After the Imperial Turn

Thinking with and through the Nation

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One-Way Traffic: George Lamming and the Portable Empire

All the books they read, their whole introduction to something called culture, all of it, in the form of words, came from outside: Dickens, Jane Austen, Kipling and that sacred gang. The West Indian's education was imported in much the same way that flour and butter are imported from Canada.

—George Lamming, *The Pleasures of Exile*

George Lamming's 1960 *The Pleasures of Exile*[1] situates the Barbadian-born novelist squarely in a familiar postcolonial tradition.[2] In that book, the hegemonic force of British imports, both physical and metaphysical (from butter to Austen), is imagined as making the colonial subject mimetically into a version of the colonizing country. Shakespeare's *The Tempest* is that book's most striking example of the West Indian colonial condition. This is in part because the text represents the colonial situation, but also because the play itself was exported to the West Indies, thus becoming part of the very colonial legacy on which it reflects.[3]

But Lamming's *In the Castle of My Skin* (1953) depicts British objects operating in quite a different way. That novel, Lamming's first, intervenes tellingly in debates that raged then, and rage now with even more force, on the nature of the cultural legacy inflicted on a colony by its conquerors and long-term owners. Thirty years after his last substantial work and at a scholarly moment when new ways of parsing both the imperial turn and postcoloniality itself have returned us to aesthetic texts as avenues into ideological formations, Lamming's novels reward reevaluation. They have always appeared to be a direct response to the logic of trade and imperial expansion that made even the postcolonial West Indies seem an overseas extension of British culture. But our new attention to the relationship between postcoloniality and globalization and a renewed scholarly interest in material culture make Lamming's novels seem something more as well.[4] In his six novels—but most notably in *In the Castle of my Skin* and *Natives of My Person*—Lamming reveals the ways in which "the whole sacred gang" of British high culture singularly fails to take hold in the postcolonial context—even at the moments when such portable imperial culture seems most triumphant.

To acquiesce to the force of the colonial mind-set, Lamming suggests, is "in silence or with rhetoric . . . [to] sign a contract whose epitaph reads: To be in exile is to be alive."[5] But Lamming thinks there is a way out of such an acceptance of exile: it comes by discovering that one's imaginary motherland, the England that made and shaped one, bears no relation to the England of the English. In other words, by refusing its imaginary hold, one can discover that the seeming portability of the imperial motherland is an illusion. In that sense, Lamming's work seems a striking prognosticator of the nature of debates about a distinctively postcolonial literary form (debates that have shaped the field in important contributions by Jameson, Ahmad, During, Hulme, Beverly, and others).[6]

The key question that Lamming approaches is arguably the most important question for framing postcolonial studies today: what is to be made of the export objects that colonizers offered as fetish representatives of the metropole? How, in other words, did British object lessons function in a colonial context to enforce a sense that the metropole is not a distant actor *upon* but a proximal actor *within* a colonial space? That question has been approached in a wide variety of ways by a recent wave of vigorous postcolonial scholarship: in recent years books like Gauri Viswanathan's *Masks of Conquest* and work by such subaltern studies scholars as Gyan Prakash have proposed that the story of British "hegemony" in India be rethought in terms of the complicated struggles among various models for how culture was to be transmitted from the mother country to the colony. And works such as Peter Hulme's have alerted scholars of the Caribbean to the complicated questions of hybridity and dissemination that C. L. R. James's *Black Jacobins* had broached in the 1960s.[7]

However, Lamming's particular contribution to the West Indian debate on the colonial legacy offers a rather different way to evaluate the postcolonial condition. If the best work by Viswanathan, for example, has focused on the export of "culture" read as a dematerialized set of practices and customers, there has also recently been a vigorous scholarly attention toward what is labeled "global circulations" in Lydia Liu's recent collection, *Tokens of Exchange*. Such work, building as it does on both world systems theory and Marxist accounts of commodity exchange and responding to the material turn evidenced in Arjun Appadurai's magisterial collection, *The Social Life of Things*, has opened the way to make postcolonial studies into a detritus field—that is, a field that studies the objects that make up the global trade by which colonies were both initially justified and sustained.[8] Justified because the export of the objects of religion played a key role in legitimating colonization in the first

place; sustained because it was the successful export of Britishness itself (teacups, domestic interiors, flags, and all manner of civilian materiel) that made the colonies seem livable extensions of Britain itself. Lamming brilliantly anatomizes the ways in which British objects, passed down or pressed onto colonial subjects, are imagined, from a British perspective, as capable of shaping lives coercively—and anatomizes as well the ways that such objects work instead to produce an odd kind of imaginative freedom.

* * *

A telling debate at the heart of *In the Castle of My Skin* spotlights Lamming's interest in classifying the British objects that help both to define and to control the West Indies. The novel at this point is collectively narrated by a group of boys to whom every object is an occasion for the same sort of inconclusive debate that rages about the doubloon nailed to the mast of the *Pequod* midway through *Moby Dick*.[9] In this case, the object is the British penny that each boy has received at a school prize day. As soon as the gift is received, the debates begin among the boys:

> Some said it was a drawing of the king made with a pin while the copper was soft. . . . It was a long and patient undertaking. But it had to be done if there was going to be any money at all, an everyone knew how important money was. [Others said] it was very silly to argue that such a job would be done by sensible people. And the English who were the only people in the world to deal with pennies were very sensible.[10]

This debate frames the production of money for Barbados as a gift of the English. Because the children believe that only the English make pennies, they also believe necessarily that there must be both a reason for their production and a reasonable way to produce them. The challenge is to read the mind of the imperium. And the debate is configured around a competition as to who can successfully ventriloquize the penny. Those pennies thus become something like the commodities that Marx believed were capable of bringing their owners to market, or even of making their owners into agents of their (objective) will.

Theories proliferate among the boys; one is that "it was the same penny all the time." The portraits of the king on the penny will not vary because "The king could never find time to press all the pennies in the world."

> One penny, that is the first penny ever made, was the real penny, and all the others were made by a kind of stamp. You simply had to get the first penny, and the necessary materials and thousands followed. That meant, someone asked, that you couldn't spend the first penny. Someone wanted to know how the first penny was made. . . . [The penny was made and heated and] finally sent to the king who pressed it on one side of his face.[11]

If this account begins to seem allegorical of the relationship between these boys and their distant ruler—that is, if the later pennies made from that first penny begin to sound like copper-colored allegorical figures for the "Brown Briton" boys themselves—so much the better.

Why does Lamming decide to go on at such length staging this debate on the meaning of the pennies? The absurdity that prevails as each unlikely theory about the penny's origin is introduced is not merely contingent, but also central to the meaning of these debates. The incredible quality of these explanations is exactly the point.

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's influential account, "George Lamming's *In the Castle of My Skin*," sees the explanations as moving toward a real understanding of the colonial condition. He argues that in this novel, "the yardstick is England. Everything that affects the tender minds of the children is geared towards veneration of England and the British throne."[12] But the yardstick is precisely not the real England. Instead it is the imaginary England that has been summoned up in the children's minds. The final thesis advanced by one of the children is that the king is not responsible for that image because "the king was never seen" and all images flow only from a kind of "shadow king."[13]

That notion of the invisible but omnipotent shadow king points to Lamming's real intent here. The wholesale importation of "Dickens, Jane Austen, Kipling and that sacred gang" has produced not a comprehensive but rather a kind of "shadow" Britishness, and that shadow's relationship to its original is fundamentally unmappable. Just as the children that a "shadow king" sires will have no genetic relationship to the "real king," the daydreams sparked by these shadow imports will have, Lamming supposes, no true relationship to the site from whence the objects came. The children's accounts of the object they see before them is grounded not in evidence but in imagination and is arrived at neither by extrapolation nor interpolation, but pure and simple speculation.

To understand the postcolonial rebellion against British portable objects, as articulated in Lamming, means in part to understand why such exportable objects as those copper pennies came with such significant cultural adhesions, such "aura" as Walter Benjamin put it, attached. The carefully satirical set piece on pennies is oriented against an ideology that had imagined the perfect *portability* of the British nation (and of an imperial culture) by way of objects. Lamming conjures up a world in which the creation of a plausible past for the imported artifact is fatally compromised by the very act of imagination that is required to constitute the object as a lesson of the empire. That is, all the

meaning that seems to inhere in the object is actually conjured up by its interpreter. That claim is both necessary and striking because Lamming is writing against an inherited set of object lessons that posit the perfect transmissibility of British culture abroad.

Consider, for example, a British tea service laid out by Britons in India. What is it that makes the object's meaning in India seem to depend upon the object's original meaning in England? Flora Annie Steel, in her 1899 *On the Face of the Waters*, has her heroine call her English garden of "heartease and sweet peas" in India "the shadow of a rock in a dusty land" and go on to describe such parlor appurtenances as a piano in the same terms.[14] Home notes sound loudest. Even playing Beethoven, even struck by Indian hands, the "old country" piano must operate as a marker of Britishness in the Raj.

Like the beloved "old willow-ware" that reminds the sea captain in Emily Eden's *The Semi-Detached House* of life back home, English objects in a range of nineteenth-century British accounts are what make the old island palpably present. To make one's country or family or even oneself feel "at home" overseas required the successful transplantation of not only culture in the most abstract sense, but also of "material culture," rooted in tangible objects.[15] Teakettles, Bibles, lockets, and portable copies of Shakespeare instantiate the homeland overseas. The British in India, in Kenya, in the West Indies strung out a sense of their distant metropole in every public space, recreated it in every private interior.[16] Flora Annie Steel's *Complete Indian Housekeeper* at century's end listed all the English items available at good Delhi markets (salad oil, tinned fish) that made an Indian house a para-English one.[17] And Emily Eden's *Up the Country*, letters written from the Indian hinterland in the 1840s, details her ability to create upon an alien landscape an illusion of British domesticity—though it might take a retinue of several hundred servants to implement that feeling of home.[18]

It should not be surprising that it is often literary works, those most culturally loaded of objects, that are imagined as best at constructing parochial Englishness abroad. Consider, for example, Rudyard Kipling's fascinating 1926 short story, "The Janeites," a convincing testament to the felt power of a Jane Austen novel to create an entire English world once Austen has become an object exportable in people's minds, not just their valises. In Kipling's account, it is a shared knowledge of Jane Austen's world (acquired through conversation and the passage of battered texts from hand to hand) that enables true Britons to recognize one another overseas.[19]

Does it make any difference to a Briton's ability to arrive in India unchanged if his collection of Jane Austen novels has arrived there with him? Kipling's

account supposes that it does, because in that motion overseas the Austen novels have become metonymical for those "middling counties of England." It is just this that West Indian writers like Lamming understand as the strongest claim that literature can make—and as the most threatening form of imperial extension into the West Indies. For if the book, suitably laden with cultural freight, can be accepted as a piece of Britain, then the imaginative force of literary conquest will have seemed not to triumph, but actually to disappear: there is no literature here anymore, simply a piece of England transported whole to these islands. Literature's triumph would therefore be its disappearance too if imperial mimesis is to become the ultimate ending of any text sent overseas "as England."

This sort of substitutive logic may seem familiar from our understanding of "regional" literature. Consider, for example, the claim of local particularity that is registered by Thomas Hardy's Wessex novels, in which the world of Wessex is definitively bounded by the province (these people belong only here) yet also made exportable as a kind of curio piece contained within the novel itself (a "taste of Wessex").[20] But there is a crucial difference. Hardy offers a representation of Wessex that will not lend itself to that world being recreated as a living whole. Kipling's "Janeites," though, implies that Austen's local truth will function abroad to make up England. The middling counties are suddenly transportable anywhere Austen is legible, so that one can imagine reconstituting England's culture, just as dried soups can be reconstituted to allow British cuisine (terrifying thought) to travel overseas.

It comes to seem, then, that the existence of England overseas depends, in an imperial age, upon the triumph of a readily portable culture, concretized in certain key culture-laden artifacts. This conception of a Britain made portable by way of objects continues, in some forms unaltered, through the middle of the twentieth century.[21] Evelyn Waugh's 1934 "The Man Who Loved Dickens" marks one important break, after which the successful dissemination of British culture (here by way of Dickens) begins to seem not a triumph but a curse on Britain, as its colonial children use that culture to turn the tables on the colonizer.[22] Waugh's account of the terrors that occur when Dickens is made available to racial aliens like the illiterate Mr. Todd (who had to kidnap the Englishman Tony Last to serve as his reader) suggests that it is time to close the floodgates, to truncate the flow of portable objects so as to save little England from the Greater Britain it has—Waugh gloomily believes—successfully created. However, a larger shift is in store. By 1950, in the work of the first post–World War II (and post–Indian independence) generation of West Indian writers, the very idea of portable British culture at times seems not simply

outmoded, but fatally flawed from the outset. Small wonder, perhaps, that Australian David Malouf's *Remembering Babylon* begins with a colonial subject crying, "Don't shoot! I am a B-b-b-british Object!"[23]

The problematic of imperial dissemination by way of imperial objects does not inevitably produce a Lamming-like response. Indeed, the responses of writers from the margins of empire to imperial notions of object portability do not always differ widely from the metropolitan accounts that the well-educated colonial imbibes.[24] And even when they do, the results may serve circuitously to affirm the effect that British imperial objects were imagined to have.

There are many writers of the ex-colonized world who accept the legacy of the successfully portaged object and turn to the question of assessing the damage that such objects have done. What have these objects done to us, some writers worry, by manufacturing illusory accounts of that "other life" back in the motherland, the "imaginary homeland"? Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1980) brilliantly anatomizes this worry in its account of the allegorical Methwold Estates. Sold to Indians at the moment of independence, the "Estates" are handed over on condition that all its artifacts are left untouched—whisky bottles and glasses, toilet paper, pictures of sweating old Englishmen. The (purely intentional) effect is that within a month the residents are gathering on the veranda for cocktail hour, telling stories of past glories in pseudo-Oxford accents.[25]

After such portability, Rushdie asks, what revenge? What is to be made now of these no longer new things, these "star commodities" that arrive on our shores with their Englishness and imperial might seemingly intact?[26] Rushdie jokes in *Midnight's Children* about the mother country's abiding hold: a radio arrives labeled not "made in England" but "made as England." Whatever comes from the mother country, home of all objects and of all objectivity, serves in the still colonial space as more than a symbol, as a metonymic portion of that mother. Seeing the English object, one thinks more of its country of origin than of the object itself. Go looking for Britain, and it recedes before you; invent it from what has been sent you, and a complete life, seemingly imported from abroad, is on offer. But Anglophone West Indian writers have addressed that legacy somewhat differently.[27] Derek Walcott, for instance, makes colonial deprivation meaningful only by contrasting it to the imagined wealth of the "essential" culture brought from overseas: "Colonials, we began with this malarial enervation: that nothing could ever be built among these rotting shacks, barefooted back yards, and moulting shingle. . . . We knew the literature of empires, Greek, Roman, British, through their essential classics."[28] And V. S. Naipaul, in both *The Mimic Men* (1967) and *A Bend in the River* (1979), takes a look at British objects that seem no longer to hold the sway they should over

colonial subjects, and the effect of his examination is to produce an account of colonial imagination that is surprisingly similar to Lamming's. Certainly Naipaul, born in 1932, who sailed (like Lamming) from Trinidad to England in 1950, is of a generation to know something of such colonial nostalgia. To some critics, his work is nothing but variations on that nostalgia—slow discoveries of various ways in which former meaning has waned and left the world the dimmer for it. Trains, stamps, steamboats are all part of the vanished European legacy in *A Bend in the River*, and at times it is hard not to feel that Naipaul fervently believes all can be restored to their colonial magnitude.[29]

That nostalgia, however, is only a way that characters persuade themselves that they once had, and so could have again, a closer relationship to the imperial center than they have now. In Naipaul's account, only two sorts of Western objects endure: denuded trade goods and irrationally aura-laden memorabilia. *A Bend in the River* seems to set up the waning presence of Europeans in Zaire as emblematic of a postcolonial fall away from civilization more generally. In the place of the bygone era of memorable European products—faded posters for Italian wines, postage stamps whereby even illiterate Arab slave traders could learn their own history, a calendar that brought order into the timeless chaos of pre-European lives[30]—Naipaul sees a grubby trade in fungibles, marking the failure of any admirable postcolonial life to replace the vanished empire. The perfect emblem for the diminished flow of culture after the captains and the kings depart is imported zinc basins: "It was antiquated junk, specially made for shops like mine, and I doubt whether the workmen who made the stuff—in Europe and the United States and perhaps nowadays Japan—had any idea what their products were used for." The actual use to which they are put, these deliberately denuded objects, could not possibly have been envisioned back in the first world: "The smaller basins for instance, were in demand because they were good for keeping grubs alive in, packed in damp fibre and marsh earth."[31]

Salim, the protagonist, pointedly distinguishes these basins from the objects that seem still filled with all the allure of neocolonial power. He has a palpable addiction to first world popular science magazines, filled with pictures of what "they" are doing in Europe—"they" being not so much Europeans as scientists of any race, inventors in sterile labs, "people far away from us in every sense."[32] The entire appeal of the magazines is theoretical, or rather, they are appealing because they bespeak a practical meaning for objects that Salim cannot imagine ever entering Zaire. Guy Debord describes the "star commodity," an object that marks the advent of technologically superior North to the retarded South.[33] But in Naipaul's account, the commodity remains a star precisely by not arriving, by not contaminating itself with actual exposure to the zone of retardation.

These inventions are appealing precisely on account of their unavailability. Should a Western object actually successfully arrive in Zaire, it could not help but be corrupted. When a "Big Burger" franchise arrives and thrives, Salim sees it only as a lowest common denominator where corrupt Zairean culture meets the worst of the West. When Salim begins an affair with a Western woman, Yvette, he wants only to possess her while she remains untouched by someone like him. He desperately wants objects to preserve their distant purity of Western promise ("made as England"), and yet he wants those objects right here simultaneously, wants them to enter his life while holding on to their chilly Northern distance from him.

Rather than constructing a suitable way for the portable European object to continue flourishing in this fallen present, however, Naipaul anatomizes the illusions that go along with imagining that European culture is a way out of one's provincial life. Like Lamming with the copper penny, Naipaul plunges into the realm of European objects to pick out one that exemplifies the work that goes into inventing the meaning that seems embedded in a Western object. He does so most tellingly in an earlier novel, *The Mimic Men*. There, he tells the story of a portable British property that never existed and yet overshadowed in the colonized mind objects that actually did: "My first memory of school is of taking an apple to the teacher. This puzzles me. We had no apples on Isabella. It must have been an orange; yet my memory insists on the apple. The editing is clearly at fault, but the edited version is all I have."[34] This apple actually erases the local object and replaces it with what has never been imported. Naipaul can conceive the European portable object's surviving, but only within this edited imaginary world. If the Lamming penny made the boys create in their minds an elaborate England that never existed, the apple creates the poignant illusion of a Western boyhood for someone who lived in a realm where the objects necessary for such a boyhood were not provided, even though the narratives of such boyhoods were.

Naipaul once claimed that "Nothing was created in the West Indies," but the conjuring up of this apple strikes me as a very telling kind of creation, most telling perhaps because the act of creation seems to do no more than mimic the colonizer.[35] Naipaul is experimenting here with something like Du Bois's notion of the "double consciousness" belonging to African Americans living in "the world within . . . the Veil."[36] In Naipaul, the narrator's conviction that the apple memory is simultaneously true and false makes him a single subject who exists both inside the bounds of empire and outside of them. Inside the Veil, the apple is real only in thoughts of the distant motherland, imaginary when associated with one's own provincial home. This form of double consciousness, though, is defined by distance; one's veiled relationship is to the proximal seeming yet distant motherland via the exported objects that arrive to constitute it—via those objects that promise to arrive and never do so. To live beneath the Veil as a "Black Briton" is to construe oneself as British until the moment that one actually arrives in Britain.

Lamming's parable of the pennies turns a seeming deficit into a hidden strength because it credits West Indian distance from the metropolis with endowing its residents with a powerful imaginative life. The West Indian imagination, by this account, is only putatively engaged in interpreting England's objects. In reality, it uses those objects as occasions for the most fabulous invention. Like Homi Bhabha's account of colonial "mimicry" as mimesis that fails even by succeeding, Lamming's account of imaginative interpretation suggests that the very moment at which colonial subjects may seem most invested in their imperial antecedents is the moment at which they have already broken with that empire.[37]

In the penny parable Lamming is, like Sarah Orne Jewett in "The Queen's Twin," praising the imagination that arises around a few scrap mementos as a far more powerful force in the world than mere mundane experience of one's surroundings.[38] In Jewett's 1899 story, the protagonist, Abby Martin, born the same day as Queen Victoria and linked to her by various other seemingly significant coincidences, builds up a collection of pictures of the queen, as well as a fantasy life of secret communication, a life that Jewett finds more admirable than living resignedly in one's own provincial locale.[39] Abby enters into feeling communion with the queen, who is made tangible to her not by pennies but by magazine illustrations and articles. Such imagination is a purely provincial power; her urbane friend, a frequent traveler to England, is incapable of experiencing the kind of thrill these illustrations bring to Abby. As a friend tells her at the climax of "The Queen's Twin," "Don't it show that for folks that have any fancy in 'em, such beautiful dreams is the real part o' life? But to most folks the common things that happen outside 'em is all in all."[40]

Like Jewett, Lamming supposes that the necessary illusions out of which provincial life is made can endow the writer or reader or colonial subject with an imaginative power far exceeding any metropolitan assets. It is not that the colonial objects really bring England with them, nor is it the case that they lie in seeming to do so. Rather, they offer a set of inimitable dreams. Provincial life is shaped not by imported objects, but by the illusion that life is shaped by these imported objects.

Lamming's claim about the force of such necessary illusions is perhaps best articulated in his most recent novel, *Natives of My Person* (1972), an allegorical

retelling of such New World exploration narratives as Richard Hakluyt's *Voyages*.[41] The book evidently owes much to *Moby Dick* as well, although here Ahab's quest for the white whale comes across as another version of the quest for the New World.[42] One can begin to understand how Lamming anatomizes the appeal of the imperial object for the provincial subject by noting that "*Inside the Castle of My Skin*" and "*Natives of My Person*" are almost identical titles. Both assert a kind of corporate unity that underlies the apparent disaggregation of persons: all these voices that you hear, scattered all over the social map, are in reality joined together within "my" experience.

The "insideness" of the first novel's skin castle echoes Teresa of Avila's castle, that spiritual retreat from the world. At the same time "skin," in the racialized consciousness of a West Indian subject, necessarily connects that retreat to the persistent master-slave relations that depend on color coding. "*Natives of My Person*" seems to offer the same formulation because it too offers a way for a collection of voices, thoughts, selves, to be gathered under a single roof, within a single life. The novel tells of the voyage of a quixotically driven Commandant and of various of his crew (Steward, Surgeon, Boat-Swain) through diaries, voices, dialogue, the manic recollections of the Commandant himself, and finally "The Women" at sea in another ship altogether.[43]

Yet the context within which the title phrase appears in the latter novel suggests ways in which the corporatism of the earlier novel has been replaced by something a bit more difficult to parse. At the book's end, when the three central characters — Surgeon, Steward, and Commandant — are already dead, their wives and lovers, stranded somewhere in the New World and still expecting their arrival, speak of the way that their own lives are shaped, as women, by submission to another's will. This is a submission that has the effect of forming their subjectivity, in that their decision to make another's life a resident part of their own means that their own actions are effectively taken as agents for that other:

> Surgeon's Wife: It was what I had to do. He was a piece of my person.
> Steward's Wife: It is the same. My husband had become that too: a native of my person. Whenever there is a crisis, we must choose against our interests.[44]

What makes the moment poignant is that death has already dissevered them from those imagined natives of their person, so that their assertion that they are not acting but simply continuing the action of others is undermined by the fact that those dominant others are not left to act. Their own subjective status is revised by the fact that they have become the agents, in effect the objects, of others who no longer exist.

In order to live, Lamming holds, people require the impression that they

are working for those persons and objects that surround and define their lives. Thus even at the moment in which their connection to those others has been severed, they continue to imagine those others inhabiting them. Be it the other the king's penny or the dead husband, the form of imaginary connection is equally strong. But finally all these seeming inhabitations of one's own thoughts by the mind of another, or by the imported objects that make up a world, are a form of fetish, a productive illusion. The pluralization in the title — so that one "native of my person" turns into "natives of my person" — seems to suggest that Lamming contains all of his characters as beloved natives. But it also suggests that his own relationship to those others whom his prose ought to contain and indeed to speak for is profoundly unsettled, as illusory (and as productive) as that imagined affinity to a distant Britain mediated through its coinage.

In a recent appraisal of C. L. R. James's *Mariners, Renegades and Castaways*, Donald Pease specifies James's investment in responding to and rewriting *Moby-Dick*. Pease argues that James writes to register "the horror of Melville's failure to provide the crew with the power to revolt against their monomaniacal captain."[45] James's indictment of Melville is echoed in *Natives of My Person*, which rewrites *Moby-Dick* in such a way as finally to liberate the crew from the Commandant's dead hand.

But Lamming goes farther. The revision to *Moby-Dick* proposed in *Natives of My Person* functions not only against Melville, but also against James's acceptance of the ultimate dependence of a West Indian intellectual on the canonical texts of the Anglo-American world. In Lamming's account, James's choice to "number oneself among the mariners, renegades and castaways" (as Pease believes James did) may seem to offer liberatory alternatives but actually traps one within a false conception of the colonial world.[46] *Natives of My Person* fantasizes the discovery that all our imagined connections to those who hold sway over us (our husbands, our captains, our nations) are a delusion from the beginning. And having recognized that delusion, one realizes that one was never subservient to that authority, that the force contained in those guiding British precepts and objects was all along a product of one's own mind, not inherent in the things themselves.

In *Natives of My Person*, the seeming triumph of asserting that one contains another as a "native of one's person" is the psychological corollary to the state of colonization. Both hinge on the delusion that objects and messages can traverse the ocean unimpeded, bearing with them a perfect replica of original intent. Rushdie's Methwold Estates are intended as a satire that bemoans the effectiveness of imperial colonization. By contrast, Lamming tells the story of portable treasures that do not portage any meaning with them; he tells the

story of "incorporation" founded on lies or on mistakes. In so doing, he returns to the foundational conceit of overseas colonies and crafts a response devastating not because it topples an old order, but because it suggests that that old order itself had never existed.

Peter Hulme rightly identifies elements of Fredric Jameson's notion of the postcolonial novel as "national allegory" that fit Lamming's work.[47] For Hulme, Lamming's interest in "the shaping of national consciousness" depends on what Hulme calls "an imaginative reassessment of the relationship between metropolis and ex-colony."[48] In fact, *Natives of My Person* makes an even stronger claim: that the shaping of national consciousness comes not by rejecting the colonial culture, but by recognizing that one's seeming ingestion of that culture had all along been an illusion. It turns out that your whole life you had been speaking postcolonial prose and dreaming postcolonial dreams without knowing it.

Notes

1 George Lamming, *The Pleasures of Exile* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992 [1960]), p. 27.

2 Sandra Pouchet Poquet sums up the critical consensus in the first line of her *Dictionary of Literary Biography* entry: "George Lamming is one of the great Caribbean writers on the subject of decolonization and national reconstruction." "George Lamming," in *Twentieth Century Caribbean and Black African Writers*, 2d series, *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, ed. Bernth Lindfors and Reinhard Sander (Detroit: Gale, 1993), p. 54. Born in Barbados in 1927, emigrated to England in 1950, Lamming is the author of one influential book of essays, *The Pleasures of Exile*, as well as six novels: *In the Castle of My Skin* (1953), *The Emigrants* (1954), *Of Age and Innocence* (1958), *Season of Adventure* (1960), *Water with Berries* (1972), and *Natives of My Person* (1972). He currently divides his time between the United States and Barbados.

3 Frantz Fanon's roughly contemporary *Wretched of the Earth* is one striking example of a similar exploration of the creation of colonial subjects as dark mirrors for their colonizers. The rise of subaltern studies (marked by, for example, Ranajit Guha, "On Some Aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India," *Subaltern Studies* 1: 1–9, is another; but see also the most recent anthologies: Ranajit Guha, ed., *A Subaltern Studies Reader* [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997], and Vinayak Chaturvedi, ed., *Mapping Subaltern Studies and the Postcolonial* [London: Verso, 2000]) is largely constituted as an extension of the legacy of Gramsci in "Marxist heterodoxy" (Chaturvedi's formulation), but it has evolved recently through the work of Chakrabarty, Spivak, and others) into a response to Fanon as well. Another influential response comes in Homi Bhabha, "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse," *October* 28 (1984): 125–133.

4 Simon During, "Postcolonialism and Globalization: Towards a Historicization of Their Inter-Relation," *Cultural Studies* 14 (2000): 385–404.

5 Lamming, *The Pleasures of Exile*, p. 24.

6 John Beverly, *Against Literature* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993). Other works cited below.

7 Gauri Viswanathan, *Masks of Conquest: Literary Study and British Rule in India* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989); Gyan Prakash, *Another Reason: Science and the Imagination of Modern India* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999); Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993); Peter Hulme, *Remnants of Conquest: The Island Caribs and Their Visitors* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

8 Arjun Appadurai, ed., *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), and Lydia Liu, ed., *Tokens of Exchange: The Problem of Translation in Global Circulations* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1999). See also Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler, eds., *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

9 It is a telling characteristic of Lamming's work that he often features such dialogues of the dupes, lengthy debates among disempowered characters who have no chance of getting the facts right, facts that even the reader knows far better than the participants. One effect of this is to produce, among those who are ignorant and know themselves so, a renewed investment in the success of pure verbal constructs.

10 George Lamming, *In the Castle of My Skin* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1991 [1953]), p. 53.

11 Ibid., pp. 53–54.

12 Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, *Homecoming: Essays on African and Caribbean Literature, Culture and Politics* (New York: Lawrence Hill, 1972), p. 115.

13 Lamming, *In the Castle of My Skin*, p. 54.

14 My sense of the Victorian meanings of (exportable) culture has been shaped by Christopher Herbert's account in *Culture and Anomie* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991) of Mayhew's idea of a working-class, object-mediated identity. Following Herbert, I speak here of "culture" in the Arnoldian sense of "the best that has been known and said in the world," to which Tylor's 1871 definition of culture as a "complex whole which includes knowledge, belif, art, morals law, custom" (cited in Herbert, p. 4) is a complicated counterpart starting in the late Victorian period.

15 Flora Annie Steel, *On the Face of the Waters: A Tale of the Mutiny* (New York: Macmillan, 1897), p. 23.

16 Ian Baucom's *Out of Place* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999), is one important recent account of this process.

17 Flora Annie Steel, *The Complete Indian Housekeeper and Cook: Giving the Duties of Mistress and Servants, the General Management of the House, and Practical Recipes for Cooking in All Its Branches*, 2d ed. (Edinburgh: Murray, 1890).

18 Emily Eden, *Up the Country* (London: Virago, 1983 [1866; actually written 1842–1848]).

19 Rudyard Kipling, "The Janeites," from *Debits and Credits* [1926]; in *Collected Works of Rudyard Kipling* (New York: AMS Press, 1970), pp. 99–128. A new collection, *The Janeites*, ed. Deidre Lynch (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001), takes the title of this Kipling story as the basis of its exploration of enduring Austen mania worldwide. See also You-me Park and Rajeswari Sunder Rajan, eds., *The Postcolonial Jane Austen* (London: Routledge, 2000).

20 The best recent account of Hardy and regionalism is John Barrell's "Geographies of Hardy's Wessex," in *The Regional Novel in Britain and Ireland, 1800–1990*, ed. K. D. M. Snell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 99–119.

21 It is worth thinking about how such paradigms of portability altered in the waning days of empire in the works of modernists from Conrad to Ford to Nigel Dennis (*Cards of*

Identity), in whose works the possibility of assembling a persuasive account of a culture through any individual's possessions comes to seem more and more problematic.

22 First published as a short story, this piece was reprinted that same year as the final chapter of *A Handful of Dust*.

23 David Malouf, *Remembering Babylon* (New York: Vintage, 1993), p. 3.

24 Nirad Chaudhuri's *Autobiography of an Unkown Indian* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968 [1951]) is one fascinating account of an education in which the reality of the British-export education works so well that even Raphael and Napoleon strike the narrator as preeminently British heroes. And David Malouf's early novels—especially his retelling of Ovid's Black Sea exile, *An Imaginary Life* (New York: Vintage, 1996)—bespeak a connection to British education that focuses all narratives around the question of the provincial relationship to the metropole.

25 Salman Rushdie, *Midnight's Children* (New York: Vintage, 1980), pp. 109–111.

26 The term is Guy Debord's; see his discussion in *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Zone, 1995 [1967]), p. 42, inter alia.

27 The French and Spanish Caribbean legacy is beyond the scope of this essay.

28 Derek Walcott, "What the Twilight Says," in *What the Twilight Says* (New York: FSG, 1998 [1970]), p. 4.

29 Naipaul is often attacked for rejecting his natal island and embracing the distant island that ruled, subdued, and shaped the West Indies. In "The Garden Path: V. S. Naipaul," Derek Walcott describes Naipaul as an "elegiac pastoralist" of England who displays "virulent contempt toward the island of his origin"—a contempt strengthened, he writes, by Naipaul's fascination with "rook, shaw and hedgerow," those little bits of barely portable Englishness: in *What the Twilight Says*, p. 122.

30 All these are images from the first section of V. S. Napaul, *A Bend in the River* (New York: Vintage, 1979), pp. 3–63.

31 Ibid., p. 40.

32 Ibid., p. 44.

33 Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, pp. 42 passim.

34 V. S. Naipaul, *The Mimic Men* (New York: Macmillan, 1967), p. 90.

35 Quoted by Reed Dasenbrock in *Interviews with Writers of the Post-Colonial World*, ed. Feroz Jusawalla and Reed Dasenbrock (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1992), p. 109.

36 W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Library of America, 1990 [1903]), p. 3.

37 Bhabha, "Of Mimicry and Man."

38 Sarah Orne Jewett, "The Queen's Twin," in Sarah Orne Jewett, *Novels and Stories* (New York: Library of America, 1994), pp. 493–511. Originally published in *The Atlantic*, 1899.

39 Bramwell Bronte, elder brother of Charlotte and Emily, was one of thousands of provincial Britons who had the same relationship, in the nineteenth century, to London. Surrounded by maps and guidebooks to the city he had never visited, he would spend evenings at his local pub waylaying London travelers and demonstrating to them his knowledge of London geography.

40 Jewett, "The Queen's Twin," p. 510.

41 Lamming, *Natives of My Person* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1972). Supriya Nair, *Caliban's Curse: George Lamming and the Revisioning of History* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996), is the best recent account. Other interesting work on the novel includes Sandra Pouchet Paquet, *The Novels of George Lamming* (London: Heinemann, 1982); Avis G. McDonald, "Within the Orbit of Power: Reading Allegory in George Lamming's *Natives of My Person*," *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 22 (1987): 73–86; Peter Hulme, "George Lamming and the Postcolonial Novel," in Jonathan White, ed., *Recasting the World: Writing after Colonialism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), pp. 120–136.

42 The most revealing recent discussion of allegory in *Natives of My Person* and its relationship to postcolonial concerns more generally is Stephen Slemon's important and controversial "Post-Colonial Allegory and the Transformation of History," *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 23, 1 (1988): 156–167. The strongest component of Slemon's argument is his claim that "the act of 'revisioning' allegory becomes also an act of 'revisioning' those codes of recognition which we inherit from the imperial encounter" (p. 164). That is, new forms of representation will reverse the causal flows that putatively make the postcolonial dependent on the colonial; in this inverted allegory, the history of the old world will "tell" only when it allegorizes the current events of the new.

43 Nair rightly points out that C. L. R. James's book about Melville, *Mariners, Renegades and Castaways* (Detroit: Bewick, 1978 [1953]), must also have been a crucial influence on Lamming.

44 Lamming, *Natives of My Person*, p. 328.

45 Donald Pease, "Doing Justice to C. L. R. James's *Mariners, Renegades and Castaways*," *Boundary 2* 27, 2 (2000): 6.

46 Ibid., p. 9.

47 Though Ahmad argues convincingly that Jameson's claims about "national allegory" fail to apply to all of postcolonial literature. This well-known debate occurs in Frederic Jameson, "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism," *Social Text* 15 (1986), and Aijaz Ahmad, "Jameson's Rhetoric of Otherness and the 'National Allegory,'" *Social Text* 17 (1987): 3–25.

48 Hulme, "George Lamming and the Postcolonial Novel," p. 131.