

## Notes from the New Editor

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In an exhibition of international contemporary art, “Century City: Art and Culture in the Modern Metropolis,” at London’s Tate Modern Gallery during the spring of 2001, an installation artwork, “sentiment-express.com,” by a young woman artist, Shilpa Gupta from Mumbai [Bombay], invited viewers to participate in an unusual declaration of love. A booth, extravagantly decorated with deep rose satin, a traditional colour of passion and emotion, offered the opportunity to sit down and compose a love letter. Composition would not be with the expected pen and paper, but rather on a keyboard and computer screen; the letter would then be e-mailed to Mumbai where Gupta and her collaborators would copy it out in ink on paper and send it (regular post or “snail mail” this time) back to the designated recipient. Gupta’s installation challenges our thinking about a whole range of pressing issues in contemporary literary, cultural, and postcolonial studies: How is the status of writing altered in a world of increasingly complex communication technologies? How might these new technologies function in the ways that, to borrow the title of Bill Ashcroft, Helen Tiffin and Gareth Griffiths’s influential book, the empire “writes back”? What innovative strategies are required to represent the emergent relations between regions of a globalized world?

In its bizarre interconnection of the impersonal processes of high technology and the individual intensity of love letters, Gupta’s “sentiment-express.com” explores the uncanny mixture of the transindividual forces of globalization and the deeply felt effects of their inscription on individual lives. Her use of both the new technologies of fiber optic internet communication and the labour-intensive acts of letter writing draws attention to the strange interconnections of globalized economies. In a world in which telephone call centres in India, run by large

corporations, employ young people, pretending to be in England on Greenwich Mean Time working for an English company, to answer telephone inquiries from people who believe they are connected to an English number, the layers of colonization and independence, mimicry, exploitation of “third world” labour, and the integration of national economies into global systems are only some of the questions and issues that Gupta’s artwork seeks to investigate and represent. She reminds those who visit “sentiment-express.com” how complex relationships between individuals and social communities have become in the twenty-first century.

Similar complexities will be familiar to readers of the contemporary international English literatures that are explored, debated, explicated, critiqued, and theorized in *ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature*. The first issue of *ARIEL* was published in 1970 at the University of Calgary under the editorship of A. Norman (Derry) Jeffares. It succeeded *A Review of English Literature*, opening out the narrower focus of English as a national literature to “literature written in English throughout the world” (7). Coming as it did at the beginning of a decade that would initiate a questioning of formalist approaches, *ARIEL* was well positioned at the cusp of the growing interest in the emergent literatures from former British colonies. Following upon the independence of India in 1947 and the many African countries throughout the 1950s to 1960s, and building on the explorations of what national cultural traditions might be in Canada and Australia, the body of writings in what came to be known as “Commonwealth literature,” offered complex, critical, passionate and sometimes troubled dialogues with the “great tradition” of literature in English. In the editorial of the first *ARIEL* issue, Jeffares wrote about how “areas of settlement or colonization moved in their own ways to [...] self-expression,” about how “Africa and the Caribbean blend their new urban societies with older traditions and enrich the common stock” (8).

During the 1980s this diverse field of literary, cultural, and theoretical practices began to be known, and institutionalized within university faculties and departments, as postcolonial criticism. At this crucial time *ARIEL* was fortunate to be under the guidance of two immensely

able editors, Ian Adam (1980–89) and Victor Ramraj (1989–2001). Ian Adam facilitated the journal's engagement with postcolonial studies and with the emergent questions of a new field of inquiry. His legacy is perhaps most notable in the widely read and much cited book *Past the Last Post: Theorizing Post-Colonialism and Post-Modernism*, co-edited with Helen Tiffin. Significantly, the book began life as a special issue of *ARIEL*. Victor Ramraj, well known for his writings on Caribbean literatures, especially V. S. Naipaul, and Canadian literature (Mordecai Richler), adeptly directed *ARIEL* in the decade of the 1990s and into the new century, a time when the discussions in "postcolonial studies" (for that term became widely used for the study of international English literatures) were particularly spirited and energetic. It is no surprise that under his leadership, ably assisted by associate editors Patricia Srebrnik and Lorne Macdonald, who often served as acting editors, the journal began publishing a section called "perspectives" that encouraged shorter commentaries, responses, and dialogues. In the spring of 2000, with Guari Viswanathan as a co-editor, *ARIEL* published a special issue on "Institutionalizing English Studies: The Postcolonial/Postindependence Challenge." Intriguingly enough, many of the articles in this issue revisited the very questions to which Jeffares had alluded in the first editorial, but they returned to these issues with the rich resources of the theoretical discussions and textual readings of three decades of critical thinking in postcolonial studies.

A new editor of *ARIEL* cannot fail to be aware of the eminent scholars who have preceded her. The first editorial in *ARIEL* made the claim—then audacious—that the quality of writing in international literatures in English could confidently stand beside the established traditions of English and American literatures. In the twenty-first century when these literatures have often been recognized by major international awards (the Nobel to Soyinka, Walcott, Gordimer, Naipaul, Coetzee; the Booker to Carey, Roy, Ondaatje, Atwood and so on), it seems less urgent to demonstrate the quality of international English literature with close textual readings. It remains, of course, a necessary project to examine the ideologies of prize-giving in constructing the market for international literature (see Strongman).

The past three decades have seen postcolonial studies and international literatures institutionalized within the curriculum of university English departments and faculties as a demanding area of research and as a popular subject of study for students. Acceptance within the institutions of literary study ought not, however, to be taken to imply that there are not pressing debates within the field. Even the name “postcolonial studies” can be subjected to vexing inquiries: How might the confidence implicit in “postcolonial” smooth over and deflect analysis of the persistence of repressive neocolonial regimes and practices? How does the very idea of “postcoloniality” impose a certain narrative on the cultures of aboriginal peoples, whose literatures all too often tell stories of continuing colonization by settler nations? In what ways can the world be said to be “postcolonial,” if the global strategies of multinational capital expand and extend the imperial colonizing projects of the past four hundred years? The articles that *ARIEL* publishes will continue to investigate the complex inter-relationships between cultural memories, contemporary pressures and pleasures, and yearnings for the future, as they are articulated in the rich and diverse texts of international literatures in English.

As I stood in the vast hall of Tate Modern in front of Gupta’s “sentiment-express.com” I was aware not only of the intertwining of pleasure and pain, but of how this doubling was itself a cliché of romantic love. I was a colonial woman from a settler colony caught up in the artwork of another colonial woman from the other side of the world in a spectacular new gallery in the metropolitan centre of the old empire, on the bank of a river I had first met in imagination reading Joseph Conrad’s classic novel of colonization, *Heart of Darkness*, in a Canadian school-room. Conrad’s narrative aesthetic from another generation curiously haunted the exchanges and interpenetrations within cyberspace evoked by Gupta’s installation. The overdeterminations of the moment seemed to be genuinely uncanny. The delicious humour and ironies in Gupta’s artwork opened up into darker reflections on the workforce of the globalized world. As Fredric Jameson has pointed out, globalization seems to carry opposing, unresolvable tensions. On the one hand, new technologies of communication have brought into the public sphere a

myriad of voices which may have previously remained marginal and unknown: this is perhaps the moment articulated when a young experimental woman artist from Mumbai is included in an exhibition at a major London venue for contemporary art. On the other hand, the rapid expansion of global capital and its incursions into national markets have created new divisions of labour throughout the world: this is perhaps the moment signified by Gupta's unnamed helpers in India whose labour is crucial to the project of the installation, but who remain faceless and anonymous. Postcolonial studies have argued for an attentiveness to the ways in which these voices might "write back" through and against colonizing power. It is also crucial to recognize how the complexities of human societies and global configurations give rise to entangled complicities in, to borrow Arjun Appadurai's terms, the ethnoscapas, financiescapas, and mediascapas that constitute the lifeworld of the twenty-first century.

The editor of *ARIEL* is only one individual in a team whose collective work is crucial to producing the journal. The editorial board, associate and review editors, the business manager, the international advisory board, those scholars around the world who assess submissions, student assistants, colleagues who generously give their expertise in matters small and large—all of these people contribute their time and energy to the journal. Without their attention to detailed tasks it would be impossible to publish *ARIEL*. We also rely on our readers and contributors to engage with texts and discussions, enter into dialogues, and respond to debates. Together, we can continue to explore the always diverse and often astonishing field of international literatures in English.

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