

“A Different Kind of Book”:
*Literary Decolonization in
David Dabydeen’s “The Intended”*

KAREN MCINTYRE

DAVID DABYDEEN’S *The Intended*, set in Guyana and England, focuses on the problems facing those occupying so-called marginal positions—characters originating from colonized or once-colonized countries now living in the colonizing metropolis—and tackles both the difficulties encountered by categorization and the ways out of the neocolonization of subjects this often effects. The text, grounded firmly in the “becoming-tradition” of creative decolonization, undertakes a thorough exploration of the very creative and critical principles out of which it is itself constructed: the commitment to a displacement of metropolitan domination, the subversion of established critical and cultural formations, and the impulse towards the creation of a new literary aesthetic independent from the cultural hegemony. Such a venture—carrying with it the very real risk of its own negation at the moment of creation, putting the text to-be-written under erasure before it is effectively even begun—is what makes the work so compelling yet disturbing. Dismantling from outside and from within, the text deconstructs not only itself, disturbing its own premises, but also the hierarchies of power and knowledge that inform the critic’s reading of the text. For Dabydeen’s *The Intended*, creative decolonization is a complex literary phenomenon that occurs internally and externally at the same time, with the space that textuality is seen to occupy becoming increasingly fluid and borderless.

The reader/critic is inevitably implicated in the construction, as well as the deconstruction of the same kinds of power-knowledge formations that the text seeks liberation from, and is thus an integral part of the neo- and de-colonizing process.

Readings, however nuanced and sensitive to the intricate working of a text such as this one, nevertheless establish new corridors of meaning; while they may open up new areas of creative and theoretical terrain, they simultaneously de-emphasize others through the setting up of new critical parameters. Thus paradoxically, the possible classificatory and containing effects of a literary investigation that is designated specifically postcolonial and decolonizing is of considerable significance in relation to this study of *The Intended*. The so-called politics of labelling is not a new issue; concern over the tendency of the act of labelling to appear neocolonialist has grown and gained credence in recent times, reflecting academics' commitment—to borrow from Ngugi wa Thiong'o—to moving the centre. Yet disquiet over the actual labels themselves until lately had dissipated where it had not entirely slipped off of the critical agenda. Early critical explorations of the issues surrounding labelling that had chosen to focus on "postcolonial"—the term with the most purchase in academia at present—had been quickly accepted, remained largely unchallenged and were soon taken for granted. Subsequent scholarly work had thus been able to define "postcolonial" as "all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day" (Ashcroft et al. 2) without problem, in the knowledge that for the majority of students of postcolonial culture, the difficulties associated with the label are well known and thus do not need to be repeated.

Yet while a rehearsal of all the major debates surrounding terminology and its implications can seem inappropriate or even out-of-date, it is nevertheless important not simply to glide over conceptual difficulties and "our slippery usage," as Deepika Bahri terms it (76), in order that study and critical exploration can continue unproblematically. It is concerns such as these that have prompted a new wave of intellectual engagements with terminology, exemplified by the recent double issue of *ARIEL* dedicated specifically to postcolonialism, where many of the earlier arguments have been delineated, re-explored, and extended with a renewed subtlety and sophistication by a variety of geographically, culturally, and politically diverse critics. What is particularly interesting about this work is its insistence on an

interrogation of the role of the reader/critic, on acknowledging and raising questions about the fact "that we are complicitous in the same exploitative modes of production we are so privileged as to be able to academically criticize" (Bahri 77).

The exploitative capabilities of the reader/critic and indeed the writer are frequently foregrounded in Dabydeen's creative work. In the poem "Homecoming" from *Coolie Odyssey*, for instance, both the writer and the reader are depicted—with some irony—as crudely neocolonialist:

I brace you up against a wall
 Doom-laden, mugging you for a life-story.
 I trade you rum for old-time Indian talk . . .
 History we greed for in England,
 Must know coolie ship, whip, brown paddy-skins . . .
 England, where it snows but we still born brown,
 That I come back to from here, home,
 As hungry as any white man for native gold,
 To plant flag and to map your mind. (43)

The inclusion of notes and introductions in Dabydeen's poetry collections restricts and problematizes the reader's role in interpreting his works. This, coupled with the elusive and fluid nature of his writings, which frequently traverse and dissolve geographical, cultural, textual, and gender boundaries, ensures that attempts to classify and contain his creative production become highly complicated and are often thwarted. Part of the problem with terminology clearly lies in the intersecting of postcolonialism as a practice, as a label, and as a way of theorizing about both. In practice, as a heterogeneous and variegated, often complex way of writing that is both theoretically and creatively informed, much of the literature commonly labelled postcolonial may be seen to overcome from within many of the difficulties raised with it as conceptual device, drawing attention to its own ambiguities, contradictions, biases, and ellipses while also offering up the possibility for an alternative way of viewing and reading texts that problematizes the impulse to label or assign it to a particular creative or political imperative. Dabydeen's texts are classic examples of this kind of writing, with the recent long poem *Turner* providing an award-winning illustration of many of these techniques at work.¹

Particularly significant in his writings is the way in which they can so often be seen automatically to decolonize, or to aid the decolonizing of the reader who is partially freed from the kinds of complicity with dominant discourses associated with the study of “postcolonial” creative production. This is particularly apparent in the case of *The Intended*, which, straddling at least two if not more divides, continually slips between labels and categories. This liminality, combined with many of the creative strategies *The Intended* employs such as canonical rewriting and the blending of possible autobiographical elements with fiction,² works as an effective means to resist the academic need or will-to-classify. Unable to capture and contain the text, the reader/critic is, to an extent, liberated from the constraints created by his or her own interpretive or evaluative practice. This resistance is also present in the text’s thematic content. The breaking down of the parameters of standardized behaviour, characterized in *The Intended* through Joseph and his final descent into what appears to be a kind of psychic degeneration, provides an interesting interrogation of the binaries of right and wrong, of social and anti-social, of acceptable and unacceptable, and leads ultimately to a supplanting of these oppositions by a seemingly inevitable blurring of the discourses of order and chaos. The resistance to classificatory processes—recurring throughout Dabydeen’s creative writings—has clear repercussions for literary studies, and can be seen to provide readers and theorists with a new way forward in their critical investigations of these kinds of elusive, label-resistant texts and the role of the critic in creative production, a process that would be predicated upon and take its impetus from the kinds of decolonizing manoeuvres contemporary writings from once-colonized nations reveal. In this way (and in a reversal of dominant trends), fiction and other creative writing could be seen to educate theory, disallowing the kind of academic containment that has become all too characteristic of much current work in the field. Thus the decolonizing potential of this text lies not only within its disruption of stereotypical “knowledges” about the so-called “other” and in its interrogation of metropolitan canonical pretexts, but also within the reinterrogation of the role of the reader/critic it facilitates and encourages.

What is immediately obvious in the theorizing of contemporary postcolonialist writing such as Dabydeen's is its resemblance to postmodernist creative production. This is clearly illustrated through Linda Hutcheon's definition of postmodernism as using and abusing, installing and subverting the "conventions of discourse which it sets out to challenge" (Adam and Tiffin 2), a definition with strong echoes of the "appropriation and abrogation" strategy Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin have associated with postcolonial writing (1989). Both postmodern and recent postcolonial writings that are predicated on a decolonizing imperative share many discursive features, including, for instance, the portrayal of history as unstable discourse, heteroglossia, repetition without narrative closure, and privileging of metonymy over metaphor with the consequent sense of a final deferral of authoritative meaning; and it is these shared features that blur the distinction between them. While it is possible to claim that the difference lies in the fact that postcolonialism does not exercise a cultural and/or intellectual hegemony over postmodernism, the implication that the reverse is true is problematic. A perhaps more useful analysis of this difference can be found in Hutcheon, who situates the difference as existing between the analysis of the colonized subject as informed by imperialism and the analysis of the subject as defined by humanism (Mishra and Hodge 281). The two are thus seen as by no means mutually exclusive, yet postmodernism is seen as having "a certain amount of luxury built in" due to the fact that it operates through the challenging of what it already possesses (Hutcheon 168). This is a very useful distinction, clearly highlighting the importance of retaining at least a notion of cultural specificity within postcolonialism and its analysis or theorization, avoiding the tendency to locate postcolonialist writing *within* postmodernism and thereby enact a quasi-colonialist appropriation of the "marginalized" back into the "centre" and yet allowing for some interaction between the two. As a liminal text, it is perhaps here, if anywhere, that Dabydeen's *The Intended* most usefully can be situated—a highly appropriate location for a text premised upon disrupting and dissolving binaries and the parameters of understanding that inform them.

In "Resistance and Complicity in David Dabydeen's *The Intended*," Margery Fee locates the text's postcoloniality in its apparent "'folking' up of the novel form" (109). She distinguishes it from Western postmodernism in its "explicit focus on texts that obsess postcolonial writers in their political project" (124n) and in the fact that "structural peculiarities" derive from a "profound although tortured identification with blackness from the tense/aspect system of Creole nation language of Guyana" (108). Her reading is an important and interesting one. It allows a space for a culturally-specific postcolonial creativity to emerge alongside but not to be contained within Western conceptions of the postmodern in a way that seems particularly appropriate with regard to the cross-cultural circumstances of the text. Yet curiously, although she draws attention to Dabydeen's ambivalent position as a Western, Guyanese, and Caribbean writer and his own textual exploration of this "fold" of competing discourses, Fee nevertheless locates the work firmly within the European tradition as a "messy version of 'elegiac romance'" (124n). *The Intended* does indeed play with canonical texts and their forms—stretching the possibilities of both the "novel" and "romance" in new and unusual directions, at times employing an acute irony to provide alternative, decolonized "versions" and to challenge directly the ideologies informing colonialist textual function. Indeed, her comments are another such form of "borrowing"—echoing Dabydeen's own description of his characters as having "messy" lives. But they also call to mind an earlier use of "messy" by Dabydeen. The poem "Coolie Odyssey" ends with the lines:

We mark your memory in songs
 Fleshed in the emptiness of folk,
 Poems that scrape bowl and bone
 In English basements far from home,
 Or confess the lust of beasts
 In rare conceits
 To congregations of the educated
 Sipping wine, attentive between courses—
 See the applause fluttering from their white hands
 Like so many messy table napkins. (13)

He has stated that the ending is meant to dampen applause after a reading. It also foregrounds the appropriative nature of literary

consumption.³ Fee's comments are clearly not intended to be of this nature, but to some extent all critical writing is appropriative and her work exemplifies the difficulties inherent in writing about postcolonial creative production. Produced to be consumed, the consumption is nevertheless problematic because Fee does not acknowledge explicitly that her use of the term "messy" is in accordance with Dabydeen's. The combination of this and the words "folking" and "version" in her essay make it seem as if she has acknowledged the postcoloniality of the text, but has nevertheless evaluated it in accordance with criteria originating from the Western cultural hegemony, an obvious distortion of her intentions. Her informative analysis of the novel can thus be misread to suggest that she deems *The Intended* an inferior—"messy"—text when compared with the standards of other canonical "versions" of elegiac romance. The very act of drawing generic boundaries around writing enables that writing, now transformed into a distinct, categorizable object, not only to be appropriated, but also subsumed into, or judged by, comparison with metropolitan creativity, obscuring the distinct and culturally-specific postcolonial elements of its identity.

Postcolonial writing directly politicizes the art form and the responses to it. Thus all critical responses to such writings, specifically those that are overtly decolonizing, are heavily implicated in the possible neocolonizing as well as decolonizing of the text and its subject matter. Language variations, irony, subversion, and of course canonical rewriting, with its strong disidentificatory reiteration that tends to expose residual colonialist politics, produce an often overt countering of the dominant literary history; an interrogation of the politics of narrative production and a contestation of received notions of "history," "fiction," and their ideological premises. The fact that it might share several discursive features with postmodernism does not necessarily mean that any differences or distinctions must be glossed over or seen as of only marginal or secondary importance, of significance for only a minority of overtly politicized or politicizing readers. Rather, instead of implying that postcolonialism is a subdivision *within* postmodernism, or alternatively, that it stands in direct opposition to it, these shared discursive features—to

expand upon the implicit thrust of Hutcheon's explicit and Fee's implicit argument—allow for the situating of such writing as simultaneously within and without the hegemonic tradition, providing in essence, a *double* possibility for decolonization, that is, two alternative points of entry or opening positions. The site of intersection or interaction between two different or differently-labelled literary forms or practices thus becomes an immensely creative space—or, as Wilson Harris might articulate it, a “womb of space” (1983) of interculturative dimensions—that actively works against the binary structure that informs colonialist discourse and which has persisted (perhaps in diluted forms) in many Euro-centred readings of postcolonial texts. Such a space, existing at this point of interaction and intersection, can also be seen to attempt to account for cultural diversity, questioning the impulse towards the recuperation of a common ancestry or cultural unity and thus circumventing charges of both essentialism and of the complete loss of individual identity through hybridization. This is a fruitful space for the negotiation of the reader/critic. Given the continual overlapping of theory and creativity characteristic of many postcolonial writings, this site provides an ideal place for a decolonizing scholarship to grow and develop.

It is precisely within this “womb of space,” this place of cross-cultural imagination, that Dabydeen's *The Intended* (a text which openly resists the imperialist-informed urge towards integration or absorption and its countermeasure separatism) resides. A key feature of creative decolonization as it is defined by Tiffin (17), the work also reveals strong impulses towards the displacement of metropolitan domination and the subversion of imperialist cultural and established critical formations through the implicit questioning of Eurocentric theories of style and genre, assumptions about the perceived “universal” features of language, epistemologies, and value-systems. Creative decolonization also signifies a movement towards the creation, out of this disruptive and destabilizing act, of a literary style or form independent from the cultural hegemony that possesses its own unique creative identity, a process that is clearly at work within *The Intended*.

In practice, and particularly characteristic of this particular work, this process involves a complex interweaving of a variety of

different creative strategies, from the exposive interrogation, appropriation, and revisionary rewriting of canonical material—here William Blake's "The Tiger" and Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*—to an investigation of the art of reading of both texts and society, by way of a contiguous exploration of contemporary postcolonial theoretical concerns. The different and differing readings offered up by various characters within the text provide a mapping of the complex and conflicting nature of opinion and the discursive construction of society. Held in conjunction with the various readings made available by the palimpsestic construction of the text, this works not only to avoid any kind of possible narrative closure, providing an endless deferral of any one privileged "authoritative" meaning for the work as a whole; but also reveals how impossible it is to actually establish a truly "pure" or essential, or fully integrated/hybridized literary form.

It is possible to consider the work to be attempting to decolonize three separate yet interconnected areas of European cultural hegemony: the creative, the intellectual, and the political, through the reading and contesting of the discourses that inform them. While this would appear to imply a rather simple inversion of the dominant discursive practice—replacing that which is/was colonialist-informed with its postcolonial deconstruction or reconstruction—this is not in fact the case. Rather, and in accordance with much deconstructive theory, the new discourse created out of this deconstructive or reconstructive practice is itself open and subject to a rigorous dismantling and deconstruction through an interrogation of its gaps and slippages, and also in terms of its interpellative positioning, the inescapable fact of it being situated within the locus of that which it contests. Binaries are inverted and contested through an appropriation and abrogation (or adaptation and displacement) of the dominant strategy of hierarchical practice, the decolonization being predicated not so much on the discovery of aporia, but first through appropriation and *then* deconstruction of those gaps and ambivalences at the site of the would-be decolonizer. Hence it is not only the dominant discourse that is subject to dismantling; so also is its apparent replacement.

This process can, of course, never be fully overcome, and therefore the text can be seen to operate by continually under-

cutting its own constructions and reconstructions in an infinite process of “becoming,” with decolonization thus being a process rather than an arrival, a system within which both textual and nontextual biases are, in Harris’s words, continually “consumed.” The effect of such a proliferation of series of interpenetrations is a destabilizing and decentering of absolutist notions, a rupturing of traditional conceptions of truth, power, and knowledge (Slemon 61). Further, it would seem that while there is an acknowledgement of the inability of fully stepping outside of the prison house of discourse or discursive formations, it is the “without,” the *anterior* of the positive unconscious, that is explored as a possible site for postcolonial articulation and creativity.

This is manifested in *The Intended* through Joseph, whose accelerating mental deterioration works to call into question the idea of accepted or acceptable identities and the wisdom of reason. Joseph transgresses the limits enforced by intellectual discipline—he can neither read nor write—and frees himself from the “normal” routines of thought and action that would usually work to establish a regular, and hence regulatable, identity; “he lacked precision in everything, unable to remember a year, a name, an episode” (88).⁴ Joseph’s world is essentially oral, and thus for him words escape the confines of dictionaries to be controlled by the here and now, by real-life situations rather than textbook definitions. Joseph, Dabydeen informs the reader, “had a gift of coming up with comparisons that came close to the mark but finally shot past by a mile” (90), destabilizing the notion of a standard system of knowledge, resisting the stratifications that bind and imprison individuals within a prescribed pattern of thinking, behaving, or indeed, living (Bensmaia xvi). Reacting to the narrator’s attempts to differentiate between pentameter and trochee, for example, he remarks,

What you doing with your pentating and strokee and all dem rules is putting iron-bar one by one in spacious room. . . . You turning all the room in the universe and in the human mind into a bird cage. (95)

By deliberately positioning himself on the “outside” of “reasonable” existence, arriving at a children’s home after borstal and a succession of welfare hostels prescribed to curb his penchant for

“vandalising parking meters, joy-riding, stealing mascots” (87), the “marginal” position Joseph occupies becomes doubly exclusive and excluding:

When I was in borstal I was rumour. They look at me and see ape, trouble, fist. All the time they seeing you as animal, riot, nigger, but you know you is nothing, atoms, only image and legend in their minds. (101)

By becoming Rastafarian and wanting to spread peace and love, to learn black history, he is further distanced from the hegemonic centre: “If you talk peace, they think you only smoking weed. Is a dangerous thing to preach feelings and oneness” (87). From his early desire to master the artistry of language, to position himself firmly within the logocentric world—“Words are so full of cleverness. . . . I wish I could learn how to read and write them. Every word is a cat with nine separate lives” (103)—Joseph shifts, stepping outside of the situating behavioural system imposed upon him by the meta-narratives that inform his and his contemporaries’ existence, transferring himself from the world of language dependency to another world. Repositioned in the realm of thought and perception representation—a space for thinking from without—“I can’t read nor write but I can see” (107), Joseph becomes increasingly “bold in his belief of the superiority of images” (155):

A film is like a mirror. . . . everybody who watch it see something different but is not necessarily what they want to see. They can’t just make up what it is they see, but they all see different. (157)

Pure articulation comes through film; his desire to “make a new language with film which would not alter with time, a language using ‘a set of open-ended symbols’” (160), coincides with the development of an interest in “nothingness, colourlessness” and “the sightlessness of air” (165). Film, for Joseph, is a means of counterpoising fixed notions of reality with his own disenfranchised, alienated, and estranged way of seeing existence (see Wakefield 33). As a form, it reflects the commodified nature of society while also acting as a tool of commodification itself, as Joseph’s brief career filming pornography reveals. Repulsed by the nature of the work—“point your camera here. Catch it going in, coming out. Film her mouth opening with grief” (234)—he

resorts to filming the title board, “fascinated by the suggestions made by the letters, the subtleties and abstraction of their form. . . . [It] is the skeleton that matter, not the flesh . . . the spaces between one rib and the next” (235-36). His idea to provide through film, “a montage of images . . . a complete statement about the condition of England with no verbal commentary or connecting narrative” (156-57), becomes merely the reflection of the postmodern condition—a state of seemingly endemic despair—his vision no more than a “blank supercession of events” metonymically related but on a flat, depthless surface (Wakefield 33). The post-rationalism he wishes to impose upon his viewers acts merely to substitute of one form of restriction of expression for another.

By removing himself and his presentation of “reality” from the legitimating system of the dominant discourse, Joseph not only decentres himself but finds his world or his perception of the world determined by chaos rather than reason. Yet, as has become clear, this postmodern, postcolonial, post-rationality only exists as a process, and thus his logophobic attempt to transcend the “positive unconscious”—the system of rules that form what is said and how it is said (Foucault, *Archaeology* 60)—is doomed to fail. The film or filmy image is not innovation but imitation, a mimicry of perception serving to reassert dubious notions of progress while also limiting imagination and freedom. Unable to deal with the contradictions inherent in his being both an excluded minority and included British subject, merely the product of the discourses of a particular moment, Joseph futilely attempts to reconcile his decentred self with the demands of language; there is no essential self to be fixed or represented by words which themselves consistently refuse to “mean.” As a consequence, this reconciliation can only be futile, almost, but not quite:

“Look! C is half O,” he continued to jabber. “It nearly there, but when it form O it breaking up again, never completing. . . . A is for apple,” he babbled, “B is for a bat, C is for cocoon, which is also coon, N is for nut, but is really for nuts, N is for nothing, N is for nignog. Can’t you see, all of it is me.” (195)

Psychically disturbed or different, he can be seen to flee the restrictions imposed by discourse, by reason, and by notions of

established authentic and authorized identity; but madness also suggests discursivity—a form of communication requiring interpretation. Joseph's last attempt to gain an identity through language is met by bewildered admiration: "I thought he was being crazy as ever, seeing things with that curious illiteracy that made everything he believed appear visionary, the product of genius" (195), and through this assertion of his "craziness," his reinscription within the dominant order is assured. By the narrator defining him as "mad," any attempt by Joseph to exclude himself from the "order of discourse" through disordered noncommunication or apparent incoherency is thwarted; Joseph is repositioned and redefined by his filial relationship to the hegemonic centre. The narrator's retrospective attempts at interpretation draw on a particularly restrictive framework of knowledge informed by a "will-to-truth" (Foucault, *Madness* 56). By asserting a dominant, authoritative meaning for his statement, the narrator provides a posthumous suppression of Joseph's freedom of articulation. Having editorial control over his already reported speech, a further prohibitive measure against free expression is undertaken, reinforcing the hierarchical relationship between the dominant and the subjugated subversive:

He was telling me that he was half-formed, like the jelly in a cocoon, like the C trying to round itself into an O, getting there with great effort, but breaking up again, because of the police, the Boys' home, the absent father, the dead mother, the lack of education, the poverty, the condition of blackness. (196)

As the narrator reports, "He stopped being a coon when he poured oil over himself and set light to the wick of himself" (197); the paradox of liberation is the death of the subject. The deterioration finally results in suicide (which can be seen as an ambiguous and ambivalent refusal or inability to speak or, paradoxically, to remain incommunicado, suggesting either the ultimate articulatory release—the flight from a logos-defined confinement) or a total silencing within it. Silence in this "voluntary" sense also suggests defeat, an acquiescence to prohibition, that is, the notion of forbidden speech implicit within discourse that acts as a procedure of exclusion. Yet despite Joseph having no language of his own (his video endeavours sabotaged by his

own inability to operate the camera and his postmodern attempt to see technology as liberating and facilitating rather than alienating since “everything was contained in books and he was handicapped by illiteracy” [107])—Joseph lives on as a trace or a memory and as both the slippage between and point of intersection of different discourses at the site of cross-cultural imagination; he is, as the narrator notes, a stain on a shirt “covered in oil . . . Joseph reminding me that he is still here” (196).

The story of *The Intended* is one in which new articulatory experiments are undercut and reconstituted; the discourse of the madman and the discourse of reason blur in and out of each other; and the premise upon which such knowledges (built on comparison, constituted by discipline, and informed by a hierarchy of abilities: literacy/illiteracy, articulacy/inarticulacy) is established, is paradoxically reinforced and dismantled. The process of decolonization, the rupturing of particular ways of thinking and of judging, operates through the interpolation and juxtapositioning of different, alternative modes of perception. Joseph’s “burning off his black skin” reveals “mostly molten flesh, meat that could have been that of a white man, or an animal” (197), the deliberate ambivalencing at work here being a key feature of *The Intended*’s decolonizing strategy: the active undermining of imperialist-inspired, colonialist-informed epistemological and ontological constructions (Tiffin 23).

The construction of colonial power through discourse demands an articulation of forms of difference, and to undermine this construction it is necessary to reveal the inadequacy of its articulation (see Bhabha, *Of Mimicry*); in this particular text, it is irony that most obviously facilitates the process. From the very beginning, albeit in a rather pedestrian fashion, the reader is made aware of the complex nature of cultural identity and notions of essentialism. The four main characters of this first section of the text, while collectively described as the “regrouping of the Asian diaspora” (5), have complicated identities:

Shaz, of Pakistani parents, was born in Britain, had never travelled to the subcontinent, could barely speak a word of Urdu and had never seen the interior of a mosque. Nasim was more authentically Muslim, a believer by upbringing, fluent in his ancestral language and devoted to his family. Patel was of Hindu stock, could speak Gujarati;

his mother, wore a sari and a dot on her forehead. I was Indian West Indian Guyanese, the most mixed up of the lot. (5)

On its most literal level, the hierarchy of difference and authenticity that the narrative constructs may be seen to reflect the absorption, or universalization of European codes of categorization (the "binding of a range of differences and discriminations that inform the discursive and political practices of racial and cultural hierarchisation" [Bhabha, *Of Mimicry* 67]) and also to be performing a classic analysis of racial and cultural difference through the identification and positioning of stereotypes within a unificatory discourse of race. However, this is unsettled and problematized by the text's ambivalent positioning both within and outside of this apparent unity.

By its location in such a contradictory site, this attentive and detailed construction of cultural identity can be seen to be operating on a highly ironic level to expose and ridicule not only the academic premise upon which such practices were initially built—the imperialist anthropological system of identifying racial type by skin tone—but also the impossibility of any practical application of such a system. While, as the narrator admits, "The only real hint of a shared Asianness was the brownness of our skins" (5), the very nature of "brownness" makes this problematical:

Patel was Aryan, tall, fair skinned, crisp. . . . he wore his clothes with self certainty and I have always suspected . . . he felt superior to the rest of us. Shaz was stoutly built, shabbily dressed, and extremely Black; Nasim, slim, was two shades darker than Patel and two shades less immaculate. I, the medium to dark brown West-Indian, was merely clumsy. (5)

The anthropological legacy is both exploited and disturbed. Simplistic notions of the possibility of standardizing and objectifying ethnicity through categorization are immediately dispelled, the defining characteristics of neo-imperialist discourse—the equation of skin colour and "civilization," and the racist imperatives that inform them—undermined by their mere transportation into the discourse of the colonized subject. By the ambiguous positioning of the narrator within several cultural categories—referring to himself variously as Asian, coon,

Indian-West Indian-Guyanese, black, dark-skinned but different, like the whites, mud, a lump of aborted anonymous flesh, Paki, a piece of pidgin, both anti-West and pro-British—it becomes impossible to locate any firm site or racial or cultural grouping to “blame” for the proliferation of discriminatory, prejudiced knowledges. The narrator openly admits his biases:

No wonder they're treated like animals, I heard myself thinking, distancing myself from this noisy West Indian-ness, and feeling sympathy for the outnumbered whites. They should send them back home. . . . I come from their place, I'm darkskinned like them but I'm different. . . . I'm like the whites; we both have civilisation.

(177-78)

The effect of this strategy of interpellation is to permit a simultaneous deconstruction and reconstruction and to provide an interrogation of the circulation and proliferation of notions of otherness, while nevertheless revealing just how deeply entrenched and pervasive such value judgements have become. By focusing on “difference,” the text provides an interrogation into the ways in which self-perpetuating codes of recognition can “hypnotize” people into a blind acceptance of a received conceptual framework, in this case leading to the subscription to imperialism and its trappings, even by those peoples most directly and adversely affected by it.

Using what has become an almost standard practice within postcolonial texts, *The Intended* employs discursive appropriation, working towards the abrogation of colonialist and neocolonialist or racist discourse, with the narrator, through a process of unconscious displaced reiteration or repetition, inadvertently, and perhaps all the more potently for it, dismantling from within the principles or “regime of truth” on which such articulations are founded. The unity of the self is called into question; there is no longer an inherent biological norm to refer back to, and the subject is seen as a constantly changing construction within discourse. In accordance with Fanon's thesis in *Black Skin, White Masks*, the black child (in this case the narrator/protagonist as both child and undergraduate) appears to turn away from himself and his race in his total identification with the possibility of whiteness as both colour and no colour:

I suddenly long to be white, to be calm, to write with grace and clarity, to make words which have status, to shape them into the craftsmanship of English china, coaches, period furniture, harpsichords, wigs, English anything, for whatever they put their hands to worked wonderfully. Everything they produced was fine and lasted forever. We are mud, they the chiselled stone of Oxford that has survived centuries and will always be here. (197-98)

Yet his desire, his perceived lack, is disavowed by the contradiction and irony implicit in the suggestion that "Everything they produced was fine and lasted forever" (198). The colonialist subject is an artificial construct, a product of imperialist colonial activity. This constructed subject, called into question by the duplicity of the narrative, which simultaneously admits the enduring nature of colonial stereotypes while working towards their undermining, contradicts the idea of fixity or immortalization *per se*. Contiguous with this is the notion of the concrete constructions of imperialism having become relics. With the Empire having crumbled, the artifacts of status are antiques with little direct relevance in the modern world. What has endured, while not "fine," has certainly "lasted"; geohistorical juxtaposition broadens the context to illustrate the point:

There was no end of bickering. . . . when war broke out in 1971 between India and Pakistan on the issue of Bangladesh, . . . the Irish were simultaneously blowing up the streets of Belfast on television and there was probably a connection . . . but we didn't know quite what. (8)

All that have endured are conflict and subjugation, and things doomed to ill repair, as the narrator recalls: "In the London Underground we re-lived the passages from India to Britain, or India to the Caribbean to Britain, the long journeys of a previous century across unknown seas towards the shame of plantation labour" (17). Just in case the irony is missed, the craftsmanship so celebrated by the narrator is also unmasked as a "greedy search for things" that are no more than mere "tokens" or "status symbols" (197); the desire to write with grace and clarity is prefaced by an extremely poetic description of trying to write otherwise:

I take up a pen and start to write in the broken way of medieval verse, paying no attention to sense or grammar, just letting the words

shudder out and form themselves. I am spellbound by this memory, I write in a fit of savagery, marking the page like stripes. (197)

What is particularly interesting about this description is its explicit adoption of one of the justifying tropes of imperialism—"I write in a fit of savagery"—and its juxtapositioning of this with the image of being whipped, the indelible imprint of slavery and subjugation "marking the page like stripes." The echoes of Blake's "The Tiger" here and throughout the text are profound and emotive. While the effect of the rearticulation of the pretexts is to provide a palimpsestic deconstruction of the kinds of assumptions and knowledges supported, and arguably sustained, by the pervasive presence of the canon, at the same time it avoids privileging a particular reading which would serve to provide a possible new authority or knowledge. Yet while encouraging a proliferation of newly constructed discourses, this implicit commentary also serves to repeat and possibly reinforce the pretext, which thus still occupies, and is encouraged to occupy, the position of "master" text (Slemon 66)—an irony the text is quick to exploit. In his attempt to write an epitaph, to "fabricate verse with an exotic flavour," the narrator's imagination reels:

After a flurry of ideas, ending with the magnificent leap of a man-eating tiger, its stripes burning bright in the forest of the night, I paused in self doubt, wondering whether I could ever rival Conrad and the other white writers when it came to jungle scenes. (144)

Yet the reader never does see the final version of the poem and like the narrator is left wondering. The hegemonic order of cultural production, it would seem, remains firmly intact.

Similarly, while the various readings of canonical material offered up by *The Intended* may be seen to revise the kind of totalizing tradition implicit within its pretext, as is well illustrated by the various interpretations of *Heart of Darkness* suggested by individual characters (for instance, Conrad's "Black shapes crouched, lay, sat between the trees . . . in all the attitudes of pain, abandonment in despair. . . . This was the place where some of the helpers had withdrawn to die" [Conrad 44] is interpreted as both "part of the theme of suffering and redemption which lies at the core of the novel's concern" and as revealing that "the white sun over the congo . . . can't mix with the green of the bush

and the black skin of the people" [98]), such activities do little to dispel and indeed may even be perceived to extend the primacy of these traditions. If this is the case, such rehearsals lead ultimately to a creative game of mirrors and perhaps even to paralysis, with a large degree of pretextual fictional dependency. As Foucault suggests, "commentary allows us to say something other than the text itself but on condition that it is the text itself which is said, and in a sense, completed" (*Madness* 57-58).

The mapping of the culturally-dominant discourse—the reading and exposing of the pretext's underlying assumptions—can also suggest the opening up of a dialectical relationship between the dominant and supposedly submissive text. Situating itself at the intersection of cross-cultural practices, this relationship may appear, as Stephen Slemon suggests, to provoke, through a symbiosis of fixity and rehearsal, a dialogue between tradition and the imagination that can actually have the effect of simultaneously acknowledging the influence of, yet distancing the newly created work from its canonical pretexts (65). Thus rather than the "canonical rewriting" being seen to provide a constant deferral and endless proliferation of different meanings or rewritings, it also becomes a creative way forward. Providing the space for a cross-fertilization of ideas in an infinite process of rehearsal and displacement, it represents a means by which contemporary postcolonial society can revise and transform received forms of perception into new liberating codes, thus perhaps avoiding both the danger of of a reinscription into stasis and of locating the text in dynastic relation to its pretext and the cognitive codes it may carry. Whatever the outcome, the process at least works to provoke an interrogation into the politics and ethics of narrative production.

Film-making is revealed as another potent creative device with decolonizing possibilities in *The Intended*; Joseph's experiments with film and improvisation highlight the importance of the visual imagination for society: "When I catch sight in the mirror, is nothing I see. . . . How come I turn all different colours if you set light to me?" (100). Using a "different kind of book" (105), Joseph appropriates a new site and medium for the rewriting of history and the canon as embodied in *Heart of Darkness*: "Tooting

Bec Common . . . had everything . . . with which to create a feel of the African landscape" (109). Yet although such a project helps to reveal the haphazard and variable nature of representation and the knowledges that both inform and are informed by it, this is only theoretically liberating. While the improvisational elements of the project—such as a stone thrown in the water to suggest the trail of a river boat, and pushing the camera lens through grass to suggest "a hazardous journey through the jungle" (109)—work to reveal the deceptive and deceiving nature of perception and provide a space for creative endeavour outside of the standard notions of artistic production, in practice Joseph's own "marginal" position undermines this. For not only is he seen to be imprecise and unrealistic (88) but, as has already become apparent, he has neither a machine on which to play the film back nor, with his inability to fully comprehend the mechanics of the camera, any assurance that there is indeed a film to see. As with Blake's "The Tiger," the rewritings of *Heart of Darkness* are explicit and multiplicitous within *The Intended*, providing not only an interrogation of the canon and the series of knowledges it subscribes to and supports, but also an exploration (and liberation) of a postcolonial space from its confinement by and within European discourse; Joseph exemplifies this through his "weaving his personal history into the text" (102).

The process of rewriting does not itself escape ironic treatment, as is clear from the epitaph; here the appropriation of form and the mimicry of tradition serve to satirize early versions of postcolonial writing. Such a strategy helps not only to preempt and displace the hierarchical positioning of what may be seen as a counter-hegemonic practice, but also to destabilize the pedagogic status such rewrites may receive. By the narrator occupying the position of "professor" (94)—guardian of the canon, dissecting passages in terms of "theme and imagery" and "appearance and reality" (95)—and by Joseph being awarded the role of illiterate student, the text at first appears to be enacting a repetition of the Prospero/Caliban literary model. Yet Joseph's attempt to teach himself to write and to impart his own peculiar form of knowledge to his self-styled "teacher" (together with the fact that both the narrator and Joseph occupy off-centre posi-

tions) serves as an inversion, displacing this hierarchy of erudition and the definitions of knowledge it promotes.

A similar disruption takes place through the reported actions of the character Patel. To pass his English O-Level Patel memorizes a pre-written text, constructed by his uncle and given authority by it being "gorged with sweetmeats from *Rogel's Thesaurus*" (10). Such a manoeuvre, with its equating of plagiarism and academic achievement, provides an explicit and ironic undercutting of traditional ideas of intelligence and the efficacy of the English education system. But beneath the humour, there is also a deeper and more overtly political significance to this remembering. As the narrator asserts, "For the middle of the essay he was abandoned to his own devices" (10); Patel must write for himself the "unknown middle passage" because for this there is no pretext, no freely available discourse for him to employ. The title of the essay is "Tiger! Tiger! burning bright / In the forests of the night," and Patel, in true Blakean style, liberates it, repositioning it within his own cultural locale: "The tiger would be hunted by men bearing torches and riding an elephant because it had snatched an Indian village baby while the family were asleep" (12). Patel, congratulating himself for his cleverness, privileges himself above "the bloody stupid tiger" (12). The tiger is a pathetic creature vanquished by the hunt; Patel, with his postcolonial reappropriations, is a survivor.

Just as Patel's "victory" becomes legendary amongst his friends, so other events pass into the realm of fiction: "The tale of how so-and-so got caught would circulate, . . . each teller infusing the narrative with his own gift of invention, so that the event passed into the realms of legend" (33). Not only does this reveal the fictional nature of history and the historical nature of fiction, it also calls into question the authority of the narrator's recounting of history, in the form of memoir, as fact. Truths established through discourse are revealed as artificial constructions, from the narrator's lies about having seen famous cricketers (14) to the desperate exaggeration of his situation:

I have my own apartment and because I am doing so brilliantly at school the Government has decided to pay the rent and give me an allowance (this sounded much more comforting than being in care).

... I have been commissioned to advise on a children's script for BBC television and at this very moment Mr Joseph, a leading young director, is doing the preliminary filming. (114-15)

Not only are the ethics and political underpinnings of racial stereotyping called into question but also the very nature and validity of commentary, whether as canonical rewriting or social critique; the process of literary decolonization comes full circle with its own strategic manoeuvres being openly interrogated to the point of infinite rehearsal and even beyond. Yet while the notion of rehearsal, a process of becoming but never, it would seem, fully arriving, has much appeal, particularly with its contiguous consuming of biases, even this is finally called into question. As Mario Relich has asserted, Dabydeen is a writer "prone to subverting expectations" (46); he works against the "crisis of expectation" (Harris, *Carnival* 253) instilled in the reader by the strategic workings of the text. While, as might reasonably be expected, the novel ends with the narrator-protagonist rejecting his idealization of white English culture as embodied by the basically characterless Janet—his ironically labelled "intended"—he also promotes a rejection of the process of becoming: "I didn't want to be born time and time again. I didn't want to be an eternal, indefinite immigrant. I wanted to get off" (243). Even creative decolonization, it would seem, is finally disallowed in a paradoxical and contradictory simultaneous promotion and consuming of biases, juxtaposed with a refusal to privilege any one mode of literary articulation.

Relich writes of *The Intended*: "Beneath the limpid surface lurks endlessly explosive undercurrents of literary, cultural and historical debate" (56). Countering many of the difficulties identified as being likely to affect writing labelled postcolonial (such as implicit homogenizing, the tacit, often inadvertent privileging of colonialism as a form of reference and as a marker of history, and the concretizing rather than dispelling of hierarchical binary oppositions), *The Intended* works actively to engage and disrupt not only systems of categorization but also the knowledges that inform, support, and even promote them. By interrogating the imperatives behind colonialist, neo-colonialist, often racist discourse and discursive practice, and by dismantling the construc-

tion of stereotypes such practices support and employ, the text destabilizes not only standard metropolitan modes of representation; however, by the interpellative positioning of the characters both within and without such discursive constructs, it ruptures even the possibility of a final attribution of blame, while also undermining the notion of a unified subject or subject position.

In examining canonical writing in conjunction with an exploration of modes of rewriting (including the use of video technology), *The Intended* helps to undercut the tendency to privilege "conformist" texts and the contiguous insistent belief in the authority of the writer and/or narrator. Complicit with this is a refusal to support the notion of there being one transcendent "reading" of texts or indeed of societies; by moving beyond the restrictions imposed upon critical and/or creative practice, by positioning one of the major characters in contest with the strategies of containment the hegemonic centre supports and promotes, the text offers up possible fields of counter-hegemonic opportunity while refusing to support simple inversions of power. These kinds of strategies, while providing alternative forms of creativity and a resistance to neocolonial academic appropriation, also refocus the critic's perspective away from reading within preformulated and set "postcolonial" or "postmodern" paradigms towards a more fluid and ultimately less reductionist but still culturally-informed critical theoretical practice. The process of becoming (or, in Harris's phrasing, the consuming of biases through infinite rehearsal in the cross-cultural womb of space), while helping to move beyond strategies of containment and providing a new path for critical and theoretical investigations of contemporary literary works, nevertheless finally reveals a decline in faith in the transformative power of the arts, providing a working towards but never an arrival at full literary decolonization.

NOTES

- ¹ Soon after the publication of *Turner*, in 1994, Dabydeen was awarded the status of "New Generation Poet" in Britain, signifying a recognition of the originality of his work and its position as lying "athwart the old Establishment" and not sitting "easily

- with older alternative powerbases" (Forbes 6). Interestingly, Dabydeen was the only Caribbean writer among the twenty writers to be given this title.
- 2 While some aspects of the narrator's life do appear to converge with aspects of Dabydeen's own (see, for example, Dabydeen's reflections on his early life in "From Care to Cambridge"), Dabydeen himself is keen to distance his own experiences from those of *The Intended's* narrator (in a conversation with the author, 1993)
- 3 In an interview with Wolfgang Binder, Dabydeen talks of the expectations his white readership has of his work: "They will buy and read my work expecting 'folksiness,' expecting maybe exotic things and a display of suffering, or a parade of one's victimization. They will consume all that, and at the end of the day you are left with . . . a useless poem. . . . You are forced to address the Whites, and you address them on issues that have to do with dispossession, and they are such personal experiences that to have the Whites consume them is painful and shameful" (78). Dabydeen's comments are conducted specifically along racial lines, but the arguments are, I feel, equally applicable to academic expectations and appropriations of postcolonial literary material.
- 4 Joseph's experience has been one of children's homes and borstals, of vandalism and theft, actions that are justifiable because, as he says: "I never hurt nobody. I never rob anybody's pocket. I never hit anybody in the face or molest them" (87). His value-system is based on a fundamental sense of equality between all entities and on mutual respect:

He spun an erratic parable about a blind man stumbling along a rocky road, bumping into things, cursing and crying out in pain. "The point is," he concluded at last, "the rock blind as well, but it stay forever in one place if necessary. . . . Why? Because if it move in its blindness, it would bump against a man and bruise him up and hurt him." (90)

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