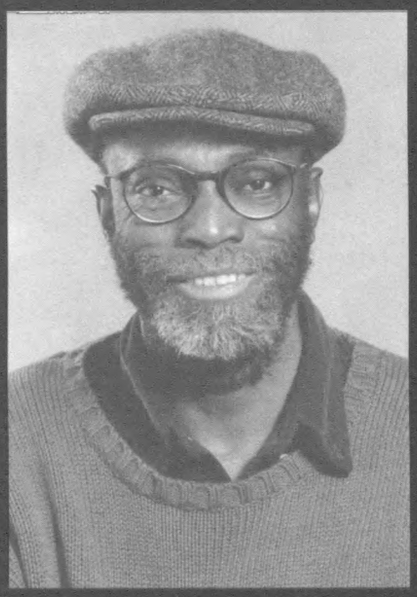

The World De-Colonized

An Interview with Biodun Jeyifo

by Paul Sawyer

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Once upon a time English literary studies in the U.S. observed the borders of two major English-speaking nations—America and Great Britain. In the multicultural world of the twenty-first century, such a limited approach to English literature has become untenable, in large part because major works in English are produced by writers from around the world, as well as writers within both the U.S. and Britain who write without a sense of Anglo-American identity. This issue of *English at Cornell* is devoted to the effect of that profound change on the Department of English at Cornell, where ten of the fifty or so faculty members belong to the Third World and Minority Studies Caucus—a ratio of nearly one to five which, as Biodun Jeyifo points out in the lead article, is unprecedented in major U.S. institutions. As a result, Cornell undergraduates may study the theater of Wole Soyinka alongside the plays of Shakespeare, or the structure of a Cherokee hand-woven basket alongside the structure of a sonnet.

Biodun Jeyifo (known to friends and colleagues as "BJ") is a distinguished critic and theorist of postcolonial literature and culture. His books include *The Popular Yoruba Travelling Theatre of Nigeria, The Truthful Lie: Essays in the Sociology of African Drama,* and, most recently, *Modern African Drama* (a Norton Critical Edition). In the interview that follows, BJ ranges broadly over such topics as his youth in Nigeria, the nature of postcolonial studies as a field, and the unique opportunities facing the Cornell English department today. In the article beginning on page 2, Laura Donaldson (Cherokee) uses the concept of "transculturation" to explain how native peoples have adapted to cultural traumas.

Paul Sawyer: How would you define the field of postcolonial studies and Anglophone writings?

Biodun Jeyifo: It is an "emergent" field that is not monolithic but has many divergent and even contradictory currents within it. Not long ago, the name "postcolonial studies" applied only to writings from formerly colonized regions of the world. But it now includes writings from around the world that concern the central place of colonialism, slavery, and the diasporic shifts of hundreds of millions of people from the Third World to the West in the making of the modern world. You can see from this that we are talking really about a mega-field that cuts across many other fields and disciplines and that generates many new, intellectually exciting possibilities as well as great theoretical and methodological problems.

What specifically has the field contributed to the study of English?

A major achievement of colonial/postcolonial and Anglophone studies is to have made very visible writers and literary and cultural traditions that were simply off the radar screen of English studies or comparative literature about three or four decades ago. Since 1975, writers like Chinua Achebe, Derek Walcott, Wilson Harris, Wole Soyinka, Bessie Head, Salman Rushdie, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Bharati Mukherjee, Michael Ondaatje, Kazuo Ishiguro—a whole range of "Anglophone" writers and writings—have become not only highly visible but almost canonical in twentieth-century English-language writing.

I went to a colonial university in Nigeria. We mostly had British literature with a sprinkling of American lit, and no African lit, no Caribbean lit, no South Asian writers and writings at all. None, absolutely. And it wasn't as if there were no African writers, no Caribbean or South Asian writers. It was simply that these writers and the literary and cultural traditions

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On Remaking the World: Lessons from American Indians

by Laura E. Donaldson

Like most Americans, I have spent many moments since September 11 trying to grasp both the act itself and the endless chain of depressing events following in its wake: Afghanistan, the newly rekindled war between Israel and Palestine, threats of nuclear conflict between India and Pakistan, Enron, ImClone, the Catholic Church's sex abuse scandals, and the tenuous economy, to mention only the highlights. Although many have rediscovered faith communities or a renewed social activism in their search for understanding, I have immersed myself in the lessons of my own Cherokee culture and history. This history teaches me to situate September 11 in the larger context of other traumas that have occurred on American soil. For example, as many as 5,000 Cherokee people perished during the forced march to Oklahoma known as the Trail of Tears—or, more accurately translated, "they were crying in that place." If one includes all related fatalities (the injured and ill who died after reaching Oklahoma), the number may have reached 10,000. Cherokee oral tradition is replete with stories acknowledging the terror of what historians euphemistically call "removal," and its physical, spiritual, and social wounds may never be completely healed. Through its "good mind," however, the Real People survived this catastrophe and began creating a new home in the lush, green mountains of northeastern Oklahoma. Wilma Mankiller, former principal chief of the Cherokee Nation, has described "being of good mind" as being able to think positively, taking what is handed out and turning it into a better path (p. 226). Mankiller herself survived devastating injuries from a car crash, a diagnosis of muscular dystrophy, multiple kidney transplants, and acute lymphoma by practicing this attitude: "After that, I realized I could survive anything. I had faced adversity and turned it into a positive experience—a better path. I had found the way to be of good mind" (p. 229).

Perhaps no tradition embodies this perspective more revealingly than that of Cherokee basket making, and particularly of the honeysuckle basket.

From time immemorial, Cherokee women designed distinctive and durable baskets from the fronds of rivercane and the bark of white oak. These baskets constituted an integral part of the People's daily social and economic activities as well as their ceremonies and many other events. Eventually, however, the negative environmental impact of colonization—the rapacious logging of Indian lands and the subsequent degradation of riparian ecosystems supporting the rivercane beds—forced the People to adapt other materials to the craft of Cherokee basket making. One of the most widely-used substitutes was the Japanese honeysuckle vine, which was introduced to the U.S. following the establishment of trade relations with Japan in 1854. This plant reproduced prolifically in the warm and humid climate of the Southeast, where it soon threatened that region's natural vegetation. As the scholar Sarah Hill notes, "This inclusion of a non-indigenous material for baskets and a completely new technique of weaving signified larger transformations in culture and consciousness and in landscapes where weavers gathered materials" (p. xviii). Some of the most pernicious transformations included the loss of ancestral languages and religious practices as well as the production of baskets as commodities for sale rather than items entwined with the larger social and spiritual fabric of Cherokee culture.

These weavers did not completely replace older rivercane and white oak basketry with the newer Japanese honeysuckle, however. Instead, they appropriated this material into a system of Cherokee values and technologies and, in so doing, actually created a new tradition (Hill, p. xix). The honeysuckle basket thus braids traditional Cherokee materials with those from Japan and Euro-America, the traditional practice of basket making with modern responses to capitalism and commodification, and the oppression represented by extractive colonization with the reality of cultural persistence. It exists as an evocative visual metaphor for the good mind because, although its material ingredients acknowledge the impact of loss, it also creates something new. At the recent American Indian Millennium Conference held here at Cornell, Wilma Mankiller aptly summarized this potential better path as "I can't do this, but I can do that."

The texts of American Indian literature offer their own version of the Cherokee honeysuckle basket. For example, Luci Tapahonso's (Navajo) poem, "In 1864," recounts the Long Walk of the Diné to their incarceration at Bosque Redondo (Fort Sumner) and the next four years of starvation and deprivation:

It was at Bosque Redondo the people learned to use flour and now

fry bread is considered to be the traditional Navajo bread.

It was there that we acquired a deep appreciation for strong coffee.

The women began to make long, tiered calico skirts

and find velvet shirts for the men. They decorated their dark velvet

blouses with silver dimes, nickels, and quarters.

They had no use for money then.

It is always something to see silver flashing in the sun

against dark velvet and black, black hair. (10)

Laura E. Donaldson

During this time, the Diné lost hundreds of their people. Yet, as Tapahonso's poem suggests, it was also at Bosque Redondo that they began to incorporate elements of both Spain and Euro-America and, like the Cherokee basket makers, created new traditions. Take, for example, something as mundane (and delicious) as fry bread. Lawrence Shorty (Navajo) observes that during their internment at Bosque Redondo, the People had to change or die because they were dispossessed of their land, lifestyle, and the very food that had nourished them for generations (p. 135). Many succumbed because the new foods they ate made them sick. The Navajo subsequently created fry bread, a food that today signifies their "survivance," a neologism coined by Gerald Vizenor (Turtle Mountain Chippewa), that combines the determination to survive with endurance. According to Shorty, "like the adage, 'when life gives you lemons, make lemonade', Navajos could claim, 'when the federal government gives us flour, we will not starve: we will make fry bread'" (p. 135). Or, from a Cherokee perspective, when the government orders us off our lands and logging companies leave us with only the honeysuckle vine, we will not lost our identity: we will still make baskets.

The appropriation of white flour and the honeysuckle vine illustrates not only Native peoples' capacity for improvisation in the face of adversity, but also the power of transculturation even in the most grim circumstances. Transculturation is the process by which subjugated or marginalized groups select and invent from materials transmitted to them by a dominant or metropolitan culture. While these groups

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cannot control what the dominant culture disseminates, they can determine what they absorb into their own cultures and how they use these adaptations (Pratt, p. 6). The concept of transculturation thus provides a much-needed antidote to the reductionist dynamic of acculturation-deculturation advocated by many social theorists. Unfortunately, the usage of this model can imply that indigenous people always leave significant elements of their cultures behind. If we view the Navajo creation of fry bread or the Cherokee honeysuckle basket through a Native lens, however, the concept of transculturation metamorphoses into what I would call a "remaking" of colonial experience in which the artifacts of suffering transcend themselves.

An example of this process comes once again from the Cherokee. Like many American Indian cultures (including the Navajo), the Tsalagi have a ceremony that enables practitioners to remake commercially produced tobacco into its sacred, and much more rare, counterpart. The smoke of sacred tobacco is thought by many American Indian peoples to carry prayers to the Creator, and tobacco therefore constitutes an integral part of most Cherokee ceremonies. The disintegration of many communities after the Trail of Tears required such remaking ceremonies because both sacred tobacco plant strains and the knowledge associated with them were lost. In order for common tobacco to become *go:dhlvhi:so?-lmv:hi*, or "remade" with the generative force of thought, one must say, think, or sing certain texts over it as well as perform the correct ceremonial gestures (Kilpatrick & Kilpatrick, p. 9). While this specifically addresses the contemporary Cherokee need for sacred substances, I also believe that remaking describes a more general, distinctly Indian way of responding to hardship and cultural change. Instead of leaving our traditions behind, the act of remaking implies that we carry them with us into new circumstances, whether they be the difficulty of procuring sacred tobacco or the long walk to Bosque Redondo. Remaking offers a more adequate understanding of transculturation because it emerges out of Native ways of knowing, and illuminates how Native peoples absorbed colonial materials into their own knowledge systems. Indeed, the Diné at Bosque Redondo "remade" the dimes, nickels, and quarters of their colonizers into a singularly Navajo expression of beauty—an expression that always combines both the sacred and the everyday in the act of adornment. As Tapahonso evocatively notes, "it is always something to see silver flashing in the sun against dark velvet and black, black hair."

The history and culture of American Indians—and not just the Cherokee and Navajo—have demonstrated that the habitual practice of a good mind and a spirituality of remaking can provide strength and agency during the most trying of times. Non-native people in the post-September 11 world could learn much from these concepts. Attempting to perform specific remaking ceremonies would be ill advised and unethical; what the *attitude* of remaking teaches us, however, is profoundly important. It teaches us not to gloss over the realities of human suffering or the stresses of cultural change, but rather to search for the possibilities within traumatic events even when the trauma itself remains unalterable. Of course, none of this happens quickly. Like most spiritual disciplines, the attitude of remaking takes years to develop and understand.

Every day I look at the honeysuckle basket from Qualla (the home of the Eastern Cherokee Nation) sitting on the fireplace mantel in my home, and every day it reminds me that I never know where or when the beginning of a better path might appear. It tells me that much of my most significant work as a human being involves not only noticing such beginnings, but also risking the journeys they offer. Then, and only then, will the generative force of our good minds begin to remake the world into a place where catastrophic experiences such as the Trail of Tears and September 11 are thankfully only distant memories.

Laura E. Donaldson (Cherokee), an associate professor of English at Cornell, is author of Decolonizing Feminisms: Race, Gender and Empire–Building *(1992).*

The Janice Ashley Memorial Panel

Most members of the Cornell community knew or knew of someone involved in the September 11 tragedy. For many in this department that someone was Janice Ashley, a 1997 graduate in English, who worked as a research associate for a financial firm on the ninety-third floor of Tower One.

Knowing how Janice loved the pillars, arches, and stained woodwork of Goldwin Smith Hall, her family approached Cornell about placing a memorial there. With the help of Carol True-Palmer and Sheila Sheean of the Alumni Affairs and Development Office for the Arts, the Ashleys set up the Janice Ashley Memorial Fund. Donations from this fund enabled the family to commission a stained glass panel based on a crayon sketch by Janice's mother, Carol.

The memorial panel was installed over the transom of the new English department lounge and dedicated on June 23, 2002. More than forty people attended the service, including family members and Cornell faculty and community members who had known Janice. Carol Ashley explained the meaning of each symbol in the panel. The eagle, flowers, and butterflies were taken from Janice's artwork. The sun represents Janice's bright and energetic warmth; she is most remembered by friends and loved ones for her contagious laughter, her *joie de vivre*. The open book and clock tower are symbols of Cornell, standing for Janice's love of knowledge and her insight. Cayuga Lake and the green hills speak of the wild beauty of the Ithaca area, which Janice loved. And, finally, the eagle represents her adventurous spirit, strength, and focus.

Those attending the dedication were delighted to see that the stained glass panel shines with equal brilliance into the hall of Goldwin Smith's second floor and into the lounge itself (from the backlight of a nearby hall lamp). The beauty of the panel, with its poetic symbolism, will provide a constant reminder of the spirit that Janice embodied.

—Michael García

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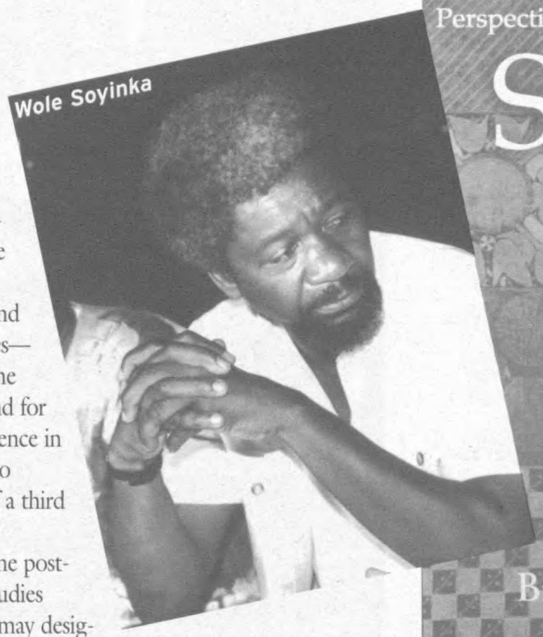
that produced them hadn't yet made it into the curriculum of English studies because academic disciplines reflected and helped to perpetuate the nature of the world we then lived in. This was in effect a world totally dominated by Eurocentric and colonial-imperial worldviews. But today, in a greatly transformed academic-institutional setting which reflects a putatively greatly transformed world, I now teach American plays by "minorities"—Ntozake Shange, August Wilson, Susan-Lori Parks, Amiri Baraka, and others—together with dramatic writings from Ireland, the Caribbean, and South Africa in a course titled Twentieth-Century Anglophone Drama. There's a tremendous excitement in teaching these new traditions of writing, a lot of them among the most experimental and innovative forms of drama today.

As a mark of that transformation, the curriculum of English studies is now perhaps best understood in terms of three distinct, though interlocking major streams: British, American, and Anglophone writings outside of the U.S. and the British Isles.

What are some of the different strands or currents within the field of postcolonial, Anglophone studies?

There are not only divergent currents within the field, there are also considerable tensions, considerable contradictions between them. This is not necessarily a bad thing. In fact, I think it is a good thing. And in saying this, I would like to invoke Brecht's unforgettable dictum that contradictions are our only hope. That dictum is rendered by Chinua Achebe in his inimitably pithy way when he said, quoting an Igbo proverb, "Where one thing stands, another thing will stand beside it."

One strand, which we may designate "progressive Third Worldist," was closely allied to the national liberation movements in the 1950s and early 1960s. In solidarity with these movements, and in recognition of their links with the civil rights, anti-war, and women's movements in this country, courses on Third World writings were taught in many North American universities. But about a decade earlier, the academic study of the languages and literatures of Africa, the Caribbean, South Asia, and Latin America was also being instituted in so-called "area studies" programs, which were developed in line with the special policies of the State Department. Within this framework, teaching the cultural traditions of the developing world was driven more by the instrumental-ideological goals of Cold War geopolitical objectives than richly and rigorously academic and progressive perspectives. Thus, in the area studies rubric, the literature of each nation or region of the developing world was studied pretty much in isolation—and within conservative or vapidly liberal perspectives to boot!

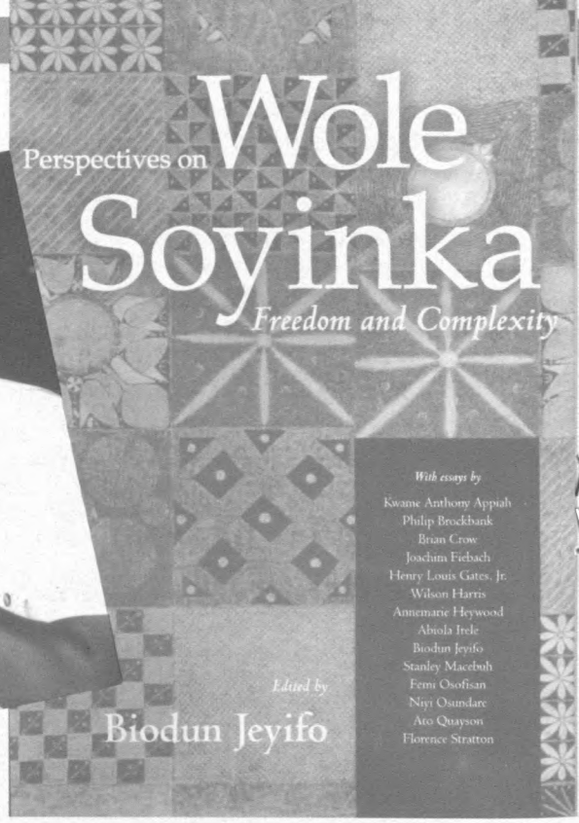


The uneasy coexistence of these two currents—progressive Third Worldist and area studies—provides the background for the emergence in the last two decades of a third current of Anglophone postcolonial studies which we may designate "postcoloniality." Loosely allied with the Third Worldist current, postcoloniality has moved us decisively beyond the area studies phase. Postcoloniality was able to achieve this transformation largely by using theory—as radical social critique and very sophisticated and rigorous intellection—to move the study of Third World literatures into mainstream departments so that they are now no longer studied as isolated national or regional literatures. Moreover, they are also now studied with regard to the mutual self-constitution of the literary and cultural traditions of empire and colony, of the colonizers and the colonized.

What of the tensions and contradictions in the field that you spoke about earlier?

One major problem derives paradoxically from its success. Moving us decisively beyond the intellectual legacies of the colonial-imperial age, beyond the simplifications and binarisms of West and non-West: this is one of the most important intellectual achievements of postcolonial studies and theory in the last two decades. It is also one of the great stories of the intellectual history of the present period, perhaps as significant as the entry into American academia of German-Jewish émigrés fleeing from Nazi Germany. But all this has come, in my opinion, at a great cost. Let me express this as carefully as I can.

One problem is that the relationship of specialism to generalism is at a very confused state in postcolonial studies and theory. Most postcolonial critics are on solid ground as generalists. They are astute in deploying and inventing general, abstract categories like critique, difference, voice, representation, identification, desire, subjectivity and subject-formation, and many others to enable them to write about and across different regions of the world as well as the Western metropolitan centers of the global order—with only a few selected or "representative" texts.



But most lack detailed, specialized knowledge of the languages and histories of the regions they write about, including even their own natal cultures and societies. Equally important, they lack a rich and nuanced grounding in the realities and contexts making and unmaking the nations and regions of the developing world and the diasporic, immigrant communities in the West. As a result, postcolonial theory is more and more cut off from the radical social movements of the developing world. That's why I think the initial promise of postcolonial theory—as a combination of progressive scholarship and radical social critique—is now seriously in question.

Another problem I see is that the relationship of postcolonial theory to postmodernism remains largely unexamined. It is incontestable that postcolonial theory has derived inspiration from the panache and the elan with which postmodernism carried out its devastating assaults on the great Enlightenment categories of rationalism, universalism, and historicism, among others. But at the same time, postcolonial theory has taken over much of what I would describe as the superstitions of postmodernism concerning those Enlightenment categories. For example, we are greatly indebted to the deconstructive exposure of the ethnocentric presuppositions of universalism as defined by many Enlightenment thinkers and their present-day intellectual heirs, together with the terrible epistemic violence that these presuppositions have produced in the real world in the last three centuries. But for scholars who speak from and "represent" the experiences of historically oppressed or marginalized groups, it is very unwise and ultimately self-defeating to buy into this postmodernist superstition that universalism was, is, and always will be unconditionally harmful. For that attitude provides the intellectual foundation for a kind of tokenism, a totally unacceptable paternalistic "respect" for difference and otherness which obscures commonalities and

shared aspirations across our differences. We need better, more flexible and testable definitions and uses of universalism. And the models for these exist in some Western thinkers produced by the Enlightenment as well as, more importantly, in thinkers, writers, and artists produced by traditions of thought, spirit, and imagination in other regions of the world.

Shall we talk a bit about your own background? What kind of environment did you grow up in?

I spent the first fourteen years of my life in colonial Nigeria, including the first two years of secondary school, so that a lot of what I'm saying now in very broad world-historical terms I've actually lived through, existentially and professionally. I grew up in Ibadan, which was at that time the largest city in black Africa, with about two million people, and one of the most important educational and cultural centers of the continent. So I grew up in a colonial, cosmopolitan background and with intense awareness of the historic movement of decolonization in the Third World.

What did your parents do?

My father was an officer in the colonial police force, which left some lasting impact on his social and political views. As a consequence, we didn't see eye to eye on many things, to put it mildly. My mother was what you'd call a petty trader, which really meant that she was a full-time housewife who did some petty trading on the side but lived mainly on my father's modest wealth. My evolving consciousness of self, history, and politics initially derived, I think, from the mass of social contradictions in my familial background. In plain terms, I was born into a petty-bourgeois family that was only two generations away from the African peasantry whose world crashed disastrously with the introduction of agrarian colonial capitalism in Africa. Moreover, with his modest wealth, my father made the most of the rather flexible norms of Africanized Christianity that allows those (who can afford it) to have several wives. Thus, literally and metaphorically, there were many mansions in my father's house and as a result of this, my siblings and half-sisters and -brothers straddle the whole gamut of the class and socio-economic cleavages of the neocolonial societies of the developing world.

After he retired from the police force, my father went into the real estate business; he owned some houses, and managed some for his friends and associates, all rented mainly to working people and poor people in Ibadan. I sometimes had to go collect rent from my father's tenants and I can't remember—I swear I'm not making this up—a more unpleasant task from my youth than going to collect rent from the tenants of those houses. For many of the children of these tenants were my schoolmates and playmates.

I would say that my "radicalism" was basically restless and formless through secondary school and college—a vague anti-authoritarianism, but it did earn me expulsion from secondary school for being the "spokesperson" for a big student demonstration. When I went to the University of Ibadan, where I majored in English, the curriculum was British lit; the faculty was overwhelmingly white—I think there was only one African, and he was a very junior lecturer out of a faculty of thirteen. A great love of reading that I developed very early was initially expressed through reading in Yoruba and English; but Nigeria was a colonial society and the advantage was all on the side of English over Yoruba. For English not only had the "prestige" of imperial traditions behind it, the school and public library shelves had a much vaster range of English-language books than books in Yoruba. So it didn't take long before love of reading became, effectively but imperceptibly, love of English! It has only been in my intellectual adulthood that I have become aware that this colonially-produced "guilty" love of English is very widespread, including in its ranks some of the greatest writers and critics in the language in the last 150 years.

How did you come to study in the U.S.?

I had a scholarship for postgraduate studies in the drama department, where Wole Soyinka had just become the head of the School of Drama. He then interested me in the black theater movement of the 1960s and 1970s in this country. I came initially just for a one-year visit, to begin my dissertation for the University of Ibadan, but after one semester, I just knew I had to stay. So I received my doctorate at NYU, and the subject of my thesis was the black image in the American theater from the nineteenth century to the early twentieth century.

I should add that part of the reason I stayed to complete my graduate education in the U.S., and particularly in New York, was because it was such a period of heady, progressive social ferment. Apart from my formal graduate study, I threw myself into intense social activism—organizations against racism, the anti-war movement, support committees for Third World national liberation struggles, labor organizations. Paradoxically, it was not in Africa itself but in America during the period of my graduate study that I came to have an intellectual grasp of the nature and depth of the violent dislocations caused by Africa's integration into the world capitalist system through the crippling backwardness and peripheralism of colonial capitalism on the continent.

Tell us a bit about the drama of Wole Soyinka. What do you focus on in your work about him?

In terms of formal experimentation, Soyinka is one of the most exciting dramatic writers now, because he's been able to fuse all kinds African performance and expressive forms and idioms—oral story-telling traditions, myth and ritual performance, the Yoruba masquerade theatre—with Western dramatic forms of character-driven, dialogue drama. He's brilliant in the kinds of things he does with dramatic form, especially in plays like *Death and the King's Horseman*, *Madmen and Specialists*, *Kongi's Harvest*, and my own favorite, *The Road*, as well as his adaptation of Euripides' *The Bacchae*. But he is a political radical as well, by far the most determined, consistent, and effective literary figure against civilian and military dictatorship in Africa. He's probably one of the few writers anywhere in the world who has actually inspired terror in dictators. There's been a price put on his head by several Nigerian dictators—which is a mark of how effective he can be in mobilizing Nigerian and African and world opinion against oppressive governments. For instance, he used his Nobel Prize renown as a bully pulpit in isolating the last military dictator we had, Sani Abacha. He managed to mobilize world opinion—all kinds of international institutions and organizations—to ostracize Abacha.

This is all reflected in Soyinka's writings, this combination of extraordinary innovativeness in the handling of dramatic form with a kind of gritty, radical humanism. But the course and the prospects of social transformation in Africa are engaged in Soyinka's writings in complexly nuanced ways that are ideologically unorthodox, even contemptuous of conventional leftist cant and that also defy any simple, unambiguous answers. For this reason, he has faced severe critical scrutiny from the Left. So that's what I've tried to explore in Soyinka: Western "official" high-literary and non-official carnivalesque forms in fertile combination with oral, ritual, and performative idioms and forms of Africa, in particular of the Yoruba people.

What can you say about Cornell's Department of English in relation to other departments and programs?

As you know, I've been here fourteen years, and one of the things I've found extraordinary and interesting about Cornell is the way that—I'll put it in metaphoric terms—more than most places in this country and the English-speaking world, the department has taken the historic task of decolonization seriously. By this I mean the decolonization of literary and cultural studies. I'll put that in very concrete terms. We have a professorial faculty of about fifty; now the Minority and Third World Studies caucus is

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NEW FACULTY

Alice Fulton

Alice Fulton, the distinguished poet and critic, returned to the department last spring as a professor of English. She received her MFA in creative writing at Cornell in 1982 and taught literature and creative writing at the University of Michigan for nineteen years. Her awards include fellowships from the MacArthur Foundation, the Guggenheim Foundation, and the Ingram Merrill Foundation. Her first four volumes of poetry are *Dance Script with Electric Ballerina*, *Palladium*, *Powers of Congress*, and *Sensual Math*; her fifth, *Felt* (W.W. Norton), was selected by the *Los Angeles Times* as a Best Book of 2001. An essay collection, *Feeling as a Foreign Language: The Good Strangeness of Poetry*, appeared in 1999. Her poems have been included in five editions of *The Best American Poetry*, and her short fiction has been selected for *The Best American Short Stories*. Her poems have been set to music by three composers; her song cycle *Turbulence: A Romance*, with music by William Bolcom, premiered at the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, in 1997.

Alice Fulton's teaching interests include the reading and writing of poetry and short fiction, contemporary poetry and poetics, critical writing, and feminist critical theory. This fall her courses will include a graduate seminar on Poetry and Science. The office she now occupies—259 Goldwin Smith—was the office of her late friend and mentor, A. R. Ammons.

Nicole Waligora-Davis joined the department last fall as an assistant professor of English. She earned her B.A. from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and received her Ph.D. from Duke University. While a graduate student at Duke, she was assistant editor for *Remembering Jim Crow: African Americans Tell About Life in the Segregated South* (New Press, 2001), an oral history with a CD. The book reflects only some of Nicole's teaching and research interests, which include the Caribbean, race riots, immigration, epidemiology, and critical race theory. She is currently working on a book, *Sanctuary: National Geographies of Law, Citizenship, and Alienation*, which examines racial crises experienced by U. S. blacks during the twentieth century. At Cornell she has taught first-year writing seminars on citizenship, politics, and poetics in the American imagination, in addition to a 200-level course on the problematics of race in American literature. This fall she will offer a course on the Harlem Renaissance and a graduate seminar on black intellectual history and critical race theory.

Nicole Waligora-Davis

Kate McCullough is an associate professor of English and women's studies. She is a graduate of Brown University and received her Ph.D. from Berkeley in 1999; she also earned an M.A. from University College, Dublin, in Anglo-Irish literature and drama. Before coming to Cornell, she taught for six years at Miami University in Ohio. She is the author of *Regions of Identity: The Construction of America in Women's Fiction, 1885–1915* (Stanford, 1999). She is currently at work on two books, *An Imperial Frame of Mind: Nineteenth-Century Women Writers and U.S. Expansionism* and *Queering the Story: Lesbian Fiction and Narrative Form*. Her article "Of Woman (But Not Man or the Nuclear Family) Born: Motherhood Outside Institutionalized Heterosexuality" will appear in a forthcoming collection of essays on Adrienne Rich's *Of Woman Born*. Her teaching interests include American literature, lesbian studies, ethnic studies, and feminist theory.

Kate McCullough

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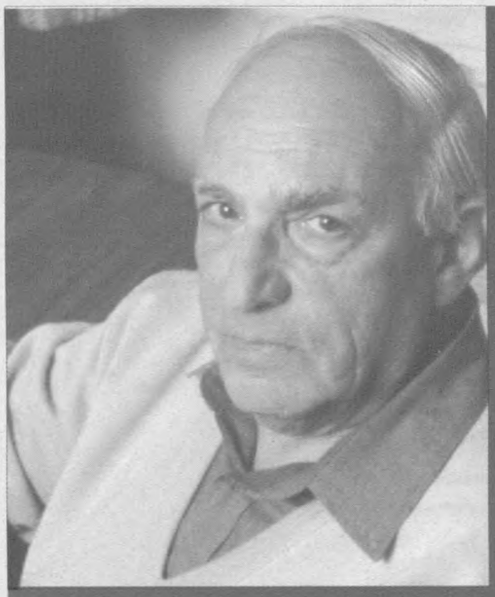
made up of ten people. That is without precedent or comparison in this country: to have one in five, 20 percent faculty of color and also faculty doing U.S. minority studies and colonial/postcolonial studies. In many places, this historical attempt to be more diverse and inclusive has generally followed an intermittent pattern of one step forward and two steps back. But we have stayed the course since I've been here. As a result, Cornell is now one of the leading institutions for the study and teaching of Third World, Anglophone, and minority literatures in the country and perhaps in the English-speaking world. Moreover, although poststructuralism in its different forms is perhaps the dominant current of theory at Cornell, there's a wide range of other theoretical formations, theoretical perspectives. And because there is no reigning theoretical formation here, no orthodoxy to speak of, there's a lot of dialogue between them and this can be seen in visible and not so visible ways.

It takes place, for instance, in the work of mentoring graduate students in their special committees. One of the things that I find exhilarating in my graduate seminars is the range of students, the diversity of backgrounds and interests that I necessarily have to speak to. I have minority students, African American, Chicano/a, Asian American, white students, foreign students—the whole range—interested in colonial/postcolonial studies, and interested in placing those studies within the future possibilities of the field of English. That's a wonderful experience to have, and it gives us a visible, rich intellectual environment for comparative minority and Third World studies. The conference on the "Future of Minority Studies" last October was in fact an attempt at an extension of this profile at Cornell.

But I don't think that our department has really assimilated this in terms of its self-understanding, its sense of its identity. Often, it seems as if the department achieved this decolonization by default. This can be seen in the way that it presents itself in brochures, with only the slightest nod at the inclusion of U.S. minority and Anglophone courses in the curriculum, the way nearly every English department routinely does these days. Also side by side with the genuine commitment to diversity and inclusiveness, one senses a deep, residual nostalgia for what the department was before this decolonization took place, when there was a virtual similarity of racial and class background between the faculty and the students. For then there were not all the problems and challenges which have come with diversity and inclusiveness to deal with! It is gratifying that this sentiment, this nostalgia is not a widespread phenomenon in the department.

And this is what emboldens me to urge that we come to a better appreciation of the fact that we attract graduate students from all around the world because we're perceived as having achieved genuine decolonization in the sense in which I have used the term here. I'd like to see that happen. Ultimately, for instance, we ought to be thinking of setting up something like an Institute of Critical Multicultural and Third World Studies, which would have interdisciplinary collaboration with other departments, something like Duke's Program in Literature.

RETIREMENTS



EDGAR ROSENBERG

DOROTHY MERMIN

Edgar Rosenberg left his native Germany at thirteen, "the last of the *barmitzim* in our town before Crystal Night arrested the formal passage to manhood," as he put it in a recent memoir. He found sanctuary first in Montreux (where his adoptive family "eyed me rather warily, as though I were a concentration-camper *manque*, the Oliver Twist *de nos jours*, the Odd Boy out"), then Haiti, then New York City. At first his English vocabulary was bookish and limited ("things like 'pshaw,' 'yon trusted pony,' 'fie fie,' and 'papoose,' which I pluralized [naturally] into 'papeese'"), but he grew to become one of his adopted country's finest stylists—a gifted critic, scholar, teacher, raconteur, and author of brilliant memoirs. In 1965 he joined the faculty of his alma mater, Cornell University. His courses included graduate seminars on Dickens, surveys of the modern European novel, and a popular course on the literature of the Holocaust; in due time he was honored by a Clark Distinguished Teaching Award. His Dickensian boyhood may or may not be one reason his bibliography displays "a certain hormone imbalance" in favor of that novelist. Edgar's first major publication was *From Shylock to Svengali* (1960), a widely-praised study of Jewish stereotypes in English literature; it includes a section on Fagin and incidentally earned him a notice in *Timetables of Jewish History*. His Norton Critical Edition of *Great Expectations* (1998) contains over 650 footnotes, some of them running to fifteen lines; its apparatus is both a landmark of contemporary scholarship and a wonderful read. The French government has required this edition of all graduate students in English literature.

Dickens was nicknamed by his contemporaries "the Inimitable." The many friends and students of the inimitable Mr. Rosenberg wish him a retirement as exuberant and productive as were his many years in this department.

In 1964, the year Dorothy Mermin came to Cornell, the English department contained one tenured woman and one faculty member of color; today the department is nearly half female and contains ten faculty of color. By her persuasiveness, commitment, and administrative skill, Dorothy has been at the heart of the profound changes the department has undergone since that time. She started out as an instructor and climbed the ranks, eventually becoming the department's first woman chair. Her first book, *The Audience in the Poem*, used characteristically astute and focused readings to examine the place of interlocutors in Victorian poetry; the next two, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning* and *Godiva's Ride*, combined close readings with a broad exploration of what it meant to write as a woman in nineteenth century Britain. Her acute interest in the shape and significance of Victorian women's careers parallels the nature of her own influence. She has stood as a model of a teacher and scholar for a generation of women students—though not only for women and not only for her students.

Her most recent publication is the anthology *Victorian Literature 1830–1900* (Harcourt, 2002), co-edited with Herbert Tucker. Its remarkable range of topics and its innovative selections have decisively redefined the Victorian canon for our time. Not the least of Mermin and Tucker's achievements are the succinct and lively headnotes, many of which introduce neglected writers and works. Dorothy's notice of Florence Nightingale's *Notes on Nursing* captures the style and the substance which her colleagues, now that she has retired, will sorely miss: "[It] shows the characteristic combination of high moral purpose, profound human sympathy, far-reaching principle, and acute organization of detail that made her the most famous woman in Victorian England, apart from the queen herself, and the most admired person, bar none."

Faculty Notes

Mary Pat Brady's *Extinct Lands, Temporal Geographies: Chicana Literature and the Urgency of Space*, is forthcoming from Duke University Press. The book explores the relationship between identity and the experience of geographical and temporal dislocation in texts by Chicana writers.

Laura Brown gave the prestigious Society of the Humanities invitational lecture this year. Her talk, "The City and the Sewer," was adapted from her book *Fables of a New World* (Cornell University Press, 2000).

Jonathan Culler's four-volume *Deconstruction: Critical Concepts* is forthcoming from Routledge. This year he was made senior associate dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at Cornell.

Laura Donaldson has co-edited *Postcolonialism, Feminism, and Religious Discourse* with Kwok Pui-Lan (Routledge, 2001).

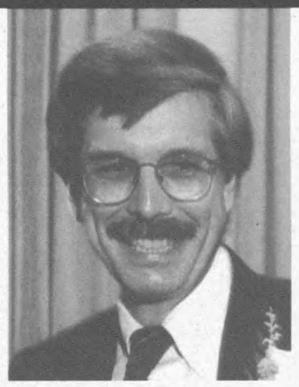
Thomas Hill has co-edited (with Frederick M. Biggs, Paul E. Szarmach, and E. Gordon Whatley) *Abbo of Fleury, Abbo of Saint-Germain-des-Prés, and Acta Sanctorum*, which is the first volume in the series *Sources of Anglo-Saxon Literary Culture* (Western Michigan University Press).

The Norton Critical Edition of *Melville's Short Novels*, which appeared this year, was edited by **Dan McCall** and includes an essay by **Gordon Teskey** ("The Bible in *Billy Budd*").

Joel Porte's Norton Critical Edition of *Emerson's Prose and Poetry*, co-edited with Saundra Morris (2001), has been chosen for the French *Agregation*, or national exam. Professor Porte is also primary consultant on a forthcoming PBS film, scheduled to appear in 2003, celebrating the bicentenary of Ralph Waldo Emerson's birth.

Dan Schwarz's *Rereading Conrad* appeared in 2001 from University of Missouri Press. The book uses gendered, postcolonial, and cultural approaches to explore the basic tension in Conrad's work between idealistic hopes and a skeptical portrayal of reality.

Letter from the Chair



By the time you read these words, my three-year stint as chair will have ended, and I will have wholly returned to the more familiar ground of teaching and research. It is a pleasure to introduce as my successor the member of the department I most hoped would take up the reins. Laura Brown recently received the high honor of being named Anderson Professor of English, a distinction appropriate for one whose work has helped to revolutionize the study of eighteenth-century British literature. She is a proven administrator, having served as director of graduate studies in the 1980s. Professor Brown faces a busy term as chair, in which the department will, among its other tasks, take its turn in engaging in a rigorous self-study capped by an external evaluation. The self-study comes at an opportune time for us: we are at an important crossroad in our history. Retirements and new hiring loom; our profession itself is in a state of redefinition. It is heartening that our leadership will rest in such capable hands.

Though endings need not inspire solemnity, they should probably inspire thoughtfulness. And for anyone who has been involved in academic administration (not to mention academic debate), the chance to have a last word is irresistible. My thoughts in writing these last words as chair of English turn to a panel discussion this year at the A. D. White House. We had been asked to speak about the ethics of reading. I took the position that the works I teach, write about, and most enjoy reading, nineteenth-century realist novels, have the important ethical function of helping us to understand what it means to live in history. I made the further claim that delighting in literary form of whatever kind can itself have an ethical component. As a teacher, reader, and writer, I invite myself, my readers, and above all my students to bathe in the brilliance of texts as verbal constructs. I believe that the pleasure that can result from a heightened awareness of literary form is good for people, and for that matter, that it can be ethically good for people. It can help make you more fully human. I believe—I must believe and would despair if I didn't believe—that those who have the privilege of experiencing the sensuous richness of art can be brought to feel a responsibility that the circle of this enjoyment be extended as widely as possible. (I am fully aware of the uses to which very great music was put by the Nazis—something that troubles me, but seems to me only one side of a more complex and more hopeful picture.) It is important, then, I told those at the conference, to teach and write about works you love, and to help others share that love on as many levels as possible.

Another member of the panel replied that, for her part, she wrote only about works she hated. With that comment, we were, as they say, off to the races. I do not know how literally my friend and colleague meant to be taken. I do know that she is a superb teacher, and I suspect an element of willful provocation here from someone who knows how to bring a discussion alive. However that may be, our opposed viewpoints raise a central issue in the study of literature. I continue to believe that my viewpoint is correct. But so is hers.

Departments of literature are charged with probing the prime records and indices of our cultural life. From the beginning of organized efforts to study English literature, suspicion and love have both been part of the enterprise. It is not simply that critics like to distinguish between first-rate and second-rate works and to heap scorn on the latter. When T. S. Eliot called Alexander Pope "the great master of hatred," he had in mind something more fundamental. When Pope, a critic as well as a poet, contemplated the society around him, he could be driven to fury. Such reactions persisted in the nineteenth-century (one thinks of Arnold and Ruskin, not to mention Dickens), and they were very apparent in the century that has just closed, not least in Eliot himself. Great writers and great literary critics have nearly always been cultural critics. They have often been driven to savage indignation at the spectacle surrounding them. It seems only just that they themselves be candidates for our indignation, since they are, for us, part of that spectacle. To shrink from exploring the possibility that admirable literature might be involved in systems of injustice and oppression would be to betray a vital tradition and a central responsibility.

Yet there remains much to admire, even love, about the works we in the Department of English teach. I am thinking here not only of the wisdom and nobility of an author such as George Eliot, but also and more generally of the realm of the aesthetic and of literary form, to which I return. In a world that seems to grow more violent, mechanical, and tawdry by the hour, it is good to experience the wonder of what human beings can accomplish with their minds, their senses, and the gift of language.

I am confident that, in the years ahead, the Cornell English department will maintain a rich and fruitful love-hate relationship with the literature it teaches. I have always considered it a privilege to be a member of the department. It has been an honor, and usually a privilege, to serve as its chair. One of the many good things about being chair is that it has put me in contact with alumni and friends who care deeply about what we do, reminding me (if any reminder were needed beyond contact with our superb students) of why it was that I chose this profession.

—Harry E. Shaw

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