

The Pennsylvania State University

The Graduate School

College of the Liberal Arts

**AFRICAN GENRES:
LITERATURE, GEOGRAPHY, AND POETICS
IN THE LONG EAST COAST**

A Dissertation in

Comparative Literature

by

Michelle G. Decker

© 2014 Michelle G. Decker

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements
for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

August 2014

The dissertation of Michelle G. Decker was reviewed and approved* by the following:

Eric Hayot
Distinguished Professor of Comparative Literature and Asian Studies
Dissertation Adviser
Chair of Committee
Head of the Department of Comparative Literature

Gabeba Baderoon
Assistant Professor of Women's Studies and African Studies

Jonathan P. Eburne
Associate Professor of Comparative Literature and English

Nergis Ertürk
Associate Professor of Comparative Literature

Christopher Reed
Professor of English and Visual Culture

*Signatures are on file in the Graduate School.

ABSTRACT

African Genres enacts a broad reassessment of academic and popular conceptions of “Africa” through analyzing written literatures from the Long East Coast. It demonstrates how geography, literary form, and interpretive practices interplay to formulate these broad conceptions. As a whole, the work demonstrates how interpretations of African geography affected its place in world history; discusses how the heuristic of genre shapes how Western readers read non-Western texts; and finally, calls for a reimagining of the limits and characteristics of an African poetics.

In respective chapters, *African Genres* enacts close-readings of the form, content, and style of texts written between 1860 and 1970, a time period that intentionally bridges multiple colonialisms (Arab, European, and internal) and postcolonialisms. In this work, Zanzibar (along with the Swahili coast and East African interior), Egypt, and South Africa are the representative locations of the Long East Coast. The Long East Coast is a new theoretical and geographical configuration that combines an unlikely collection of geographies—some of which are not coastal—and an atypical collection of texts from or about those spaces—most of which are not novels—and thereby posits a new theory of what “Africa,” and African literatures could mean.

African Genres also proposes a method for reading African literatures that predate or ignore the novel, and for reading novels written by Europeans who lived in the continent. In both cases, the aim is to identify colonial and precolonial texts operating outside European

genres, and 2) to compile the aspects of potentially new genres, and, eventually, theorize how such genres could shape our view of literary expression.

In *African Genres*, the texts analyzed include *A Passage to India* (1924) by E. M. Forster; “Passage to India” (1871) by Walt Whitman; *Maisha ya Hamed bin Muhammed el Murjebi, yaani Tippu Tip*, by Tippu Tip (1902/1903); *Zanzibar; City, Island, and Coast* (1872) by Richard Francis Burton; “Funeral for Walt Whitman” (2012) by Abdel Moneim Ramadan; and a selection of South African poetry, including works by Sydney Clouts, Wally Mongane Serote, Douglas Livingstone, and Muthobi Mutloatse.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgments.....	vi
Introduction. African Genres	1
The Making of “Africa”	3
The Long East Coast and Its Literatures	10
Genre.....	15
Chapter 1. African Interiors, as Told by Tippu Tip and Richard Francis Burton	25
Burton’s Forms.....	34
Tippu Tip’s Interiors.....	58
A Coda: The River of the Future.....	77
Chapter 2. The Passage by Egypt: Whitman and Forster’s Suez Canal.....	84
A Doubled Passage to India	95
Forster’s Passage: A Poem in the Present Continuous.....	107
Chapter 3. Grey Aesthetics: Apartheid South African Poetry between Politics and Form	137
White Aesthetics / Black Politics	148
Grey Aesthetics	168
Works Cited.....	188

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Beneath each polished page of this dissertation are strata of castoff ones that, finally, at some moment of unknown and never-to-be-known thickness, settled, sighed, and allowed what now remains. Standing on this side of composition, and on this side of graduate school, I feel somewhat like I imagine this piece of writing would feel, if it could: held up by a thousand small labors that are both its own and never completely so. I thus acknowledge those labors and laborers, who have toiled alongside, before, and for me.

I'm grateful for a supportive and functional committee whose members—Gabea Baderoon, Jonathan Eburne, Nergis Ertürk, Christopher Reed, and my advisor, Eric Hayot—individually and collectively shaped not just this dissertation, but also my scholarly method as a whole. When I took Jonathan Eburne's senior seminar on literary theory as an undergraduate, I was introduced to someone who practiced equally enthusiastic and brilliant teaching and literary criticism. Thanks to his example and persistence, I now present my ideas in positive terms. Many conversations about academic life and African literature with Gabea Baderoon helped to reignite my curiosity and enthusiasm for my project when, during the haul, it flagged. Nergis Ertürk's anticolonialism seminar and her suggestion to leave India out of the project, for now, saved me much time and frustration. And Christopher Reed's careful reading and incisive comments on every chapter helped me transform the original "final" chapters into the much better ones you'll read next. He did

you, the reader, and me a great favor in urging me to rethink and rewrite those earlier versions.

It was because he was trained as a Chinese historian, said Martin Bernal, that he could write *Black Athena*, a book that would challenge dearly held truths about the foundations of Greek civilization. An outsider can see things that those inside cannot, due to the sheer fact of perspective, and that they have not been trained to ignore the obvious questions. I wasn't trained as a Chinese historian, and I can barely hope that *African Genres* will have the longevity and effect of *Black Athena*. However, I was trained by someone who knows an awful lot about China and helped me to see and trust that the obvious questions that I asked about African and postcolonial studies were worthwhile, and pushed me to write and revise (again), until the result was a worthy response to those questions. The good paragraph structure and little jokes; the boldness and ambition; the argumentative method and mode of reading observable in and constitutive of this dissertation are because of Eric Hayot's tireless mentorship. Thank you for teaching me so well, and for telling me, as often as I needed to hear it, that you were proud of me and certain of my abilities.

In many ways, I've grown up as a scholar while in the Department of Comparative Literature at Penn State. That I've turned out okay is in large part due to Caroline Eckhardt's vision for the department, in assembling a faculty whose members have that rare combination of intellect and kindness, and in recruiting graduate students who have served as examples and comrades. It's also largely because of Dr. Eckhardt's zeal for the discipline of comparative literature in all its forms that I have become the teacher and writer that I am.

Through the Department of Comparative Literature's travel support, I attended conferences where I grew tremendously as a scholar. The department also funded my trip to

Tanzania to study Kiswahili in the summer of 2008, a trip that facilitated my interest in the Indian Ocean region, and planted the seeds for this dissertation. While at Penn State, I was fortunate to receive a summer residency fellowship at Institute for the Arts and Humanities, a dissertation fellowship at the Africana Research Center, and travel grants and awards from the Penn State Graduate School for research trips to Northwestern University and to South Africa (and the University of the Witwatersrand).

If you tunnel down far enough in the strata of *African Genres*, you may be able to find the impact crater that registers the rise and fall of a marriage, and the missteps and triumphs of building a new life. To those friends whose guidance, patience, and intelligence helped me through various stages of that trying time, thank you: Atia Sattar, Caroline Egan, Leisa Rothlisberger, Molly Appel, and Lea Pao. I'm also grateful for those colleagues who have become friends over the years, and whose good humor and insight taught me to search for the same in myself: Ziad Bentahar, Aaron Rosenberg, Germán Campos-Muñoz, Mich Nywalo, Nicole Sparling, Sara Marzioli, Darwin Tsen, Juliana Chapman, Micah Donahue, Kristen Fisher, Adam Toth, Kate Anderson, Dawn Taylor, Andrés Amerikaner, Max Jensen, and Grace Wu.

For showing me that academia isn't the only world, and for urging me to use my creativity and smarts to imagine a world that seems impossible, my love and gratefulness to Chris Danilo.

My siblings by blood and marriage—Meghann Campbell, Clint Campbell, and Ryan Decker—have kept me laughing (and drinking) many an evening at the Decker kitchen table. I would have floated away on a current of ideas and books long ago, if not for you three. My parents, the dedicatees of this dissertation, have likely experienced immense relief that I've

finished, since they no longer have to ask, “So, how’s the writing going?” (Well, at least they’ll not have to ask for the next few years.) Thank you, Mom and Dad: your love and steadfast belief in my ability to overcome circumstantial and self-made pitfalls have been an ever-present help in times of trouble. And, to my little niece, Anna Jay Campbell: we’ve seen where my love of reading has taken me; I’m excited to see where yours takes you.

For my parents, Gene and Debi Decker, who always knew

INTRODUCTION / *African Genres*

“Okonkwo was well known throughout the nine villages and even beyond. His fame rested on solid personal achievements.” So begins the most famous of African novels, with an indication of the protagonist’s fame in a world of uncertain expanse. The matter-of-fact, declarative narrative style established in these two sentences—subject–verb–predicate, with few subordinate phrases or asides—propels the remainder of the story, reinforcing the seeming simplicity of Okonkwo’s tightly circumscribed world. The sphere of Umuofia and the nine villages remains stable because of Okonkwo’s sense of his centrality within it. In the second half of the book, the tremors introduced by Christian missionaries displace him spatially and epistemologically, driving him to despair and suicide.

This is the plot of Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*, first published in 1958. That book, more than any other, has prompted and shaped the recognition, and eventually the institutionalization, of African literature in Europe and the Americas. For better or worse, since 1958, *Things Fall Apart* has acted as a sort of cultural origin story, standing in for the entire continent’s multivariate cultures despite its finely local setting in Nigeria. Partly because the novel was the first widely read narrative of colonialism from an African perspective, and partly because of the explosion of independence movements on the continent soon after its release, that *Things Fall Apart* has entered the world literature canon. That the novel continues to be the most widely taught and read contemporary African novel speaks not only of Achebe’s skill as storyteller, but the poignancy of his narrative in a time devoid of humanizing tales about Africa and Africans.

Things Fall Apart was my entrée to African literature. It was a story that bored me, whose strange names and unfamiliar customs puzzled me. If I hadn't been reading it for a class, I would have put it away before finishing it, and that would have been the end. Then, somewhere around chapter 8, the story pulled me in. By the time I found Okonkwo hanging from the tree in the closing pages of the book, I was so shocked that I had to flip back twenty pages and reread. Then I read and reread the closing paragraph, written from the perspective of the District Commissioner: "[He] thought about that book [that he would write]. Every day brought him some new material. The story of this man who had killed a messenger and hanged himself would make interesting reading. One could almost write a whole chapter on him. Perhaps not a whole chapter but a reasonable paragraph, at any rate. [...] He had already chosen the title of the book, after much thought: *The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger*." The shocking dissonance between this final paragraph of the book and the opening sentences were striking. This final act of representation of Okonkwo by the district commissioner as a nameless one within the "primitive tribes" of broad geographic space obfuscates the particularity of Umuofia, the nine villages, and the entire system of the first half of the book. The conclusion to the novel shows how the widening gyre that causes things to fall apart belongs not just to colonialism or Christianity alone, but to the texts written in their service, the ones that reduce individuals to categories, or to reasonable paragraphs. All of this changed my understanding of Africa, of literature, and my thinking about how those two together did or didn't affect world history.

There are few novels in my memory that make that final gesture: a revelation of the nested hierarchies that annul the meaning of the individual story just told, even as they extend it to something like infinity. The brilliance of Achebe is the fracturing of this

perspective, which allows the revelation that there are millions of Okonkwos, and as far as everyone is concerned they matter most in their annihilation, as anecdotes to write home about, or as minor characters in adventure novels. Okonkwos do not contribute to what *matters*, except when those with power (historically, usually those in the West), decide that they matter in the service to something or someone else. Why, I wondered, has Africa for so long been viewed in terms of its extractable resources—material, intellectual, or otherwise? What contributed to its construction as a more or less monolithic geography in the world imaginary? And what role does African literature play in altering or reinforcing that imaginary?

My experience reading *Things Fall Apart* more than a decade ago ushered me into African literary scholarship, and into the much larger corpus of texts written in and around Africa (or what one calls “Africa”) before and after 1958. The more I read, the more I realized that the initial questions raised by Achebe’s novel were so deeply embedded in the fields of postcolonial literature and African literary studies as to make them invisible. *African Genres* is my answer to those questions. Though the content of this dissertation analyzes different spaces and time periods, all of the chapters in some way center on how the interpretation of African geography affected its place in world history; on how the heuristic of genre shapes how Western readers read non-Western texts; and finally, on how we might reimagine the limits and characteristics of an African poetics.

The Making of “Africa”

That a provincial, monolithic Africa ruled the Western imaginary in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries will surprise no reader of this dissertation. The National Geographic

Society's Gardiner G. Hubbard could speak in his 1888 presidential address of "Africa, where the physical features have left so marked an impression upon its inhabitants, and where the animal life is so different from that of the other continents. It is rather by differentiating Africa from other countries that we obtain any data from which to form an opinion of its future" (100). Hubbard's Africa, both continent and "country," is so filled with a populace ruled by the wildness of its home, with animals so different from everywhere else, that its future can only be determined by its exceptional nature. Hubbard's thesis was a prominent view of the day, which explains it in part. However, the fact that *today* Hubbard's Africa remains most of the world's Africa—continent/country,¹ home of exotic animals, and defined by its strangeness—is what enabled rapper Rick Ross to broadcast to his fans in 2013 that he had "just landed in the beautiful country of Africa." This particular view of Africa has been around for centuries, and shows few signs of altering in the popular imaginary.

Academic "Africa" has not fared much better. Outside the realm of African studies, Africa's contributions to world history and civilization are usually confined to ancient Egypt, which, following Hegel, is seen as something qualitatively different from the "rest" of the continent. Martin Bernal's *Black Athena*, for instance, famously argued that the linguistic and anthropological record proved ancient Greece's "black" roots; the ancient civilization was "the result of the mixture of native Europeans and colonizing Africans and Semites" (2). Bernal's view of Egyptians as "black" was indebted to the Senegalese scholar Cheikh Anta

¹ Hubbard likely meant something other than "nation-state" when he referred to Africa as "country" above, but the very fact that the two are conflated in contemporary parlance, and that most readers now would not pause over Hubbard's interchangeable use of the two in the context of Africa, reinforces my point.

Diop's argument made in *The African Origins of Civilization: Reality or Myth* (1974) that Egyptians were racially related to sub-Saharan populations, a fact that Bernal only briefly acknowledges. Both Bernal and Diop's heavily contested claims about the black roots of Egyptian, and thus, Greek, and thus world, civilization aim for a reassessment of Africa's place in the world by arguing that the West's civilizations were African all along.

Whereas *Black Athena* endeavored to rewrite Western history by excavating the African cornerstone supporting its foundation, more recent studies in literary and cultural criticism have turned to the contributions of the continent's diasporas to emphasize Africans' contributions to contemporary Western culture. In 1993, Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic* inaugurated a revolution in the field, theorizing the broad cultural consequences of the transatlantic slave trade in the Americas. *The Black Atlantic* itself influenced subsequent study of African diasporas: though nation-based models persist, the Mediterranean Sea and Indian Ocean regions have risen alongside the Atlantic as heuristics for mapping migrations and cultural exchange.

In the past decade especially, the field of Indian Ocean studies has grown rapidly. Recent publications on the Indian Ocean region has opened up the possibilities for literary scholarship predicated on an oceanic, rather than nation- or language-centric, view of this part of the Global South. Some examples of scholarship that has shown the necessity of restoring Africa's historical and cultural position within oceanic studies includes: Françoise Lionnet's *The Known and the Uncertain: Creole Cosmopolitanism of the Indian Ocean* (2012); Isabel Hofmeyr's *The Portable Bunyan* (2004) and *Gandhi's Printing Press* (2013) on the travel of particular texts, such as *The Pilgrim's Progress*, and their transformation along the way; Engseng Ho's *The Graves of Tarim* (2006) on the cosmopolitan lives and afterlives of Hadrami

Yeminiis who circulated throughout the Indian Ocean region and helped to create a common culture. Gaurav Desai's *Commerce with the Universe: Africa, India, and the Afrasian Imagination* (2013) theorizes eight centuries of Indian Ocean history and argues for a multiethnic rereading of East Africa based on writings by South Asians and their descendants on the African continent.

These strides toward an historical theory of world connection that includes Africa, even those oceanic models like the Indian Ocean and the Atlantic—not to mention the Mediterranean world-system, as theorized by Horden and Purcell—tend to include only the Africa that has been visibly and culturally changed by its contact with the “outside.” As much is clear in early historical studies of the Indian Ocean, like Janet Abu-Lughod's *Before European Hegemony: The World System, 1250–1350* (1989). Abu-Lughod's foundational survey of preindustrial economic world-systems in the “Arabian seas,” omits sub-Saharan Africa because, she writes, its “geographic reach was relatively limited. African merchants were largely local and African goods seldom made their way to China or Europe” (36). K. N. Chaudhuri puts it more bluntly in *Asia before Europe* (1990), writing that East Africa was excluded from the civilizational groups of the Indian Ocean region because its culture was governed by a “separate and independent” historical logic qualitatively different from that of the Arabian Peninsula and South Asia.²

The exclusion of East or sub-Saharan Africa from a theoretical configuration like the Arabian Seas, in Abu-Lughod's case, or an Asia-centric Indian Ocean, in Chaudhuri's case,

² Chaudhuri thus dismisses African indigenous historical logic as outside Indian Ocean history without analyzing it. He would have to have a very good theory of what “separate” and “independent” meant in these terms before he, or anyone else, was able to assert something like this so cleanly. Sugata Bose critiques Chaudhuri's statement in *A Hundred Horizons* (2006). I discuss the Chaudhuri–Bose debate more fully in chapter 1.

makes a certain kind of sense, at least on its face. The specificity of the geographical focus—on Arabia and Asia—would seem, by definition, to exclude Africa. But these world-systems do not elsewhere require geographic contiguity, do not demand that the circuits of the system make a kind of coherent spatial sense. They emphasize other forms of internal cohesion: in *Before European Hegemony*, evidence of long-range movement of goods and people; in *Asia before Europe*, a common historical logic. If the world-systems devised in these studies can omit East Africa because its goods were not widely traded, or because its civilizations were not ordered like others in the Indian Ocean, then we must analyze not individual critics' work, but rather the criteria that themselves determine what constitutes an historical or imaginative world, or world-system.³ Once more: are these criteria legitimate measures of a civilization, and of a world? And if so, how so?

In the context of literary studies, migration- or diaspora-focused approaches tend to unconsciously utilize world-systems criteria as bases for theories of culture. The geographical movement of people and goods between, say, India and Africa, provides explicit justification for Africa's involvement in world history and/or -culture.⁴ In order for Africa to matter, it seems, it must send things or people away from itself (or import the desirable from

³ The term "world-system" typically refers to a configuration that operates according to its own logic—typically "systems, economies, empires," according to the term's originator, Immanuel Wallerstein (17). "World" and "world-system" connote different things, but here, I'm arguing that, though world-systems do not claim to account for the globe, they nevertheless posit a totality which is a kind of world; I'm interested in the logic behind the construction of these world-systems, and which portions of the globe are allowed to be part of their worlds. For a more substantive discussion of worlds and world-systems, see Eric Hayot, *On Literary Worlds*.

⁴ Recent books that analyze Indian Ocean culture from a migration or trade perspective include Dan Ojwang's *Reading Migration and Culture: The World of East African Indian Literature* (2013); *India in Africa, Africa in India: Indian Ocean Cosmopolitanisms*, edited by John Hawley (2008); and *India in Africa: Changing Geographies of Power* (2011), by Emma Mawdsley and Gerard McCann.

elsewhere), in a measurable and visible way.⁵ Implicit in these studies is the understanding that, in order for Africa to belong to the world, its “separate and independent” historical and cultural logics must transmute (or aspire to) the regional or the cosmopolitan.

How, then, to theorize a different “Africa”—one that undermines both the popular vision of “Africa” as a premodern country/continent, and the academic “Africa,” whose contributions to the world are most easily recognized as cultural and material exports, or the transformation of the coasts into cosmopolitan spaces? As I’ve suggested, we need to analyze the categories that typically exclude a particular imagined Africa—categories like the Indian Ocean, the cosmopolitan, or the civilized. This first task amounts to a deductive process, whereby we follow the genealogy of this negative construction of what Africa is not; or, we could say, its path of invention. The second task is to generate new definitions of these broad categories of belonging or exclusion—which, in this dissertation, are genre, geography, and poetics—to determine how African imaginative and cultural modes, in their difference, expand and modify, rather than violating or failing to attain to a (typically Eurocentric) standard.

To explore the foundation of the invented Africa is to follow V. Y. Mudimbe. In his groundbreaking 1988 study, *The Invention of Africa*, Mudimbe focuses on the formation of African *gnosis*, which he defines as the “scientific and ideological discourse on Africa” (187), a discourse so deeply embedded in academic and popular perspectives that through it, “African worlds have been established as realities for knowledge” (xi). Examining the “form, the content, and the style of ‘Africanizing’ knowledge” and “the status of traditional system

⁵ *The Black Atlantic*, for instance, as well as myriad others, examines the cultural legacies of the Atlantic slave trade in the African diaspora, but has an implicit export-only model of African contribution to world *cultural* history.

of thought and their possible relation to the normative genres of knowledge,” allows Mudimbe to probe not just the external discourses that create an imagined “Africa,” but also how Africans make outside knowledge “theirs” (x). In so doing, he demonstrates how what we think of as “traditional” African knowledge (which is therefore outside the normative) helps constitute the normative or universal.

Mudimbe’s almost literary approach—one that considers form, content, and style—to the discursive foundations of “Africa” within nineteenth- and twentieth-century anthropology and latter-day Africanist discourses of Pan-Africanism and *négritude* allows my method here. I scrutinize the formation of an “Africa,” and an African literature, by analyzing how the classification of African writings via geographic, poetic, and generic structures have formed fictional “African worlds [that] have been established as realities for knowledge.”

African Genres thus turns to three geographical sites that have been posited as synecdochally African or exceptionally African—Zanzibar (along with the Swahili coast and East African interior), Egypt, and South Africa—to research the granular bases for these fictional African worlds. These areas, though belonging by virtue of contiguity or proximity to the continent, are nevertheless interpreted as either far beyond the “the real Africa” or as perfect distillations of that African sensibility. Whether one is exception or synecdoche depends on who is doing the interpreting—in the Egyptian instance, whether it’s Martin Bernal or a contemporary Egyptian (who likely thinks himself a member of the Arab world rather than the African).

From those places and the perspectives their geographies bring, we will close-read the form, content, and style of texts written between 1860 and 1970, a time period that

intentionally bridges multiple colonialisms (Arab, European, and internal) and postcolonialisms. Bringing together case studies from these locations will help build a larger geographical and theoretical configuration, something I call the “Long East Coast.” The Long East Coast combines an unlikely collection of geographies—some of which are not coastal—and an atypical collection of texts from or about those spaces—most of which are not novels—and thereby posits a new theory of what “Africa,” and African literatures could mean. By reorienting our perspective according to the Long East Coast and its multiple colonialisms, new systems of relation come into relief: 1) connections between the Arab world and the sub-Saharan; 2) the constitutive relationship between the interior and the coast, as well as the worldliness of the interior; and 3) the aesthetic-political innovations of Africans (and Europeans who traveled to the continent) from mid-century to mid-century.

The Long East Coast and Its Literatures

Political scientist Denis Constant-Martin once argued that “Africanism has no future except in comparatism: first, an internal comparatism that will allow the true establishment of Africa as a geographic place of similar and different experiences; and second, an external comparatism that draws parallels, no longer with an artificially generalized Africa but with African realities and other non-African realities” (55). Those sentences close an essay whose major argument is that current approaches to studying the continent reinforce the notion of its homogeneity. In either in title or in content, Constant-Martin wrote, many Africanist studies invoke “Africa” while actually discussing something local or regional—as though one explained or could stand in for the other. Comparison alone can produce new knowledge about the continent: Africanists need to develop methods for viewing the continent that

highlight the differences among regions without elevating any one area to synecdochic exceptionalism; when comparing Africa to extra-continental regions, methods must resist positing a singular “Africa” against the world, and should rather look for instances of correspondence and/or mutual transformation.

This prescription for a new African comparatism finds its expression in the Long East Coast. The Long East Coast is inherently comparative—geographically, temporally, and linguistically—and therefore brings into relief the cultural similarities and differences within the continent, as well as establishing the bases of North–South and South–South comparisons. It theorizes connections, both strong and weak, among portions of the continent typically treated separately, as is the case with the east coast.

Despite the topographical continuity of the African east coast, the region is rarely, if ever, viewed as a whole—because of the “exceptional” spaces, Egypt and South Africa, at its northern and southern extremes, because of its varied languages, and because the dividing-point of the Sahara has long dictated, at the very least, the difference of the lands alongside it. Scholars who study eastern Africa are presented (according to historical precedent) with five main regions: Egypt, which, as we’ve already discussed, constitutes its own historical and cultural space;⁶ the Horn of Africa, which includes Sudan, Ethiopia, Somalia, and, more recently, Djibouti and Eritrea; conventional East Africa, so called because it was formerly British East Africa, which includes Kenya, Tanzania, and Zanzibar; Mozambique, a Lusophone outlier often analyzed alongside its west-coast coinheritor of Portuguese imperialism, Namibia, rather than its geographical neighbors; and South Africa, whose

⁶ Hegel: “The second portion of Africa is the river district of the Nile—Egypt; which was adapted to become a mighty centre of independent civilization, and therefore is as isolated and singular in Africa as Africa itself appears in relation to the other parts of the world” (92).

peninsular position at the confluence of oceans (and so migrations) resulted in a varied racial makeup, which contributed to apartheid—all of which resulted in the conceptual sequestration of South Africa from the rest of sub-Saharan Africa.

The historical and cultural differences among these regions have thus divided the east coast socio-politically, as well in academic scholarship. My “invention” of the Long East Coast as an analytical unit, an invention no less suspicious or convenient than the invention of Africa itself, is not meant to erase these differences, or to suggest easy homogeneity, but instead to imagine a fragmented whole, rather than a coherent one. The Long East Coast is an uncomfortable category, meant to undermine formations like “the Indian Ocean” or “African literature.” It engages core aspects of those formations—such as the cosmopolitan, the coast, or the novel—and posits alternative theories of geographic and generic interpretation (and creation) that broaden or even displace prior definitions.

The Indian Ocean configuration, for instance, tends to focus on the shared culture of coastal regions—typically port cities and their cosmopolitan inhabitants. The increasing popularity of the coast, or the littoral zone, as a unit of analysis in literary studies over the past fifteen years is evinced by the fact that 76% of the entries on the *MLA International Bibliography* for the term “littoral” were published during that time period. One of the broad appeals of the littoral as metaphor is its amorphousness, and its definitional resistance to constancy. “The littoral is always fluctuating, moving, changing, advancing and retreating,” wrote Michael Pearson in his study on the Indian Ocean. “What we have here is ambiguity, lack of definition and boundaries, a zone where land and sea intertwine and merge, really the fungibility of land and sea” (Pearson 37). These latter characteristics of the coast—particularly its fluctuations and ambiguity—have provided a metaphorical apparatus to the

reimagine the postcolony, since the resistance of the land *itself* to a static mode of being translates well to the postcolonial characterization of nonwestern cultural and intellectual dynamism.

The propinquity between the littoral and the cosmopolitan—and the port city, the space that expressed the convergence of those two things—can be observed in Rhoads Murphey’s description: “Port functions, more than anything else, make a city cosmopolitan. [...] A port city is open to the world, or at least to a varied section of it. In it races, cultures, and ideas as well as goods from a variety of places jostle, mix, and enrich each other and the life of the city” (qtd in Pearson 32).⁷ Often, the worldly, polyglot, creole port city finds its opposition in the hinterland, a site for resource extraction and relative homogeneity. The emphasis placed on the worldly coast reinforces assumptions about its absolute separation from interior, despite their economic and cultural interdependence. The reinforcement of the coast–interior binary, especially in Africa, further emphasizes long-held ideas about the backwardness or “darkness” the interior.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has identified the dangers of embracing a coastal cosmopolitanism too quickly or fervently. A littoral cosmopolitanism at its extreme results in a sort of denial of the realities of contemporary globalized governance of the “non-citizen,” she writes; it replicates a Euro-centric view of the non-West, where its coastal civilizations are recognized as “like us,” their cultural expressions always anticipating or recovering from the arrival of the West (108). We cannot think beyond the nation-state, or rebut colonial

⁷ “Coast,” “littoral,” and “port” are three distinct terms in oceanic studies. According to Pearson, not all port cities are on the coast, and a littoral zone does not guarantee a port city (31–37). For the purposes of this introduction, however, let the three terms interchangeably signify an inhabited space on the coast, which, in literary scholarship, has been deployed as a key metaphor for a pre- or paranational cosmopolitanism.

configurations, Spivak argues,

through mere regionalism: by showing the Europeans that there were lived cosmopolitanisms in Asia and theorizing them. That gestures legitimizes Euro-teleology by reversal. [...] [In] thinking littoral cosmopolitanisms, we fall back upon the discourse of the postcolonial conjecture reterritorialized for the metropolitan immigrant: “hybridity,” “hybridization,” “syncretism.” Then comes the idea of the cosmopolitan citizen. Have we thought through the social contracts presupposed by a citizenship on the cosmopolitan register? (107, 108)

Spivak implies here that the reliance on the trope of the hybrid urban immigrant produces a toothless theoretical rebuttal to Western epistemologies, because such configurations replicate the center–periphery model *and* rely on a cosmopolitan ideal that does not exist as such.

Though she refers to the twenty-first century in particular, Spivak’s critique of the littoral cosmopolitan as a presumed good, and therefore a neutral heuristic for scholars, enables us to rethink the sorts of conclusions drawn about postcolonial and colonial Africa as well—particularly those concerning the separation between cosmopolitan coast and isolated interior, and between Africa and the rest of the world. In stepping away from typical understandings of “hybridity” or “syncretic” as they’ve been used in postcolonial scholarship,⁸ and looking for examples of overlap between coast and interior, and even the determinedly separate spaces along the Long East Coast, we will begin to see that the much-lauded cosmopolitan cultures of the coast were not hybrid through their containment of dueling cultures, but in their demonstration of the annihilation of binaries, which is also true of the interior. The cosmopolitan coast is not an exceptional space on the continent, but rather points toward our need to rethink the purportedly opposed categories of “coast” and

⁸ See, for instance, Bhabha.

“interior,” as well as the discursive baggage accompanying the evocation of either.⁹

That is what the Long East Coast provides: textual and historical examples of local African spaces that transform or ignore concepts of the global or cosmopolitan, at times (and in fact usually) unintentionally. The Long East Coast geographically and imaginatively joins coastal regions with the African interior and with spaces “beyond,” like England, India, or the United States. The comparative framework is necessarily multilingual (in *African Genres*—Arabic, Kiswahili, and English are represented) and encompasses previously discretely theorized geographies (the oceanic, the island, the coast, the interior, North and sub-Saharan) and colonialisms (internal, Arab, European). The syncretism is not just a received one, but a rewriting of the dualistic, unidirectional exchange between “the world” and Africa. The Long East Coast configuration enables comparison: it unifies areas that, according to other geographically or historically based models, are otherwise taken as exceptional or as generalized. It is thus an Other of the many invented “Africas” whose cohesion arises from shared colonialisms, languages, religions, or races; and of the “Africas” whose synecdochalization results from a Eurocentric identification of its cosmopolitanism or civilization.

Genre

As the “Horn of Africa” and “East Africa” are to African geography, so is “the novel” to

⁹ The way around such a theoretical conundrum for Spivak is to seek out and analyze historical and current examples of societies who operate to the side of, or despite, these governing structures—and the centralization of seemingly peripheral regions, whose difference has occluded them from “general arguments.” For her, and for us, one of those regions is Africa: “We have to think about Africa as we think about our own region, because Africa is generally ignored in general arguments. [...] This particular idea, that we can see historically, in shared syncretisms, leads to a different description of globalization and that is what is coming back to work as ‘culture’ because European colonialism was a relatively brief and contained—though intense and transformative—phenomenon” (109–110).

African literature: formal configurations so embedded in academic structures that their neutrality and necessity can be taken as granted.

In the twentieth century, however, African intellectuals began to question to what extent a novel—though written by an African in an African language—could ever be deemed autochthonous, because of the presumed Western roots of the form. During the independence era of the 1960s and 1970s, authors and critics alike sought to revivify traditional poetics after centuries of European imperialism, a byproduct of which was the dismissal of African literary forms as primitive at best. Because of a lack of a written tradition, the colonizers argued, Africans had no culture. As Isidore Okpewho put it, as recently as the 1950s, Western anthropologists argued that African societies were “still groping in the dark with elementary problems of existence and had not yet attained the level of achievement whereby men could indulge in the pursuit of poetic excellence; besides, their languages were not yet sufficiently developed to cope with the complex techniques of poetic expression” (4).

Despite initial skepticism of the novel as form, the postcolonial answer to this construction of the primitive quasi-human incapable of poetic expression, in Africa and beyond, was to “write back” to the empire. This orientation toward “answering” the former metropole yielded novels like *Things Fall Apart*, Ousmane Sembène’s *Le Bouts de bois de Dieu* [*God’s Bits of Wood*] (1960), Tayeb al-Salih’s *Mawsim al-Hiġra ilā ash-Shamāl* [*Season of Migration to the North*] (1966), Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o’s *A Grain of Wheat* (1967), and Bessie Head’s *A Question of Power* (1973), among others. Though these novels were part of a particular historical period that valued a “writing back” model, seeing them only those terms places them (as well as that of the Global South) in an endless, reactionary call and response with

the West.

Part of the reason that the novel, as long-form narrative, was favored by this generation of authors was because of the intertwined relationship between nationalism and literature: many of these novels were almost exclusively read as allegories of the nation, crafted to counter the external narratives posited by apologists for imperialism. The first-generation postcolonial authors thus shaped the expectations of what an African literature could look like, academically and otherwise. Susan Andrade put it well when she explained, “African cultural nationalism so dominated the literary landscape from the 1950s until the early 1990s that criticism posed questions of aesthetic value in terms of political commitment” (183). Critical appraisals of writing from this era thus focused almost exclusively on the thematic elements of the narrative, rather than engaging the aesthetic or stylistic mode of the novel.

By the 1990s, the expressive approach of many African novelists (at least those read and studied outside the continent) began to drift from social realism and toward a more abstracted, anti-mimetic narrative style. The publication of novels like Syl Cheney-Coker’s *The Last Harmattan of Alusine Dunbar* (1990), Mia Couto’s *Terra Sonâmbula* [*Sleepwalking Land*] (1990), Ben Okri’s *The Famished Road* (1991), and Pepetela’s *O Desejo de Kianda* [*The Return of the Water Spirit*] (1995), in turn propelled the critical conversation in African literary studies toward magical realist texts. Attendant with this recent turn, argues Andrade, is an implicit bias toward the contemporary modernist mode: “The literary critical pendulum has now swung violently: anti-mimeticism is valued more than mimeticism; it is understood to be sophisticated and complex” (183). Andrade continues to contend for the value of social realism alongside (or even above) magical realism, and exhorts the critical community to

attend to the many and varied modes of novelistic expression over the past sixty years or so, rather than turning exclusively to modernist, contemporary novels.¹⁰ Inherent to her argument is an appeal for a broad, complex, and historicist view of African literature, a view that would treat anti-mimetic and the mimetic novels with equal critical attention, rather than as ever-diminishing products of an earlier era.

This approach to the novel—with its attention to history, reception, and the politics of the critical community—effectively addresses how to read and understand the African novel now and in the future. What still remains: how to read African literatures that predate or ignore the novel—or any other “Western” genre, for that matter.¹¹ If only postcolonial novels—and, occasionally, poetry and drama—populate our critical universe, then we risk replicating the very structures European and Arab colonizers used to understand African cultures: they only existed once cultured outsiders showed up and developed them. In *African Genres*, I therefore step away from African novels, and the post-1958 surge of nationalist (and post-nationalist) writing. In order to produce an extended genealogy of African literature, we need to go back further in history, and explore African writings that

¹⁰ Though she doesn't state it overtly, Andrade's argument points toward the politics inherent to criticism, and how African literary study (of the novel in this instance) has served as a counterpoint to political activism (as with the realist novels she mentions) or as a sort of proof-text of Africa's membership in the worldwide modernist movement. We can see how quickly the comparison between realism and magical realism (or modernism, depending on your preference) can become an opposition that resembles any variety of familiar binaries, like cosmopolitan and interior, or modern and traditional.

¹¹ In his introduction to a study of the novel on the continent, Abiola Irele writes: “Although Africa has had a long and enduring tradition of poetry and drama, the novel is today, as almost everywhere else in the world, the dominant literary genre on the continent” (1). The form has been shaped by the preeminence of oral narrative, which Irele argues, “provide[s] the imaginative background and, often, the structural model for the appropriation of the novel genre” (1). Irele proceeds to explain the evolution of the African novel over the last 100 years or so (he also discusses earlier examples that could be classified as “African”), and points to the formal transformations African authors have effected in order to make this genre particularly their own. This work, which broadens the genealogy of the novel back in time (preceding 1958), makes clear Africans' innovation within the form, rather than implying their passivity or mindless mimicry of Europeans.

preceded the novel, to enable a view of the literary tradition that they are *extending*, rather than *establishing*.¹²

Part of this task is recognizing that African texts that do not follow Western generic conventions were often discarded as poor writing, or used as illustrations of the civilizational shortcomings of Africans. This is especially true of texts written (or told) prior to and during colonialism. (More on this in chapter 1.) Genre is as much a part of reading and interpretation as content, African anthropologist Karin Barber reminds us: “Genre is a ‘kind.’ It is a concept by which we group texts into categories or family. But unlike natural species, it is not a concept that can be operated wholly externally, by an objective observer alone: for the idea of genre is constitutive of the texts themselves” (32). Bearing this in mind, the expansion backward from twentieth-century African writing behooves us to recognize the ways that Western generic categories have explained non-Western texts, in spite of them. If Western readers have explained them, they may have also overlooked the unique generic expressions found on the Long East Coast. “Recognition” is thus two-fold: 1) to identify colonial and precolonial texts operating outside European genres, and 2) to compile the aspects of potentially new genres, and, eventually, theorize how such genres could shape our view of literary expression.

The second part of this task is rethinking long-held truths about European authors and novelists. Though modernists like Ezra Pound drew inspiration from a fetishized East, few canonical Western authors have acknowledged Africa as locus of formal inspiration;

¹² I’m not advocating for a text-only view of African literature; on the contrary, oral expressions must be included as part of its genealogy. In *African Genres*, I focus on textual/written works, so my language here reflects that.

instead, we have the African dreams or nightmares of Paul Bowles and Joseph Conrad.¹³ We rarely, if ever, consider the formal and imaginative transformations that European authors (even the most canonical ones, like E. M. Forster) might have undergone as a result of their time spent on the continent. In chapter 2, I expand the purview of African and postcolonial literary studies by engaging in a study that follows Wendy Laura Belcher's method in *Abyssinia's Samuel Johnson*. Belcher created the term "discursive possession" to describe the ways that "African discourses can animate European texts" (6), a possession that she traced throughout the oeuvre of one of England's most foundational English authors. I follow Belcher's approach in my analysis of Forster's *A Passage to India*, positing that Forster's experiences in Egypt impressed themselves on the formal structures of the novel. *African Genres* thus presents poetry, nonfictional narratives, and a British novel written by Africans or Europeans while they were living or traveling the Long East Coast that, together, demonstrate how generic assumptions about African writing affected interregional, and eventually, colonial and postcolonial understandings of African civilization, worldliness, and humanity.

Chapter 1 begins in the nineteenth century with the Swahili-language narrative of the Zanzibari ivory- and slave-trader, Hamed bin Muhammed el Murjebi, known as Tippu Tip. The history of Tippu Tip's narrative, *Maisba ya Hamed bin Muhammed el Murjebi, yaani Tippu Tip*—its publication, scholarly study, and translation—as well as its content, display the ways that African geography and writings have been interpreted via a static lens of European Orientalist-inspired perspectives. The life and legacy of Richard Francis Burton especially exemplify this manner of seeing and interpreting, which, I argue, is still active today. In 1856,

¹³ See Eric Hayot's *Chinese Dreams: Pound, Brecht, Tel quel*.

Burton embarked on his East African expedition to find the source of the Nile. Analysis of Burton's two-volume work, *Zanzibar; City, Island, and Coast*, demonstrates the extent to which Burton's Orientalist understanding of India and the Arabian Peninsula—as well as his dependence on masquerade and the acquisition of customs and language in those regions—guided his representations of Zanzibar in particular, and Africa generally. Because the system of life and knowledge differed from the Orient, Burton saw Zanzibar, with its Indian Ocean-influenced culture, as the far limits of the Arabian cultural reach; beyond that, in the interior, savages reigned. These geographical and ideological perspectives coalesce in the generic recasting and interpretation of Tippu Tip's text over the past century. By evaluating both the form and content of *Maisha* with an eye for its cues to a worldly African interior, as well as its generic idiosyncrasies, I demonstrate a means of reading nineteenth-century African texts and geographies that contributes to an understanding of East African poetics.

The second chapter takes us to Egypt, and to “the Suez canal initiated, open'd,” as Walt Whitman would sing in 1871. French diplomat and canal mastermind Ferdinand de Lesseps's utopian vision of a universal passage through, yet around Africa, inspired dreams of a connected world, and, for Whitman, the connection of mankind. Whitman's “Passage to India” encapsulates the hopes and contradictions inherent to the romantic imagination of a singular world, and the dissolution of East and West, when that imaginary depends on a universal passage that omits Egypt and Africa. Whitman's poetic dream anticipates and explains E. M. Forster's 1924 novel *A Passage to India*, in that Forster's novel invisibly reckons with and is shaped by the absent Egypt in yet untheorized ways. Forster's wartime stay in Alexandria, and his two Alexandrian publications—*Alexandria: A History and a Guide* (1922), and *Pharos and Pharillon* (1923)—which just precede the appearance of the long-

gestated *Passage*, clarify the novel's strange vision of India as "muddle." Understanding *A Passage to India* depends on reading these Alexandrian texts, wherein Forster encounters an intimate, disappointing Orient (Egypt), and posits an ethical counter-vision, predicated on poetry, to the imperialist view of the East. The "double vision" enacted in the novel is a symptom of this African experience. In what ways, I ask, might we think of *A Passage to India* as an African novel, or as a novel uniquely inflected by Africa's shaping of Forster's poetic imaginary?

From Whitman and Forster in Egypt I turn to apartheid South Africa, and a moment when the aesthetic divide between European and African writing enters the political sphere. Because of the rise of the police state and the ratification of censorship laws in the early to mid-1960s, the next twenty years saw the rise of a radical poetics, referred to as Black Consciousness, and an equally conservative, formalist poetics, most often practiced by white South African poets. Black Consciousness poetry was characterized by its direct, at times conversational approaches to the everyday violence of apartheid; those writing within the "white lyric," conversely, followed the modern poetic practice of an abstracted, sublimated sensibility. The critical conversation in South Africa during that period was sharply divided over the ethics of poetry (and art) during apartheid. Lyric poetry was either beauty in the midst of ugliness, or evidence of a privileged apolitical position; Black Consciousness poetry either the authentic expression of those dispossessed in a ruinous and ruined state, or the formless, blurted rants of the dispossessed—and thus not poetry at all. After the first democratic elections in 1994 and the formal end of apartheid, Black Consciousness poetry was increasingly viewed as a relic of an earlier age, which could be studied for its historical influences, but not much more. By returning to the divided decades of the 1960s and 1970s

now, and reading both the critical conversations and the poetry by black and white poets, we can work toward a reading that registers the interstices of black and white poetics *today*.

African Genres thus argues for a new conception, geographically broadened and formally complex, of the relation between non-Western literatures and politics. Demonstrating how literature and literariness shaped and were shaped in turn by the Long East African coastal culture-sphere in the last two centuries, I show how generic categories conventionally associated with literature—including the autobiography, the Orientalist novel, the travel guide, the Romantic poem, and the lyric—have shaped not only histories of African literature but also theories of the continent’s social and economic fluidity, the “worldliness” of African life, its cultural expression, and its history. This dissertation produces a new series of challenges and questions: In what ways do our interpretive practices of African literatures revivify old “Africas”? How might the heuristic of the Long East Coast, with its plenitude of overlapping and divergent histories and languages, provide a model for studying the poetics and literatures of other regions of the Global South? And, can we understand the poetics of the Global South *not* as an artifact of an earlier age, but as molding what we understand as a postmodern or contemporary poetics, which in some ways seeks to reimagine or recast the lines between the artistic and the mundane?

One of the goals of this dissertation is to make the Oyeniya Okunoye’s observation, if not impossible, at least more difficult to say or believe: “Modern African poetry [and African literature], very much like other postcolonial literary practices, is defined in relation to European literary traditions which provide the paradigms, conventions and critical principles that are either appropriated or negated in the process of defining the identity of the newer literatures” (Okunoye 769–770). We cannot continue to have a using-the-master’s-

tools theory of the possibilities of African poetics. In its respective chapters, *African Genres* works toward a new theory of an inclusive African poetics, one built not on negation or appropriation, but on the dynamic incorporation of Arab and European colonialisms and aesthetics—an incorporation that alters, in turn, the colonizer's or the traveler's systems of representation, and so their worlds.

CHAPTER 1 / African Interiors, as Told by Tippu Tip and Richard Francis Burton

A narrative by a man most famous for his slave-trading is perhaps an unlikely tale to begin things with. Now most commonly known by the Kiswahili title given it in the 1950s, *Maisha ya Hamed bin Muhammed el Murjebi, yaani Tippu Tip* was written near the turn of the twentieth century, after the author's long, mostly lucrative career transporting ivory and slaves from the African interior to the coast from the 1840s to the late 1880s. *Maisha* is not fictional, and its narrator is not a sympathetic character, but the history of the interpretation of the text, and the text itself, will tell us things about how Africa has been read and understood historically (and geographically), which have repercussions for the way that we understand African literature writ large. With that in mind, let us turn to Tippu Tip.

Though born on the island of Zanzibar as Hamed bin Muhammed el Murjebi circa 1840, Tippu Tip would live most of his life, and earn his wealth and second name, in the African interior. His ancestry was mixed: he was described as “dark-skinned and negroid in feature, [...with] the bearing and manner of a well-bred Arab” (Smith 9). He was thus considered, and considered himself, a Zanzibari Arab, not an African. By the time he was 12 years old, he had been entrusted with some of the family's copal-trading business affairs; he thereafter established himself as an ivory- and slave-trader in the interior (Rockel 50).

Slave-trading made him famous outside Zanzibar and the continent; ivory, however, provided his wealth. (The acquisition of slaves ensured his acquisition of ivory, since the slaves served as porters, carrying the ivory to the coast.) His wealth brought him renown, and with it, ownership of lands. His manner of acquiring and maintaining control of these

lands was significantly different than those who had come before him—he subdued dominant tradesmen through war, using exhibition of gun power. From the late 1860s through the 1880s, write Roland Oliver and Anthony Atmore, “Tippu Tip was the most powerful man in the eastern part of what later became the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). He was loyal to the sultan of Zanzibar, yet—unlike most of the Arabs—he maintained excellent relations with the Nyamwezi. [...] By the 1880s, Tippu Tip was said to have 50,000 guns at his command” (85–86). His nickname, Tippu Tip, came from an early battle with Samu, a Nyamwezi lord, when the locals reported that Samu was battling a man named “Tip Tip,” a man whose “guns went ‘tip tip’ in a manner too terrible to listen to” (*Maisha* 55§30).¹⁴ Tippu Tip’s navigation of the complex system of tributes and strongmen, as well as his copious use of violence, enabled him to conquer and claim lands for his own wealth, and also for the Zanzibari Sultanate.

Late in his career, Tippu Tip’s de facto control over the African inland (from the Tanganyika coast to the north-eastern Congo) brought him into contact first with those who explored it, and then those who sought to control it: first David Livingstone and Verney Lovett Cameron, then Henry Morton Stanley and Hermann von Wissmann. The genealogy of Europeans whom he encountered also traced the trajectory of public European exploration: Livingstone the altruist, Cameron the adventurer, Stanley the capitalist, and von Wissmann, the explorer who would become governor. Eventually, explorers gave way to representatives of nation-states and empires, a process allegorized by Stanley, who had by the mid-1880s taken up the yoke of empire and capital in his alignment with Belgium’s King

¹⁴ Hereafter, I will refer to Tippu Tip’s text according to a shortened form of its most recent title, *Maisha*. All citations will be keyed to the 1958–1959 edition published in the supplement to the *East African Swahili Committee Journal*.

Leopold. Tippu Tip's control over the inland ceded to the needs of loyalty: first, he was governor of the interior on behalf of the sultan of Zanzibar, and later, after the sultan's agreement and Stanley's cajoling, he too represented King Leopold. He was feared and respected, on Zanzibar and without. He was good at what he did because he was a shrewd and fierce leader, an opportunist, and a savvy businessman.

Tippu Tip's opportunism, as well as his sense of himself in relation to the European explorers, is well illustrated in the following anecdote from his narrative, which occurred sometime in October 1876. Tippu Tip and his retinue were in the interior, somewhere west of the Indian Ocean coast, east of the River Congo, when:

Alasiri akatokea Stanley. Nikamkaribisha tukampa nyumba. Hata asubuhi tukaenda kwake, akatuonyesha bunduki, akatwambia; *Bunduki hio hutoka risasi khamstahara*. [...] Hamwambia, *Ipige, tuione*. Akasema; *Afadhali kutoa reale ishirini thelathini kana kupiga kiasi kimoja.*" (*Maisha* 110§111)

One afternoon Stanley appeared. I welcomed him and gave him a house. The very next morning we went to his house, and he showed us a gun and told us, *This gun fires fifteen bullets*. [...] I said to him, *Fire it. We want to see*. He said, *You need to pay me 20 or 30 reales and I'll fire it once*. (*Maisha* 111§111)

The intense transactional grip of this encounter's second sentence relaxes not at all in the sentences that follow, where Stanley offers to show off his gun for money, or in the relationship that followed them in turn. This short excerpt displays the extent to which both men eyed each other with some suspicion, neither desiring to be in the other's debt: Tippu Tip gave him a house, so Stanley was indebted to him; to even the score, Stanley charged Tippu Tip for a gun demonstration.

The morning after his arrival, Stanley asked Tippu Tip to serve as a guide and to provide porters for his journey through Central Africa, a journey intended to find the source of the River Congo. Tippu Tip agreed. Being a porter meant carrying Stanley's boat (the

Lady Alice), which had been divided into large pieces, through the inland. (The boat would be used to navigate the river from source to mouth.) The decision to help Stanley brought hardship: Tippu Tip describes how Stanley's route took them through terrain that made it impossible to carry the disaggregated boat, and eventually, how only a remnant of men were able to continue with Stanley to his destination. Because the journey took six months instead of one (as had been promised Tippu Tip and the porters), and because of Stanley's mistreatment of the porters, Tippu Tip had to intervene so that those few men would press on. He himself refused to continue.

In his narrative of this incident, Tippu Tip says almost nothing about his actual experiences guiding Stanley; he is much more concerned that his European counterpart rescinded on a contract and treated Tippu Tip's men poorly.¹⁵ In notes about Tippu Tip in *Through the Dark Continent*, Stanley describes him as the most distinguished Arab he had met in Africa,¹⁶ though he accuses Tippu Tip of speaking like a child in refusing to press on in the difficult terrain, and of violating the conditions of their contract. Stanley casts himself as the one who holds tight to principle, whose decisions "destinies await," who, in the midst of Tippu Tip's desertion kept hold of the responsibility to direct and guide the expedition (Stanley 2:96). Two and a half years later, Stanley satisfied the conditions of his contract by sending Tippu Tip three thousand reales instead of the promised seven thousand, and, perhaps to diminish the deficit, a photograph of himself. In a telling reiteration, when Tippu Tip reunited with Stanley in 1887, the explorer augmented his misdirection by presenting

¹⁵ Cameron and Stanley, in their respective writings, say much more about what was asked of Tippu Tip and what he refused to do. See *Across Africa* (Cameron) and *Through the Dark Continent* (Stanley).

¹⁶ Stanley saw Tippu Tip as Arab rather than African, mostly because of the Islamic attire and customs Tippu Tip followed.

Tippu Tip not with the yet-realized reales, but a dog (*Maisha* 115§116–117, 164§179; 119§122, 165§179).¹⁷

What is strange about this is not only the substitution of the money by the dog, or the weird narcissism of the photograph, but more generally the disconnect between Stanley's sense of what he was doing in the middle of the so-called Dark Continent, and Tippu Tip's. It would be tempting to think of the latter's transactional portrayal of Stanley's niggling relation to exchange, his petit bourgeoisie, as a kind of "sly civility" designed deliberately to puncture the white explorer's psycho-historical balloons.¹⁸ But Tippu Tip was never that close to the now-familiar structures of relation between European and native, colonizer and colonized, that governed the more established frameworks within which those two mighty and mightily intertwined opposites came to live and to make a social life. We cannot read his version of Stanley's story—or rather, his version of his own story—in relation to a colonial social or aesthetic genre that we already know.

We cannot—for most of the history of the text, though, it has been read in just such a way. For example, Tippu Tip's story has been read through the lens of his being a slave-trader, or as one of a few examples of nineteenth-century Swahili writing, or a means to access a slightly different perspective on European histories of Africa. Generically, its classification has shifted from life narrative, autobiography, chronicle, to travelogue, depending on who was reading it and why. This unsettled manner of reading and classifying

¹⁷ Tippu Tip recalled this dog incident with particular disgust, and, with perhaps the most emotion in the entire text, calls Stanley a liar: "[T]he kindness I had shown [Stanley] was not enough. He promised to inundate me with payment. But I saw the signs in his words when he said, 'When I get to Europe, I don't know what I'll give you, because I shall acquire great wealth and signal honour.' Yet he brought a photograph, and later when we met again—on the Cape trip—he gave me a dog [...] a mere puppy. I knew him for a liar" (*Maisha* 165§179).

¹⁸ See Bhabha, "Sly Civility."

likely has something to do with Tippu Tip's fraught history—he's not exactly a nice guy—as well as the various purposes for which it has translated.

At the beginning, these purposes were to expand Orientalist knowledge and to, in some ways, justify the European colonialist project in Africa. We know Tippu Tip's story because, after his retirement to Zanzibar circa 1890, he wrote it at the behest of Dr. Heinrich Brode, an employee of the German Consulate at Zanzibar. Brode transcribed, translated, and published the original Swahili-language text in the Orientalist journal, *Mitteilungen des Seminars für Orientalische Sprachen*, in 1902 and 1903 (in Kiswahili and German). Brode explains in his introduction to the initial installment of the translation: “Die nachstehende Schilderung seines Lebens hat auf meine Anregung der jetzt in Zanzibar als Grossgrundbesitzer lebende Araber Schech Hamed bin Muhammed el Murjebi, genannt Tippu Tip, geschrieben. Bei der wichtigen Rolle, die der Verfasser in der Entdeckungsgeschichte des inneren Afrika gespielt hat, war zu erwarten, dass seine Autobiographie nicht ohne Interesse sein würde” [The following account of the life of the Arab Sheikh Hamed bin Muhammed el Murjebi, called Tippu Tip, was written at my suggestion, as he is the largest living landowner now in Zanzibar. With the important role that the author has played in the history of the discovery of inner Africa, it was to be expected that his autobiography would not be without interest] (“Autobiographie” 175). Brode explained in subsequent paragraphs why Tippu Tip chose to write in Kiswahili rather than Arabic, and also how the written form of Kiswahili had been recently romanized—the sort of facts to be expected in an Orientalist philological journal compiled in 1902. The opening lines of the introduction, however, point to the catalyst prompting this publication: “the important role that the author has played in the history of the discovery of Africa.”

Tippu Tip is here positioned as an accessory to the European—specifically German—history of discovery, not the purveyor of knowledge in his own right. The story was presented solely as a linguistic specimen of interest, and as an appendage to European histories of colonialism.¹⁹

The narrative, which Brode called an autobiography, is Tippu Tip's account of his rise to power in the interior during the years just prior to formal European colonial rule.²⁰ Anecdotes about wars, ivory transport, and travel between inland and coast dominate the narrative. These contextless incidents caused a problem of readability for the outsider, a problem "solved" by Brode in his paraphrased rewriting of *Maisha*, first published in 1905. In the 1907 English translation of *Tippoo Tib: The Story of His Career in Zanzibar and Central Africa*, Brode (who called himself "the Author") notes his interventions toward textual intelligibility: "I intended to work up the material furnished me by Tippoo Tib into a work on his life which should be generally intelligible. . . . The historical introduction in the first chapter may seem to many far-fetched. . . . Should any reader find it wearisome, I beg him to begin at the second chapter" (*Tippoo Tib*, xi, xii). Taking Tippu Tip's account as raw material rather than a coherent text, Brode added detail and his own recollections, and edited out the first-person narration. He responded to this challenge to readability (for Europeans) by transforming the early narrative into something that also held *his* voice and memories.

¹⁹ Brode notes in the preface to his 1905 version of the text: "Having been resident for a considerable time in Zanzibar, I had the opportunity of becoming closely acquainted with the hero of this work, and I succeeded in inducing him to recount the story of his life, which seemed to me of interest in view of the important part which he has played in the history of African exploration. His descriptions were set down by him in Swahili in Arabic characters, and by me transcribed into Roman script, in which form they appeared, together with a German translation, in the 'Proceedings of the Institute of Oriental Languages,' Part III., fifth and sixth yearly issues" (*Tippoo Tib* xi).

²⁰ Brode titled this first translation, "Autobiography of an Arab Sheikh Hamed bin Muhammed el Murjebi, called Tippu Tip."

The “mundane” details of Tippu Tip’s life in the interior—the wars, ivory transport, and travel—were less valuable to Brode than Tippu Tip’s role as slave trader and guide to European explorers. This role, more than anything else, is what Brode emphasized in his subsequent version of the narrative. Tippu Tip himself says relatively little about slave-trading.

It is precisely Tippu Tip’s silence about and Brode’s insistence on the merchant’s role in slave trading, and on his collaboration with European colonizers, that introduces a generative, but overlooked, tension in discourses surrounding the text, its translation, and its interpretation during the past 100 years. Contrary to Brode’s classification—and the classifying impulses of subsequent editors and translators—*Maisha* is neither autobiography, nor travelogue, nor chronicle exactly. Local politics, raids, and trivialities consume pages. Its patterns at first follow those of an autobiography or a bildungsroman, but it morphs into a kind of frantic travelogue, and in portions reads like a chronicle. All the while, Tippu Tip’s laconic style propels the plodding narrative forward. The bulk of the text relates context-less details of alliances, wars, and disputes over claims to land, dead elephants, trade routes, and ivory. Within and beside these incidents, Tippu Tip’s recounting of his interactions with explorers—one of the aspects of the text that has drawn the most external attention—commingles with various personal minutiae, composing a picture of an author concerned with navigating the complex web of the African interior by completing business transactions, forming alliances, and building wealth. He reveals to the reader a worldly African interior, not a dark continent, while his text denies access to what Western readers would recognize as “interiority,” the central characteristic of autobiography.

Tippu Tip’s narrative, in its affective flatness and transactional squalor presents an

interpretive problem, which is also an historical problem. The problem has to do with how East Africa represents itself in, and is represented by, world history; that larger representation arises due to external delineations of geographical, social, and aesthetic forms.

Maisha's quotidianism composes a picture of both the author and of the African interior that cannot be reduced to either; portions of its content elucidate the extent to which Tippu Tip and the world of the interior in the years just prior to the introduction of formal European colonialism relied both on local culture and the Indian Ocean trade of luxury goods, as well as the incorporation of the European explorer into the system of the interior—and not, though the Europeans thought so, their placement at its center.

The content of Tippu Tip's story and his biography show us these things; the text's latter-day formal transformations show how the West has historically found it necessary to recast and reimagine Africa's textual and intellectual products to fit them within extant lines—be they cartographic, social, or generic. The imbalance between what Tippu Tip emphasized in his text and what scholars and translators have, in the past hundred years, emphasized suggests a need to attend to what we might otherwise cast off as unimportant; to consider how Tippu Tip's narrative shows us something about the African interior besides European explorers' entering and exiting; and to ask how the author's mode of presenting his story (and himself) exceeds or revises the generic modes available to us. The structural and constituent parts of *Maisha* thus hold great potential for new interpretations, and for more broadly rethinking how African texts and histories have been miscategorized, excised, or managed within Western cultural, economic, and intellectual systems. In order to more fully understand the mechanisms operating in Brode's and others' classification and interpretation of *Maisha* and Tippu Tip, we will go back a bit further in the history of how

England especially, and Europe generally, saw and understood Africa—back, for now, to Richard Francis Burton.

Burton's Forms

Unlike Stanley and Livingstone, Richard Francis Burton never met Tippu Tip. Nevertheless, it is Burton who will propel the analysis in this section, since he most prominently practiced the mode of interpretation that even now influences how African texts and histories are read. Burton's travel writings show a particular combination of scientific and imaginative engagement that aims, seemingly contradictorily, to understand a new geography or culture by establishing scientific categories, and then by pushing beyond (or beneath) those just-established boundaries to find what is unattainable by empirical methods. This tension in Burton between the impulse to categorize and interpret comes to bear on his understanding of geography and civilization—particularly Arab and African—which in turn affects his representations of individuals and societies in those spaces. Before delving further into the story of Tippu Tip's narrative, then, let's engage Burton, and his "scientific" documentation of his journey to East Africa's islands, coasts, and interior.

Most accounts of Richard Francis Burton's life include at least one paragraph that looks something like this: "Explorer and ethnographer, polyglot and poet, consul and connoisseur of the sword, infantry officer and *enfant terrible*, this famed—and in some circles infamous—Victorian is such an over-sized figure that he seems at first sight almost *sui generis*" (Kennedy 1–2). Both Burton's contemporaries and latter-day biographers, faced with Burton's behemoth achievements and linguistic gifts, are often forced to depart momentarily from a

narrative and resort to the most banal of written forms: the list. Lists of languages known, places visited, and written matter produced—lists required because of the sheer excess of Burton’s curriculum vitae. The list that is the true Burtonian biography, for he, and only he, coheres the disparate adjectives.

Before the lists, Burton crafted his self-image through the kinetic perspectives afforded by immersion and masquerade within non-Western cultures. Narrative would come later. After his expulsion from Trinity College, Oxford, in 1842 for attending a steeplechase, the 21-year-old—who was already adept in French, Italian, Latin, and Arabic—enlisted in the British East India Company’s army. During his time in India, his facility for languages was funneled by the Anglo-Indian government toward Orientalist ends: though the use of language, non-Western societies could be known, interpreted, and ruled.²¹

While studying to be a translator of Hindustani in Sindh,²² a valley in India’s northwest, Burton grew frustrated about accruing knowledge without learning its context—

itself a kind of performance without audience. He thus seized the opportunity to act as assistant land surveyor. Burton writes in a postscript to his text on falconry:

I began to look with interest upon the desolation around me. The country was a new one, so was its population, so was their language. After reading all the works published upon the subject, I felt convinced that none [...] had

²¹ For more on Burton as Orientalist, see Dane Kennedy, *The Highly Civilized Man*, chapter 2, “The Orientalist.” I would be remiss to footnote Orientalism without pointing toward Edward Said. See his 1978 study, *Orientalism*.

²² Burton also studied Arabic, Armenian, Persian, Portuguese, Pushtu, Telegu, Toda, and Turkish while in India (Kennedy 34). In his early writings, copious and mostly unnoticed, Burton tried to reconcile the compulsions to categorize and explain. The juxtaposition of these early titles, which follows, reveals how Burton aimed to present expertise on the peoples and geography through a combination of the authority wrought by his personal experience and his position as military officer and “geographer.” He published in quick succession *Goa and the Blue Mountains; Or, Six Months of Sick Leave* (1851), *Scinde; or, The Unhappy Valley* (1851), *Sindh, and the Races that Inhabit the Valley of the Indus, with Notices of the Topography and History of the Province* (1851), *Falconry and the Valley of the Indus* (1852), and *A Complete System of Bayonet Exercise* (1853).

dipped beneath the superficialities of things. My new duties compelled me to spend the cold season in wandering over the districts, levelling the beds of canals, and making preparatory sketches for a grand survey. I was thrown entirely amongst the people as to depend upon them for society, and the “dignity,” not to mention the increased allowances of a staff officer, enabled me to collect a fair stock of books, and to gather around me those who could make them of any use. So, after the first year, when I had Persian at my fingers’ ends, sufficient Arabic to read, write, and converse fluently, and a superficial knowledge of that dialect of Punjaabee which is spoken in the wilder parts of the province, I began the systematic study of the Scindian people, their manners and their tongue.

The first difficulty was to pass for an Oriental, and this was as necessary as it was difficult. (*Falconry in the Valley of the Indus* 98–99)

One cannot help to notice the preoccupation with surfaces in this passage: “none had dipped beneath the superficialities of things” in available texts; as a surveyor he leveled “the beds of canals” and was responsible for registering the undulations and movements of the earth’s surface; he had a “superficial” knowledge of selected languages; and then, he desired to “pass for an Oriental.” Burton’s new project impelled him to form close relationships with local people, to walk about in non-Western dress, to speak the languages he had learned in isolation, to observe the locals without (he imagined) himself being observed. The rigor required to penetrate to the essential *core* of the Indian people could only be wrought by, as nearly as possible, becoming one of them. The mystery of the people and the newness (to him) of the geography enthralled him. The most important thing to notice here is that Burton is convinced that, in India, in the Orient, *something* lay beneath those surfaces; he recognized that the linguistic and cultural knowledge that he accrued would be used to access that system of knowledge and life that would have otherwise remained only an exterior mark of difference.

Burton, on a furlough in 1852, had an idea, which would yield a journey, then a book that he hoped would change everything. The following year, disguised as a Muslim doctor

from India, he departed for a trip to the holy city of Mecca to complete the Hajj. His knowledge of Islam, his mastery of Arabic, and his desire to know “beyond the superficialities” made this trip possible. The resulting text, *Personal Narrative of a Pilgrimage to El Madinah and Meccah*, published in three volumes beginning in 1855, recorded his process of disguise and observation in the sacred Muslim cities. The text presented itself as an exposé of what lay beyond the gaze of Christian Europe’s anxious eye. Burton’s well-chosen epigraph to the *Personal Narrative* echoes Gibbon’s *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*: “Our notions of Mecca must be drawn from the Arabians: as no unbeliever is permitted to enter the city, our travellers are silent.” Burton’s journey answered Gibbon’s rhetorical call (or, perhaps, his lament), in that his book was precisely what Gibbon had identified as lacking: a white European observation and description of the guarded city.²³

After the success of his faux-Hajj, Burton turned his eye increasingly toward solo expeditions. Instead of treading the verboten paths around the Kaaba, he sought to make an indelible mark on the face of history by discovering the unexplored wilds of East and Central Africa, and, he hoped, the source of the Nile.²⁴ The Hajj was an important milestone for Burton because it convinced him of the utility of the knowledge (language, mannerisms,

²³ The choice was wrought not solely by Burton’s curiosities, but also by the political and cultural imaginary of the time: “[Burton’s Hajj] played on a British preoccupation with the strategic corridor that ran from the Nile Delta through the Gulf of Suez and the Red Sea to the Gulf of Aden. [...] In 1854, the year after Burton’s pilgrimage to Mecca and just before the publication of his *Personal Narrative*, Ferdinand de Lesseps obtained his concession to build the Suez Canal. All of these developments heightened the public interest in Burton’s adventures and observations” (Kennedy 61).

²⁴ Since reading of German missionary Johannes Krapf’s verification of the existence of snow-capped peaks in Tanganyika in the October 8, 1850, edition of *The Times*, Burton had conceived the necessity of an East African expedition. If the interior held such wonders as snow in the tropics, he reasoned, perhaps it also held the mythic and long-sought source of the Nile. Burton’s stated goal and potential glory would lie in establishing the location of the Nile’s source: “For 3,000 years explorers had tried following the Nile upstream to trace the source. In a flash [Burton] saw a way of making history, and at the same time stultifying the old Eastern proverb, ‘*Facilius sit Nili caput invenire*’ (‘It would be easier to discover the source of the Nile’)” (Lovell 145). See “Geographical Discoveries in Central Africa” Lovell, *A Rage to Live: A Biography of Richard and Isabel Burton*.

mores) that he had amassed, since it enabled him to enter into a space where he would have been an unwelcome outsider. For our purposes here, the Hajj proved an important precursor to Burton's African explorations, since his experience of the Arab world—and his ability to navigate and explain it through masquerade and discovery—would serve as a heuristic through which he viewed Zanzibar and continental Africa.

Cloaked with this new understanding and the garments of empire, in late 1856, Burton prepared to launch his East African Expedition, armed with instruments to measure, calculate, and test the surfaces of that space. During the fortnight's journey from Bombay, Burton occupied himself with research and the preparation of diagnostic tools appropriate to a scientific and scholarly exploration: "I read all that had been written on the subject of Zanzibar . [...] We rubbed up our acquaintance with the sextant and the altitude and azimuth; and we registered barometer and thermometer, so as to have a base for observations ashore" (1:17). For Burton and his crew, their search for the source of the River Nile would be set apart by the combination of that knowledge and these instruments.

Despite Burton's ultimate goal of finding the Nile's source, as early as 1853 (prior to the Hajj and while still in India), he suspected Zanzibar was not solely a footfall on the path to the African hinterland, but an intriguing object of exploration. In a letter to Norton Shaw, written on November 16, 1853, he expressed his desire to undertake a journey to Zanzibar: "Now I shall be ready next season to explore the interior, if leave can be procured [...] my wish is to attack (scientifically) Zanzibar . [...] About Zanzibar I have plenty of sound practical reasons why a mission there is highly advisable. A scientific mission of course. It is one of the headquarters of slavery [...] and it has very great resources quite undeveloped" (qtd. in Lovell 143, 144). The island of Zanzibar, though not a Holy Grail like the Nile,

attracted Burton because its space had yet to be approached scientifically.

The island archipelago of Zanzibar, approximately 16 miles off the coast of Tanganyika, along with the Swahili coast of East Africa had long served as an intermediary between the continental hinterland and the Indian Ocean trading system: slaves, ivory, gold, and spices came to the eastern coast of the continent, where they were transported to Zanzibar, and then distributed by merchants to the Persian Gulf, India, and beyond; beads, cloth, and weapons traveled from Zanzibar to the coast, and then were distributed in the hinterland (Rothman 82). Prior to the arrival of Europeans in the region, the coast was ruled by the Waswahili, whose powerful city-states dotted the coast from Somalia to Mozambique, and whose cosmopolitan culture arose as a direct result of this trade.²⁵ Early contacts between the East African coast and the Arabian Peninsula were marked most significantly by the arrival of Islam in the eighth century (Glassman 24). The ties of Islam extended across the ocean between these two regions (and, indeed, others in the western and eastern regions of the littoral), and came to form the identity of the dwellers of the Swahili coast: “By the time of the city-states’ classic age [ca 900–1500 CE], Islam was central to how the coast people defined themselves, both in relation to their pagan neighbors and in relation to one another. [...] [Their] devotion to Islam helped cement a notion among them that they lived in a world apart, connected more with their trade partners and coreligionists overseas than with their cultural cousins of the near interior” (Glassman 24, 25). This separateness and

²⁵ Vasco da Gama’s diarist, Alvaro Velho, wrote with some surprise of the Portuguese crew’s first interaction with the Swahili people, whose wealth and sophistication far exceeded their expectations: “The men of this land are russet in colour and of good physique [...]. They are of the Islamic faith and speak like Moors. Their clothes are of very thin linen and cotton, of many-coloured stripes, and richly embroidered. All wear caps on their heads trimmed with silk and embroidered with gold thread. They are merchants and they trade with the white Moors [i.e., the Arabs].” Quoted in Christiane Bird, *The Sultan’s Shadow*, 42.

prestige of Islam was further cemented when, in the seventeenth century the Omanis helped to oust the Portuguese (who had arrived in 1498),²⁶ and then, eventually, took control themselves over the coast. By the 1830s, the sultan of the new Omani Busaid Dynasty, Seyyid Said, had moved the seat of his rule to Unguja, the main island of the Zanzibar archipelago, and began to make inroads into the African interior via takeover of networked trade routes and outposts (Glassman 29).²⁷

In the case of the East African coast, European colonialism (and its attendant ideologies), joined a series of colonialisms, not the least of which Arab colonialism; the Omani Busaid Dynasty ruled in East Africa coeval with European “high imperialism.” Those other colonialisms further defined the ways that social difference was coded, and how it was geographically situated. Devout Muslim dwellers on the Indian Ocean islands and the coast called themselves, in Kiswahili, *waungwana* (children of God, or the civilized); those in the interior, far from the civilizing, orthodox reach of Islam, they named *washenzi* (pagans, or the uncivilized).²⁸ That these non-racial structures governed the relationship among island, coast, and interior—and subsequent assertions of civilization and barbarity—supersede and render moot typical understandings of race, racialism, and, indeed, any assumption about the

²⁶ The sultan of Mombasa wrote to his sworn rival, the sultan of Malindi, after Mombasa fell to the Portuguese: “Allah keep you, Said Ali. I would have you know that a great lord [da Gama] passed through here, burning with fire. He entered this city so forcefully and cruelly that he spared the life of none, man or woman, young or old or children no matter how small. [...] In this city the stench of death is such that I dare not enter it” Quoted in *The Sultan’s Shadow*, 52.

²⁷ The foundational history of Zanzibar’s participation in the Indian Ocean trade is Sheriff, *Slaves, Spices and Ivory in Zanzibar*.

²⁸ Jonathan Glassman discusses the social distinctions of these monikers in *War of Words*, 34–35, including the use of other terms, such as “wazalia” for those born slaves versus “waungwana” or “washenzi.” Tippu Tip follows this mode of categorizing in his narrative as well. This is noted and discussed in Geider, 39–40.

smooth homogeneity of Africans in the sub-Saharan region.²⁹

When the Europeans arrived en force, whether as merchants, explorers, or missionaries, those lines that had been traced among island, coast, and interior, between devout and heathen, were retraced, but according to external signs of civilization and of physiognomy. As Burton's earlier remarks show, Zanzibar itself was known as a hub of the Indian Ocean slave trade due to the Moresby Treaty of 1822, signed by Sultan Seyyid Said, which barred the sales of slaves to any Christian nation.³⁰ Because of Zanzibar's position in the global imaginary in the mid-nineteenth century, and because of the practical considerations of exploration and travel, Burton chose the island as the point from which to launch his expedition.

As we will soon see, Burton's approach to Zanzibar was inflected less by its position in the Indian Ocean or Islamic world and more by its geographical closeness to Africa—which is to say, its ideological distance from everything else. Though he stopped on the island only “on the way” to the interior, Burton wrote a two-volume text about his two-week endeavor titled *Zanzibar; City, Island, and Coast*. In the early pages of that text, Burton mentions what, to him, was the mystery of how Zanzibar, despite its relative closeness to seats of British imperial power, could remain unexplored (or unknown): “Still geographers declared that Zanzibar was a more mysterious spot to England and India than parts of Central Africa and the shores of the Icy Sea” (*Zanzibar* 1:45–46).³¹ This, though the British

²⁹ I am indebted to Glassman in this discussion of race and racialism. See in particular his second chapter in *War of Words, War of Stones*, for an excellent analysis of the development race in colonial and postcolonial Zanzibar.

³⁰ See Christiane Bird, *The Sultan's Shadow*, for an accessible and well researched discussion of slavery and the slave trade in Oman and Zanzibar.

³¹ This is Burton's paraphrase of an excerpt from the *Transactions of the Bombay Geographical Society*, which is his book's epigraph.

surveyed the entire Zanzibari coast, though Britain had a consulate on the island for half a century, though a handful of merchants and planters performed business there (1:16). In an actual and a metaphorical sense, Zanzibar was known to the Europeans by its edges: its coasts, its exports, its politics.

Burton filled in those sketches of the island with detail both factual and metaphorical as his ship approached land; the scientific veneer of Burton's earlier notations faded into florid description of the island, seen from afar.

Truly prepossessing was our first view of the then mysterious island of Zanzibar, set off by the dome of distant hills, like solidified air, that form the swelling line of the Zanzibar coast. Earth, sea, and sky, all seemed wrapped in a soft and sensuous repose, in the tranquil life of the Lotus Eaters, in the swoon-like slumbers of the Seven Sleepers, in the dreams of the Castle of Indolence. The sea of purest sapphire, which had not parted with its blue rays to the atmosphere—a frequent appearance near the equator—lay basking, lazy as the tropical man, under a blaze of sunshine which touched every object with a dull burnish of gold. The wave had hardly energy to dandle us. [...] The breath of the ocean would hardly take the trouble to ruffle the fronds of the palm. [...] The island itself seemed over-indolent, and unwilling to rise; it showed no trace of mountain or crag, but all was voluptuous with gentle swellings, with the rounded contours of the girl-negress, and the brown-red tintage of its warm skin showed through its gauzy attire of green. (*Zanzibar* 1:27–28, 28–29)

So Zanzibar, the long-awaited, rose to view in the uninterrupted ocean. The prepossessing prospect attracts through the smoothness of its placement in the water: it is all timid hills and swelling coastline, as though it reluctant to infringe upon the boundaries of horizon and sea. The beauty of this vignette departs from Burton's stale description in the prior pages, describing the distant island as a "girl-negress," whose curves are hills, whose scant vestments and warm skin are tropical verdure. The island appeared in *Zanzibar* when the ship lingered between intimacy and distance: it was small enough to control in his field of vision, to be enframed, close enough to reveal specific curves of hills and variations in the color of

the tree canopy.

Zanzibar's geography, according to Burton, had been previously known by its geometry—its distance from certain points in space (16 miles from Africa, 2,400 from India, etc.), its elevation from the depths, its edges' angles and arcs. His use of metaphor simultaneously renders the scene sublime and cues to the reader how they ought to understand the island—as unknown, yet knowable. As Franco Moretti has written (following Ricoeur), metaphors are used in “in an unknown space,” because “[o]nly metaphors [...] can simultaneously *express* the unknown we must face, and yet also *contain* it. [...] and keep it somehow under control” (47). The moment of “discovery” of island Zanzibar thus aligns with the familiar conventions and rhetoric of Victorian travel writing, as Mary Louise Pratt would remind us, while also drawing on a metaphor familiar to maritime exploration.³² The tropical island was typically represented as “deserted, constructed as *terra nullius* (empty land), tropical, and extremely fertile. [...] [it] is often represented as a female body” (DeLoughrey 14). Metaphor appears here in Burton's book *not* on the boundaries of the unknown, but to reinscribe the imagination of the tropical island as conquerable, empty, and even beyond and before time—as a world unto itself. He thus reserved his most powerful rhetorical tool for the moment most germane to the idea of the tropical island, so as to signal his readers to

³² As described by Mary Louise Pratt. Pratt presents Burton's presentation of Lake Tanganyika in *The Lake Regions of Central Africa* as the “descriptive *tour de force*” of the genre (*Imperial Eyes* 201). Pratt identifies three conventions utilized by Burton and other Victorian explorers in composing such scenes: aestheticization, density of meaning, and relation of mastery. She writes, in regard to aesthetics: “The sight is seen as a painting and the description is ordered in terms of background, foreground, symmetries between foam-flecked water and mist-flecked hills, and so forth” (204–205). For more on the idea of the written picture of the African landscape, particularly the South African context, see J. M. Coetzee, “The Picturesque and the South African Landscape,” in *White Writing: On the Culture of Letters in South Africa*, 36–62. See Paul Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor*; Franco Moretti, *The Atlas of the European Novel*; Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*; Richard F. Burton, *The Lake Regions of Central Africa*.

access knowledge concomitant with and parallel to the image of the black female body. This metaphor bolsters a European hierarchy of race and difference that was, as we will see, challenged by the imperfect admixture of races Burton will encounter on the island itself.³³

A sign of this different order comes into view as the ship moves closer to Zanzibar, as curves and swells sharpen, growing distinct, particular. Gliding south-east along the coast, Burton notes the presence of Seyyid Said's palaces, which he calls "a large pile" and "pauperish and mouldy" (*Zanzibar* 1:30, 31). The view again widens as the ship moves closer to the shore, inside "the coral reef which defends this great store-house of Eastern Intertropical Africa." Once here, we are given another vignette of the island of Zanzibar, though with a view of the city.

And now we could distinguish the normal straight line of Arab town, extending about a mile and a half in length, facing north, and standing out in bold relief, from the varied tints and the grandeur of forest that lay behind. A Puritanical plainness characterized the scene—cathedrals without the graceful minarets of Jeddah, mosques without the cloisters of Cairo, turrets without the domes and monuments of Syria; and the straight stiff sky-line was unrelieved except by a few straggling palms. In the centre, and commanding the anchorage, was a square-curtained artless fort, conspicuous withal, and fronted by a still more contemptible battery. To its right and left the Imam's palace, the various Consulates, and the large parallelogrammic buildings of the great, a tabular line of flat roofs, glaring and dazzling like freshly white-washed sepulchers, detached themselves from the mass, and did their best to conceal the dingy matted hovels of the inner town. Zanzibar city, to become either picturesque or pleasing, must be viewed, like Stambul, from afar. (*Zanzibar* 1:32–33)

This second composition of the island is a synecdoche: the whole city is drawn as the Arab

³³ I say "imperfect admixture," because, as I will soon discuss, other sorts of hierarchies governed Zanzibar. One of those hierarchies was established through the order of Islam: lines were drawn between believer and non-believer, and between Zanzibari Arabs (a class that Tippu Tip belonged to, though he was "mixed-race") and interior black Africans. The way that Burton saw race was not the way that Zanzibaris did, though the relationship among dwellers of the island, coast, and interior was anything but one of nonracial coexistence.

quarter. That the Arab quarter represents the city as a whole ought to indicate its importance—fort in the center, battery in the foreground, palace to its right, consulates to the left—and, it does, to an extent. The “bold relief” with which these buildings stood from the forest and the straggling palms established a baseline of civilization on the island, separating man from nature. The structures, all line and shape, align to the right and left of the central “square-curtained artless fort”: “the large parallelogrammic buildings of the great,” and “a tabular line of flat roofs.” This scene, however, shows us the first signs of what I mentioned earlier: the way that Burton’s sense of Zanzibar (and later continental Africa) would be viewed according to his Orientalist knowledge and experience. Notice the sorts of adjectives he uses to describe the Arab quarter and the buildings: artless, contemptible, tabular, square. Though a city typically acts as perpetual sign of the civilized, this Arab city is comprised of dead, absent architecture. Even the royalty’s homes were “mouldy” and “pauperish.” These adjectives lead into what Burton will conclude in the final line of this excerpt: that the only way this city can be pleasing is by viewing it as we must view Istanbul, from a distance.

This ugly city has, from Burton’s perspective on the ocean, but one or two redeeming characteristics. One of them: the “large parallelogrammic” houses of the nobility that hide the “dingy matted hovels of the inner town.” When Burton disembarks from the ship, he will describe this “inner town,” the black African quarter of the city, home to poor laborers. The characteristically Arab buildings enclosed this “native town,—a filthy labyrinth, a capricious arabesque of disorderly lanes, and alleys, and impasses, here broad, there narrow; now heaped with offal, then choked with ruins. [...] [T]he certain effluvia of carrion

and negro, make it impossible to flâneur through the foul mass” (*Zanzibar* 1:96).³⁴ We can imagine Burton picking his way through these unclean and “disorderly lanes, and alleys, and impasses” disgusted at both the “effluvia” and his limited his ability to explore on foot. What was hidden in the quarter, though, seeped to the shore, where he observed the following:

Corpses float at times upon the heavy water; the shore is a cess-pool, and the younger blacks of both sexes disport themselves in an absence of costume. Round-barrelled bulls, the saints of the Banyans, and therefore called by us “Brahmani,” push and butt, by way of excitement, the gangs of serviles who carry huge sacks of cowries, and pile high their hides and logwood. Others wash and scrape ivory, which suggested to a young traveler the idea that the precious bone, here so plentiful, is swept up by the sea. (*Zanzibar* 1:80)

Sainted bulls jostle gangs of black slaves lugging loads of cowries; an unkempt man scrapes ivory into waves that carry the corpses of captured Africans. Death brings value to the “precious bone” that commingles with the cast-off corpse; death denies profit to the slave-boat captain who discarded his inert cargo to avoid a head tax on shore.

We have, then, bodies and bones of various imputed values, expelled from or bordering on a polluted black quarter, hidden by the houses of the Arab nobility, “glaring and dazzling [...] whitewashed sepulchers.” What can we extract from this montage, where Burton seems to speak in the voice of Christ in the Gospels, who rebuked those who “are like unto whited sepulchers, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead *men’s* bones, and of all uncleanness” (Matt. 23:27, KJV)? Is he expressing his sympathy for the blacks, and condemning the Arabs for obscuring the truth to the outside world?

Though Burton makes clear his disdain for the slave trade (necessarily, for the sake of his

³⁴ Benjamin, etc. This also corroborates Felix Driver’s observation that “the idea of exploration was freighted with a variety of meanings, associated variously with science, literature, religion, commerce and empire. The business of the scientific explorer was not always, or easily, distinguished from that of the literary flâneur, the missionary, the trader or the imperial pioneer” Felix Driver, “Distance and Disturbance: Travel, Exploration and Knowledge in the Nineteenth Century,” 75.

post-abolition readership), besides this vivid juxtaposition of Arab and African environments, every representation of blacks on Zanzibar reduces them to bodies: either the passive body of the corpse, the kinetic body that lugs the commodity, or, as we will soon see, the static body whose form dictates its content.

It seems less likely that Burton was rebuking the Arabs for hypocrisy than utilizing the biblical image of the beautiful tomb and its dead, worthless contents as a synecdoche for what he saw as the relationship between Arab and African on the island, and in East Africa more broadly. The first sight of the town established this Arab outpost as a frontier of the Orient, a lesser sister to Cairo and Jeddah, more closely related to another city on the fringe of the Arab world, Istanbul. In spite of its deficiencies, the of the city is picturesque (and perhaps “effective”) from a distant seaborne vessel, since its coastal visage hides the dirty “interior,” the African quarter. Burton’s representation of the blacks he found there as purely formal bodies whose function aligns with their animal humanness, crafts them as both human and not. As Hannah Arendt would write later in another context: “The world [finds] nothing sacred in the abstract nakedness of being human” (299).

Burton’s approach to the Arab-African island, his experience and characterization of its “interior,” and his characterization of Zanzibar and its inhabitants through various levels of metaphor, helps us understand not only the remainder of *Zanzibar; City, Island, and Coast*, but also his (and other explorers’) characterizations of the so-called Dark Continent. Recall that his preoccupation to get beyond the surfaces in Sindh and during the Hajj was satisfied by acquiring the superficialities of language and attire, and then learning what lay beneath. This act was itself a recognition that under these surfaces lay a system that composed Eastern life. Burton’s power as an Orientalist, according to Edward Said, came because “he was

preternaturally knowledgeable about the degree to which human life in society was governed by rules and codes . [...] [H]e knew that the Orient in general and Islam in particular were systems of information, behavior, and belief, that to be an Oriental or a Muslim was to know certain things in a certain way, and that these were of course subject to history, geography, and the development of society in circumstances specific to it” (195). To recognize a system is to recognize the presence of a culture, and of a civilization (of a kind). Zanzibar offered Burton another kind of Orient. He could not acknowledge it because it was neither the Arabia nor the Sindh whose codes he understood—and even loved, for Burton personified an Orientalism that loved its object, that strove to become it, to hold it close, to wrangle with it when necessary.

Further, he could not masquerade among them like he did in Mecca: not only were they black, they also “disport[ed] themselves in an absence of costume.” Burton earned the sizable scar on his cheek during a failed attempt to enter another forbidden city, the Somali city of Harar (a spear went in one cheek and out the other), by disguising himself as the Hajj-proven Indian doctor. This expedition to Harar happened just before the Zanzibar journey, which proves important to my point here about the limits of disguise and black skin as a marker of difference. Dane Kennedy writes: “The strategy Burton had used in India, Egypt, and Arabia to gain entrée to the intimate lives of other people had failed him in Somalia and the implications of that failure extended across sub-Saharan Africa. However much he might have supposed black skin to be a ‘garb’ [...] it was not possible for him to don it as a disguise. [...] For a man whose understanding of others derived from his ability to pass as one of them, this obstacle presented a formidable challenge, compelling a reconsideration of race itself” (89). Burton’s epistemological structure was based on the selective creation of

knowledge—or ignorance—and hierarchies based particularly upon the exposure to and comparison with the Orientalist knowledge system. Such a system required interacting first with the Arab and the Indian separate from the African, then the Arab and the Indian in Africa, then the African in Africa. His understanding of black Africans focused on their exteriors—perhaps because of his inability to embody that exterior—and his conclusion that little more than animal impulses lay beneath.

As the scene on the shore and the metaphor of the island-girl-negress suggest, Burton did not view Africans as in possession of secret knowledge, or their public manners as clues to an underlying, complex cultural system. As much as apparent in the second volume of *Zanzibar; City, Island, and Coast*, where he records details of a tentative expedition to the East African coast. Part of his mission included categorizing the people he found there. When faced with describing “types” of Africans (and their bodies), Burton fell in line with the social-scientific evolutionary theory gaining momentum in the mid-century: “Physically the Wanyika race is not inferior to other negroids. [...] [T]he skull is pyramid-oval, flattened and depressed at the moral region of the phrenologist—a persistent form amongst savages and barbarians” (*Zanzibar* 2:82). Burton’s instruments of measurement remind us of the surveying instruments used back in Sindh, and how he found them inadequate to get beyond the “superficies of things.” In this instance, though the instruments will be enough. He comes to conclude that the African exterior—human and, we’ll soon see, the geographical—indicates what the interior will be, not vice versa. There is no system: for him, the dictates of geography determine the exterior of the peoples, which indicates their interiors. This relationship, at once complementary and dialectical, apprehends the cultural structures in Zanzibar as racial, and understands the blacks there as the same as

those who will be found in the continental interior. “Africanness” or “blackness,” for Burton and for many of his era, circumscribed the possibility of civilization, apparent or hidden.

We can’t fault or villainize Burton for this. He knew what he knew, not what we know now. What is useful for us, going forward, is to notice how Burton’s method of viewing Zanzibar (and later, interior Africa) depended on not just a comparison with Europe, but also, and primarily, with the East. The sort of divisions Burton makes between Arab and African, which he racializes according to a nineteenth-century perspective, was a then-modern version of a much older European view of Africa, which featured a dialectical relationship between the African interior its coasts.

This perspective operates in the title he gave to his book: *Zanzibar; City, Island, and Coast*. That title, so straightforward, so logical, emphasizes the lens used to understand Zanzibar and its attendant coast—Zanzibar as city, which was mostly the domain of coastal traders and Omani Arabs, which signaled its cosmopolitanism; Zanzibar as island, a discrete body surrounded, isolated, yet connected to the world by the Indian Ocean; and Zanzibar’s relationship to the East African, or Swahili, coast. Burton introduces his readership to Zanzibar by viewing it in accordance with these various perspectives, and through a contrast in representation of black and Arab, emphasizes its relationship to Africa as a continent. These three dominant geographical views coalesce with the way that Zanzibar has too often been interpreted within the present-day Indian Ocean perspective: as a self-contained, yet connected cosmopolitan island, whose connections extend (culturally, at least) to the coast of Africa, but not much farther. What is missing from Burton’s title, and which serves as the

absent specter here and elsewhere, is the interior, the “real Africa,” the Dark Continent.³⁵

That metaphor was hundreds of years in the making. Both the dialectical relationship between coast and interior, and the idea of Africa as the site of savagery was one that well preceded Burton. Prior to 1799, when Mungo Park’s expedition successfully reached the Niger River’s source, the African interior was imagined in Europe entirely based on the evidence of the coast, or from the evidence of the imagination. Herodotus, Pliny, and Defoe provided Europe’s sole intelligence about the African interior, in part because most cartographers in the eighteenth century (and before) believed that Africa’s interior was so arid, and the path there so treacherous, that only the most stalwart, or foolhardy, could attempt the journey (Hallett 192). The cartographers’ “scientific” postulations, based on conjecture rather than experience, fueled the long-held images handed down from antiquity. Herodotus (5th century BCE) imagined the interior as populated by men of “monstrous shape, with dragons and other wilde beasts of wonderful nature,” while Pliny (1st century CE) placed these beasts in the inner regions, “the middle of the earth, [...] where the sun hath his way and keepeth his course, scorched and burnt with flames [...] parched and fried again with the hote gleams thereof, being so near” (qtd. in Hallett 193). Defoe’s *The Life, Adventures and Piracies of the Famous Captain Singleton* (1720), his novel after *Crusoe*, offers a protagonist who traveled throughout the barren interior, marking locations, encountering serpents, hardship, and savages. The text, with its careful balance of vague geography and striking visual detail, convinced its readership of its verisimilitude so completely that the famed nineteenth-century geographer, James Macqueen, used *Captain Singleton’s* verbal map

³⁵ Incidentally, the *Oxford English Dictionary* lists Henry Morton Stanley’s *Through the Dark Continent* (1878) as the first instance of the usage of the term “Dark Continent.” But here we have it in Burton, written in 1858, published in 1872.

of the interior to corroborate Burton's claims in *The Nile Basin* (1864) that Speke had not found the Nile's sources (Knox-Shaw 944, 945). Neither Defoe nor Macqueen had ever been to Africa. Through the mid-nineteenth century, Europe's authoritative voices about the African interior spoke from works of fiction that were read as fact.

The relationship between the coast and the interior was represented as a dialectical one, as is apparent in the pro-slavery and abolitionist writings of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. In these, the discrete geographies of interior and coast hold one another stable, while threatening at any moment to fold into one another. John Wesley famously wrote in his *Thoughts Upon Slavery* (1774) that the pro-slavery camp utilized the image of the wilderness interior with a motive: "What kind of country is that from whence they are brought? Is it so remarkably horrid, dreary and barren, that it is a kindness to deliver them out of it? I believe many have thought it so: But it is an entire mistake, if we may give credit to those who have lived many years therein, and could have no motive to misrepresent it" (6). Wesley later addresses the slave ship captains, and placed culpability for any lack of civilization directly upon the slave trade: "to the Captains employed in this trade. [...] Perhaps now, by *your* means, part of [the interior] is become a dreary uncultivated wilderness, the inhabitants being all murdered or carried away, so that there are none left to till the ground" (44).

Notice that despite the opposing content expressed by these two views, there is a constant: the coast is always paired with the interior, and the coast is always affirmative or negative evidence of the truth of the interior. The abolitionists wrote that the coast was damaged because of its exposure to European cruelty, and so—therefore, necessarily—the interior was evidence of the "true" Africa that was maintained and protected from European

incursion; whereas slavery advocates used the coast's decadence as an example of the interior's true nature and the need for Africans to be rescued from their harsh environment. The representation of the interior and the coast, then, held heavy ideological weight in Britain, so that the group that controlled how these two regions were represented also held how the peoples of those regions were represented in the public imaginary.³⁶

By the time Burton commented on Africa's geography in 1872, he extended the abolitionists' coast-interior dialectic to Africa's coastal geography, which led, in turn, to the interior's necessary and certain isolation:

It is an old remark that Africa, the continent which became an island by the union of the twin seas in the year of grace 1869, despite her exuberant wealth and her wonderful powers of reproduction, is badly made—a trunk without limbs, a monotonous mass of painful symmetry, wanting opposition and contrast, like the uniform dark complexion of her sons and of her fauna—a solid body, like her own cocoa-nut, hard to penetrate from without, and soft within; an “individual of the earth,” self-isolated by its savagery from the rest of the world. This is especially true of intertropical Africa. (*Zanzibar* 1:116–117)

This passage opens the chapter titled “Geography and Physiology,” a name intended to join disparate topics of discussion—the African geography and Africans' physiognomy. With this opening paragraph and the ones that follow, however, Burton unconsciously posits the African person's homogenous connection with the continent-island. The coasts' similar geology, for example, leads Burton to an ultimate conflation: the inhabitants with one another, with the land, with the plants, with the animals.³⁷ Burton thus renders Africa a

³⁶ Notice also that Wesley's position depends on the idea that that the “uncultivated” wilderness existed only because the “tillers” were taken away. This invocation of productivity implies their at least marginal civility, since tilling and cultivating are not only signs of civilization, but also that these Africans are obedient to the word of God, which is embedded in the heart of every man: to fill the earth and subdue it (See Romans 2:15 and Genesis 1:28, respectively).

³⁷ Burton writes: “The negroes and negroids of both these inhospitable coasts, an undeveloped and not to be developed race—in this point agreeing with the flora and fauna around them—are the chief

geographical and cultural tautology, whose symmetry allows bifurcation, and whose redundancy allows division of all sorts without loss of particularity. (It is also without detail, without the specific.) For Burton, African geography and physiology are mutually and inextricably constitutive.

Once Africa's difficult exterior (the coasts) have been "cracked" like its coconut, the interior unfolds, soft, yielding, and rewarding. Its interior "sons," and the central, inter-tropical geography, are characterized as "individual[s] of the earth," of and only of the substance from which they were formed. The 1869 completion of the Suez Canal made manifest what was already suspected: Africa's geographical and cultural isolation from Arabia (and from the world otherwise). Within the ill-formed island of Africa floated yet another island—the interior—whose isolation upon the most isolated and impenetrable of the earth's peopled continents yielded an undifferentiated mass of men unmatched in savagery.

Today, Burton's mode of seeing the interior/coast geographical and cultural formation persists, though it is rid of obvious signals of its Orientalist or Eurocentric roots. The centuries-long *perception* of the interior's impenetrable difference has, at times, prompted scholarly replication of Burton's geographical and ideological separation of cosmopolitan Zanzibar and the Swahili coast from the rest of the continent. Despite the work of scholars such as Isabel Hofmeyr, Françoise Lionnet, and Gwyn Campbell, who argue for the eastern coast and interior of Africa as contributors to the history of the Indian Ocean and beyond, the coast-interior separation persists not only in North–South models of comparison, but

obstacles to exploration, and remarkably resemble one another. The productions of east and west are similar" (*Zanzibar* 1:121).

also in South–South comparisons and in Indian Ocean studies.³⁸ Take, for example, *Asia before Europe* (1990), one of the founding studies of the Indian Ocean region. K. N. Chaudhuri analyzes the imbricated economies and civilizations of the western Indian Ocean from the rise of Islam until 1750, and, according to geography and scholarly precedent, ought to include coastal East Africa. He, however, chooses to omit one-third of the Indian Ocean littoral: “The exclusion of East Africa from our civilisational identities needs a special word of explanation. In spite of its close connection with the Islamic world, the indigenous African communities appear to have been structured by a historical logic separate and independent from the rest of the Indian Ocean” (36).³⁹ Despite the documented historical and cultural transactions between coastal East Africa and other regions in the western Indian Ocean, Chaudhuri dismisses outright the possibility of its inclusion and contribution to Indian Ocean culture.

In a more recent work on the Indian Ocean region that theorizes the importance of culture—poetry, in fact—in maintaining an “Indian Ocean culture” even after the dominance of colonial powers in the region, historian Sugata Bose criticizes Chaudhuri’s exclusion: “In Chaudhuri’s scheme the Indian Ocean blends imperceptibly into Asia,

³⁸ Some examples of scholarship that has shown the necessity of restoring Africa’s historical and cultural position within oceanic studies includes: Françoise Lionnet’s work (2011; 2012) on theories of creolization and the Indian Ocean islands; Isabel Hofmeyr’s work (2004; 2013) on the travel of particular texts, such as *Pilgrim’s Progress*, and their transformation along the way; Engseng Ho’s (2006) text on the cosmopolitan lives and afterlives of Hadrami Yeminis who circulated throughout the Indian Ocean region and helped to create a common culture. Studies by economic historians such as Gwyn Campbell account for Africa’s position in the pre-colonial historical trade; John Hawley’s work on the material cultural exchange between Africa and India places more or less similar emphasis on the two regions. But Chaudhuri’s statement is symptomatic of the elision of Africa in a cultural-historical *theory* of the Indian Ocean. See Gwyn Campbell, *The Indian Ocean Rim: Southern Africa and Regional Co-operation*; John C. Hawley, ed., *India in Africa, Africa in India*.

³⁹ See also, “Africa proper, as far as History goes back, has remained—for all purposes of connection with the rest of the World—shut up; it is the Gold-land compressed within itself. [...] Its isolated character originates, not merely in its tropical nature, but essentially in its geographical condition” (Hegel 91).

comprising four distinct but comparable ‘civilizations’—Islamic, Sanskritic Indian, Chinese, and Southeast Asian. [...] The limitations of Chaudhuri’s perspective become apparent in the marginalization of Africa” (11). This censure of Chaudhuri, well-placed as it is, is however addressed no further in Bose’s study. Africa isn’t part of Bose’s solution to Chaudhuri’s civilizational segregation. Instead, he resumes a project that theorizes the nineteenth- and twentieth-century Indian Ocean almost entirely through the movements of an Indian general, an Indian poet, Indian laborers, and Indian nationalism, thereby placing India at the center of the Indian Ocean, and everything else quite literally to the side.

These examples suggest that although the Indian Ocean provides deep and compelling possibilities for comparison and for new ways of viewing the geography of the Global South, there remains a seemingly impervious boundary between that coastal culture, its cosmopolitanism, its self-sufficiency, and the possibilities for Africa—particularly the Africa that has long been held as sequestered, outside, and holder of darkness and savagery—to be a robust participant in this Indian Ocean world in particular, and to the world generally. As Isabel Hofmeyr puts it, Africa’s invisibility within Indian Ocean studies forms a fault line in the field.⁴⁰

Our Burton example showed how Zanzibar’s link with Africa (and Burton’s Orientalist background) limited the possibility of its membership to the Indian Ocean world, and how the exterior bareness of its population solidified its separation from other civilizational forms. In Indian Ocean scholarship—nevermind other considerations of Africa

⁴⁰ My work here thus continues that performed by historians and literary critics alike, such as Gwyn Campbell (2010), R. J. Barendse (2000; 2003; 2009), Isabel Hofmeyr (2010), and Dan Ojwang (2011), who have argued that Africa’s contributions to Indian Ocean history and culture need be considered as equal rather than marginal.

in world history or systems theory—the perception of Africa, particularly interior Africa, as qualitatively different from Arab or Indian civilization has excised it from systematic considerations of world history. When we look at statements by someone like Chaudhuri, there’s actually very little difference between what has written and what Burton wrote a hundred years earlier. The only difference is that “indigenous African communities” and “a historical logic separate and independent from the rest” sound nicer than “barbarians,” “tribes,” and “savagery.” Those like Bose who have recognized a problem with the civilizational hierarchy that Chaudhuri proposed have either stopped at the moment of recognition, or have offered explanations of difference that still unconsciously operate according to an interior/coast dialectic.

My solution for viewing such connections vividly, and for opening up the possibility of revising those distinctions among island, coast, and interior (and those who dwelled there), is a close reading of the historical context of Tippu Tip’s text, and of the text itself.⁴¹ To be clear: Tippu Tip had no agenda to humanize the peoples of the interior, or to argue for an integrated view of the interior and coasts of Africa, in writing *Maisha*. He was more concerned with recollecting his past and, perhaps, regaining some of his former glory, since

⁴¹ My work answers Gwyn Campbell’s call for a more inclusive scope of Indian Ocean studies (though his work is mostly focused on the *economic* contributions Africa made to the Indian Ocean World global economy), “[I]t is important to replace conventional colonial demarcations of North, East, Central and Southern Africa with one that more accurately indicates the pre-colonial reality. For Africa’s precolonial relations with the first global economy, it is important to identify those regions of Africa (hereafter called ‘Indian Ocean Africa’ [IOA]) in close relations with the IOW [Indian Ocean World]” (173). The continued identification of Zanzibar and the Swahili coast with existing geographical, cultural, and social demarcations—or in accordance with extant theories of those geographies—reinforces the sequestration and exception of interior Africa from its own history. Therefore, those “rigid distinctions between a self-contained African ‘interior’ and an externally orientated coastal enclave need to be revised,” writes Indian Ocean historian Gwyn Campbell (2010). He continues: “Of central importance here is the recognition of two major interrelated economic systems, one terrestrial and the other maritime (*landscape* and *seascape*), and of the connections between them.” See also Pearson, *The Indian Ocean*.

by the time of his writing he had lost much of his fortune and property.⁴² Despite this, moments in *Maisha* tell a story about the interior—imagined and geographical—that supersedes even as it sidesteps Tippu Tip’s biography and prejudices.

Tippu Tip’s Interiors

i. The dark interior

After Sultan Seyyid Said moved the seat of his empire from Muscat, Oman, to Zanzibar in 1840, he turned his attention to the African mainland as a source of untapped wealth for his small island. He established treaties with the Nyamwezi, a powerful ethnic group that had theretofore controlled inland trade routes (and therefore inland trade), and thus the trade of commodities like ivory from the inland to the coast. Seyyid Said’s treaties ensured the safe passage of his caravans into the interior, and with this passage, enabled him to establish Zanzibari-Arab trade outposts into areas now part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Uganda, and along the shores of Lake Tanganyika.⁴³ The Arab merchants’ steady stream of capital from Indian businessmen (also known as Banyans) from Zanzibar steadily depressed Nyamwezi dominance in the region. Consequently, Nyamwezi leaders purposed to regain control of the trade routes (and the profits) that they had ceded to the Arabs. The trade routes that etched the face of the African soil soon themselves became crisscrossed

⁴² Geider (1992), recognizing the varied and unusual nature of Tippu Tip’s narrative, writes, “Tippu Tip’s interests seem to be as diverse as his account, which is full of name-dropping, detailed episodes, mercantile references and recorded speeches which one must be proud contemplating in the evening of life. The fact that Tippu Tip was tried for the murder of Major Barttelot might have caused him to justify one or other of his deeds, as he had an interest in appearing honourable e.g. in the question of the slave trade” (62).

⁴³ The routes originated at the Indian Ocean in modern Tanzania, and proceeded in a mostly northwesterly direction around the north shore of Lake Tanganyika, and either went north toward Uganda or to the west/southwest to the DRC.

with the blood of *askaris* (mercenaries) and merchants, African and Arab alike. This is more or less the climate into which Hamed bin Mohammed, soon to be Tippu Tip, stepped when he ventured inland; this is the environment that shaped and propelled his narrative.

Tippu Tip at first spent his time on trips to the inland, subduing lesser powers, and gaining control of trade routes. As I've mentioned already, his manner of gaining control was what earned him his nickname—or so he claimed. Early in his narrative, Tippu Tip recounts some of these early battles with the Nyamwezi ruler Samu. He had just won a skirmish, he said, and rather than continuing on his trading caravan with his relatives, he decided that he wanted to destroy Samu completely: “Hawaambia, Mimi siondoki ila niwapige hata walete amani. Haazimu vita” (54§31) [I said, I am not leaving until I have completely defeated them, and they offer peace. I had decided on war]. Tippu Tip dispatched some of his men to search the surrounding area for any straggling men still loyal to Samu, but they found someone else instead: “Wakaenda watu katika vita kabla hawajafika wanakokwenda wakakuta Mzungu mwingereza, mkubwa, jina lake Livingstone, na jina la bara akajiita Devid” (54§32) [The men went out in preparation for war, but before they could do so, they met an Englishman, an important man, Livingstone by name, called David (55§32, translation modified)]. They had found, in 1867, the man that all of England thought lost.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ In the years after Tippu Tip's initial meeting with Livingstone, the Western world considered Livingstone “lost,” because he did not make contact with Britain for six years. The loss of Livingstone caused the commencement of rescue exhibitions, one of which was funded in March 1871 by the *New York Herald*, and headed by journalist cum explorer Henry Morton Stanley. Stanley found Livingstone in Ujiji in November 1871, but word of Stanley's discovery did not reach Britain before the Royal Geographical Society launched its own exhibition, led by Llewellyn Dawson, in February 1872. The steamship carrying Dawson and his convoy was the first of its type to pass through the newly opened Suez Canal to arrive at Zanzibar. Upon arrival, the steamship encountered the severe cyclone that Tippu Tip mentions above (April 15, 1872), and was the only ship that was not grounded. Dawson encountered Stanley in Bagamoyo (coastal city in Tanzania) in May 1872, who told him about having found Livingstone in Ujiji. Dawson promptly returned to England. Because Livingstone did not return to Zanzibar as anticipated, by the end of 1872, the Royal

Before elaborating on Livingstone, though, Tippu Tip finishes narrating his defeat of Samu—including the detailed terms of the tribute he received—and describes their next trading destination. After this exposition, he returns to the Livingstone affair, remarking

Na Livingstone tunaye hata masurufu hana bidhaa. Tukamchukua mimi na Said bin Ali. Akataka watu kumpelekea Mweru. Akaenda, akaregea, akataka kwenda Runda kwa Kazembe. . . . Nasi twalimwarifu anakuwasilia Livingstone, mheshimu sana, asikasiri. (54§32)

[As for Livingstone, he had neither goods nor rations. Said bin Ali and I took him in. He wanted guides to take him to Lake Mweru. He went, came back, wanting then to go to Runda-Kazembe. . . . We sent word to this man that one Livingstone would be arriving and that he was to respect him and not give him any trouble. (55§32, translation modified)]

When Tippu Tip’s men found him, Livingstone was embarking on what seems the necessary entrée into nineteenth-century exploration: seeking the source of the Nile. This, despite Speke’s lauded claim in 1859 that he had discovered that the Nile flowed from Lake Victoria. Livingstone, like Burton, was unconvinced. He therefore embarked from Zanzibar in 1865 for his final journey to the interior, outfitted with supplies, camels, and porters.⁴⁵ By the time he entered Tippu Tip’s narrative, Livingstone had been exploring around Lake Nyasa (near present-day Malawi), with a dwindling entourage and supplies.

This moment in *Maisha* could be interpreted, as Leda Farrant would have it, as proof that Tippu Tip was a Europhile and helped explorers because they fascinated him (Farrant 43).⁴⁶ The detail of this interaction, however, as documented by both Tippu Tip and

Geographical Society funded another expedition, this one led by Verney Lovett Cameron. Cameron was met in the city of Kazeh in August 1873 by a group of porters carrying Livingstone’s body. He had died on May 2 of that year.

⁴⁵ To be precise: “six camels, three buffaloes, and a calf, two mules, and four donkeys. I have thirteen Sepoys, ten Johanna men, nine Nassick boys, two Shupanga men, and two Wayaus, Wekatani and Chuma.” We have to give him credit for preparation and precision. This is the entry from Livingstone’s journal, dated 18 March, 1866.

⁴⁶ Farrant refers to Tippu Tip as “Livingstone’s gentleman slaver” later in the book (56), which seems a wildly inaccurate reading of this interaction.

Livingstone,⁴⁷ emphasizes its transactional nature. While Livingstone listed the particular items Tippu Tip provided him, Tippu Tip's words communicate his largesse toward Livingstone, and how his position of power in the interior allowed him to protect and grant passage to whom he would. "Tukamchukua mimi na Said bin Ali," Tippu Tip says, which literally translated means "we carried him" or "we supported him." Tippu Tip's material generosity, as far as he was concerned, enabled Livingstone to live and to move freely within the interior, not the other way around.

This anecdote spans only three paragraphs of the larger narrative. In the recounting of the incident, and also in the incident itself, center and periphery reverse. Livingstone, empire, and concerns of geography and conquering, existed on the periphery of Tippu Tip's domain. They enter momentarily, consume resources, and exit the scene. The retelling and the actual instance seem not to have moved Tippu Tip's world in the least, despite the fact that according to the larger political reality of the day, Livingstone's presence was a sign of the coming European colonial reign in the region.

So it was: seven years after Tippu Tip's encounter with Livingstone, and within less than two years, February 1874 and October of 1876, he encountered and guided both Verney Lovett Cameron and Henry Morton Stanley through the central African inland. Both Cameron and Stanley were brought to the interior on missions to find Livingstone, but stayed on to accomplish feats of geographical exploration. For Cameron, this meant carrying out the first equatorial crossing of Africa from ocean to ocean; for Stanley, completing bevy

⁴⁷ In Livingstone's diary, the entry for 29 July, 1867. "Went 2½ hours west to village of Ponda, where a head Arab, called by the natives Tipo Tipo, lives; his name is Hamid bin Mahamed bin Juma Borajib. He presented a goat, a piece of white calico, and four big bunches of beads, also a bag of *Holcus sorghum*, and apologised because it was so little." Livingstone, *The Last Journals*.

of exploits, including finding Livingstone and following the Congo River from source to mouth. Though the London *Times* would memorialize Tippu Tip as “the famous Arab merchant and slave trader of the Upper Congo who was associated with Cameron and Stanley in their expeditions across Africa,” Tippu Tip says almost nothing about his actual experiences guiding Cameron, and we have already seen how he viewed his interactions with Stanley (“Death of Tippoo Tib” 5).

As critics, we pay attention to these moments in texts because we are interested in David Livingstone, not Tippu Tip, or we hope to make Tippu Tip important by association. And, of course, we know that it turns out that Livingstone is famous—it’s a kind of reading in hindsight that misreads the text by reading it within the frame of how history turned out. There’s more to this than understanding *ourselves* as readers of historical documents, though: there’s the fact of Tippu Tip’s reading of this incident, too. In writing his narrative near the end of his life at the turn of the twentieth century, he was all too aware of the importance of these men, and what their arrival meant for the eventual dissolution of his power.⁴⁸ In his narration of the Livingstone incident, he names the explorer “mtu mkubwa” [an important person]; yet, after Livingstone leaves the frame, Tippu Tip continues to narrate events as though it never happened. Rather, he crafts a tightly sequential perspective, which neither acknowledges the significance of Livingstone nor hints extra-diegetically at what he would later know about what Livingstone’s explorations meant for Europe in Africa. The diegetic

⁴⁸ In a conversation documented only by Stanley, Tippu Tip says that he would like to visit England before he dies. Stanley constructs this incident in light of Tippu Tip’s supposed awe of the whites after seeing Cape Town. Stanley quotes the purported dialogue. The explorer says: “If you have discovered so much, Tippu-Tib, then you are on the high road to discover more. The white men require a deal of study before you can quite make them out. It is a pity you never went to England for a visit.” Tippu Tip responds: “I hope to go there before I die.” Stanley recreates this moment as a moment of enlightenment for Tippu Tip, places him on a ship in Cape Town harbor, viewing the city as a light against the darkness of the continent. Stanley, *In Darkest Africa*, 1:74–75.

Tippu Tip keeps his gaze trained on the present and immediate future, and travels between trading posts in the interior, and then, always, back to the coast, where journeys became monetized.

What might this mean for the narrative itself, and for the kind of world that our author presents? At a basic level, it *is* his story, so perhaps he wanted to minimize the importance of others in order to place his accomplishments into greater relief. Regardless of (and perhaps because of) his intentions, *Maisha's* refusal to elevate the explorer incidents above the mundane marks its disinterest in colonial metaphors, according to which the explorer acts as part and symbol of the empire, his narrative a narrative of the country he represents. The epic tenor of those explorers' movements, and so their travel journals, also depended on the existence of a dark African interior to navigate. Tippu Tip engaged with the same geographies as the explorers—even territories that he considered “unknown”—but in his tightly sequential, quotidian narrative, he shows a subtler, complex structure to that same “darkness.”

Elsewhere, the Livingstone incident reinforced ideas of interior Africa's isolation, troped as the tendency of not only individuals, but news and messages, to be lost in transit from the “jungle” to the coast and Europe. Silence from the interior, however, was sometimes a message of refusal, instead of an example of the interior's absorption and annulment of knowledge. When Tippu Tip received Stanley's picture and his meager payment, the messengers also brought a message from the new sultan of Zanzibar, Seyyid Barghash, which instructed him to return immediately to Zanzibar to repay a loan to the customs agent, Taria Topan. Tippu Tip at first laments that “sikujua [...] khabari ya kuja Seyyid Majid, wala khabari ya kimbunga, ilipoanguka miti Unguja. Sina khabari, wala

kutawala Seyid Barghash, sina khabari. Hapata khabari siku hiyo, wala vita vya Tabora” (104§103) [I didn’t know the news about the death of Seyyid Majid, or the news about the cyclone that uprooted trees in Zanzibar. I didn’t have the news, even about the rule of Seyyid Barghash, I didn’t have news. I wasn’t given the news then, even about the war in Tabora (105§103, trans. modified)]. The repetition of the phrase “sina khabari” four times within three sentences underscores his isolation from Zanzibar and coast while in the African hinterland. He did not know of the politics, the tempest, the death of one faraway ruler and the ascension of another. Note, however, Tippu Tip’s response to Barghash’s party: “Nami sikusema neno. Wale turushi waliokuja hawaweka mwaka, haazimu safari” (118§123, 120§123) [But I said not a word. The messengers who arrived I put off for a year and then decided to travel (119§123, 121§123, trans. modified)].

Circumstantial and created ignorance push against one another in this incident’s retelling: Tippu Tip first bemoans how, during his fourteen years in the hinterland, he did not receive news of events from home. Because he constantly traveled, or because some snare entangled the messenger during his journey inland, he did not know of them. After this lament, though, Tippu Tip himself contributes to the evidence of a supposedly aphasic interior: rather than respond to Barghash, to Stanley, or (so it seems) to the messengers themselves, he says nothing. The silence that greeted Barghash, that greeted Stanley from the interior, contributed to the narratives of the African interior that they chose to construct. For Barghash, perhaps it was the interior silence of Tippu Tip, who refused to return to Zanzibar to pay his debts; for Stanley, it was the silence of the “dark interior [...] still unknown to the world” (*Through the Dark Continent* 1:2). For Tippu Tip, this silence was a strategic response to a political situation he was trying to avoid.

Tippu Tip's pragmatic approach to the "darkness" of the interior shows how he capitalized on the benefits its reputation afforded him, and his awareness that, from the outside, a refusal to answer looked the same as a lost message or dead messenger (at least for a little while). That we are also reading the geographical (and even personal) African interiors from that outside perspective ought to give us pause when we interpret the fuzzy, vague, or silent "messages" issued or withheld from those spaces.

Maisha's depiction of the interior further counters prevailing nineteenth-century representations in Tippu Tip's retelling of an incident that seemed to have surprised even him. Keep in mind that Tippu Tip called himself a Zanzibari Arab: His attitudes toward peoples of the interior aligned with not only with European views of the time, but also with how Muslim dwellers of the coast tended to view them. Though Tippu Tip in the narrative routinely differentiates interior-dwellers according to location or group, he routinely refers to them as *washenzi*, or as "pagans" or "barbarians," as opposed to himself and his civilized compatriots. (This prejudice is likely what freed him to capture and sell these individuals as slaves, too.)

Tippu Tip's assumptions about the savage peoples of the interior were challenged when he entered Irande, a region west of Lake Tanganyika, which he considered "unknown country" (89§84). An understated amazement enters the narrative as he explains the nature and organization of this space: "[M]iji iliyomo mikubwa mno ya ajabu, haina kiasi. Na shughuli yao kufuma viramba. Na miji yao hujenga huko majumba na huko majumba, kana situri ya migharofuu" (88§85) [The villages were wonderfully large, and without number. (The people's) work was to weave *viramba* cloth. The villages were built around a central space, and looked like clumps of clove trees (89§85, translation modified)]. To this

description, he adds that one could walk for six or seven hours, and all of the houses and villages followed this organizational pattern. The locals, as they wove their *viramba*, noticed that Tippu Tip and his entourage carried guns, and so approached him: “Bunduki tulizo nazo hutuuliza hii mituwangu? Maana mituwangu michi ya kutwangia, nasi huitika wakidhani michi” (88§85) [Of the guns that we had with us, they asked, “Are these pestles?” (The meaning of the word they used is a pestle used for pounding.) [*sic*] And we replied that they were pestles (89§85, translation modified)].

The sophisticated construction of the villages in Irande impressed Tippu Tip, but a symptom of its isolation from the coast surfaces in a question about the gun. This question would seem a mark of ignorance, a mark of their absence from the push of technology and the movement of goods. But more interesting than the question is the answer. Tippu Tip and his men, rather than explain the function of the gun, instead allow the Warua to maintain their ignorance. Inasmuch as the pestle-gun conjoins knowledge and ignorance, it becomes a symbol, at least for us, of the African interior within and beyond the 1870s.⁴⁹ “Darkness” or “the dark interior” has continued to serve as shorthand for what Achille Mbembe has called the supposed temporal schism wrought by spatial separation (259).⁵⁰ Tippu Tip’s movement into an unknown land and his encounter with the locals would seem to buttress the concept of a temporal/spatial schism and offer evidence of the interior’s

⁴⁹ In a wonderful (deliberately comic?) reversal, Tippu Tip recounts a few paragraphs later that as they passed through another area, “people were hostile and stole from us, but we were patient; because they had arranged it so that we had no weapons, we carried pestles” (91§88, trans. modified).

⁵⁰ Mbembe’s starting point is Fernand Braudel’s theory of “world time,” which describes a grand movement of time and history, a “superstructure of world history.” Braudel argues, “There are always some areas world history does not reach, zones of silence and undisturbed ignorance” (18). This theory, writes Mbembe operates within configurations of the African interior even now; part of what I’m doing here is to show one of the ways that Tippu Tip’s text troubles Braudel’s theory. Fernand Braudel, *Civilization and Capitalism 15th–18th Century: The Perspective of the World*.

absence from the push of Indian Ocean cosmopolitanism. The pestle-gun shows, though, that the darkness was not a truth, but a tool. Ignorance was strategically created and molded for Tippu Tip's purposes. It both was and was not the consequence of geographic isolation; in neither case could it guarantee a "historical logic" separate from that of the coast, the Indian Ocean, or Europe.

The pestle-gun incident also shows us a rare moment when Tippu Tip acts as an "explorer." He usually describes his journeys through familiar routes; the same location names surface again and again. Here, though, he goes into the "deep" interior, in a place outside his territory. He finds, much to his astonishment, a not chaos, but order; not violence, but dialogue. His heuristics of the interior were slightly rearranged. It seems that, here, the people of the interior were doing just fine without the civilizing reach of Islam, Christianity, or anything that resembled the coastal culture.

Whether the interior was known, unknown, or even knowable, depended on whom you asked. The parts of Tippu Tip's text that can be deemed autobiographical suggest that he himself likely would have responded that the interior was a place to find wealth, and its most civilized portions were where the Arabs had established their trade outposts. As for those from hinterland, most were savages; some could be trusted, some could not. *Maisha*, despite Tippu Tip, not only revises old boundaries between interior and coast, but also demonstrates that the fluidity with which knowledge, technology, and goods could pass between those regions was at times regulated by those in power, rather than by, say, hostile natives or by treacherous jungle.

With this reading, we can begin to see how *Maisha*, and texts like it, can show us untold parts of history in spite of themselves; or, rather in spite of their authors' stated aims.

Though this narrative is a story of a Zanzibari Muslim who dominated and sold the resources and inhabitants of the African interior, we find in these incidents (and others yet to be analyzed) an alternative story of that commoditized and exploited interior. This alternative story shows an interior that at first absorbs and accommodates Europeans, as far as we can see in Tippu Tip's story; an interior whose "darkness" has been crafted from the outside as an absence of knowledge or civility, when in the cases seen here, it has been a willed withholding of information. The most interior of the interior spaces that Tippu Tip visited surprised him—and even though the Warua didn't "know" what the gun was, we have a new view of this area of the world whose way of being revises typical representations of the African interior in the nineteenth century.

Inasmuch as that dark interior was created mostly by the external drawing of lines between civilized and uncivilized, coast and interior, so it was with Tippu Tip and his narrative. His reputation as slave trader, as well of the circumstances of the narrative's recording, have influenced its generic classification, and have circumscribed *Maisha* and subsequent readings and interpretations of it. If we understand the geographical realities of Africa's relationship to the Indian Ocean as exceeding the classifications placed upon it,⁵¹ we must also recognize the excess produced (but ignored or criticized) in the history of reading, analyzing, and, ultimately, classifying and grasping not only Tippu Tip's writing, but also other instances of African writing. The reading that I perform in the remainder of this chapter focuses on that excess, tracing and questioning those various genres in turn.

⁵¹ Gwyn Campbell (2010) claims that the standard means of understanding African regions is also limiting (and imposed from outside), which is why he proposes doing away with sub-Saharan (and its attendant East, West, Central, Southern) and North Africa, in favor of, for our purposes, the Indian Ocean Africa (173). I assume that though Campbell doesn't mention it, we could also classify Africa in term of its neighboring bodies of water, much as has already been done with Paul Gilroy (1993) with the Atlantic and Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell (2006) with the Mediterranean.

ii. Genre: A story of containment

It didn't much matter to Tippu Tip in what year he was born, or where. For him, life began at age twelve, when he was first invited to join his father on a trading expedition from Zanzibar to the African inland, where they would acquire copal. This is how the narrative begins:

Nilipopata miaka thenashara, nalishika safari za karibu. Hafanza biashara ya sandarusi, pamoja na ndugu yangu Muhammed bin Masud el Wardi na mjomba wangu Bushiri bin Habib wa Abdallah bin Habib el Wardijan. Nachukua bidhaa kidogo, maana kijana. Nao wao ndugu yangu na wajomba wangu wakichukua bidhaa nyingi kidogo. Hufanza biashara ya sandarusi mwaka mmoja. (38§1)

[When I was twelve, I started to go on local trips. I traded in copal,⁵² together with my brother Muhammed bin Masud el Wardi and my uncle Bushiri bin Habib, and Abdallah bin Habib el Wardijan. I only took small loads, as I was merely a youth. My brother and my uncles carried rather more. This trade we carried on for a year.] (39§1)

This Muslim Zanzibari opens his narrative abruptly and personally with, “When I was twelve”—in Kiswahili, “Nilipopata miaka thenashara.” The prefix “ni” boldly asserts the first-person singular, an abrupt and personal overture focused on the “I” of the narrator.

This assertion of the narratorial “I” supplants the traditional invocation of Allah—*Bismillah il-Rahman wa il-Rahim*, in the name of God, the Merciful and Benevolent. Thus, this text, and this view of the world, seem to mark the advent of the individual, rather the religious or secular collective.⁵³ This “I” is determined by its entrance into a trade (that of copal, which

⁵² The original translation reads “gum-copal” but I have changed it to “copal,” since gum-copal is a different commodity that was traded from the South Pacific islands almost exclusively.

⁵³ Kristen Brustad and her coauthors write that in order for an Arab autobiography to point at the same time to the greatness of God and the life of man, the Muslim writer followed a schema of sorts. First, he showed his spiritual and anthropological pedigrees: in accordance with the Qur’an, he opens the texts with the *Bismillah*, and he displays a long history of Arabic autobiographies, which he hopes his narrative will join (Brustad 2, 3). To omit the *Bismillah* was tantamount to dangerous hubris at the

was shipped to India and Europe), an entrance enabled not by Tippu Tip's will or ingenuity, but by his family.⁵⁴

From here, the narrative transitions from its initial 'Nilipopata miaka...' [When I was . . . years old] in the first two paragraphs, to the language that composes the remainder of the text: that of movement and travel. The transition to "Nilipokwenda" (39§3) and "tukavuka" (39§4) ["when I went," and "we crossed (a lake)," respectively] indicates a definitive break with the opening of the text, which, though we didn't know it at the time, was itself a break. The initial "I" of the opening paragraph drops away even further as the narrative continues, and is obscured by a continual invocation of the group and its travel through the interior.

That pattern of movement, movement that is unexplained, distances unmarked, hardship unmentioned, has led Thomas Geider to suggest reading the narrative as a travelogue.⁵⁵ Seeming to bolster this claim are the pages that follow the so-called "autobiographical" opening. Staccatos of going, crossing, and traveling build in subsequent pages to a prolonged cadence of movement between villages, then back to the coast, then back to the interior again, in search of the best cache of ivory and the best prices for that

least, and sacrilege at the worst. Many Swahili-language literary texts roughly contemporary with Tippu Tip's narrative, such as the poem "Al-Inkishafi" (ca. 1810), follow the Islamic tradition, so Tippu Tip's omission thereof is significant.

⁵⁴ Tippu Tip's father's marital connections with a ruling family in the interior made possible his later rise to power. In the second paragraph of the text, he explains that six years after his initial journey, he was permitted his first major expedition to the interior: "Nilipopata miaka themintashara, baba yangu Muhammed bin Juma, alikuwa msafiri, yeye na jema zake waliazimu safari ya kwenda Ugangi [...] Unyamwezi, Tabora. Na hapa Tabora alikuwa yeye kana sultani" (38§2) [When I was eighteen, my father, Muhammed bin Juma, went on a journey; he and his kinsmen decided to go to Ugangi. [...] Unyamwezi country, Tabora. In Tabora he was comparable to a chief" (39§2)]. To travel to the land of the Nyamwezi—and, even more, to have familial connections with the Nyamwezi was to enter into an alliance with the kings of the interior. See Michael Pesek, "Cued Speeches," and Rockel, *Carriers of Culture*.

⁵⁵ Geider (1992, 40–41) notes that this is a common trope among other travelogue writers, though this is different from the sort of "travelogue" we are accustomed to in the Western tradition.

ivory.

In the span of one page, for instance, Tippu Tip mentions that he went from Tabora to Zanzibar to Ngao and Nyasa to Mahenge to Uhehe to Urori to Fipa to Nyamwanga to Ruemba to Urugu to Zanzibar again. Anecdotes about wars, leaders, and ivory acquisition occasionally correspond with location, but Tippu Tip ignores the attributes of the geography itself, despite the fact that the distance from Tabora to Zanzibar, for example, is some 450 miles, and that from Zanzibar to Nyasa is another 450 miles. Surely the land presented difficulties and opportunities, but in contrast to Burton and Stanley's focus on representing the terrain, Tippu Tip, though a foreigner in the interior, makes a poor tour guide indeed.

Due to the intensive and far-flung movement in the narrative, *Maisha* has been included in several studies of Swahili-language and/or nineteenth-century East African writing. Even then, however, grouped with travelogues by Swahili traders roughly Tippu Tip's contemporaries, the narrative squirms under the heavy weight of its awkward generic fit. As Geider explains in his study of early Swahili travelogues, his logic for including *Maisha* in his analysis is "because in large parts it could be regarded as a travelogue or 'memoir' rather than an autobiography, [because] it lacks a certain introspection" (39).⁵⁶ For this scholar, this text's shortcomings as an autobiography, particularly its focus on the events exterior to Tippu Tip, rather than those experienced internally, warrant its placement among "memoirs" or Swahili travel narratives.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ I'm not sure why the word "memoir" requires scare quotes in Geider's article, except to signal its qualitative difference from an autobiography.

⁵⁷ Jack D. Rollins postulates that Tippu Tip may have been beholden by the requirements of Arab historians not to act as a *mujafaza*, or a historian who dared to give his opinion on the truth of prior events. Such concern, Rollins says, leads Tippu Tip only to mention his concerns or opinions as asides folded into other moments of narrative. Early Swahili prose autobiographies and memoirs, apart from Selemani bin Chande's *Safari Yangu*, have this in common. See Jack D. Rollins, *A History of Swahili Prose*. See especially chapter 3: "The Swahili Memoir, Autobiography and Early Prose Fiction."

This explanation drives at the core of the issue of genre: Geider views the text in parts, and then (it seems), weighs the portions that seem like autobiography against those that seem like travelogue. In this case, travelogue wins. Translations and studies before and after Geider's have disagreed, or, at a minimum, have chosen to focus on the autobiographical or chronicle-like sections of the text. When the *Maisha* was republished in 1958 and 1959 as a supplement to the *Journal of the East African Swahili Committee* (in Kiswahili and English), the journal's editors (perhaps unintentionally, perhaps ironically) patterned its title after an African American slave narrative: *Maisha ya Hamed bin Muhammed el Murjebi, yaani Tippu Tip, kwa Maneno Mwenyewe*, or "The Life of Hamed bin Muhammed el Murjebi, called Tippu Tip, in His Own Words." Then came the French translation in the 1970s (Bontinck 1974), whose title described the text again as autobiography (*L'autobiographie de Hamed ben Mohammed*), and, most recently, the Arabic translation in 2005 (al-Mahruqi), which classifies the text as an exotic adventure tale (literally, "an Omani adventurer in an African jungle"), and subordinates the autobiography to the subtitle (*Hayat [. . .] Tibu Tib, sirah dhatiyah* [the life of [. . .] Tippu Tip, an autobiography]).

Whether a text leans toward adventure tale, autobiography, or travel narrative depends in large part upon narrative mode—in what *style* the author presents his world, and, in this case, himself. A narrative mode that wavers near stasis inches Tippu Tip's story along, it focuses on the commodity and its market, and touches here and there on a quasi-autobiographical detail. Tippu Tip, for instance, relates that his decision to trade small tusks rather than large ones brought him much wealth (40§4; 41§4), and blames the difficulty of transporting ivory, not on environmental hardships, but on unreliable porters (44§14; 45§14). A few pages later, he notes that his departure from the coast was delayed because he

wanted to go to a wedding (62§44; 63§44), that he disagreed about whom his father should marry (64§48; 65§48), that six more men from his caravan died of cholera the morning after many had died of the same illness (64§46; 65§46). These disparate details occupy the same space in the narrative; they are given the same narratorial weight as, say, receiving news that the sultan of Zanzibar had died (105§103).

Perhaps Tippu Tip's orientation toward the real is strange for us because it combines perspectives typically separated within the Western mimetic tradition. Tippu Tip's undifferentiated narratorial attention amounts to a compressed foreground and background in the text, a feature relatively rare in the West. The two diverging foundations of Western realist narration, according to Erich Auerbach in *Mimesis*, are found in the *Odyssey* and the Old Testament story of Abraham and Isaac. Homer, he explains, narrates Euryclea's realization that the stranger she attends to is the long-absent Odysseus in a scene "scrupulously externalized and narrated in leisurely fashion" (3); Odysseus, Euryclea, and Penelope "express their feelings in copious direct discourse" (3). The superfluity of narration fills the scene with detail, leaving little question about the character's feelings and thoughts. This Auerbach compares to the story of Abraham's call by God to sacrifice his son Isaac in the book of Genesis. This equally epic, equally ancient tale, he says, is propelled by absences and questions, rather than detail. Who is God? From whence does he speak? Who is Abraham, and what does he think about God's command to sacrifice his beloved son? God appears "from some unspecified place [...]. [O]f Abraham too nothing is made perceptible except the words in which he answers God [...]. [I]t is left to the reader to visualize" (9). In Genesis, the silences of the characters create a relative emptiness, a flatness of both the actors and the stage, and so craft an imaginative-moral space where the reader can fit herself

and also learn to obey. The narrative mode, and the fullness or sparseness of the *Odyssey* and Genesis thus construct worlds differently oriented toward realism or the real; both, though, inform the ways in which the mimetic operates in Western texts.

Returning, then, to *Maisha* and its particular narrative mode: Tippu Tip's mimetic sensibility unconsciously bridges aspects of the Homeric and Elohistic approaches to the real. Because Tippu Tip provides details about tusks and the death toll from cholera in a measure equal to those about his dealings with European explorers, his narrative has "a strong sense of total foregroundedness, which is, in effect, the mark of *zero amplitude*: a very small or even nonexistent gap between foreground and background material" (Hayot, "On Literary Worlds" 144). What results is the sense that determining the rightful owner of a dead elephant's tusks was just as important to Tippu Tip as meeting David Livingstone. (Perhaps it was.) While Tippu Tip's mundane recollections fill the foreground, and so craft a densely organized African interior, Tippu Tip withholds his *interiority* (the "lack" that Geider noted).⁵⁸ Even as Tippu Tip fashions his environment as a cacophony of the quotidian, this "autobiographer" fashions himself as a collection of silences. In this sense, Tippu Tip resembles the biblical Abraham, who is portrayed not as an individual, but only in relation to other characters, and to the story itself (Auerbach 10). For, as in the Old Testament, Tippu Tip's "speech does not serve, as does speech in Homer, to manifest, to externalize thoughts—on the contrary, it serves to indicate thoughts which remain unexpressed" (Auerbach 11). Tippu Tip, then, presents himself as an Abraham in the *Odyssey*, an endlessly interpretable character in the midst of a "uniformly illuminated" geography (Auerbach 7).

⁵⁸ Or, it could be that this *was* his interiority; we just don't recognize it as such, since it looks different from the expressions we're accustomed to.

Maisha ya Hamed bin Muhammed is in this way a synthesis—or, perhaps, for the Western reader, a jarring dissonance—of Auerbach’s aesthetic antitheses. The point of this observation, though, is not that an African text resolves a European paradox, but rather that, during the lifespan of this text, its stylistics of compression resulted in sense of inherent textual tension—a tension that could resolve only by disaggregating the narrative and deeming various parts as more or less aligned with Western genres. If, instead, we view this tension *not* as a tension, but as an organic feature of the aesthetic of the text (imagining perhaps that such an aesthetic has something to do with the world in which he lived), we then can see how *Maisha*’s compression of the interpretable and the indecipherable, the epic and the everyday, enables readings of this text that permit a view of the social and imaginative structures governing the African interior in the nineteenth century.

The impulse to assign a genre to Tippu Tip’s text after its translation and circulation in Germany, then throughout Europe and elsewhere, and then to deem the text as a bad example of that genre (or as not quite fitting its conventions, and thus existing slightly to the side of canonical European examples), points to a larger problem that still exists in the study of “minor” colonial and postcolonial literatures. In the African case, one manifestation of the problem is a shortened genealogy of literary writing, since many pre-1958 writings don’t necessarily fit Western generic classifications of novel, short story, chronicle, travelogue, or autobiography. Tippu Tip’s narrative therefore relates to the question of genre both in terms of how it eludes standard European means of classification (is it autobiography or chronicle? Why does this classification matter?); and in terms of how it relates to history: why do we read certain texts from the past, and how does the way that we read its form/genre inflect our understanding of that past, and the place from which it arises?

In order to begin to answer these questions, it is incumbent upon us to recognize the possibility that *Maisha*—and, indeed, other non-Western texts—could reside within a genre yet to be named, a genre that allows us to view Africa differently. This genre could be defined by its compression of time and space through the view of the narrator, and indeed, by how it presents the narrators' thoughts, opinions, interiority. The combination of Tippu Tip's individual obsession with commerce and his cultural orientation toward the overlapping worlds of the interior and coast—or, crudely, interior Africa and the Indian Ocean—birthed this disorienting narrative that acts at various moments like an European chronicle, autobiography, and travelogue.⁵⁹ By reading it in accordance with its formal novelties rather than despite them, we can discern an inner African life-world in the writings of a coastal dweller who thought the interior peoples separate from his trade, his culture, and his religion.

The tension between calling this text an autobiography, as Brode did, and observing what others have called Tippu Tip's "lack of interiority," according to a reading such as this, serves as a metaphor for the African interior itself. The "darkness" attributed to the African interior, and even to Tippu Tip's interior, arose from a willful withholding rather than a blank absence, and from a series of readings that mistook geographical distance for distance from humanity.

The darkness of the interior, in this sense, was also a darkness imposed upon Tippu Tip. His own words, because of their restraint and attention to the mundane, hardly compete with the narratives that Stanley or Heinrich Brode or later scholars constructed about him.

⁵⁹ On form's effect upon the narration of history, see Hayden White; for analysis of the unattached explorer-traveler in the foreign land, see Mary Louise Pratt's classic study, *Imperial Eyes*; on autobiography/life narratives, see Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson.

Tippu Tip closes his narrative with the following note about his text:

Hayo niliyoandika yote. Sikuzidisha neno na mengi nimeyaacha. Hayo nimeandika mukhtasari na baadhi ya maneno ya mbele nimeandika nyuma. Maana siku nyingi zimepita, sennin. Lakini maneno yote niliyoandika, hayana khitalafu. Yote haya sahihi, hapana shaka. (168§183)

[I have written everything. I have neither added anything nor have I omitted much. I have written an abridgement; some earlier material I have written later, because you will appreciate a long time has passed! But everything is here; nothing is lacking. Everything is straightforward, there are no doubts. (169§183)]

Evidence of abbreviation nestles alongside boasts of totality. An assertion of clarity closes a text which, to all save Tippu Tip, offers a vague view of both the man and the lands that he traveled. And, in the middle of this excerpt: “baadhi ya maneno ya mbele nimeandika nyuma.” Literally translated, this sentence reads, “some of the words in front I have written behind,” and so marks a spatial configuration of the temporal act of remembering, of writing, a life and a geography. This messy conclusion that overlaps time and space, the whole and the part, serves as a fitting metaphor for the African interior that Tippu Tip did not know that he presented to us.

A Coda: The River of the Future

Against *Maisha*'s multivalent imaginary, Burton's monadic configuration of the interior would win.

When Tippu Tip returned to Zanzibar in early 1887,⁶⁰ Barghash exhorted him to

⁶⁰ Tippu Tip first returned to the coast and Zanzibar on November 22, 1882. On the day of Tippu Tip's arrival in Zanzibar, both the Belgians and Sultan Barghash offered him a position as official interior representative of their respective entities. He rejected the Belgian offer, saying that he was under the dominion of the Sultan, and so could not be aligned with the Belgians. When Tippu Tip relayed this conversation to Barghash, the latter realized the profound threat that the Belgians posed in the interior, and that his concerns should no longer be about controlling the trade routes, but rather laying claim to lands. Tippu Tip leaves for Tabora, but only after staying in Zanzibar for eight

abandon his loyalties to Zanzibar, and to attend to his own concerns. Soon thereafter, Stanley approached him. The explorer had been sent on yet another relief mission, this time to rescue the beleaguered Emin Pasha.⁶¹ Tippu Tip agreed to provide porters, and also to accompany him as far as Stanley Falls, a depot on the Congo River that sat in the center of the cone portion of the African continent, almost exactly equidistant to both coasts. They prepared for departure in the usual fashion—gathering goods, people, and supplies—but rather than journeying to the east coast as most did, Stanley steered his boat toward the Cape of Good Hope, rounded the tip of South Africa, and then proceeded toward the mouth of the Congo.

The decision to take a steamer up the Congo rather than traveling overland to Stanley Falls was a practical one: Stanley had initially opted for the east coast route, but the politics of the newly internationalized Africa prohibited his movement from east to west: “We had no sooner adopted the East Coast route than the Sovereign of the Congo State invited the Expedition to pass through his territory; the Germans had murmured, and the French Government protested at the idea of our marching through East Africa” (*In Darkest Africa* 1:77). Such a statement marks the realities of post-Berlin Conference Africa: Stanley was no longer concerned about receiving travel permissions from the sultan of Zanzibar,

months, despite Barghash’s urgings that he leave hastily for the interior. He was gone for three years, traveling to various villages, gathering ivory, visiting Stanley Falls, which had become an important Arab trading post. Along the way, he mentions finding porters for British missionaries, unprecedented until this portion of the narrative. After a few more trips from the interior to the coast, Barghash tells him that the game is up, and the Europeans are in control now. He gives Tippu Tip permission to look out for himself, instead of representing Zanzibar. The conversation with Stanley soon follows.

⁶¹ The Emin Pasha was a German-born Muslim convert who was named the Governor of Equatoria (an area in today’s northern Uganda/southern South Sudan) in 1878 by the Khedive of Egypt. His communication with the Khedive was cut off by the Mahdi Rebellion of 1881, so that by 1883 plans began for a relief expedition. Stanley was chosen to head the aptly named Emin Pasha Relief Expedition.

because the more important consideration was what European countries he might offend by passing through their new territories. Beyond these political considerations, though, the decision to take the riverine rather than the terrestrial route, to progress across the interior from west to east, rather than east to west, also indicated a shift in the relationship between the coast and the interior.

Stanley Falls represented in miniature this new order of things. The Stanley Falls depot was situated on a long island in the Congo River, near the cataract where the river begins, and was named in honor of Stanley's exploration of the river ("Exploration and Travel" 408). Tippu Tip recalled the depot:

Wakajaa Stanley Falls wazungu na mali kadiri utakacho. Ikawa bandari kuu mno. Unachokitaka tayari. . . . Ikawa Stanley Falls kana pwani. Hapana aliyehitaji kitu Unguja wala Tabora wala Ujiji, kula kitu dhahib. (*Maisba* 158§176)

Stanley Falls was full of Europeans and as many goods as you could want. It became a great harbour. Anything you wanted was available. . . . Stanley Falls was itself like the coast. No one wanted anything from Zanzibar nor from Ujiji or Tabora; everything was [at] hand. (*Maisba* 159§176)

The similitude between Zanzibar and Stanley Falls is clear here. The island-city of the Indian Ocean provided commodities for the outside world, and provisions for those who wished to explore the interior; Stanley Falls, island within the island of the interior within the island of Africa, floated in the Congo River and was "itself like the coast." Stanley Falls was a Zanzibar with Europeans rather than Arabs, a new locus of resource extraction from the interior.

But Stanley Falls was not the coast. It did not offer Zanzibar's fiduciary opportunities as site of transaction and accrual or disposal of commodities. Nor did it offer the eighteenth-century European view of the coast as an ideological dialectic, or the early

nineteenth-century view of port cities as the site of a troublesome cultural complexity. Stanley Falls represented none of these. It was a settlement in the interior, a European island, whose position made superfluous the need to engage the complexities of the coast. The new narrative became that of the river, rather than the ocean.

The Congo was called “the river of the future” in 1888, and it was.⁶² The passage up this river enabled a journey to the interior that, though difficult, allowed colonists (for we can call them explorers no more) a vantage point for floating observation. Only four years after Tippu Tip and Stanley’s 1887 journey, an imaginary passage up this river would give life to Kurtz and the horrifying darkness.

Now that we’ve understood the heuristic of Burton’s Africa; *Maisha*’s generic and stylistic compression; and Tippu Tip’s unconscious refutation of the inner darkness—both of his interiority and of the African interior—we begin to see a new arrangement, geographic and generic, for seeing the continent. The new configuration that presents itself arises from the specificity of East Africa, but certainly has sub-Saharan counterparts from the west and the south. What this particular example from the Indian Ocean region shows, I have been suggesting, is that our understanding of formal constructions—whether literary, geographic, oceanic, or otherwise—can only be full and complete when we include the exception, or that which is placed deliberately outside its purview. Africa, the exception, the anomalous, the untouched unknown, was never as anomalous, exceptional, or untouched as anyone (from Herodotus forward) had wanted to believe. If this is the case—and it is—then how to

⁶² See the address given by Gardiner G. Hubbard, president of the National Geographical Society at its annual meeting in December 1888: “Africa, Its Past and Future.”

incorporate the lived experiences and the pre- and paracolonial literary expressions of Africans within extant theories, particularly that of the Indian Ocean? And how does understanding the particular mental and metaphorical structure of the African imaginary—here emblemized as Burton’s image of mutually constitutive African geography and physiology—enable us to both amend contemporary versions of the “island” continent, which continue to borrow tropes from the nineteenth century, and to understand the nature of the *European* mind that imagined that Africa into being and necessity?

The reading required of us in engaging this kind of text, in reading this kind of geography, is a reading attendant to both the collections of silences and the collections of the mundane and the epic; and a reading that questions what the “quotidian” and the “epic” really are. Such a reading could begin to answer the question that Simon Gikandi recently posed in an essay on the place of so-called minor literatures, particularly African-language literatures, in the discipline of comparative literature. Gikandi first wonders how we explain the paucity of Swahili texts translated into European languages. He then revises this, and asks a question about genre:

Why does Swahili poetry, and not prose, render itself into translation into the European languages? Why do works of prose seem untranslatable? [...] My somehow provisional claim is that Swahili poetry, especially its classical tradition, is easier to translate because its structures, often drawn from Arabic or Persian poetry, are not strange to translators grounded in European Orientalism. [...] Swahili prose seems to present difficulties of recognition: It has no ‘Orientalist’ tradition to draw from and it has struggled to find a structure in European prose such as the essay or novel. (263)

Just as the West’s experience of the Orient made Africa’s life-system invisible to Burton, so did the Orientalist poem facilitate the invisibility of Swahili prose. Gikandi’s last sentence here—that without an analogous Western form, a body of literature will be left

untranslated—points to what I’ve argued here about Tippu Tip’s text, and about the structural misreading of African civilizations: in the Western tradition, there is not a form analogous to what he wrote. Still, translators for various reasons persevered and presented us with their versions of the text, which seem in every way to be a poor example of a familiar genre, since they drew lines here or there to try to fit it within preexisting models (and preexisting expectations).

My inroads in placing *Maisha*, an example of Swahili prose, within a comparative context, then, depend upon reading across generic lines, in reading the patterns of language, style, and form. We begin to see, then, how considering Tippu Tip’s narrative within the nexus of East African history, and, indeed, within a theory of the cultural and historical legacy of that region, could open the possibilities for an understanding of that culture that does not depend upon drawing a sharp line between coast and interior, between the cosmopolitan and the indigenous, or between Africa and the rest of the world. The challenge would be, in a world of multiplied examples, to *name* the genre, to affirm its relative or local singularity, to assert its intentionality even with a larger frame of production, transaction, and exchange, and to move, in the long run, towards a recognition of the kinds of problems such a genre solved, or attempted to solve, within the various contexts from which it emerged: the local, the pre- or para-national, and the oceanic.⁶³

Because if, as Chaudhuri has written, Africa is “structured by a historical logic separate and independent from the rest of the Indian Ocean” (and so the rest of the globe), if that Africa must be *excepted* to take its place within the Indian Ocean sphere as an historical

⁶³ A good place to start: Geider’s recognition of the various influences in the Swahili travelogue—oral factual narration, topically limited letters, account lists, and chronicles (61).

exception, then we are doomed to replicate more sophisticated versions of Eurocentrism as we attempt to conceptualize both the history of imperialism and the possibilities of cultural and social difference. A sense of Africa as written with “some of the words in front [...] written behind,” as Tippu Tip might have put it (*Maisha* 169§183), offers new ground for writing more complete histories of the Global South, which means, in turn, writing more complete histories of the concept, limits, and possibilities of modernity.

CHAPTER 2 / The Passage by Egypt: Whitman and Forster's Suez Canal

On the day in 1871 when Henry Morton Stanley found David Livingstone, he gave the missionary provisions, as well as a satchel of letters from his family in Britain. After reading a few letters from his children, Livingstone asked for some general news of the world. Stanley responded, “You probably know much already. Do you know that the Suez Canal is a fact—is opened, and a regular trade carried on between Europe and India through it?” (415)⁶⁴ The canal had opened two years prior. Livingstone responded that he had not heard of its opening, that it was grand news, and that he wanted to know what else had happened while he had been lost. Stanley, “enacting the part of an annual periodical to him,” related that “the Pacific Railroad had been completed; Grant had been elected President of the United States; Egypt had been flooded with savans [*sic*]; the Cretan rebellions had terminated; a Spanish revolution had driven Isabella from the throne of Spain” (Stanley 415). The years that had passed while Livingstone was navigating the networks of inner Africa had seen wild shifts in European politics, the fall of an empire, and the completion of a modern engineering project that would change the world as much as (or more than) the fall of dynasties. Here, the import of the Suez in constituting and remaking the world “outside” is marked by its position in Stanley’s proto-periodical.

The opening of the Suez Canal on November 17, 1869, was the pinnacle of a project

⁶⁴ I find this first sentence—“You probably know much already”—rather befuddling. If the African interior was where Europeans and intelligence were lost, then how could he assume that the lost Livingstone “probably kn[e]w much already” of the outside world? It seems worth thinking about this moment of unconscious incongruence.

that had begun, in its modern incarnation, some fifteen years earlier. Prior to 1869, travelers from Europe had reached East, Southeast, and South Asia either via circumnavigating Africa via da Gama's route, or by an overland trek that departed from Cairo and arrived at Suez (a city in the south of Egypt), situated on the Red Sea. As manufacturing technology improved, the need followed for expedited movement of raw and finished goods, as well as people, between the colonies in India and the Pacific and European metropolises. By the 1850s, due in no small part to French diplomat and canal mastermind Ferdinand de Lesseps's ambitious politicking to bring the Suez Canal plan to fruition, the question of the canal, versus the British plan to build an overland railway, was one of the most fervently debated topics in Europe.⁶⁵ Either way, Europe was committed to the idea of a plan to detour Africa in order to reach India.⁶⁶

The canal plan won. The winning came from a peculiar combination of the exigencies of politics, the rhetoric of modernity, and Europe's determination of Egypt's readiness to enter that modernity. As de Lesseps wrote in one of his many letters to British officials during the 1850s:

[T]his chance of rupture [between France and Great Britain] would disappear if, by a providential event, the geographical conditions of the ancient world were changed, and, that the commercial route to India, instead of passing through the heart of Egypt, were removed to its confines, and, being opened to all the world, could never be exposed to the chance of its becoming the exclusive privilege of any one. [...] Let the Isthmus be cut through, let the waves of the Mediterranean mingle with those of the Indian Ocean [...] and Egypt, in acquiring an increased importance as a productive country, as a

⁶⁵ On the political foment in Europe surrounding the creation of the canal, both contemporary and latter-days, see Fitzgerald, *The Great Canal at Suez*; and Karabell, *Parting the Desert*.

⁶⁶ There were many opinion pieces in European newspapers on the viability, political ramifications, and economic possibilities of the Suez Canal in years leading to its opening, starting in earnest ca 1855 with the publication of de Lesseps's *The Isthmus of Suez*. See, for example, a review of the text in 25 August 1855 edition of *The Athenaeum*, and an article on the economic boon certain to come as a result of the Suez by W. Kernaghan, "Suez. A Maritime Canal."

country of internal commerce, as a general storehouse and common transit, loses its dangerous pre-eminence as an uncertain and contested passage of communication. (*The Isthmus of Suez Question* 12)

In the same letter, de Lesseps also posited the dissolution of old enmity between the French and British via the Egyptian canal. “The chance of rupture would disappear,” he wrote, “if, by a providential event, the geographical conditions of the ancient world were changed.” As de Lesseps would continue to reiterate throughout his campaign for the canal, man would correct what nature had not completed: fusion would come through fissure. Fusion would come to a Europe obsessed with factions and contending empires of East and West through cutting through a point where Orient and Occident came together. The canal would be owned by an international collective of capitalists—the Universal Suez Company—rather than a single European country. Egypt would have no claim to the canal either, though according to any definition of territorial sovereignty, it should have been Egypt’s in the first place. To make the route to India pass to the side of Egypt, rather than through it, and to make that passage universal rather than the dominion of one country would, de Lesseps promised, open up the world to the peoples.⁶⁷ Even more, by this great action, the commerce that would be brought by the canal and, hopefully, the railroad also, would serve to stabilize and modernize Egypt.⁶⁸

From the moment of its modern beginnings, the Suez Canal was thus about more than just itself: its “universality” depended on navigating the pull of empires (and empires meddling within empires) who wanted it, and sidestepping, recreating, and eventually

⁶⁷ *Aperire terram gentibus* [to open up the world to the peoples] was the motto of the Universal Suez Company, and was often deployed by de Lesseps in his letters to potential advocates or prominent skeptics of the project.

⁶⁸ See Emily Haddad’s excellent article on the tensions between the ideologies of modern and ancient Egypt surrounding the creation of the canal, “Digging to India.”

ignoring the country where it actually *was* located.⁶⁹ It held the promise of the modern.

The Suez Canal anchors this chapter because it is both geographic fact and made thing. In its conceptual beginnings and completion, the canal signaled a reorientation of the world toward a new center—located by accident in Egypt—that facilitated the flow of goods and colonials from Europe to the east and south. As G. W. Steevens, British journalist, remarked upon his visit to the canal in 1898—twenty-nine years after its auspicious opening—“I did see the famous Canal. For three hours the train-tram never went out of a walk, and all the time I saw the Canal. Never, I suppose, has any single work of man upset the balance of the world like the Suez Canal; it has made and unmade men, cities, nations. But to look at, it is just a narrow ditch cut through a sheer wilderness of sand” (30).⁷⁰ The reality of the canal as just a ditch in the desert simultaneously defied and emphasized its effect on world politics and individual fortunes. That ditch made and unmade worlds. Wedged between two continents even as it constructed them, in the midst of the “flat, empty, endless [...] aching barrenness,” the Suez symbolized the triumph of engineers over the desert: “The Suez Canal goes on mile after mile, unbending, through desolation” (Steevens 30).

The tensions that Steevens glossed in his journal in 1898 were those used by de Lesseps to sell the feasibility, the necessity, and the modernity of a canal in Egypt to

⁶⁹ Or, as the British’s financial takeover of the “Universal” Suez Company in 1875, or its fleet’s bombardment of Alexandria during the Urabi Revolution in 1882, would prove, paying attention to that country only to ensure the stability and certainty of the Suez, which permitted the passage to India.

⁷⁰ Steevens’s statement on the real and imaginative force of the canal is reinforced by literary works such as Oscar Wilde’s *An Ideal Husband*, wherein the plot is propelled by the fortunes gained and lost through canals—the protagonist, Sir Robert Chilton, made his fortune unethically through capitalizing on insider information about the Suez Canal; the antagonist, Mrs. Cheveley, manipulates Chilton so her fortune will not be lost due to an ill-placed investment in an Argentine canal scheme.

European investors in the 1850s, nearly twenty years before the canal opened, and at least five years before the work on the canal began in 1859. When de Lesseps toured Egypt between 1854 and 1855 to determine the viability of the Suez project, his journal notations ranged from those documenting places found in the Bible (Goshen), to those detailing his Nile tour that led him to the pharaonic ruins at Luxor and Thebes, and, finally, to those observing and documenting the geography and geology of the isthmus.

Alongside the continuity of the Egyptians with their forebears, de Lesseps outlined the natural, geographical reasons for choosing Egypt as the site of this important canal.⁷¹ But the difficulty of building the canal in Egypt is that you couldn't build it in Egypt without building it in Egypt. De Lesseps put the problem more eloquently when he wrote that "Egypt, by her geographical position, is the most natural and advantageous means of transit between West and East; and this is a privilege which cannot be lost so long as the internal state of the country does not destroy the work of nature" (*The Suez Canal* 282). Where nature had erred in allowing the isthmus to exist at all, it had permitted the ideal opportunity for the exercise of human ingenuity. The problem was the volatility of the people who happened to live there. De Lesseps tried to anticipate and neutralize this publically by implying that we can trust these present-day Egyptians, or at least manage them, since they are the same as the pharaonic-age ones.

In a public version of those journal notations, published in *L'isthme de Suez* (the official newspaper of the Suez Canal project), de Lesseps presented the "facts" about the

⁷¹ In a letter to the British Consul-General, he writes of the isthmus, a "neck of land of forty leagues," that "no one interested in civilisation and progress can see [it] upon the map without an earnest desire to remove the sole obstacle remaining on the grand route of the commerce of the world" (*The Suez Canal* 33).

land: its history, its populace, and the particularity of its geographical position for the purposes of reinforcing the suitability of the proposed canal project. De Lesseps took his reader through a short history of the region, starting with its difference from its neighbors—an important consideration for his audience, since much capital and labor would be invested into this non-Christian, non-European country. Egyptians, he wrote, have “nothing in common” with the residents of the rest of the Ottoman Empire—neither with the Greeks nor the Turks nor the Arabs. Instead: “The inhabitants of the Valley of the Nile are the same as the Egyptians of Pharaoh. . . . In body and mind, in their habits and in their prejudices, they are the faithful representatives of the old race; and the revolutions which have wrought so many political changes in Egypt do not seem to have produced any material alterations in the primitive type of the native population” (“Remarks on Egypt,” *The Suez Canal* 280). Egyptians had nothing in common with their neighbors, but had everything in common with themselves. The ancient pharaohs were memorialized not only through their monuments, but also within and through Egypt itself, which preserved “faithful representatives of the old race.” De Lesseps thus enforced Egypt’s suitability for the canal project, and its stability as an investment site, by pulling into a circle the flat, distant edges of history and time, and asserting the immutability of the Egyptian people, their land, and its dead.

This conflation of the geographical and the anthropological in de Lesseps’ writing about Egypt and the Egyptians brings to mind the representations of Africans from the interior by Burton and his contemporaries. Whereas Burton connected the Africans’ attributes with Africa’s geography, de Lesseps simultaneously connected and disconnected the Egyptians from their geographical position and their history. Remember how Burton wrote in *Zanzibar; City, Island, Coast* that Africa—real Africa—became what it always had

been by the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869:

It is an old remark that Africa, the continent which became an island by the union of the twin seas in the year of grace 1869, despite her exuberant wealth and her wonderful powers of reproduction, is badly made—a trunk without limbs, a monotonous mass of painful symmetry, wanting opposition and contrast, like the uniform dark complexion of her sons and of her fauna—a solid body, like her own cocoa-nut, hard to penetrate from without, and soft within; an “individual of the earth,” self-isolated by its savagery from the rest of the world. This is especially true of intertropical Africa. (*Zanzibar* 1:116–117)

Isolated Africa became island Africa with the opening of the canal. The rest of the story—or its other half—is Egypt, the portion of the continent that has long had (and continues to have) an ambiguous relationship to Africa, its geographical home, Arabia, its latter-day cultural home, and Europe, whose civilization it did or didn’t cradle, depending on who you asked.⁷² Suez seemed to disambiguate things, marking at least where Africa began and Asia ended. It was only by disconnecting Egypt from Arabia and enforcing its connection with Africa, with what was seen as beyond or beside or under “the world,” that Egypt could be integral to, yet subordinated to this project. In this way, Egypt was both connected and disconnected, the container of contradiction.

That excess of meaning can be observed, for example, in the symbolism and pageantry that accompanied the opening ceremonies at Suez in November of 1869. After an Egyptian judge, who lauded the Egyptian monetary and physical contributions to the endeavor, and after the archbishop of Jerusalem’s general benediction and blessing upon the canal, the Empress Eugénie’s confessor, Marie-Bernard Bauer, spoke. Bauer stated the

⁷² Hegel, for one, held that Egypt constituted a separate part of the African continent, which, for him was tripartite: sub-Saharan, “Africa proper”; “European Africa,” or, the coastline; and Egyptian, which is connected with Asia: “Egypt; which was adapted to become a mighty centre of independent civilization, and therefore is as isolated and singular in Africa as Africa itself appears in relation to the other parts of the world” (92).

history “of the crescent and the cross, which had fought for centuries and were now being united. He spoke of Africa and Asia, which had ‘met without touching,’ and were now closer for being linked by the canal. [...] Finally, he saluted Ferdinand de Lesseps, ‘whose name should be placed side by side with Christopher Columbus,’ because not since that explorer had landed in the New World had any one person so transformed the globe” (Karabell 254–255). As with the chronotope of the ship, the canal here is rhetorically (and hyperbolically) charged with the completion of the task of connection. In addition to its ability to allow spatial connection via the ships that would pass through, to more closely link Asia and Africa which had previously “met without touching,” its completion was meant to signal the end of animosity between Christianity and Islam, between West and East.⁷³

In actual terms, the canal would remain “universal,” though in large part owned by France and Egypt, until 1876, when British Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli approved the purchase of the majority of shares in the canal’s governing body. With the combination of steam technology and the Suez Canal, the British had a protected route to the diamond in the crown of Empire, India (Pearson 210–211). As Michael Pearson has written in his study of the Indian Ocean, “The main user [of the canal] was always Britain The British occupied Egypt in 1882 in order to ensure British control of the canal” (211). Then, whatever modicum of Egyptianness could be claimed, at least in name, dropped out, as did Egypt’s affiliation with the canal.

It had always been thus, though. When Eugénie’s yacht made the first passage through the canal—before the Khedive’s own ship, and in lieu of the absent Ottoman

⁷³ For an alternative view of the millennia-long tension between Christians and Muslims in and around the Mediterranean, see Nabil Matar’s *Europe through Arab Eyes, 1578–1727*.

sultan—the craft sailed past two obelisks at the new port city, Port Said. These were not ancient granite structures, though, but obelisks of a different sort: “As the French Imperial yacht entered the Canal from Port Said, it passed between the two great obelisks which mark its entrance—hollow wooden structures, painted a light red, to imitate the granite obelisks which the Company proposed to erect there” (Fitzgerald 2:38). The obelisks placed at the entrance of the canal were meant to signal the canal’s filiation with ancient Egyptian monuments and those pharaohs’ engineering genius, as well as the symbolic marriage of East and West.⁷⁴ As soon as those ships breached the line extending between those two obelisks, they left Egypt, the East *and* the West, and entered into a “universal” passage. Though the canal would be taken and claimed by different powers, the fact of the universal passage and its consequences are the stuff of the remainder of this chapter.

This is the position that Egypt occupied in the late-nineteenth-century Western imagination, because of the opening of the Suez. Egypt was both some and all of the thing: the geographical center (but only imaginatively so, but through the imagination, functionally so); and to the side, peripheral to the modernity pushing itself between the new coasts of Africa and Asia. Egypt could be and needed to be shaped into all of these things—secular center of the world; host of the most modern of monuments and the most ancient;⁷⁵ defined by flawed geography perfectly suited for correction; a place ripe for change because of its immutable people and land—in order for it to catalyze the reimagination of the world made possible by the *passage through* Suez, and not, ultimately, the fact of Suez itself.

⁷⁴ These observations are well-rehearsed ones, given the reading of obelisk as phallic object and the history of obelisk-filching and -erection in the West. See Curran et al’s *Obelisk: A History*.

⁷⁵ For an excellent study of monumental modern projects of the nineteenth century, see Darcy Grimaldo Grigsby, *Colossal: Engineering the Suez Canal, the Statue of Liberty, Eiffel Tower, and Panama Canal*.

The renewed visibility of Egypt, in this case, required its invisibility. According to what de Lesseps tells us, modernity and innovation *had* to be birthed in Egypt because of its perfect geography and its ideal geology and its malleable people (not to mention its history), *and* that, after canal was built, that Egypt would “los[e] its dangerous pre-eminence as an uncertain and contested passage of communication.” This assertion, made in that letter to the British Ambassador, along with de Lesseps’ and others’ assertions elsewhere iterates Egypt’s status as site of dangerous, uncertain passages; implicitly, the goal then was to make an *invisible* site of safe passage. Which is to say: when the Suez was built, Egypt became a conduit, a channel for passage elsewhere. It mattered little that *Egypt* surrounded the Suez; it mattered that the conditions had been met to make the canal, and so the passage, universal, neutral, atopic. Egypt and the canal were larger iterations of an ever diminishing fractal: Egypt didn’t matter as much as the canal, which is located in its eastern extreme; the canal doesn’t matter as much as the passage that it enabled. In both cases, the importance lay in the necessity of the moving, the going through, rather than in what remains.

It is because Egypt had to disappear that it matters so much. This chapter is concerned with constructions of relations that arose as a result of the opening of the Suez Canal, as well as the organization of peoples and objects that became conceivable after its opening in 1869. The primary texts—“Passage to India” by Walt Whitman and *A Passage to India* by E. M. Forster—are here because they can be construed as works of “colonial” or Orientalist fiction, and because of their implicit dealings with the disappeared Egypt and Suez. My readings of them, however, will emphasize how their minor textual geographies create larger structures of understanding the world; how these texts both *created* and *reflected* the reimagination of the world after Suez. Just as Egypt provided the fraught structure, the

form, the invisible labor that enabled the reimagination of the world, my inquiry here will focus on the structure of these texts, which record and imagine the canal or its consequences, as well as their content.

This is because Suez causes the metaphors and themes that governed the West's view of the world (and of its sense of its place in the world) to coalesce. The reality of the Suez meant that the metaphorical vision of one world could be momentarily actualized at the moment of the Suez's inauguration. Whitman and Forster's texts, separated by fifty years, register the changes over time in the split perspective of the universal and the particular, as well as the persistent, though at times invisible, place of Egypt and Africa in this world configuration. Whitman's passage, published only two years after the opening of the canal, intones the imaginative peregrinations, both terrestrial and extraterrestrial, attendant with the connection of East and West. Forster's novel, in borrowing Whitman's title, shows how the slow exodus of the canal from public discourse yet affected the world imaginary of East and West.

That newly efficient passage East displayed the ethos of the European imperial age; the trope of that passage was soon appropriated and diffused as a means to discuss the transition between the intimate and the foreign, the familiar and the terrifically new. Forster's and Whitman's passages to India prompt us to consider how those literal and metaphorical passages to India were, as Whitman would claim, always to "more than India." The consequences of the canal and its passage, which caused a silenced clash between the universal connected globe and the ideologies of imperialist cultural separatism and hierarchy, start and end with Egypt.

A Doubled Passage to India

Edward Said wrote that “in the Suez Canal idea we see the logical conclusion of Orientalist thought and, more interesting, of Orientalist effort” (92). The bard of that achievement was Walt Whitman, whose 1870–71 *Leaves of Grass* included “Passage to India.” Written to commemorate the completion of the Suez Canal and the Pacific Railroad in 1869, the poem imagines the expansion of the world due to the collapse of distance, which meant newfound global coequality and contiguity.

The entire poem is a passage, from the particular time and space of Egypt and the United States in 1869, to the unification of time, space, and life (and, for Whitman, death), via the words and metaphysical travel of the poet. This sounds, perhaps, like every other Whitmanian poem, which expands from the minute to the universal and back again. As Charles Zarobila remarks at the opening of his article on Whitman and the panorama: “The Walt Whitman who is large and contains multitudes in ‘Song of Myself’ can catalog the population of a city or survey within the pages of his poem the landscape of a continent. [...] Having associated Whitman with extensiveness, one has said everything and nothing” (Zarobila 51). Yes. But whereas the world in Whitman’s early poetry begins with the atom of blood or grain of sand and arrives at the Collective and the Ideal, the world in “Passage to India,” comes to match and overlap with the terrestrial globe, a world that, for Whitman, fulfills the promise of Columbus: an unhindered passage to India.

Whitman’s poet begins his passage thus:

Singing my days,
Singing the great achievements of the present,
Singing the strong light works of engineers, (the antique Seven outvied),
In the Old World the east the Suez canal,
The New by its mighty railroad spann’d,

The seas inlaid with eloquent gentle wires;
Yet first to sound, and ever to sound, the cry with thee O soul,
The Past! the Past! the Past! (285)

Whitman establishes then builds on the “achievements of the present,” which supersede the ancient, but are firmly rooted in those things which precede them, of which he sings at the end of the stanza. The spatial unification of the Past and Present—which is to say, of those eras according to deep, geologic time—in the first of the poem’s sections permits the pairing of the “facts of modern science” and “myths and fables of eld, Asia’s, Africa’s fables” (285) in the second section. The temples and towers belonging to those respective cultures, now accessible to the other, prove the divine and necessary denouement of the work of those engineers:

Passage to India!
Lo, soul, seest thou not God’s purpose from the first?
The earth to be spann’d, connected by network,
The races, neighbors, to marry and be given in marriage,
The oceans to be cross’d, the distant brought near,
The lands to be welded together. (286)

This stanza, with its vision of an earth “spann’d by network,” of racial unification following the welding together of lands,⁷⁶ enunciates a Saint-Simonian romance of human congress through the work of technology.⁷⁷ At the same time that it posits the triumph of a secular

⁷⁶ Ali Behdad argues that Whitman’s flattening out of racial differences constitutes a “forgetting of history” that “enables [him] to tell a mythological narrative of American people who transcend their differences and sing in one voice in spite of their differences”—ultimately creating a “conformist concept of community” (88, 89).

⁷⁷ The Saint-Simonian ideal of “universal association”—which is to say, the connection of the individual via networks like canals and railroads—would be most prominently experienced in urban spaces (since there would be the greatest concentration of networks there). This, of course, would be in Paris (since they were in France, after all). Saint-Simonian Charles Duveyrier proposed that, in light of Paris’s place in this project of universal association, the city should be divided into four sectors, each of which would have a principal road leading in a cardinal direction (Wittman 35). “Each of these sectors was to be occupied by a division of a peaceful army of workers who would labor to create the ideal modern Paris. As they performed this work, they would have before their eyes the foreign lands that lay in the direction toward which their sector of the city was oriented; their understanding of labor would be inflected by their knowledge of these places and, reciprocally, by the knowledge of what those places would take from seeing the work in Paris. . . . Workers based at the

technology, the poem insists on the roots of the spatial and spiritual unification of peoples via religious literature, thereby creating a “patchwork” geminate narrative of Darwinian evolution (Warren, “Reading” 57). (Whitman himself wrote of the “combinatory strategy” used in “Passage to India”—to “sing well of persons and events, of the passions of man, and the shows of the material universe [while using a . . .] religious tone” [qtd. in Warren, “Reading” 57].) Whitman thus spans all time, all terrestrial space, and all facets of human invention in this ur-narrative of human progress.

Between his singing of the works of the present and the wonders of the past, he places his reader within particular geographies—first, in the East with the Suez, second, with the railroad in the New World, preliminarily connected with the laying of the Transatlantic cable in 1858.⁷⁸ But it is the Suez Canal and the Pacific Railroad that provoke the poet’s praise, with their provision of literal, doubled, passages to India:

Passage to India!
Lo soul for thee of tableaux twain.
I see in one the Suez canal initiated, open’d,
I see the procession of steamships, the Empress Eugenie’s leading
the van,
I mark from on deck the strange landscape, the pure sky, the level
sand in the distance,
I pass swiftly the picturesque groups, the workmen gather’d,
The gigantic dredging machines. (286)

The introduction, for the second time, of the Suez Canal brings not an ecstatic description of oceans crossed or lands welded, but a human-scale description of the material objects and

walls of Villejuif in the south would be inspired by the ‘sublime thought’ that their labors would ‘pierce to the heart of that Africa and that Asia who spread out in the bosom of the seas like a great wound of servitude and barbarism’ (Wittman 35–36). Wittman writes that Duveyrier’s text creates a “single spatiotemporality” in which “the immediacy of embodied spatial experience” is extended to “the geopolitical scale, with no concession to the differences between the two” (36).

⁷⁸ Notice that the cable’s laying nearly twenty years earlier did not alone inspire the writing of this poem. Only the doubled Indias could, and the peoples’ ability to actually *follow* the course established by these two works.

persons that Whitman places at the initiation of the canal. As a lexical panorama unfurls in front of the stationary viewer, so does the scene unfold: first, we are on the banks of the canal, watching the spectacle of Eugénie's barge leading the succession of ships entering the canal; then, suddenly and abruptly, the narrator stands on deck, from which he sees, marks, and passes "the strange landscape, the pure sky, the level sand in the distance." Included within this strange landscape, and marking from within the twin tableau a continuation of the dualistic theme of the poem, are both the Egyptian workmen and the "gigantic dredging machines," one replaced by the other, the latter (perhaps fittingly) completing a task envisioned as the marvel of modern engineering.⁷⁹

The list of objects and figures beheld ends there, leaving the reader with the sense that, though the narrator "pass[es] swiftly" through the canal, the passage lingers. That part of the tableau satisfied with a few words, Whitman diverts the reader's vision to the West, and to the Pacific Railroad, enacting through the stifling intimacy between one stanza and another the newfound intimacy between one distant realm and another. Immediately, Whitman moves to the other tablet in the tableau, and describes painstakingly the wonders from an aerial perspective, then those visible from the window of a railcar:

In one again, different, (yet thine, all thine, O soul, the same,)
I see over my own continent the Pacific railroad surmounting every barrier,
I see continual trains of cars winding along the Platte carrying freight and
passengers,
I hear the locomotives rushing and roaring, and the shrill steam-whistle,
I hear the echoes reverberate through the grandest scenery in the world,
I cross the Laramie plains, I note the rocks in grotesque shapes, the sage-
deserts,
I see in glimpses afar or towering immediately above me the great mountains,
I see the Wind river and the Wahsatch mountains,

⁷⁹ For more on the circumstances necessitating the replacement of the fellaheen with the dredging machines (including the workers' rebellion) see Karabell's chapter, "Men and Machines" in *Parting the Desert*, 206–232.

I see the Monument mountain, and the Eagle's Nest, I pass the Promontory,
I ascend the Nevadas,
I scan the Noble Elk mountain and wind around its base,
I see the Humboldt range, I thread the valley and cross the river,
I see the clear waters of lake Tahoe, I see forests of majestic pines,
Or crossing the great desert, the alkaline plains, I behold enchanting mirages
of waters and meadows,
Marking through these and after all, in delicate slender lines,
Bridging the three or four thousand miles of land travel,
Tying the Eastern to the Western sea,
The road between Europe and Asia. (286–287)

Note here the continuation of subject-verb anaphora established in the first stanza of the section, as well as Whitman's expansion of the sensory field of the poem from visual-kinetic to include the auditory: "I see [...] I hear [...] I cross." To further overwhelm and engage: a catalogue of "the grandest scenery in the world," identified in their particular, able to be located on maps: Platte, Laramie, Wind, Wahsatch, Monument, Eagle's Nest, Promontory, Nevadas, Noble Elk, Humboldt, Tahoe—specificity in the midst of the multitude. The role of this catalogue of terrestrial wonders differs from that of Whitman's catalogues elsewhere, such as that in "A Song for Occupations," where the catalogue of the tools and environs of coalminers, stevedores, and butchers illustrates the "strange and hard [...] paradox true" that "Objects gross and the unseen soul are one" (162, 163). It is different from that which organizes and forms "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry," a list of symbols—"slow-wheeling circles," "scallop-edged waves," and "ladled cups"—that relinquish their individual meanings to form a "pattern of motion and light," the basis of the aesthetic of the poem (Coffman 227, 232).⁸⁰ Instead, the catalogue here of the proper-named sites along the railroad serves to *concretize* and make *particular* the passage to India from the Eastern to the Western sea, from Europe

⁸⁰ Criticism is rather sparse on Whitman's use of the catalogue. In addition to those quoted here, though, see James Perrin Warren, "'Catching the Sign': Catalogue Rhetoric in 'The Sleepers'"; John B. Mason, "Walt Whitman's Catalogues: Rhetorical Means for Two Journeys in 'Song of Myself'"; Mattie Swayne, "Whitman's Catalogue Rhetoric."

to Asia. With these mappable and mapped places—with the designation of the Pacific Railroad as road connecting America to itself, to Europe, to Asia—the strophe and its passage originate and end.⁸¹

Compare this detail, and this finality, with the miniature “catalogue” of the Suez’s vague attributes, which are so few that we should probably just call it a short list. What Whitman included could have been gleaned from a two-sentence newspaper clipping: in November of 1869, ships went through the canal, machines replaced humans at the end of the project, and the desert was nearby. The “strange landscape” stretched under the “pure sky” and the “level sand” in the distance constitute a hazy picture of an open expanse, a landscape whose monotony seems to swallow the ships and leave them forever floating toward a destination that ought to (but need not) be India.⁸² The lack of specificity here, especially considering this portion’s proximity to and “twinship” with the railroad, seems to reinforce James Perrin Warren’s assertion that “the imagery of the Suez Canal scene is so general as to seem ill-imagined [...] but the stanza treating the Pacific Railroad features some

⁸¹ The US announced itself as India the day after the Pacific Railroad was completed: “Yesterday the last rail was laid, and the last spike driven, which completed an iron track across the American continent. *Thus Columbus is at last justified*. He sailed westward to find a shorter way to Cathay; and with the help of the ‘universal Yankee nation’ this shorter way is to-day open to the world. It is a very great event, this completion of the first railroad across the continent. [...] This way to India will make New York the centre of the world’s commerce; it will fill our harbors with ships and our land with people; it will turn the eyes of the world more than ever towards us; it will pour upon our shores the wealth of both oceans and all continents. ‘This is the way to India,’ telegraphed the directors of the Pacific Railroad, yesterday, from the point w[h]ere the last rail had just been laid. But, give us only a half century of peace and freedom; give us only the unshackled development of all our faculties and energies, for fifty years, and we shall not cry out, ‘This is the way to India;’ we shall stick upon our shores the sign, This is India.” “This Way to India.” (Emphasis added). Quoted in Betsy Erkkila, *Whitman the Political Poet*.

⁸² Arthur Golden claims that the “tableaus twain” section, with its “dreadful succession of clichés reinforced with exclamatory flourishes,” exemplifies the decline in Whitman’s post-Civil War poetry. James Perrin Warren in “Reading Whitman’s Postwar Poetry” gives credence to Golden’s criticism of the Suez portion, and says of these few lines that “The imagery of the Suez Canal scene is so general as to seem ill-imagined.” Golden uses the manuscripts of the poem to establish that “Passage to India” is a patchwork of three previously unpublished poems.

of Whitman's most effective geographical imagery, including eleven place names in ten lines" ("Reading" 59)—as though one stanza explains and saves the other.

In the whole of "Passage to India," Whitman never mentions the word "Egypt," ancient or modern, or makes any allusions to stereotypically Egyptian objects. Subsequent catalogues of ancient civilizations and heroes list China, Persia, Arabia; the traders and travelers have among them the Muslims, the Venetians, the Arabs and Portuguese; the great rulers of the past, Alexander, Tamerlane, Aurungzebe; the great rivers, the Euphrates, Ganges, Indus. Egypt, the Nile, and Ramses are conspicuously absent. Not only, then, is the Suez Canal the only proper name given to the geography near or *of* Egypt in "Passage to India," but it stands as singular monument *in* the present, *to* the present in a land known mostly as an ancient one.

One might think that this is because Whitman just didn't know anything about Egypt. But, no: Whitman knew pharaonic Egypt through reading, and through visiting the Egyptian exhibition at the Brooklyn Institute in 1846.⁸³ He recognized Egypt as central to and foundational in the history of Western civilization: "Hindostan, Egypt, Assyria, Persia[,] China, Phoenicia, and other elder lands, preceded the Greeks, Romans, and Hebrews" (*Collected Writings* 5:1928). All of the ancient glory of pyramids and obelisks, mummies in linen, and hieroglyphics that might have entered this poem as symbols appear elsewhere in Whitman's poetry, such as "*Salut au Monde!*" (1860) and "Proud Music of the Storm" (1870—

⁸³ And, in making a case for literary history as "a special kind of world history," starting with Egypt, Wai Chee Dimock places tremendous weight upon Whitman's infatuation with and voracious reading about ancient Egypt (619). Such infatuation and knowledge, in fact, that she argues that Whitman's expansive "I" is inspired by the ancient Egyptian understanding of the soul, as expressed in the *Book of the Dead*.

71).⁸⁴ That Egypt is absent and that the Suez Canal's allotment of lines pales beside that of the Pacific Railroad does not indicate Whitman's failure of imagination. Rather, he either saw typical Egyptian symbols, icons, and histories as inappropriate to the content of "Passage to India," or, he viewed Egypt as a qualitatively different geographic and cultural formation than the Suez.⁸⁵ Regardless, when one is present, the other disappears.

Instead of proffering one or the other of the Suez/Pacific stanzas as good or bad poetry, or as exemplifying Whitman's biographical affinities, we see that, if the Pacific Railroad section brings geographical specifics of the western passage to India—and, indeed, that the United States has *become* an India, as claimed in the stanza following the Pacific Railroad one⁸⁶—then the Suez voyage, drifting para-topos, is interminable. In that interminability, this imagined presentation of the Suez overlaps with the rhetoric used by de Lesseps to sell the necessity of this universal passage. For Whitman, the passage to the Orient via the American West required the specificity of realism—locatable and named formation—whereas the passage to Orient via the East, the Suez Canal, remained a

⁸⁴ In "*Salut au Monde!*" (1860), he sees "Egypt and the Egyptians, I see the pyramids and obelisks, / I look on chisell'd histories, records of conquering kings, dynasties, cut slabs of sand-stone, or on granite blocks, / I see at Memphis mummy-pits containing mummies embalm'd, swathed in linen cloth, lying there many centuries, / I look on the fall'n Theban, the large-ball'd eyes, the side-drooping neck, the hands folded across the breast" (114). Accompanying the publication of "A Passage to India" in 1870-71, a poem titled "Proud Music of the Storm," in which he writes, "I hear the Egyptian harp or many strings / The primitive chants of the Nile boatmen" (284). Between the two poems, we have a romantic picture of Egypt.

⁸⁵ This is not to suggest that Whitman's subject position here is above reproach. But I am interested more in what exists in the poetry rather than querying Whitman's biography or politics. For those who do that, see Marek Paryz, *The Postcolonial and Imperial Experience in American Transcendentalism*; Eric Wertheimer, *Imagined Empires: Incas, Aztecs, and the New World of American Literature, 1771-1876*; and Mailini Johar Scheuller, *U.S. Orientalisms: Race, Nation, and Gender in Literature, 1790-1890*. The crux of the arguments found in these texts are the lack of attention paid to the political and imperial context in which Whitman was writing, and Whitman's posited innocence as a figure of US expansionism he walks all over the world in the poem.

⁸⁶ "(Ah Genoese thy dream! thy dream! / Centuries after thou art laid in thy grave, / The shore thou foundest verifies thy dream.)" (287).

construct described mostly by the gaps between words, or by the ambiguity embedded in the adjectives themselves.

Hence, the Suez in Whitman's poem acts as a hinge that moderates the strange movement between the rhetorical insistence upon the world-as-globe and the world-as-multiple-worlds. We see this strain in "Passage to India" at the moment of the mention and disappearance of Suez—as well as in the absence of the other Suez (Egypt). The tension mounts with the sudden change from horizontal perspective to vertical perspective, from a subject-position based on the Earth to that in the heavens:

The plans, the voyages again, the expeditions;
Again Vasco da Gama sails forth,
Again the knowledge gain'd, the mariner's compass,
Lands found and nations born, thou born America,
For purpose vast, man's long probation fill'd,
Thou rondure of the world at last accomplish'd. (287)

As an image rising before the poet, history rises and falls "as a rivulet running," reminding the viewer and the author that the singular passage completed by da Gama, then a handful of men after him, is now accessible to the masses. And it is with the possibility of endless, painless replication that the "rondure of the world [is] at last accomplish'd."

But there is also a sense here, alongside the democratization of the passage, of emptiness. For, in recounting the plans, the voyages, the expeditions, da Gama's rounding of the Cape of Good Hope—and the implication that canal and railroad repeat these accomplishments again and again, each time anew yet the same—is an assertion of "knowledge gain'd." Whitman first uses the term "again" to transition between the Suez and Pacific Railroad portions of section 3. He opens with the phrase, "In one again, different, (yet thine, all thine, O soul, the same)." The semantic tension among "again," "different,"

and “same,” emphasizes the belonging of the Suez and the Railroad to a similar category of monument, but the trochaic interruption of “different” insists on its uniqueness. Regardless, they are the territory and property of the soul (and so the Poet). With the management of the contradiction of repetition and difference through their unification under the aegis of the soul, Whitman manages the tension inherent in these two conceptions of the world. The word “again” holds within it the idea of a return, but a repetition with a difference, as indicated by the *OED*’s fourth main definition of it: “expressing repetition of an action or fact: a further time; once more; any more; anew.” After all, the sense of repetition and empty return comes from the recognition of the monotony of the world as sphere.⁸⁷ This emptiness arises from the loss of collective knowledge to be gained by surveying the Earth’s edges, its latitudes and longitudes; what remains, then, for the sake of the masses, is to fill in the blank spaces remaining on the maps (hence, Burton et al.), or to escape the surface altogether in favor of the depths of the core and the heights of the heavens (hence, Jules Verne).

Whitman’s solution to this implicit crisis of completion, of the oneness of the world, is escape. With the beginning of the next stanza, “O vast Rondure, swimming in space,” he places himself in a vertical relationship with the globe; the marvels of the world just recounted in specificity now diminished to “manifold grass and waters, animals, mountains, trees” below (287).⁸⁸ With this abrupt movement, Whitman solves the problem of redundancy and monotony via extending the world to contain the universe, from *non ultra* to *plus ultra*.⁸⁹ It also maintains the possibility of a reserve of the unknown, the novel, the

⁸⁷ “On a spherical surface, to leave on point is already to begin *to draw closer to it!* The sphere is Monotony” (43). Victor Segalen, *Essay on Exoticism: An Aesthetics of Diversity*.

⁸⁸ For more on the break in the cosmological imagination after Galileo, see Frédérique Ait-Touati, *Fictions of the Cosmos: Science and Literature in the Seventeenth Century*.

⁸⁹ See Djelal Kadir, *Columbus and the Ends of the Earth: Earth’s Prophetic Rhetoric as Conquering Ideology*.

unique.

That is where the poem would have us go: beyond the planet. After viewing the Earth from space, the Poet journeys again to the past: “Passage to India! / Cooling airs from the Caucasus, far, soothing cradle of man, / The river Euphrates flowing, the past lit up again” (289). With the reiteration of great explorers of the past, he arrives at Columbus’s failures, and declares that the deferred “efforts of heroes,” planted deep in the ground, eventually “fill[...] the earth with use and beauty” (290). From there, any traces of the Earth subside, as the Poet urges the soul toward “primal thought [...] not lands and seas alone,” and, finally, toward final departure and completion, with a modified cry of “Passage to more than India!” (291). From the vertical perspective of the middle space between Earth and heavenly bodies, the Earth (and earthly experiences) seems paled, dimmed, a domain where one may only “see in a mirror dimly”:⁹⁰ “Have we not stood here like trees in the ground long enough? / Have we not grovel’d here long enough, eating and drinking like mere brutes? / Have we not darken’d and dazed ourselves with books long enough?” (292). The poem acts as a metaphor for the passage—and not a passage *to* a place, but a passage *from* one: from the known to the unknown seas, to return (and repeat) no more, to escape the completed world of repeated, completion, again.

If Whitman is the High Romantic poet of the nineteenth century, who, as E. M. Forster would later say, “found life absolutely beautiful, in all its aspects” (with heavy emphasis on the “all”), then this is the ultimate romantic escape, though it is an escape from the perfected, justified earth (“The Beauty of Life” 174). “Passage to India” is the ultimate

⁹⁰ 1 Corinthians 13:12: “For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known” (NKJV).

expression of the particular brand of American Transcendentalism to which Whitman (partially) subscribed: earth's great works, man's great accomplishments, and the contradictions of existence can be solved through their marriage in the soul.⁹¹ From the perspective of the Beyond, though, the accomplishments dim; the possibility of a hereafter displaces the need for a song, a hymn to humanity, in the first place. From that vantage point, humans and their accomplishments seem to have been but groveling, fulfilling base desires, stumbling about in darkness—so, the tension, yet again, of the dualist mind with which this was written: on the one hand, the soul and the beyond, on the other, the present achievements of man.

As we have seen, in the world of “Passage to India”—and in the criticism of the poem—Suez disappears (and Egypt is absent) amid the wash of New World imagery, of Columbus, of the lists of historical events and figures. The effect of Suez on the poem and on the larger world imaginary, however, remains: “After de Lesseps no one could speak of the Orient as belonging to another world, strictly speaking. There was only ‘our’ world, ‘one’ world bound together because the Suez Canal had frustrated those last provincials who still believed in the difference between worlds” (*Orientalism* 92). So Said. Suez begat a passage to India at once universal and world-making; it forced the recognition of the overlap between globe and world, and tension between the imagination of a distant and different place, and

⁹¹ In the preface to the Centennial edition of *Leaves of Grass*, Whitman explained in a very long footnote (171 lines, to be exact) the role of “Passage to India.” He likened the release of this poem to the release of a hero’s ship to the seas at the end of an “ancient legend-play” (which he suggests elsewhere is Greek), so as to “close the plot and the hero’s career.” With a loosing of hawsers and ties, a spreading of sails to the wind—a starting out on unknown seas, to fetch up no one knows whither—to return no more—and the curtain falls, and there is the end of it—so I have reserv’d that poem, with its cluster, to finish and explain much that, without them, would not be explain’d, and to take leave, and escape for good, from all that has preceded them. (*Collected Writings* 2:464) In this poem, in which he sings the completion of the world, he completes an oeuvre.

the realization that it was neither distant nor different in the way one had thought. The one world of which Whitman sang had actually come to pass, but that reality conflicted with the romance of it: the remainder of the poem registers the crisis of the fulfillment of his fondest romantic dream, one coeval world. The romantic vision's ideal would be the inclusion of Egypt, but the reality of Egypt as *in the present* has been found untenable. We see here in Whitman's "Passage," then, the clash of time and space inherent in the chronotope of the Suez: the gap between the distant exotic (which existed often in the past, for Egypt) and the present has closed.

Whitman's passage solved the problem of the passage to India, by pushing us beyond it: "Passage to more than India! / [...] O sun and moon, and all you stars! Sirius and Jupiter! / Passage to you!" And once we've reached them, "O farther, farther, farther sail!" Whitman pushes us toward the *plus ultra*, into an unknown cosmos that, he assures us, is familiar and navigable because they're all "the seas of God." His answer to the crisis of the connected world of the Suez, as I've been suggesting, was the answer of the escape, and the safe escape to the transcendent realm of the beyond.

Forster's Passage: A Poem in the Present Continuous

When E. M. Forster named his novel *A Passage to India*, he did so because of Whitman.⁹² He said,

the book is not really about politics, though it is the political aspect of it that

⁹² E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India* was a book without a title for most of the twelve years that it was written. Forster started writing the text in 1912 and it was not published until 1924. During those years, the Amritsar Massacre had occurred in northwestern India (1919) and a revolution had succeeded in winning Egypt's independence from Britain (1922); both were well publicized incidents demonstrating the profuse contractions of the British Empire.

caught the general public and made it sell. It's about something wider than politics, about the search of the human race for a more lasting home.... It is—or rather desires to be—philosophic and poetic, and that is why, when I had finished it, I took its title, "Passage to India," from a famous poem of Walt Whitman's. ("Three Countries" 298)⁹³

In this statement, some thirty-five years after *A Passage to India*'s publication in 1924, Forster notes the confluence of readings and circumstances that shaped the public life of his novel. The novel tells the story of a city called Chandrapore, a British and an Indian protagonist, and in parts addresses whether imperialism, cultural misapprehension, and racism proscribe the possibility of human friendship. The particular admixture of setting (India), plot, and characters (Anglo-Indians and Indians), has, in the years between 1924 and the 1990s, driven the novel to be read as a mostly political book. But, Forster says, the title alludes to what it aspires to be: poetic and philosophical.

A Passage to India has been analyzed many times over according to these various perspectives, and most notably, during the height of postcolonial criticism, according to the novel's political aspects. In that context, critics have often taken issue with Forster's representation of Indians and India in the novel. From the moment of its publication in 1924, scholars' attention tended to focus on the interplay between the two types of characters in the novel, the Anglo-Indian and the Indian, and Forster's representation of them: "[Indian critic] Nital Singh lamented the fact that, in his view, Forster had painted his Indian characters as either 'full of religious prejudice,' or 'footling meddlers'" (Morey 256).⁹⁴ Criticism of Forster's representation of the non-Western subject has often been

⁹³ Forster reiterates this in a 1958 lecture at Cambridge: "I am delighted *Passage to India* had a success and that it was influential because I believe the political side of it was the side I wanted to express though it is not primarily a political book" (Heath 317). The version of this sentiment that I quoted above was part of an address that Forster gave in 1959, in Milan and Rome.

⁹⁴ See also Nirad C. Chaudhuri, "Passage to and from India," and Peter Morey, "Postcolonial Forster."

accompanied by criticism of his use of British liberal humanism (and, some say, of “manliness”) as an answer to the problems wrought by imperialism.⁹⁵ Questions of power in representation, the intersection between novelistic representation and political reality, and realism itself, have guided many postcolonial analyses.⁹⁶

The novel has been carved as a monument to the failure of British liberalism, its created space and romantic realism offering a strange sort of intersection between the real and created world, the inescapable strictures of which are bound and solidified by paracolonial and postcolonial criticism. Much of the criticism that I mentioned above—from both the early and late twentieth century—depends on weighing the limits of Forster’s realism, and to what extent his work was an apologia for imperialism.⁹⁷ Benita Parry opens her chapter on *Passage* with the following note:

When *A Passage to India* was published in 1924 it was received by many readers as a work of social realism and praised or execrated for its critique of the British in India. While some [...] saw it as a definite picture rather than a creative imagining, there were reviewers who recognized it as the work of a major novelist. [...] Since then, and especially during the last decade, the large body of critical literature on Forster’s writings has been predominantly concerned with understanding his poetic vision by analyzing thematic structure, deciphering symbolic patterns and probing psychological depths [...], discrediting attempts at pedestrian socio-political interpretations. (260)

⁹⁵ The most recent classically postcolonial study is one by Praseeda Gopinath, which combines some of these former topics within the context of imperialism, nationalism, and gender: For example, “Representing imperial manly disarticulation as a consequence of the rise of colonial nationalism, these anti-imperial texts [*A Passage to India* and Orwell’s *Burmese Days*] reveal the constitutive contradiction of the imperial discourse of law and the superiority of English manliness through which colonialism was justified” (220).

⁹⁶ Some of the more recent studies on the novel have focused on theories of landscape and jurisprudence, as well as the religious idea of *via negativa* (via the Marabar Caves). See also Catherine Lanone, “Negotiating Colonial Contradiction: E. M. Forster’s and V. S. Naipaul’s Negative Landscapes”; Allen Mendenhal, “Mass of Madness: Jurisprudence in E. M. Forster’s *A Passage to India*”; George Piggford, “The *Via Negativa* in Forster’s *A Passage to India*.”

⁹⁷ Homi Bhabha, “Signs Taken for Wonders”; Benita Parry, *Delusions and Discoveries*. See also Abdul JanMohamed, “The Economy of Manichean Allegory”; Sara Suleri, *The Rhetoric of English India*; Jenny Sharpe, “The Unspeakable Limits of Rape: Colonial Violence and Counter-Insurgency.”

In this excerpt, which was edited out of a subsequent version of her book *Delusions and Discourses*, Parry proposes and performs an analysis that balances the “contemporary realities of the human situation” and the “metaphysical drama” enacted in the novel.⁹⁸ The opening two sentences emphasize the mixed reception received by the book, not in the sense of its value or skill, but where it landed on the spectrum of mimetic representation. Was it real? How *real* was the realism, and what was the author’s agenda in so representing this land, its people, and its unwelcome rulers?

Said took up Parry’s question in his examination of Forster and his novel in *Culture and Imperialism*, writing that *A Passage to India* is “a novel that surely expresses the author’s affection (sometimes petulant and mystified) for the place” (200). This characterization of Forster as a petulant mystic willfully wooed by an imaginary India continues throughout *Culture and Imperialism*, as Said weighs Forster’s representation of Hindus versus Muslims in terms of his sympathetic portrayal. In the end, he says, though Forster is slightly more sympathetic to Muslims, “the final lack of sympathy [for both] is obvious” (202). Per a certain kind of postcolonial rubric, both Said and Parry entered into an appraising mode when approaching *Passage*, and aimed to determine the relative acceptability of the author’s ethical stance, as well as the political subtexts embedded in his characterization of subalterns and Oriental spaces.

Though it is important to attend to these questions of mimetic representation that arise from the realist mode *Passage* utilizes, I want to shift attention away from the question

⁹⁸ The quotation used in the prior sentence as well as the subsequent 18 pages were eliminated from the 1998 Verso edition of the text. That updated edition focused on aspects of the text that could be considered more obviously postcolonial. See Benita Parry, *Delusions and Discoveries* (London: Verso, 1998), pp. 225ff.

of politics for now, and instead query *A Passage to India* in the context of Forster's statement about its kinship with Whitman's poem, and his aspiration for it to be a poetic and philosophic novel. The pivot point for this analysis, though, will be similar to those often addressed in postcolonial literary studies: Forster's treatment of India as a location, and his narrative mode, the latter of which raises questions about the narrative as realist novel.

Said, for instance, observed without further comment: "*A Passage to India* is at a loss, partly because Forster's commitment to the novel form exposes him to difficulties in India he cannot deal with. Like Conrad's Africa, Forster's India is a locale frequently described as unapprehensible and too large" (*Culture and Imperialism* 201). What Said determines a loss because of Forster's overcommitment to the novelistic form, I want to propose as a formal experiment, which presents itself in traditional Edwardian trappings.⁹⁹ What if we think of *A Passage to India* as sort of "poem" shaped by the literal and metaphorical Suez, and its imaginary as an enunciation of an experience of the canal in the early twentieth century? In what is to come, I will engage the novel itself; Forster's experiences in Alexandria, which shaped the novel; and some of Forster's "minor" writings, *Alexandria: A History and a Guide* and *Pharos and Pharillon*, which were published immediately before *Passage* and, I argue, helped to construct its final form in ways yet unrealized. I see the novel as an expression not of a definitive India, but as an amalgamated representation of the two "Orient" that Forster experienced, India and Egypt, particularly Alexandria. In reevaluating portions from *A Passage to India* that focus on a traditional imperialist tropes, we will begin to see how Forster's novel enacts a poetic vision through the fracturing the conventional view of the

⁹⁹ Judith Scherer Herz discusses Forster's poetic view of history in "The Remaking of the Past in Forster's Non-Fiction."

Orient as a monolithic space.

The “unapprehensible, large,” monolithic exotic space characterized the Orientalist novels of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century European novelists. Alternating between a controlled, picturesque landscape built by metaphor and a painterly aesthetic (as in Rider Haggard or Burton) and the uncontrollable, primitive landscape where the animal roots of human nature roam untamed (as in Conrad), the representation of Britain’s elsewhere has been domesticated or loosed to suit ever-shifting ideological dicta. In the excerpt from Said above, he said of *Passage*: “Like Conrad’s Africa, Forster’s India is...” In comparing Forster to Conrad, Said intimates that Forster presents a predetermined, homogenous India, at once both passive and primally invasive.¹⁰⁰ Forster draws attention to his manner of representing India’s romantic and romanticized terrain through a constantly telescoping narratorial perspective, thereby stepping away from the kind of geographic representation seen in Conrad.

Forster’s perspective, in its dynamism and scalar shifting, shapes *Passage* from the very beginning. When the novel opens, the passage has already been completed: we arrive in Chandrapore, a fictional city that serves as a British outpost in northern India sometime during the waning years of the Raj.¹⁰¹ From the first word of the first chapter, the reader enters a world where the land dictates the lives (and even the autonomy) of those who live there: “Except for the Marabar Caves—and they are twenty miles off—the city of

¹⁰⁰ For the purposes of my analysis of Said’s comparison, I am oversimplifying *Heart of Darkness*. It’s not too much to suggest, I think, that Conrad’s way of presenting Africa is very different from Forster’s means of presenting India, which I will prove shortly.

¹⁰¹ The time period of the novel is deliberately ambiguous; it is unclear whether it is pre- or post-World War I, and part of this is due to the fact that Forster wrote it over such a long period of time. See Frank Kermode for a meditation on the necessity of Forster’s “out of time” narrative.

Chandrapore presents nothing extraordinary.” The Ganges, the bazaars, temples, and roads are all ordinary at best, or filthy, ineffective, profane, and ugly at worst; the city, we find, is a castoff remnant from the days of Imperial India, when its position was tentatively valuable rather than insignificant (3). No democracy, no carving, no painting. The description continues, in the particular, and then extends to the larger form of the city, the very constitution of which seems to be terrestrial, muddy, and muddled:

Chandrapore was never large or beautiful [...] The very wood seems made of mud, the inhabitants of mud moving. So abased, so monotonous is everything that meets the eye, that when the Ganges comes down it might be expected to wash the excrescence back into the soil. Houses do fall, people are drowned and left rotting, but the general outline of the town persists, swelling here, shrinking there, like some low but indestructible life form. (3, 4)

This broad view of time, and of a moment in that time, is of a landscape that is anything but monumental *or* exotic.¹⁰² The people here are of the muddied earth itself, their marks upon the landscape simultaneously ruined by it and constituting it. Forster introduces the reader to his India via a tired landscape whose sole singularity is its caves.

Forster tells us that the “prospect changes” once we are “inland”—within the city itself. Then, we see the maidan (city square), houses, and on the higher ground, a civil station. Viewed from this raised prospect, “Chandrapore appears to be a totally different place. It is a city of gardens. It is no city, but a forest sparsely scattered with huts. It is a tropical pleasance washed by a noble river” (4). Each sentence in the succession revises the one that came before, each stated more assertively, rhythmically, with the unequivocal, “it

¹⁰² Cf the “Time Passes” section of *To the Lighthouse* (1927). In Woolf: there is a disappearance of characters through accelerated time and lack of explanation of events that would seem momentous; the domestic space is overwhelmed by the natural. In Forster, the natural space indifferent to the movement of, the effect of the humans. The rest of the novel is about the human interactions, but it punctuated by these natural formations, these formations that exist above and beyond and within human interaction.

is . . . it is . . . it is.” As we arrive at the top of the rise with the viewer at the “sensibly planned” red-brick civil station, we view a Chandrapore that “appears to be a totally different place” from the one first described—wild, outside of and indifferent to the confines of built landscape and religious connotation. It only “appears” to be so at first, though. Then, abruptly, it is a city of gardens; then, just as quickly, it is *not* a city, but a forest with huts; then, finally, a “tropical” park with a “noble” river. With these transitions, the tentative nature of the initial observation cedes to an ostensible certainty in the guise of the declarative, affirmative individual sentence. When taken as a series, however, the certainty contained in a particular grammatical unit is revealed as an overall ideological prevarication, betrayed by an increasing reliance on assertions of a clichéd, exotic landscape, punctuated and organized by right-angled intersections.¹⁰³ This view of the narrator’s overview of Chandrapore as a photographic negative, as an enunciation of the “skeptical abyss of difference,” places it outside the typical representations of exotic spaces and ordered colonial landscapes (Lanone 230). Furthermore, the quick contradiction of the previously stated declaration—“It is a city of gardens. It is no city [...]. It is a tropical pleasaunce”—from the beginning draws into question the nature of reality, as though the entire ontology of a thing can change simply by drawing near to it.¹⁰⁴

The toddy palms and neem trees and mangoes and pepul and bazaars, and other key signifiers of the Orient, diminish as Forster segues out of the description of the city. In the

¹⁰³ Lanone asserts of the second, closer description of the town “the reader quickly decodes those apparently positive images as clichés, casting doubt on the pervasive cultural ideology which the ironic text briefly pretends to uphold. The view is now *constructed* as landscape” (231).

¹⁰⁴ This becomes important later in the novel. This later: the scene with Professor Godbole and the birth of God. “He is, was not, is not, was. He and Professor Godbole stood at opposite ends of the same strip of carpet.” (317). David Medalie writes that “Almost all conceivable violations of the realist method are present in this short extract” (96).

last two paragraphs of the chapter (itself only four paragraphs long), he shifts the reader's attention away from the particularity of the city—which is not a city at all, he says—and toward the sky, which is what “settles everything—not only climates and seasons but when the earth will be beautiful” (5). Through its color, its rain, its sun, and, most of all, by its gesture toward the beyond, particularly at night, it decides: “Then the stars hang like lamps from the immense vault. The distance between the vault and them is as nothing to the distance behind them, and that farther distance, though beyond colour, last freed itself from blue” (5). This section resonates with the closing stanza of Whitman's poem. The overwhelming sense of the beyond, the beyond that has “freed itself from blue,” the blue of various shades that dominates *our* sky, seems to tie us to the earth and its necessities of perception. Notice here how the perspective originates from a terrestrial site, not the other way around, as it was with Whitman. In Forster, a grounded view of the beyond supersedes (and renders moot) the possibility of a vertical escape that enabled Whitman to maintain his transcendental romantic fantasy.

The chapter closes with a return to the Marabar Hills, and the “extraordinary caves,” after Forster establishes that their extraordinariness depends in part on the fact that everything else around them is mediocre: “League after league the earth lies flat, heaves a little, is flat again. Only in the south, where a group of fists and fingers are thrust up through the soil, is the endless expanse interrupted. These fists and fingers are the Marabar Hills, containing the extraordinary caves” (5–6). The interruption of the flatness by the anthropomorphized hills and the caves provide not only a tidy close to the chapter, with its mirroring of the opening lines, but also signals the return of the human (or the human-like) to the text.

Forster's four opening paragraphs—together a tightly crafted interplay between human, nature, landscape and built environment—thus moderate both questions of humanism *and* novelistic representation. The chapter asks us to consider the humans' connection to the world and to history. The second paragraph, where Forster takes the reader inland, brings forth not only the question of perspective—and whose perspective the reader can trust, and how the land itself is being framed—but of symbolism and the real. Then, suddenly, he distances us from our former conclusions and interactions with the built environment by emphasizing the sky and the beyond, bringing everything in Chandrapore and beyond it together (as Whitman did), though from a distance, and with an emphasis on the smallness of what we have just seen in comparison with what is far from it “distance between . . . distance behind . . . farther distance . . . beyond.” The romance of the exotic landscape is thus shown as a construct, insofar as the viability of that exotic depends on presenting an audience with a very particular perspective at a very particular scale. Now, we have seen that the distance among “Chandrapore *was* never large or beautiful,” “Chandrapore *appears* to be a totally different city,” and “when *the sky chooses*, glory can rain into Chandrapore,” depends on the temporal and spatial distance from which Chandrapore (and India and the Marabar Hills/caves) are viewed and described.

From the beginning moments of *A Passage to India*, Forster thus draws attention to the privilege of different narratorial perspectives and the relationship between distance and romance, scale and universality. Here and elsewhere, that relationship is expressed through the pairing of distance and beauty, so that “authentic symbolic episodes”—which are the sign of the romantic Orient—come to pass in the narrative only when, in “retreating from Forster's material India, we attain the ‘suitable distances’ required to make the Marabar ‘look

romantic,' something that may require a trek to the moon" (May 138).¹⁰⁵ Forster has turned the angle on the mirror just slightly in this opening chapter, so that the reflection now refracts.

The telescoping perspectives on the land occupied by Chandrapore, and on India itself, disturb typical treatments of "the Orient" in both realist and romantic novels of the period. In the remainder of the novel, the dissonance between the two modes surfaces in Forster's use, broadly conceived, of inescapable vertical collapse and disappointment.¹⁰⁶ The realism/romanticism (with romanticism coded as fantasy, Orientalism) question has directed much late Forster criticism. Thus, the interpretive conflict roots itself in the question of the work's mimetic capacities and modes, asking how its aesthetic inflects the politics of representation.

The novel's enactment of a refracted vision—which amounts to the collapse of a vertical romance into the reality of disappointment and the ordinary—seemed to some a sort of formal schizophrenia or novelistic inefficacy. Virginia Woolf was one:

[T]he problem [that] lies before Mr. Forster—how to connect the actual thing with the meaning of the thing and to carry the reader's mind across the chasm which divides the two without spilling a single drop of its belief. [...T]he Marabar caves should appear to us not real caves but, it may be, the soul of India. Miss Quested should be transformed from an English girl on a picnic to arrogant Europe straying into the heart of the East and getting lost there. [...] What does this mean? we ask ourselves. What ought we to understand by this? And the hesitation is fatal. *For we doubt both things—the real and the symbolical: Mrs. Moore, the nice old lady, and Mrs. Moore, the sibyl. The conjunction of these two different realities seems to cast doubt upon them both.* Hence

¹⁰⁵ The line that May references is "the day generally, whose rough desiccated surface acquired as it receded a definite outline, as India itself might, could it be viewed from the moon" (*A Passage to India* 107).

¹⁰⁶ This constitutes a departure from typical models for English realism, which "has generally tended to provide 'escape hatches'—webs of causality with large loopholes in them—and the Edwardian period brought an intensification of an existing trend, rather than an entirely new emphasis" (Medalie 66).

it is that there is so often an ambiguity at the heart of Mr. Forster's novels. We feel that something has failed us at the critical moment; *and instead of seeing [...] one single whole we see two separate parts.* (n. pag., my emphasis)

Forster, Woolf says, presents two equally plausible, equally weighted realities; their convergence “seems to cast doubt upon them both.” It makes for bad novelistic form *not* to discriminate between the symbolic and the real, and, it seems, not to communicate clearly to the 1920s British reader “one single whole.” That is what the novel does, though. *A Passage to India* is fairly called a novel divided, a novel comprised of “two separate parts” that appear because of the tension between the pull between the realistic and poetic—or, as it has been read, the political and the symbolic.

The schism between the two parts—the refraction—arises not from a flaw in Forster's novelistic vision, I want to suggest, but from the telescopic perspectives on human life and geography that he initiates from the beginning of *A Passage to India*, and from his structural presentation of a disjunctive perception of time. We've already seen how he enacts this geographical perspective, which effectively disallows a singular perspective on the Indian landscape. As for the temporal disjunction: at a very basic level, the sense that the novel is written “out of time,” sometime at the end of the Raj but unsteadily pre- or post-World War, comes by virtue of Forster's writing it over a long period of time, from 1912 to 1924. Aside from this content-based observation of its “out of time” setting, structural marks of its temporal strangeness can be traced to Forster's sentence-level mixture of tenses, and his placement of caesuras or gaps in the narrative when there should be resolutions or climaxes. Via these devices, *A Passage to India* holds the realist and the poetic in tension, thus resulting in a novel that portrays India, and the world generally, “at an angle.”

Both of these aspects of the novel arise in turn from Forster's experience of

Alexandria, which itself intervened between Forster's two visits to India in 1912–13 and 1921. It is in Alexandria, I want to suggest, that *Passage* became itself, because of Forster's encounter with Egypt (for him, an unromantic Orient), and because of his studied experience and writing of the layered, ruined city of Alexandria.

Forster made the passage through the Suez for the first time in 1912, when he was on his way to India. (He would make the same journey two other times in his life.) Upon arriving at Port Said, the city at the Mediterranean entrance of the canal, on October 7, 1912, he wrote with disappointment of his experience: "No minarets, only one dome, and the statue of Lesseps pointing with one hand to the canal and holding strings of sausages with the other" (qtd in Furbank 1:223). This vignette of absent and meager signs of the grand Orient at this supposed gateway to the East, as well as a cartoonish spectacle of the de Lesseps statue, would appear later in *Passage* itself when Adela Quested, who becomes disillusioned and no-longer-a-fiancée while in India, returns to England via the Suez.

Forster, like Whitman, thought that Suez was different from Egypt was different from Alexandria. He would later write that "[Alexandria presents] a scene unique in Egypt, nor have the Alexandrians ever been truly Egyptian. Here Africans, Greeks and Jews combined to make a city; here a thousand years later the Arabs set faintly but durably the impress of the Orient; here after secular decay rose another city, still visible, where I worked or appeared to work during a recent war" (*Pharos and Pharillon* 10). That recent war was the First World War; Forster was stationed in that city on the Mediterranean from 1915 to 1918 while he volunteered for the Red Cross. *A Passage to India*, which he had begun three years earlier, remained untouched while he was there, for a variety of reasons. One was writer's block; the other was the fact that he at first despised Egypt. He wrote in a letter to Syed Ross

Masood, the dedicatee of *Passage* and a longtime friend, in December of 1915:

I do not like Egypt much—or rather, I do not see it, for Alexandria is cosmopolitan. But what I have seen seems vastly inferior to India, for which I am always longing in the most persistent way, and where I still hope to die. It is only at sunset that Egypt surpasses India—at all other hours it is flat, unromantic, unmysterious, and godless—the soil is mud, the inhabitants of mud moving, and exasperating in the extreme: I feel instinctively not at home among them as I feel instinctively at home among Indians. (Furbank 2:22)

This feeling of being “instinctively not at home” among the Egyptians, and the apprehension of Egypt as inferior to India because it was “flat, unromantic, unmysterious, and godless” registers Forster’s initial understanding of “the Orient” (undulating, romantic, mysterious, mystical), and signals how the experience of Egypt, and Alexandria in particular, would come to disturb that Indian Oriental vision.¹⁰⁷

As Forster spent more time there, he began to work through his initial disappointment with Alexandria by excavating the city’s history, and writing two books that would attempt to bring together the ethos of the Hellenic past with what he saw as the lesser, refracted present.¹⁰⁸ These books are unlike any other that Forster published formally and topically: *Alexandria: A History and a Guide* (1922) and *Pharos and Pharillon* (1923) focus solely on the city, and the passage of time and history that has washed over that Mediterranean port. *Alexandria*, divided into sections titled “History” and “Guide,” helps the foreigner learn to see the ruined city of Forster’s time in terms of the deep history that preceded it. The historical vignettes told in “History” portion cross-reference the sites and

¹⁰⁷ Some of Forster’s most formative moments happened in Alexandria. There was the 2 years he spent in Alexandria in the service of the Red Cross during the war; there was the fact that he met and fell in love with Mohammed al-Adl, a tramcar driver/worker, his first long-term sexual relationship; there was the time that he spent there (again) on his way back from India to England.

¹⁰⁸ Critics such as Hala Halim have written that these works were where Forster gloried in a myopic Hellenic cosmopolitanism, one that served as an example to fascism even as it ignored Arab history and contemporary Egyptian nationalism. See Hala Halim, *Alexandrian Cosmopolitanism*.

ruins outlined in “Guide,” so that one could imagine, say, Pompey’s Pillar, in its glory rather than its ruined state. *Pharos and Pharillon*, published the following year, is a collection of short stories, some of which were published previously in the English-language newspaper the *Egyptian Mail* (Moffat 138).¹⁰⁹ Though this book does not announce itself as a guide, it follows the divided past-present, history-“guide” form of the first: “Pharos” takes its name from the Pharos lighthouse, one of the wonders of the ancient world, and the stories in that section are about the city’s storied and ancient past; “Pharillon” was the lesser, replacement lighthouse, and an apt title for this section, since the stories of present-day Alexandria, though charming, hardly compete with the legend of Alexander the Great at Siwa. The guide is an invitation to see differently as one moves through the city; the collection of stories an invitation to imagine a different genealogy to the present.

Despite their varied tone—*Pharos and Pharillon* is a bit more identifiably “Forsteresque” since it is more focused on storytelling than historical fact-finding—the texts have two identical components: an opening passage that focuses on the deep, geological history of the city, and a poem about Mark Antony placed between the two main sections of the book. Forster foregrounds both texts with a description of Alexandria’s prehistoric formation, a description that he alters only slightly for the publication in *Pharos and Pharillon*. Here’s the *Alexandria* version, in part:

The situation of Alexandria is most curious. To understand it we must go back many thousand years. Ages ago, before there was civilization in Egypt, or the delta of the Nile had been formed the whole of the country as far south as Cairo lay under the sea. The shores of this sea were a limestone

¹⁰⁹ Wendy Moffat writes that writing the stories that would later comprise *Pharos and Pharillon* were important outlets for Forster as he figured out how to be a gay British man, and how to be a gay British man in the Orient(s). Moffat argues that close reading these two books shows the formation of a particular way of seeing, an enunciation of “his insights in a different key, [...] an invitation to view life at an angle” (Moffat 138).

desert. The coastline was smooth as a rule, but at the north-west corner an extraordinary spur jutted out from the main mass. [...] Alexandria is built half-way down it. [...] To the north of the spur, and more or less parallel to it, runs a second limestone range. [...] It seems unimportant. But without it there would have been no harbor (and consequently no town), because it breaks the force of the waves. (5, 6)

With this opening, Forster contextualizes the histories to come: before all civilizations, before the Nile, there was a sea. He also emphasizes the importance of the collection of accidents that allowed Alexandria to exist. In this case, it's the small limestone range that breaks the waves. This excerpt leads to a quotation that I've reproduced above (though that one is from *Pharos and Pharillon*), in which Forster states that Alexandria geographically and geologically differs from Egypt, which results in a civilizational difference: "Such are the main features of the situation; a limestone ridge, with harbours on one side of it, and alluvial country on the other. It is a situation unique in Egypt, and the Alexandrians have never been truly Egyptian" (*Alexandria* 6). This concatenation of causal natural forces—the sea, then the ridge, then the harbor—leads, for Forster, to the establishment of a qualitatively separate urban culture, one that belongs to the Mediterranean rather than to the Arab world or to Africa. (He softens this statement in *Pharos and Pharillon* to include the Greeks, Africans, and Arabs.)¹¹⁰

The same geological perspective on the present landscape makes its way into *A Passage to India*, in the opening chapter (as we have already seen), and at the beginning of the "Caves" section. There, he uses this macro view of history—"Geology, looking further than religion, knows of a time when neither the river nor the Himalayas that nourished it existed"

¹¹⁰ Forster's statement here about the foundational force of geography in shaping a culture aligns closely with that of Burton, as seen in chapter 1. Forster, despite his other variances from the British worldview, follows it in his separation of Africa from the Mediterranean, or anything that would show it as part of a prominent or identifiable world history/culture.

(135)—to diminish the climax of the novel, the cave incident. What are humans, he seems to ask, in light of geologic time, in light of the beyond? This very intensive view of the geological history of the caves creeps ever closer to the present as chapter closes, and as a coda, Forster alludes to the precariousness with which the caves enter the space coeval with the narrative: “Nothing, nothing attaches to them [...] One of them is rumoured within the boulder that swings on the summit of the highest hills; [...] The boulder because of its hollowness sways in the wind, and even moves when a crow perches on it” (137, 138). Notice that despite the temporal scale according to which Forster wrote this opening section—from before the beginning of the Ganges to just prior to the present—it is narrated in the present tense. This proves an important bridge to the next chapter, as well as a disconcerting oddity within the novel, since with the course of a single sentence, syntax and tense and perspective move wildly and unpredictably. This is the first sentence of that next chapter:

These hills look romantic in certain lights and at suitable distances, and seen of an evening from the upper verandah of the club they caused Miss Quested to say conversationally to Miss Derek that she should like to have gone, that Dr. Aziz and Mr. Fielding’s had said he would arrange something, and the Indians seem rather forgetful. (138)

The sentence commences with a gesture to the immediate yet distant hills, “these hills,” and connects them through the use of the present tense to the macro-history that was just told in the prior section. The second half of the sentence swings between perspectives (Miss Quested’s and the narrator’s), and plunges from the observation of the Marabar Hills to the everyday pitter-patter of run-on sentences, itineraries, and docile racism.¹¹¹ Sentences like

¹¹¹ This also happens earlier in a scene where the Anglo-Indians had gathered after the unsuccessful Bridge Party. They sit, quietly, looking at some birds, and then, “with an impartiality exceeding all, the sky, not deeply coloured by translucent, poured light from its whole circumference. It seemed unlikely that the series stopped here. Beyond the sky must not there be something that overarches all the skies, more impartial even than they? Beyond which again ... They spoke of *Cousin Kate*” (39–40).

these in the novel, according to Molly Tinsley, show how Forster attempts to mimic the “muddledom” that is India, which induces vacillations between boredom and chaos (192). This grammatical nightmare of a sentence, rather than mimicry, enacts a nonlinear poetic experience within the linear bounds of narrative, through its movement between present and past tenses. Forster’s use of the present tense in this portion, as I mention above, acts as a bridge to the prior geological section of the novel. Within the diegesis, the only clue to the layered history of those caves, and those hills, are the “distant romance” attributed to them at the opening of the following chapter—and, the present tense.

As a “poetic” aspect of the novel, this admixture of tenses uses the cue of the quasi-timeless space (the caves, in this instance) as a means of accessing the deeply historic (geological time versus imperial time). Why might this observation be important or useful? What is the objective of Forster’s structural pointing toward a slowly changing space as a means of accessing an alternately ordered temporality? And might it not be a problem if this space is only located in or synonymous with the Orient? Yes and no. In order to elaborate on this more fully, I want to return to Alexandria for a moment.

When Forster arrived in Alexandria, he disliked it. Its distance from India was one reason; another was because, as he saw it, the present cosmopolitan city was mostly denuded of its historical past. Part of the work of *Alexandria* and *Pharos and Pharillon* was to reconcile those two disparate cities, and to reconnect them for himself, and for other people like him. As Lawrence Durrell noted in the introduction to the 1982 edition of *Alexandria: A History and a Guide*, Forster “had glimpsed the phantom city which underlay the quotidian one”

Forster again uses the abrupt transition from contemplation of “the beyond” (here listed by name) to the trivial to underscore the lengths to which the Anglo-Indians went to avoid the mystical contemplations that they assumed occupy Indians.

(*Alexandria* xvi–xvii). For Forster, the collision of the modern world with the ancient in Alexandria, and the meager, crumbling presence of the richness of the past meant that he needed to learn (and needed to teach others) how to view them as one, or as leading one into another. Ultimately, despite the varied written forms that he used to express that fusion, he required poetry to unify the past and present formally and, I think, ideologically.

The organization and logic of both *Pharos and Pharillon* and *Alexandria* depend on the same poem. “The God Abandons Antony,” is positioned at the formal transition from past to present in the books, between the sections named “History” and “Guide,” and “Pharos” and “Pharillon.” In the texts, it stands apart from the stories or historical anecdotes preceding it, with scarcely an explanation, except to note its author and to give some historical background on the poem itself. The poet is C. P. Cavafy; the background the legend of Hercules leaving Alexandria, heralded by an invisible choir, as Antony prepared for his imminent defeat by Octavian:

When at the hour of midnight
an invisible choir is suddenly heard passing
with exquisite music, with voices—
Do not lament your fortune that at last subsides,
your life’s work that has failed, your schemes that have
proved illusions.
But like a man prepared, like a brave man,
bid farewell to her, to Alexandria who is departing.
Above all, do not delude yourself, do not say that it is a
Dream,
that your ear was mistaken.
Do not condescend to such empty hopes.
Like a man for long prepared, like a brave man,
like to the man who was worthy of such a city,
go to the window firmly,
and listen with emotion,
but not with the prayers and complaints of the coward
(Ah! supreme rapture!)
listen to the notes, to the exquisite instruments of the mystic choir,
and bid farewell to her, to Alexandria whom you are

losing. (*Alexandria* 104; *Pharos and Pharillon* 56)¹¹²

Above and beside the historical incident it reenacts, the poem speaks of loss and disillusionment, and the need to refuse the urge to deny the inevitability of that loss. The tone vacillates throughout, moving between imperatives and expressive parenthetical asides, as though it is the transcript of an internal dialogue, enacted at the precise moment when one realizes that the present (and so the future), once so certain, has been irrevocably altered.

Notice how the poem's tension is enacted through the use of a multiple present tense. After the initial moment of realization, there is a tirade of present-tense commands: do not lament; bid farewell; do not delude yourself; do not say; go; listen. (This is how to cope with what is now, in this/that moment happening.) Then, the translation uses the present perfect to mark the moment of transition, of understanding the past in light of this new present: Antony's life's work has failed and his schemes have proved illusions.¹¹³ All of the sentences that we can imagine Antony speaking to himself are crafted in those tenses. The last form, the present continuous, opens and closes the poem. This form contains the others, and suspends the poem in time, and at the edge of devastation, at the fulcrum between the end of romance and the beginning of the real. This verb tense thus winds the poem tightly, holding its kinetic potential, since Antony has not yet completely lost Alexandria, nor has the city completely departed. As long as the invisible choir can still be heard, he is suspended in the moment between the two realities, between the past and the

¹¹² C. P. Cavafy, "The God Abandons Antony." Trans. George Vassopoulo. *Pharos and Pharillon*, 56.

¹¹³ I'm analyzing the translated version of Cavafy's poem, the version that Forster reproduces in both *Alexandria: A History and a Guide* and *Pharos and Pharillon*. I understand that the sorts of arguments I'm making here depend on the grammatical structure of English, rather than the poem's original Greek, which could be bad comparatist form. Since my reading depends on Forster's use of the *English* poem, however, analyzing the translation actually makes more sense here than reading Cavafy's original. The original, "Απολείπειν ο θεός Αντώνιον," as well as several English translations, can be found at the website of the Official Cavafy Archive.

present, in the moment of passage.

Through the poem, the beauty of Alexandria remains just out of reach for Antony, and for us. It enacts a complex relationship between the past and the present in its manifest and latent content: the “plot,” or the scenario, places us in the past; the verbal architecture of the complex present keeps us there, at least for a moment. Once we leave that imagined space, we are struck by its fleetingness, and our inability to grasp it completely. This, Forster seems to say, ought to be our approach to the phantom city and its past: the poetic imagination, as indicated by his positioning of the poem at formal hinge-point of the bifurcated past and present in *Alexandria* and *Pharos and Pharillon*.

As I said, Alexandria was, at first, a disappointment to Forster because of the near invisibility of its ancient past, so he wrote two books that taught people (like him) how to see it anew. What we have here is a new vision of the city—not a total or perfect one, as though such a thing were possible—but one that aims at bridging the past and present by seeing it as a poet would. Poets like Cavafy, Forster said, stood “at a slight angle to the world,” or “at a slight angle to the universe” (*Pharos and Pharillon* 91, 92, 97). Their vision produced poetry that enables the reader to “escape from life and see it at the same time” (“The Creator as Critic” 90). Forster enacted that angled point of view in his guidebook and essay collection, placing past and present side-by-side (and, in the guidebook, intertwining them through cross-reference), and connecting them with Cavafy’s poem.

Perhaps this is also how we should understand *A Passage to India*, and the so-called split worlds of the Orient and Occident. Forster wanted *A Passage to India*, like Whitman’s “Passage to India,” to be poetic. We cannot, of course, discount political readings of the novel, just because the author wanted it otherwise; nor can we say that even if the novel is

poetic, it excises it from the political realm. For the sake of the poetic argument, though, let's return to Woolf for a moment, who, you'll remember, said of the novel: "For we doubt both things—the real and the symbolical [...]. We feel that something has failed us at the critical moment; and instead of seeing [...] one single whole we see two separate parts." The real and the symbolical, she said, seem equally plausible, which results in a novel that refuses to fully concretize or fully romanticize India. In *Passage*, Forster utilized the trope of double vision, though he referred to it only as "the twilight of the double vision." Mrs. Moore has decided to leave India for England, and Forster introduces this term to describe her newfound mental state after hearing the echo in the Marabar Caves:

She had come to that state where the horror of the universe and its smallness are both visible at the same time—the twilight of the double vision in which so many elderly people are involved. If this world is not to our taste, well, at all events there is Heaven, Hell, Annihilation—one or other of those large things, that huge scenic background of stars, fires, blue or black air. (230–231)

The twilight of the double vision, the ability to see with some clarity scale of an individual life, and the vastness of the universe, arrives because of elderly people's intimacy with death. Mrs. Moore's entrance into this realm means that she can see two halves of a crumbling whole—the present world, and imagined world of the beyond. This refracted vision, though, refuses to settle on the pure symbol of the beyond or the strictures of the present, and instead apprehends them as imbricated and equally possible, equally large, equally small.

Through the doubled vision of the Alexandrian texts and *A Passage to India*, the reader glimpses a temporally deep history in the present, and thereby Forster's somewhat unconscious means of combatting a British narrative of imperial absolutism and historical linearity. Through continually pointing to the precolonial history of a storied colonial space,

whose history well predates not just the British but humans altogether, he unseats the narrative of progress and singularity that accompanies and bolsters imperial domination. Thus, Forster's Egyptian and Indian works, despite their realist representational pitfalls, as a whole disallow a smooth overlaying of the past on the present (or vice-versa), and instead propose the poetic vision, and the ethos of poetry itself, as a means of being in the world.

The passage, metaphorical and literal, through Suez thus collapsed not only the space of ancient and modern Egypt, but also the long presumed (and barely contained) worlds of East and West. With the removal of that thin slice of isthmus to the side of Egypt, the way was paved for the continued avoidance of Africa, just as with da Gama's route. With travelers such as Forster, whose circumstances or curiosity required the ship to stop, and for them to sit with what Egypt was—and, indeed, what the East always had been—came the unseating of the narrative of universality and atopic modernity. At first, Forster's encounters with Egypt and Egyptians (particularly Cairenes) in their “flat, unromantic, unmysterious, and godless” land allowed him to displace the romantic to what he thought was the “true” East, India. That Forster incorporated the terms he used in 1915 to describe his distaste for Egyptians—“the soil is mud, the inhabitants of mud moving”—to describe his fictional Indian outpost of Chandrapore (or vice-versa), suggests that his experiences in the “real” Egypt, permeated and eventually revised his romantic notions of India. Eventually, over time, with more time in Alexandria and return trips to India, the illusion of the romantic Orient, and of *A Passage to India* as a “bridge of sympathy,” faltered. He wrote in 1922, again to Masood, of how his view of the novel had changed in the ten years since he had started it:

When I began the book [*A Passage to India*] I thought of it as a little bridge of sympathy between East and West, but this conception has had to go, my sense of truth forbids anything so comfortable. I think that most Indians, like

most English people, are shits, and I am not interested in whether they sympathize with one another or not. Not interested as an artist; of course the journalistic side of me still gets roused over these questions. (Furbank 2:106)

Despite Forster's disillusionment with the possibilities of *A Passage to India*—and, perhaps, because he was disillusioned—the novel's structural and topical portrayal of the colonial space within the “present continuous” mode, a present connected profoundly to a past predating the British, proposes a singular world no longer divided into East and West, but shakily unified into a singular globe.

This is the moment in someone else's book that an attempt would be made to bring these fateful objects together: to say, finally, what Suez has to do with the various formal and thematic perspectival shifts that characterize, I have been arguing, the work Whitman and Forster do in their respective passages—fictional and nonfictional, in the latter's case—to India.

But: no. Though it is tempting to produce, via a magisterial allegorism, a reading that would say something like: “the troubled double vision that breaks the strictures of genre is the Suez of the poetic mind,” or, more modestly, that “the utopian crisis Suez provoked in the imagination of the planet finds itself refracted in the American or British sense of an equally utopian (or dystopian, which amounts to the same thing) crisis in the aesthetic imagination,” both these readings pass too quickly, like a canal, between structures that do not exactly operate on the same conceptual or historical plane. At the same time, one does not want to say, well, it's all down to colonialism, and Suez had nothing to do with it. Clearly, Suez had *something* to do with it. The world only happened this way once, and the once includes Suez, as it does Whitman's poem, as it does Forster's decision to borrow from

that poem for his book. The problem that faces all historical critics thus appears before us in all its unpleasant clarity: we do not have a perfect theory of the over- and under-determined and determining relationships between the imaginary and the real (or, to be fairer, among the many varieties of the imaginary, from those that imagine themselves to be real to those that don't).

Here, let us say, however provisionally, however minimally, the following: first, without Suez the history of the literary would not have had the particular shape it has. This is a minimal claim about the reality of reality. Suez acted as an occasion for a large-scale ideological discourse one of whose goals was to organize a planet without Africa; presumably this was one of its appeals to anyone who picked up on that discourse—even if to disagree with it. Anything that refers to Suez, therefore, also refers to the possibility of this Africaless world. This is especially true when the reference uses the word *passage*. Whitman and Forster are not stupid; therefore they knew and deployed the word *passage* in both its literal and metaphorical (or symbolic) modes. In fact the very borrowing of the word by authors recognized in advance as poets (or attuned to the poetic) means that the symbolic register is assumed. We are then justified in asking what, or how, that borrowing and its effects (in terms of the organization of the symbolic and the realistic, the metaphorical and the literal) plays itself out thematically or formally in their work. The answer to that last question is what you have before you in this chapter.

The argument is then that—though there can be no easy way for someone to say, “the logic of Suez produces the poetics of Whitman” wholesale, or, more fancifully, that “the logic of Whitman’s aesthetic vision (or Forster’s) represents the truth of Suez wholesale”—the connection among these things exposes for us two serious minds thinking

through the issues that concern us here: the relation between Africa and world history as it was written in the last two centuries, and the ways in which that relation interfered with the history of the aesthetic, particularly in formal terms. Again, the answer to how that happened is what this chapter just did. The point is not to develop praise or blame but to see how the history of the aesthetic we have has been interfered with by Africa (here, in this chapter, via Suez), and how it continues to interfere with it.

With that in mind, let's return to Egypt. Egyptians maintained few illusions about the role that the Suez played in the world imaginary, such that the "Suez Crisis" of 1956 was predicated by Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser's seizure and nationalization of the canal. The takeover of the canal by the country that should have owned it to begin with brought war with France, Israel, and Britain, because in the nearly 100 years of its existence, Suez had retained its status as "an important symbol of Western presence in the Middle East and a major artery of international trade," especially, now, the trade of oil (Painter 31). As the crisis would demonstrate as it played out over the next ten days, Suez remained a linchpin at the center of the world, though, this time, it was at the crux of two new imaginary worlds—the communist and the capitalist. Among the outcomes of the crisis was a Soviet and Egyptian political victory, and, some say, the final death knell for Britain's empire.¹¹⁴

With that death came a kick to the gasping romantic East and vitality to the image of an oil-rich, brutal one. So we see in contemporary Egyptian poet Abdel Moneim Ramadan's "Funeral for Walt Whitman" [إفانز والت وينمان] a poem that lauds the notion of poetic kinship beyond time and location (Whitman in the poem, for example, pays homage to Arabic classical poets Abu Nuwas and meets with Federico García Lorca). Ramadan places

¹¹⁴ See, for example, Keith Kyle, *Suez: Britain's End of Empire in the Middle East*.

Whitman in a city to which he had never traveled as he channels the American poet's style, with a difference:

أحيراً على طرفِ دبابةٍ
يجلسُ والت ويطمانُ
أحيراً يتأملُ شوارعَ بغداد
ويرى الطيورَ الورقيةَ
ويفكرُ كيف أقامَ البناون قصرَ الخلافةِ
وكيف هدمته الطائراتُ

So, finally, atop the fender of a tank
lounges Walt Whitman.
Finally he observes the streets of Baghdad.
He sees above him birds of paper.
He ponders how the caliph's palace was constructed
and how airplanes destroyed it

This Whitman travels imaginatively throughout the gutted city, encountering poets long dead, bureaucrats, and soldiers, the poem's tense marking these actions as long since having occurred: The meetings with Abu Nuwas, Lorca, and Khalil Gibran, and even with the narrator, are narrated with an intonation of "I met," "he met," "they met" [تقابل]. We forget that he has not moved from the fender of the tank until, again, Ramadan places him there with the repetition of the lines that opened the poem: "يجلسُ والت ويطمانُ" / "أحيراً على طرفِ دبابةٍ" [“So, finally, atop the fender of a tank, / lounges Walt Whitman”]. The location of the tank is never quite certain, but from his position on the fender Whitman is able to see expansively—the streets of Baghdad stretched in front of him, the “birds of paper,” above him—as well as intensively and temporally. He wonders at the construction and destruction of the caliph's palace and at the Virgin Mary's reading of *Leaves of Grass*. This time while on the tank, Walt Whitman turns his eyes to a mulberry tree, which he had “requested [...] keep him company,” and observes:

عندما يستريح ينظر ينظر إلى نفسه
وينظر إلى الشجرة
أحياناً لا يرى نفسه
أحياناً يرى الشجرة ولدًا برياً
أحياناً يراها أخته التوأم
أحياناً يراها السفينة العالية
والبرج العالي
والمشقة العالية
والت ويطمان مازال يحلم
مازالت الشجرة شجرة

When he rests, he looks at himself
and at that tree.
sometimes he does not see himself.
sometimes he sees that tree as a wild boy,
sometimes he sees it as his twin sister,
sometimes he sees it as a tall ship,
and the tall gallows.
Walt Whitman is still dreaming.
The tree is still a tree.

The tree is sometimes a tree, sometimes another human, sometimes an out-of-place means of transport, and sometimes a harbinger of death. The repetition here of “sometimes he sees” [أحياناً يرى] places the transformation of the thing in the eyes of the viewer, Whitman, instead of within the object itself. The power of the viewer’s interpretation over the thing he beholds seems absolute, until the next stanza, when we realize that the companionable mulberry tree becomes, for Whitman, his tall gallows. As “night with its heavy weight falls upon the earth,” he lifts himself into the crook of the tree: “عنفه بين جذوعها / والت ويطمان يتدلى:” [“Walt Whitman climbs the mulberry tree. / He puts his neck between its branches. / Walt Whitman dangles there.”]. He so brings to pass the seemingly fanciful daydreams that began with a boy and a ship.

In the course of the poem, Whitman dies many deaths, and his corpse transmogrifies: at the beginning of the poem, he is stabbed by Khalil Gibran with the wooden cross; Al-Hussein impales him with a wilted rose and a tortoise. He has drowned in

rivers. Despite those many deaths, the figural Whitman travels throughout the world, meeting Lorca and others in New York, before arriving finally in Baghdad. Here, at the end of the poem, when he hangs himself on the mulberry tree, this is the death that sticks: he dangles, still observing, watching his gravediggers and eventually his own corpse as it rots and turns green. It is death by dream realized.

That the figural Whitman's final demise comes because he believed too much in his dream brings to mind the life and death of the romantic fantasies of the Orient imagined into being by the real Whitman and Forster. Ramadan's poem reverses the lens, and depicts the death of a benevolent, figural Occident—a very particular Occident, America—an Occident that imagines the utopian “earth [...] spann'd, connected by net-work,” and vision of “[t]he races, neighbors, to marry and be given in marriage.” This dream rots, dies, and its corpse mutates into the new symbol of the West in the East, the tank (التي كان يجلسُ عليها) “أصبح طرفُ الدبابة” [“He turned into the fender of the tank where he was sitting.”]). As the poem concludes, the image further reflects and refracts:

وولت ويتمان يتمدّد علي الأرض الحمراء
ينظرُ إلى جثته هابشعر الملمّخ
ينظرُ فترةً طويلةً
ويلحظُ المكانَ الذي وقعَ فيه المسدّسُ
والركنَ الذي برزت منه الكاميرا
وبقايا لصحراء
ثم يكمل موته
بلا أيّ السمتاع

And Walt Whitman stretches out on the red earth.
He looks at his own corpse for a long time.
He notices the place the gun fell,
the corner where the camera appeared,
and he notices what's left of the desert.
He finishes dying
without taking in it the slightest pleasure

The red earth, the corpse, the gun, the camera, the desert: these are the symbols that remain after Whitman has died, and are the new symbols that cloud the Western interpretation and engagement with the East and South.

Much as Forster's passage makes clear the muddle, and Whitman represents the image of the romantic, of the singular body who holds multitudes, and the ur-American, Ramadan's poem makes clear that, despite rhetoric of democracy and goodwill, the space radiating around the Suez remains a place for reality and romance to collide, and, in some of its forms, to die.

My reading of an Egyptian poem does not indicate that only the Egyptians are really the inheritors of the historical intertwining I've described here. The point is not to say, the future of the colonial lies in the postcolony; the point is rather how these forms of interference are always dangerously in touch with the ways we usually talk about literature: what it is, what it does, and how it does it. With that in mind let's go look at the history of South African poetry.

CHAPTER 3 / Grey Aesthetics: Apartheid South African Poetry between Politics and Form

South Africa tends to occupy an exceptional space within the narrative of sub-Saharan African history and culture of the past five centuries. From the beginning of Dutch exploration in the sixteenth century (and the use of the Cape Colony as a stopover point on the way to the East Indies), the South African territory uneasily accommodated Europeans (mostly Dutch and British), native Africans (Xhosa and Zulu in the East; Khoi and San in the West), as well as Indians, Southeast Asians from the Malay peninsula, and the mixed-race populations that arose from the intermingling of those groups. Systems of segregation and classification would coevolve with the population, even when racial differences were not so visible.¹¹⁵ Because of this history, along with patterns of British and Boer (Dutch-descended) settler colonization, what “South African” is has changed extensively over time.

With the election of the National Party in 1948 on a platform of increasingly severe policies of separation, or apartheid, the state definition of “South African” meant white descendants of European settlers.¹¹⁶ From the late 1940s through the 1960s, the state ratified laws that sought to sequester non-whites. Some of the most infamous of these were the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act of 1949, the Population Registration Act and the Group Areas Acts of 1950 (which enforced racially based geographical segregation and required passes for non-whites to enter white areas), and the Bantu Education Act of 1953. The years

¹¹⁵ According to the Cape Slave Code of 1754: “Freed slave women are not to wear coloured silk or hoop skirts, fine lace, or any decoration on their hats, or earrings made of gems or imitation gems” (Page and Sonnenburg 965).

¹¹⁶ The British had long before the rise of the National Party instituted censorial policies; the apartheid state strengthened and elaborated on them. See McDonald, and also J. M. Coetzee, *Giving Offense: Essays on Censorship*.

following were marked by increasing public resistance to the laws, led by members of the African National Congress (ANC) like Nelson Mandela and Walter Sisulu; of the South African Communist Party such as Ruth First; and of the Natal Indian Congress and South African Indian Congress like Monty Naicker and Yusef Dadoo. These activists and 151 others were indicted and tried for crimes against the state in what became known as the Treason Trials of 1956. (They were eventually acquitted, though many, like Mandela, were subsequently imprisoned on other charges.) The judiciary arm of apartheid was augmented by the actions of the police state in 1960, when police opened fire upon crowds demonstrating against the pass laws in Sharpeville, near Johannesburg. Ten days after the massacre, the ANC and PAC (Pan Africanist Congress) were banned; within a year, the newly underground organizations created their militant arms (Schwartzman 1).

Writers and critics grappling with what it meant to be South African in the twentieth century—in the pre-apartheid, apartheid, and post-apartheid periods—have often narrated that era according to those in power and those deprived of their rights. Most often, these discourses fit into a binary of white–black, or European–African, frictions. Sarah Nuttall and others are quick to remind us that the lived experiences of those in the opposed and separated groups were always far more entangled and interrelated than they would have liked to admit (Nuttall 12ff). She argues that historically, “the more dispossession occurred the more blacks and whites depended on each other” (2).

This everyday imbrication of the lives of South Africans at times of the most severe segregation holds promise for thinking through *aesthetic* production in those eras. Though Nuttall and others such as Loren Kruger do so,¹¹⁷ the conversation has often been stymied

¹¹⁷ The meeting of the two oceans at the Cape of Storms (the Cape of Good Hope) exemplifies for

by an understood opposition between two forms of South African poetry: Black Consciousness and formalist poetics. The structural binary that divides and ties them has often been grasped, in South Africa and in other parts of sub-Saharan Africa, as parallel to an African/European racial one.

A foundational study of the opposition between African and European poetics is Abdul JanMohamed's *Manichean Aesthetics* (1983), which engages the theories of Frantz Fanon to study twentieth-century African novels and what he refers to as European, or colonial, novels. *Manichean Aesthetics* studies six authors, "three Europeans, Joyce Cary, Isak Dineson, and Nadine Gordimer, and three Africans, Chinua Achebe, Ngugi wa Thiong'o (formerly James Ngugi), and Alex La Guma." He demonstrates "the negative influence of colonialist literature on African fiction" (6, 8). The opposition of black and white as European and African (regardless of the fact that Nadine Gordimer was born in South Africa, while the other "Europeans" were not), carries through the study, which is in the end a diagnosis of "the antagonistic relationship between colonial and African, a hegemonic and nonhegemonic, literature" (13).

Gaurav Desai has recently argued that JanMohamed's configuration of a black-white opposition in Africa does not fit with the lived reality of societies shaped by the Indian Ocean trade.¹¹⁸ Desai discusses the history of Asians in East Africa, as well as those living

Loren Kruger the possibilities of tracing the always already intermingled histories of the country via fiction, where "black and white Atlantics collide with Indians that may be black or white or neither. [... I trace] fictions that weave across the holes gouged in the hearts of South African cities in the name of apartheid and the gaps in South African history left not only by apartheid but also by influential antiapartheid narratives, including a recent magisterial attempt to create a 'single literature' out of multiple 'smaller stories' underneath the grand narrative of struggle" (Kruger 114). Kruger wants to deploy the historical record as a means of demonstrating how its narratives "burst the bounds of apartheid racial classifications or, indeed, the vessels carrying racial habits that persist despite the official demise of apartheid" (113).

¹¹⁸ See also Desai's *Commerce with the Universe: Africa, India, and the Afrasian Imagination*.

during apartheid who were Coloured, Indian, or Asian, and thereby excluded from this Manichean narrative, as proof of the complexity that JanMohamed's analysis omits. Desai concludes by calling for a reframing of "the discussions of the politics of African identities" (716) through the reading of recent literary texts that speak to "the racial and cultural hybridity of the Indian Ocean world [... and that are] set in Asian, Arab, Cape Malay, and mixed-race communities in Africa" (718). Desai is right to argue for the reframing of current conceptions of Africa based on the historical and current complexity of those living there. His attention to recent fiction that diegetically exemplifies "racial and cultural hybridity" is an important counter to JanMohamed's binaries; however, we need to consider also how the black–white frame remains tied to understandings of and expressions of African poetics.

Any radical reassessment of the African–European binary in the sub-Saharan context needs to consider the independence-era debate among African intellectuals in the 1960s and 1970s about African and European expressive cultures.¹¹⁹ Because the education systems established by British and French colonials (among others) devalued traditional African modes of expression and elevated European ones, part of the post-emancipation conversation involved how to restore and revivify African traditions. Central to the project of decolonization was, as Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o would put it, the project of decolonizing the mind. For Ngũgĩ, this meant doing away with European-language instruction in schools and, for him and for other African writers, to begin writing in indigenous African languages and forms. To do otherwise was tantamount to a continuation of the colonial project itself.

¹¹⁹ "The inaugural moment of the scholarly engagement with modern African poetry is best seen as coinciding with efforts at making modern African literature a subject of academic enquiry in the 1960s, the most significant being the Makerere, Dakar and Freetown conferences, all of which were held between 1962 and 1963. The proceedings of the conferences, edited by Gerald Moore (1965), are brought together in *African Literature and the Universities*" (Okunoye 769).

Poetry, as one of the oldest modes of artistic expression on the continent, was a primary site of debate: how to best reclaim a link to oral models of African poetry, while writing in the modern era? Vehement discussions ensued over whether the language of poetry should be complex or simple. Those who argued for the simplicity of traditional poetry bolstered their case with evidence of writers whose poetry was modeled after European modernism, and thereby difficult for their fellow countrymen to understand (Okpewho 21–22). Wole Soyinka, on the other hand, argued that some traditional African poetry, such as that used for mystical or secretive purposes, was deliberately complex, and simplicity should not be a prerequisite for an “authentic” African poetics. Complexity and linguistic density, for some post-independence African intellectuals, became as much of a symbol of colonialist mentality as the use of European forms or languages.

The question of a social and aesthetic imbrication of black and white within the South African context in 1960s and 1970s, then, becomes even further charged, considering this broader context. On the one hand, there was censorship, and on the other, the heightening of state-sponsored violence, which meant that writers writing against the state were swiftly punished through exile, imprisonment, or death. For writers (and for ordinary citizens, as well), the most formative moments in 1960s South Africa were the Sharpeville massacre and the passage of the 1963 censorship law.¹²⁰ In most retellings of the history of

¹²⁰ Michael Chapman, for example, argues in *A Century of South African Poetry*: “The distinct emergence in the 1960s of a literature sharply distinguished by a sense of new alternatives is of course not unconnected with an altered apprehension of reality during these years, both in southern Africa and abroad. The 1960s saw a general disillusionment with post-War humanist ideals [...]; while in southern Africa the failure of the ideals of gradualism [...], the apocalypse of Sharpeville, the post-colonial mood of Africa, South Africa’s break from the Commonwealth, the creation of a new martyr in Nelson Mandela, are all symbolic of the fact that—at least, as far as the white English-speaking South African was concerned—the 1960s marked the end of an era: an era which had generally been characterised, on the part of South African English writers of the previous decade, by more or less confident assumptions about the civilising role of English culture” (23, 24).

apartheid South Africa, the Sharpeville incident (1960) marks the beginning of a qualitatively different kind of state. Adam Schwartzman writes that Sharpeville and its consequences constitute “one plausible water-shed beyond which South Africa was another country, an intuitive marker—political as well as cultural (for art and politics have been exceptionally closely linked in South Africa, as in the rest of Africa)—for the beginning of the ‘recent past’” (1). Denis Hirson explains the interstices between poets’ lives and the South African polity after 1960, and names thirteen poets (of all races) who were political prisoners, exiled, were institutionalized for mental illness, or committed suicide (xx). Both Schwartzman and Hirson emphasize the post-Sharpeville intrusion of the public in the private lives of South African citizens, either physically or artistically.

The law that brought many of these imprisonments or exiles to pass was the Publications Act of 1963. The newly established Publications Control Board was charged with eliminating the “undesirable” text—the term for one found “morally repugnant, blasphemous, socially subversive, or politically seditious” (McDonald 34).¹²¹ Those first two categories of undesirability entailed the project of building a pious national literature through cultivating expression construed as Good or godly; the latter two excised threats to the legitimacy of the system itself.

Formalist theories of literature and literariness directly informed the definition of the Good. When in 1956, Geoffrey Cronjé, a former sociology professor and head of the Cronjé Commission, authored a report that recommended the formation of South Africa’s

¹²¹ The five clauses in the law covering the “undesirable publication” describe it as one that, in whole or in part, “(a) is indecent or obscene or is offensive or harmful to public morals; (b) is blasphemous or is offensive to the religious convictions or feelings of any section of the inhabitants of the Republic; (c) brings any section of the inhabitants of the Republic into ridicule or contempt; (d) is harmful to the relations between any sections of the inhabitants of the Republic; (e) is prejudicial to the safety of the State, the general welfare or the peace and good order” (qtd in McDonald 34).

Publications Control Board (the censorship arm of the apartheid state), *Theory of Literature* (1949), by New Critics René Wellek and Austin Warren, was among the texts cited (McDonald 27). Wellek and Warren defined literature as purposively purposeless, as apolitical, as “pure poetry”:

We ought to evaluate literature in terms and degrees of its own nature. [...] What is “pure” literature? The phrasing of the questions implies some analytic or reductive process; the kind of answer arrives at conceptions of “pure poetry”—imagism or echolalia. [...] Such a conception of purity is one of analyzing elements. We do better to start with organization and function. It is not what elements but how they are put together, and with what function, which determine whether a given work is or is not literature. [...] What literature is, by modern definition, “pure of” is practical intent (propaganda, incitation to direct, immediate action) and scientific intent (provision of information, facts, “additions to knowledge”). (Wellek and Warren 249)

You know pure poetry from the words themselves: when their sounds or organization approaches the thing they describe, that is pure poetry. Literature, broadly speaking, can be understood only *via negativa*: it is pure of practical and scientific intent, *Theory of Literature* argues. Its aesthetics are necessarily apolitical, impractical, and fictional.

The dictates of formalist aesthetics provided the guidance, rather than the motivation, for censorship of writings construed as in opposition to the state and its policies. Regardless, after 1963, the “pure,” apolitical, impractical literature—literature either written by whites or following a “white aesthetic”—that passed by the censor unscathed, and thereby was implicitly *approved*, came to carry the stigma of state-approved literature. The stark contrast between the high personal price paid by Black Consciousness writers who used their art as a weapon and those who abided by the art-as-object ethos thus fueled the debate between the opposing sides.

The twin aggressions of state violence and censorship (here symbolized by Sharpeville and the censorship law) that targeted non-whites was thus in large part

responsible for the rise of Black Consciousness and explicitly antiapartheid art in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Steven Biko's enunciation of a Black Consciousness philosophy helped shape the black aesthetic of the late 1960s and beyond, and expanded the definition of "blackness" beyond the racial: "blackness does not merely denote skin pigmentation but is 'a reflection of a mental attitude,'" he said, which arises from an experience of shared political, economic, and social discrimination (Ngwenya 500). Hence, Indian, Coloured,¹²² and black African poets could write within the "black experience" in South Africa (Ngwenya 500), insofar as it meant that those poets were committed to writing against apartheid and its ideologies. Though Black Consciousness philosophy was at its core inclusive, the most prominent figures of the literary arm of the movement typically were black, male, and, over time, increasingly militant.

Black Consciousness poetry, sometimes called "Soweto poetry" after the Johannesburg township where its first artists lived, broke every one of Wellek and Warren's "rules" about poetry: it was political, direct, used everyday diction, and arose from the reality of nonwhites' lives during apartheid. Because of this clear violation of the literary laws, many of the most virulent poems were not published at the time, and instead were performed in the street or at political gatherings.

This division between black and white poetry, roughly configured as an orientation toward the political or aesthetic, also characterized critics' conversations in 1960s–1970s South Africa about whether art was a "cultural weapon" or whether it should act solely as a reserve for the beautiful. The opposed philosophies of literature's purpose were roughly

¹²² This refers (only in South Africa) to a mixed-race person, and is a relic of the apartheid era, when it was an official racial classification.

divided along racial lines, the former position an expression of Black Consciousness, the latter dubbed “Butlerism” after a white poet, Guy Butler, who publicly espoused the view that poetry should look to the ideal, not the political. Though the ideologies were not exclusively the domains of particular races, the fact of their acknowledged and, indeed, historically rooted racial designations meant that the political or the aesthetic (which I’m using here to refer to a kind of a formalist poetics) were de facto the domain of one or another group.

The two most prominent studies of black and white writing in the South African context, J. M. Coetzee’s *White Writing* (1988) and David Attwell’s *Rewriting Modernity* (2005), analyze the poetics and development of white settler (and early apartheid) writing, and black writing during the same period, respectively. White writing, for Coetzee, does not “imply the existence of a body of writing different in nature than black writing. White writing is white only insofar as it is generated by the concerns of people no longer European, not yet African” (11). Black writing, for Attwell (who positions himself as in conversation with and extending Coetzee’s work), cannot be defined as the inverse of white writing, as the African (writer) who is not yet European, since to do so would rehearse a colonial teleology. In an effort to sidestep this problem and to widen the purview of his work beyond a strict racial binary, Attwell crafts his project to include African writings that highlight the author’s negotiation with modernity (a term that he uses instead of “Europe”), broadly defined (15–16). Attwell is right to argue for a non-oppositional view of black and white writing, though the replacement of “Europe” with “modernity” replicates a contested structure, where modernity arrives from elsewhere to be “negotiated with” by the non-West.

Coetzee argues that “white writing” is white only insofar as it is written by white people, and is not “white” in an ontological way. Attwell contends that this statement remains more or less unelaborated in *White Writing*, and asks whether this also might be true in the case of “black writing.” No, he says, because Coetzee’s comment on whiteness “shifts the emphasis away from the historical, bodily realities of race toward a more abstract concept of discourse.” To place black expressive culture in such a context, he counters, would be “inappropriate,” since it is “frequently about race and the historical body and their place in language and relations of power” (15). The rest of Attwell’s book bolsters his claim through providing historical examples of black negotiation with modernity (16).

Both Attwell and Coetzee thus analyze the genealogy of white or black expression, and their analysis of the literature of the apartheid era depends on that historical contextualization—hence Coetzee’s argument that the whiteness of white writing is not ontological but discursive, and Attwell’s that the blackness of black writing can, in part, be found in the location of the historical-political-racial within it. These observations are true: there really is nothing “white” in the poetry written by white South Africans, just as there’s nothing inherently “black” in black poetry. I want to suggest, however, that here and now, in the West fifty years later, *reading* this poetry (white lyrics or Black Consciousness poetry), we read them according to a racialized schema, wherein the white (modernist) poem can be divorced from its context and read to learn about the universal human condition, whereas the black poetry must always be historicized and read to learn about the particular *black*

experience, which is necessarily and qualitatively different from the general human experience.¹²³

This chapter is therefore an examination of interpretive method as much as it is an examination of history or literary content. I take up the creation of a South African national poetic literature via anthologies, paying special attention to the way that the lyric form mediates or exacerbates the problem of racial unification. Next, via a series of close readings, I propose that, due to a variety of factors (not the least of which is the persistence of formalism), poetry within South Africa, and sub-Saharan Africa generally, acts as a *social form*, since the discourse surrounding it has reproduced the separation between black and white. This results in a continued and mostly uncontested separation between African and European aesthetics, with the African occupying the realist, political mode, and the European occupying either the modernist or romantic, allegorical mode.

Just as *Theory of Literature's* formalist dictates served as a heuristic for the censors to choose what literature was good or bad, dissident or innocuous,¹²⁴ an unwritten code of the anti-formalist (or post-formalist) has served as a means to understand poetry written in the 1960s and afterward. In order to draw out a more meaningful conversation about our working theories of African literature and poetics, we need to rethink the real, yet overemphasized differences (and/or separation) between black and white aesthetics in the South African context. Warren and Wellek opened their second chapter on the nature of

¹²³ I'm not suggesting that what I have shorthanded here as the black and white aesthetics are the only ones operating in South Africa, but rather am trying to work through the thorny issue of representation and interpretation in sub-Saharan Africa generally and in South Africa particularly, where black and white aesthetics tended to overshadow the others. As I mentioned with Desai's argument, I hope that my work here will open up some space for the less visible stories that don't operate according to the black or white aesthetic, as defined in South Africa.

¹²⁴ Note: I'm not saying that Wellek and Warren were racists. Their book was just used for inherently racist purposes. It could happen to anyone.

literature by asking, “What is literature? What is not literature? What is the nature of literature?” This chapter is about how these questions have been answered in South Africa—in part because of the Publications Board, but mostly because of the dictates of critics, poets, and the tension between the expectations of how poets and poetry can and cannot act (formally, aesthetically) in a place like apartheid South Africa—and in colonial, postcolonial, and oppressed locations, generally speaking.

White Aesthetics / Black Politics

The construction of an English-language South African literature can be observed most clearly in the poetry anthologies compiled during the early twentieth century. The first of the major anthologies of the century, edited by Francis Carey Slater in 1925, was titled *The Centenary Book of South African Verse (1820–1925)*. In the introduction, Slater engages topics that would continue to haunt subsequent anthologists: language, content as a product of context, and comparative aesthetics. The opening of the text indicates how these three categories guided South Africa’s aesthetic self-presentation to an audience conceived at this time period as the metropole, though that would change in the years to come: “The anthology before us is confined to South African verse written in English. This limitation is not imposed because Afrikaans poetry is unworthy” (vii). Exemplary Afrikaans poems are many, he writes, but the linguistic constraints of the potential readership outside of South Africa prevented him from including them. Those poems that have been selected, Slater reminds us, were written in a context far different from that of English poets: great irruptions of war, quarrels, exploration and excavation have wrested the necessary time for artistic creation away from South Africans. Further, the scale of man within the vast,

untrammelled South African veld pushed poets (nearly to the person, in that anthology) toward recording meditations on that topic (x).¹²⁵ Finally, and most important to Slater, is the merit of South African verse in the English context. This anthology is in its organization an argument for the metropole to value “Dominion” writing:

The main indictment brought against South African poetry by English critics is that it is too derivative in form. Apparently they look to new countries for new forms—for a new way of writing. Is this quite fair? New forms, it seems to me, are the produce of ripe culture, and a new country is the last place in which to seek them. If the poets of new countries introduce new subject matter, and handle old forms in an individual and characteristic manner, is this not all that can reasonably be expected of them? (xii)

The value of the South African poetry to a broader English poetry in the early twentieth century was content-based (new images of, say, the colors and scenery of the veld and the tropics), not formal.¹²⁶ Slater goes further, deriding “modern poetry” of the metropole as a useless and recursive development: “The new form—or formlessness—of much modern poetry is scarcely a sign of healthy development and strength. [...] It is as though a man, in order to appear peculiar, walked upon his hands instead of his feet. This eccentric mode of progression might possibly enable him to make a minute study of the pavements and pillar-boxes, but it eliminates the mountains and the stars” (xii). Slater thus positions the South African aesthetic as both local and timeless, in its meditation on the sublime and its

¹²⁵ J. M. Coetzee writes of Pringle and his era of poetry that, notably, the appeal to the sublimity of the landscape is markedly missing: “What is striking in both Burchell and Pringle is how little the possibility is explored of deploying a rhetoric of the sublime on the interior plateau. Why, at a time when the notion of the sublime had not exhausted its potency, was it not applied to the vast ‘empty’ spaces of the hinterland?” (*White Writing* 49). The landscape’s difference from Wordsworth’s Britain disallowed such meditations. Instead, as Coetzee observes later, Pringle’s poetry domesticated the strangeness of the landscape through its form: “Though the flora may be strange to Britons, the poetic context in which Pringle sets them is not: the familiar trot of iambic-tetrameter couplets reassuringly domesticates the foreign content” (164).

¹²⁶ Simon Gikandi’s essay “Provincializing English” provides a useful counterpoint to the ways that English and Englishness worked in other colonial spaces, where the choice of using English (versus an indigenous language) became tantamount with choosing Englishness as a way of being and thinking.

maintenance of a form that reflected that orientation. The colony, distant from the corruptive influences of the metropole, could act as guardian of virtue and tradition.

The aesthetic cue to that respectable Englishness was the Victorian lyric, the sole poetic type included in *The Centenary Book of South African Verse*. A poem written by Thomas Pringle,¹²⁷ considered South Africa's first English-language immigrant poet, "Emigrant's Song," could serve as the distillation of sensibility conveyed in this anthology. Written in ballad form, the poem is an extended farewell to the native land and a deferred arrival: "Our native Land—our native Vale—/ A long, a last adieu! / Farewell to bonny Lynden-dale, And Cheviot-mountains blue!" (151). And so forth. Slater's anthology solidifies the place of local South African poetry as pre-modernist and peripheral—but, from his perspective, central, since it acts as a reserve for upright form—insofar as the ethos of the work was the negotiation of the content within stable, British, traditional boundaries.

Perhaps because of the conservative connotation of the lyric, the first step toward a racially inclusive South African poetry used that form. Anthologists extended the purview of "South African Verse" to include non-white authors writing lyrics, whether in English or in translation. In his 1958 anthology *Poets in South Africa*, Roy Macnab introduces his project as one of linguistic inclusion: "I would aim at presenting within a single volume and a single language a variety of poets nurtured by the same South African soil but communicating in a different medium [Afrikaans or a Bantu language]" (np).¹²⁸ Unifying these poems was not

¹²⁷ Most studies of South African poetry in English begin with Thomas Pringle, who immigrated briefly to South Africa in 1820, and was the first to write on "South African themes" (Slater xii). A sample of Pringle's titles gives a taste of the themes: "Emigrant's Song," "The Nameless Stream," "Evening Rambles," "Afar in the Desert."

¹²⁸ Remarkably, Macnab never mentions race in the introduction, but rather uses the signifier of language to multiply indicate the racial and the linguistic. To wit: "Here was a number of remarkable poets, whose names were known to all, but whose work was widely familiar only among their own

just linguistic medium (through translation, English), but also the lyric. Visually, nearly all of the poems are organized in stanzas of six to nine lines; apart from the translated poems, most adhere to a regular rhyme scheme. The poems translated from Bantu languages, even those that deal with racialized inequality, do so according to a familiar, or familiarized, poetics.¹²⁹

The following excerpt from “In the Gold Mines” [“Ezinkomponi”] by B. W. Vilakazi indicates the formal and stylistic conventions Vilakazi used to make Zulu poetry “recognizable” to “modern world literature” (Attwell 90):

Thunder away, machines of the mines,
Thunder away from dawn till sunset;
I will get up soon: do not pester me;
Thunder away, machines. Heed not
The groans of the black labourers
Writhing with the pain of their bodily wounds,
The air close and suffocating
With the dirt and sweat of their bodies
As they drain their hips till nothing is left. (96)

Though Vilakazi’s poetic form marks this verse as outside a traditional black South African aesthetic lineage, the content dwells on a local, racial concern that typically falls beyond the purview of the lyric: the mechanization of the black body, and the draining of resources from the land and that body “till nothing is left.” Here, the medium permitted the message’s communication. Vilakazi was himself aware of the power of the lyric form, and how the movement of traditional content into a “European form” permitted the communication of

language group” (np). This is either exceptional politicking or an earnest effort to emphasize a unified South African poetics that transcends race.

¹²⁹ According to a review of the volume, the verses translated from Bantu languages “exhibit a freshness, directness, kick, and humour which leaves much of the European verse in the anthology looking pretty etiolated” (Wright 245).

(and, hopefully, the acceptance of) content that was “foreign,” and perhaps difficult (Attwell 77–78).¹³⁰

The thirty-three years between Slater’s and Macnab’s anthologies reveal the tensions and benefits inherent to conceiving a South African poetry (or poetics) based on the lyric: Slater saw the South African lyric as holding fast to the sublime, while the metropole turned to the modernist quotidian; Macnab understood it as a site to work through (or sidestep) cultural and racial differences at home in South Africa. Though Macnab’s approach is undoubtedly Anglocentric, the advantages are also clear: his anthology attempted to present a fuller picture of South African poetry that included non-white writers. Macnab’s anthology, which took for granted that the English-language lyric could transcend the divisions then being solidified by the National Party, would be the last that could do so without a caveat.

What Macnab utilized as a medium for unification in 1958 in the 1960s and after became the site of debate about the ideology of form—the lyric’s colonial roots, its communication of a Romantic subjectivity, its supposed valuation of aesthetics over politics (Klopper 588).¹³¹ By implication, the poet him- or herself became subject to the same sorts of questions: to what extent could the use of the lyric guarantee a certain sort of sympathy or antipathy toward anti-apartheid politics?

¹³⁰ See David Attwell’s chapter on Vilakazi and H. I. E. Dhlomo in *Rewriting Modernity*, “Modernising Tradition,” 77–110. Attwell discusses Vilakazi’s writings about poetic form at length, particularly his idea that “if we are to believe and teach other races of humanity to believe our tale, the poets must be truthful.” This entailed “finding forms that can be recognized” (Attwell 90).

¹³¹ See especially Dirk Klopper’s analysis of the tension between the colonial, metropolitan roots of the lyric and its use in South Africa during the 1950s and 1960s. Klopper’s study of the South African lyric some fifty years after the moment of internal crisis also helps us see us how English has eventually become the “neutral” language of poetic expression in the country (as in many postcolonial places); how the lyric has shed its overly aesthetic reputation, and how it has become the domain of not just white poets of English descent, but of those identifying as black, Coloured, Indian, and to a lesser extent, Afrikaners (to a lesser extent since some write solely in Afrikaans).

That white poets writing in the lyric mode were suspected of collusion with or indifference toward apartheid—and, therefore, often pilloried by poets sympathetic to or part of the Black Consciousness movement—has much to do with the ideological position associated with Guy Butler. Butler’s 1959 anthology, *A Book of South African Verse*, by including English poets and South African poets of English descent, offers “South African poetry” as a settler form that looks elsewhere for its intellectual and historical validity. Whereas Macnab uses English and the lyric as an attempt to unify South Africans, Butler sees both the language and the mode as the domain of a “linguistic, political, and cultural minority” (xvii). Butler crafts the white, English-speaking South African as perpetual wanderer, an exile in Africa due to a fundamental cultural incompatibility that is traceable to the geography and, though he doesn’t say it, the people of the continent: “Most of our poets have tried to belong to Africa, and, finding her savage, shallow and unco-operative, have been forced to give their allegiance, not to any other country, but to certain basic conceptions, such as love, liberty, and the duty to seek truth” (xxxvi). This sentiment is what Mike Kirkwood, head of the racially inclusive Ravan Press, would come to call “Butlerism”: the belief in the pitiable, exilic plight of white English-speaking South Africans; the necessity of the poet to speak life and mystery into the empty forms of the African landscape; and the need to devote one’s craft to the pursuit of beauty and the ideal.¹³²

Butler’s sense in 1959 that a South African poet ought to pursue and create the beautiful mystery despite his or her uninspiring surroundings shaped the poetry magazine

¹³² Butler: “A landscape where ‘there is nothing but the forms and the colours’ [...] desperately needs man to give it a mystery, to read something into it” (xl).

that he helped to found in 1965, *New Coin*.¹³³ In its inaugural issue, the magazine's editors announced their credo: "We believe that the art of poetry, as it is the oldest, is still the most delicate instrument we possess for finding out who and where we are. We believe that there are not enough outlets for poets in South Africa. Can there be too many?" The editorial established this publication as one that would continue the work of the early anthologies by rooting itself in lyrical expression. South African poetry was implicitly and explicitly understood as artistic, ancient, delicate, and illuminating (and even enlightening). Notice the Butlerian additional of a locative: poetry is for "finding out who and *where* we are." Whereas his early insistence on poetry's duty to enunciate allegiance to "certain basic principles" within a savage Africa could, at best, be explained as an aesthetic preoccupation with "his alienness in Africa" (Coetzee, *White Writing* 169), his founding of a literary magazine based on those principles after the sea change of Sharpeville and censorship was criticized as intentional blindness to, and complicity with, the political and social conditions of millions in his country. The editorial's concern with its sense of philosophical exile in Africa during the 1960s exhibited an obliviousness to very real, very proximal social oppression.

And there, the vehicle of it all, was the lyric. The Butlerian preoccupation with the beautiful meant that the poems in *New Coin* straddled the divide between the traditional lyric advocated by Francis Carey Slater in the 1920s, and the "South African modernist" mode of younger writers, like Douglas Livingstone and Sydney Clouts. The traditional verses in the

¹³³ An excerpt Butler's poem "Home Thoughts": "I have not found myself on Europe's maps, / A world of things, deep things I know endure / But not the context for my one perhaps. / I must go back with my five simple slaves / To soil still savage, in a sense still pure: / My loveless, shallow land of artless shapes / Where no ghosts glamourise the recent graves / And every thing in Space and Time just is: / What similes can flash across those gaps / Undramatised by sharp antitheses?" J. M. Coetzee analyzes this poem in *White Writing*, with special attention to Butler's Romantic primitivism and his interest in the "difficulty in finding a language for Africa" (167).

magazine follow typical Victorian lyric meter and rhyme patterns, and any attempts to reflect its geographical context are manifest in the inclusion of a lion, an Afrikaans word or two, or a thinly allegorized image of racial injustice. This latter aspect of the poetry—its advocacy of liberal humanist ideology within the lyric—was a mid-century inheritance from the Slater era of settler poetry. Christian sympathy toward the downtrodden races helped form poetic vignettes of pitiable, yet distant blacks. A brief excerpt from the 1965 poem, “The Bushveld Tree” by Dorothy Murray, suffices as example:

Quite suddenly upon my way
Against a plum-dark bushveld tree,
I see bright blossom foam and spray
Its startling whiteness, wounding me
As in my mind I see a bed,
A listless, drooping child who lies
Bemused and still, with heavy head
And melancholy patient eyes.
.....
The vast and sparsely shaded plain,
The grinding-stone and mealie patch.
The ancient tuneless rhythmic sound
Of a simple harp, the endless play.

The iambic tetrameter, the a-b-a-b rhyme scheme (apart from the closing stanza above)—and, here and throughout the poem, continued references to the veld,¹³⁴ to the “listless, drooping child” whose listlessness derives from its pitiable position as a brown person (we find out later) confronted with “startling whiteness”—place this poem within the purview of the “white” mode of writing, whose goal was to represent and understand the white settler self within the South African context. The poem reaches back to Pringle and his farewell to bonny Lyndendale and arrives, uninterrupted, at the metrically identical bushveld tree. The content and the form deliver the liberal ideology of British settlerism, in its own way a

¹³⁴ “Veld” means “field” in Afrikaans, but it is often used in nineteenth-century poetry and elsewhere to refer to the sparsely inhabited spaces of South Africa.

“tuneless rhythmic sound,” endlessly repeated for its own sake. This position of sympathetic, distant inaction indicated for critics like Kirkwood *New Coin*’s insulation from the radicalism practiced in the social sphere.

Alongside poetry that followed Pringle’s galloping tetrameter, Butler and his coeditors included selections of “modern” South African poetry. This poetry, which was characterized by “technical proficiency and a greater sophistication,” resulted from “direct contacts with Europe,” according to a 1970 article by poet and critic Jack Cope (“Turning Point” 14). One issue after Murray’s poem was published, this poem by Douglas Livingstone, “Fringes,” appeared in *New Coin*:

Not a sparrow falls,
not even at the derelict dumping-site,
on the outskirts of town.

A curlew calls
in sleep far up the river where night
slips off her dressing gown.

The midflats hump
in the warm lagoon’s disgorging jaws;
crying, the gulls sail in.

Dawn fans the sump
of civilisation where the outlaws
shack up in shanties of tin.

Too early yet
for the shrimp-diggers, the quietening
of the all-night sea.

The sun, still wet,
pauses below its bunched brightening,
only the gulls have it free.

Six stanzas with three lines each follow a loose meter and a strict rhyme scheme, as

Livingstone presents a scene of a beautiful dump, populated by birds and outlaws. “Not

even a sparrow falls,” he quotes, hedging an opening with a biblical allusion, “not even at the derelict dumping-site, / on the outskirts of town.” Nature entices, rules, despite the refuse: the birds call, swoop, thrive, in a scintillating scene “where night / slips off her dressing gown” and “[t]he midflats hump / in the warm lagoon’s disgorging jaws.” This unexpected personification guides the image, while humans are relegated to the domain of the dump, “the sump / of civilisation.” Nature wins, and the poem rejoices in the beauty of the words, of the sun that, “still wet / pauses below its bunched brightening.” In the end, Livingstone tells us, “only the gulls have it free.” The poem displaces humans’ presumed dominion over nature by depicting a powerful, nearly fanciful landscape moving within and threading together the cesspools of human civilization. Written only a year after he returned to Durban from Rhodesia, where he was educated, “Fringes” roots Livingstone within the tradition of South African landscape poetry (so important for white settler poets):¹³⁵ the only difference between Livingstone and someone like Pringle is that the former uses fewer words and an irregular meter.

For all of Slater’s decrying of pillar-boxes, this kind of modern lyric acts as a logical extension of the traditional mode practiced by poets like Murray. The South African variation of “modern” poetry obviated the need for explicit political comment because it reached toward abstraction and the sublime, but through linguistic density and freedom of meter. Curiously, unlike Murray, Livingstone does away with any hint of liberal humanism: though his “outlaws” in shanties of tin could be interpreted as non-whites living in segregated townships, the poem really has nothing to say about why they’re there, or why they’re being called outlaws in the first place. Does the poet think they’re outlaws, or is he

¹³⁵ See especially J. M. Coetzee’s *White Writing*.

using the word ironically because the state deems them as such? It's hard to tell, since it doesn't seem like a question that the poem is interested in asking.

The pages of the 1960s and 1970s editions of *New Coin* are filled with poems like these, which barely register the series of trials, imprisonments, deaths, and other political events that critics at the time, and now (like Hirson and Schwartzman), have said indelibly marked the lives of the poets writing during this era.¹³⁶ The magazine's appearance on the literary scene in 1965—a year after Mandela's sentencing to life imprisonment, two years after the Publications Act came into full force, and five years after Sharpeville—and its explicit expression of a removed, “pure” poetics absent of politics both circumscribed and proscribed its mode of choice, the lyric, as an apolitical (and thus political) form. We only have to look to Ian Glenn's review of Butler and Chris Mann's updated anthology, *A New Book of South African Verse in English*, released in 1979, twenty years after the first version, to see how the ideals traditionally associated with South African verse—a suspicion of the political, for example—had themselves becomes subject to suspicion:

There is, whether admitted or not, an editorial bias against certain themes or styles. Briefly, one could say that this is a *New Coin* anthology with *New Coin* strengths and limitations: a dislike of modernism and post-modernism; a distrust of the political and the public; a suspicion of political statement or ideology; a preference for reasonable moderation (whatever or wherever that may be); a dislike of the bloody, the ugly, the vulgar, the sordid, the apocalyptic, the frightening. One could put it even more briefly by saying that the only difficulty censorship appears to have presented is in the case of four Dennis Brutus poems which could not be printed. (70–71)¹³⁷

¹³⁶ Other poetry magazines of the time included *Contrast*, *The Classic*, *Unisa English Studies*, *Ophir*, *Izwi*, *Wurm*, as well as *Purple Renoster*, which was founded by Lionel Abrahams in 1957. See Michael Gardiner's comprehensive review of the era, and the literary magazines that helped shape it, “Time to Talk: Literary Magazines in the Pretoria–Johannesburg Region, 1956 to 1978.”

¹³⁷ Butler and Mann's anthology opens with an acknowledgement of their distaste for the “postmodern”, and all that entails. Though Glenn contains his criticism of the anthology in a single, semi-colon separated sentence, his distaste for the text could be divided into three kinds: its aesthetics, its politics, and its sensibility. An overall criticism: that the anthology does not represent

The phrases included in the reviewer's second sentence, set off by semicolons, denote not only the perceived deficiencies in Butler and Mann's anthologies (and perhaps even in the editors), but also connote what an anthology of South African verse ought to look like in 1979: political and public, and perhaps even ugly, vulgar, and frightening. Censorship made such an anthology impossible; instead, the imagined, impossible anthology of apocalyptic poetry—of the public and the political, and thus the “real”—marked the one that actually existed. Having passed through the censors' fine-grained sieve, the published poems were censured by many South African intellectuals, black and white, who had come to understand a local, ethical South African poetry (and art generally) as following the dictates of Black Consciousness aesthetics. So it was, in that historical moment, that the lyric was marked by its whiteness. Depending on which side of the political divide one fell, it was the ideal or the descried; the universal and so untouched by race, or the most racialized of forms; a medium to attain the beautiful, or the stigma of the politically indifferent.

The new form for expressing one's black consciousness was (what appeared as) formlessness. The sudden appearance of black poets in the late 1960s and early 1970s meant a search for a literary genealogy of black authors. The first collection of black poetry released, *To Whom It May Concern* (1973), anthologizes early examples of Black Consciousness poetry by pioneers like Casey Motsisi, Sipho Sepamla, and Mongane Wally Serote.¹³⁸ The

the reality of the kinds of poetry written, and is undergoing a kind of censorship due to the editors' sensitive constitutions. His latter criticisms fold into the first, so that we have a working definition of the South African modern/postmodern that defines it as public, political, and disturbing, since the situations faced by the South African public required such a response.

¹³⁸ It also caused some relief on the part of liberal whites, and gave them something to nurture and to prove their ethical politics. Christopher Hope writes: “[T]he emergence of new black voices has caused most excitement among whites, or more specifically, amongst liberal English-speaking whites—an excitement which is tinged with relief. [...] Generally, poetry is becoming good coffee-table chatter, good copy, good protest—for the moment. [...] Socially, it is acceptable; politically, it is useful, at least for one side in its war against the other” (*Poetry* '74 140).

editor, Robert Royston, introduced the poems, and defined the mode of expression as “assertiveness,” and “terse, confidently defiant, humourous, cool” (7). Whatever their content, he says, the poems act as defiant enunciations of humanity: “Their poetry states, in various degrees of subtlety and explicitness, that they will remain human, alive and free in the face of whatever destructive forces outside reality might be aiming at them” (7).

Royston’s underscoring of the poetry as a declaration of basic humanity is a distillation of the hinge on which subsequent debates over this poetic mode would swing. On the one hand, as Glenn implicitly argued in the above critique of Butler’s anthology, Black Consciousness poetry projected a “truer” picture of the political state of South Africa. Other critics rebutted that its verisimilitude didn’t necessarily qualify it as art, let alone poetry.

Let an extract from Douglas Livingstone’s essay on Black Consciousness poetry serve as example of this latter view. In the early parts of his essay, delivered at a conference in 1979, he analyzes poetry by the early prominent artists Oswald Mtshali, Serote, and Sepamla, and outlines their main strengths and shortcomings. Although Livingstone writes mostly positively about these three poets, he concludes that, as a whole, they suffer from

A general *weakness in form*, language or structure. The sprawling technique, or lack of it, militates against the memorability of the work. [...] I must add at once, I am not advocating that these poets rush off and brush up on their rhyme, ½-rhyme, free verse, blank verse, assonance, dissonance, rhythm, metre, alliteration, prosody, stanza shape, size, structure, length, etc., etc.! They will know what I say when I say: a worked and moulded snowball can be thrown further and harder than handfuls of snowflakes. [...] I merely wish to put in a word, mildly, for the exercise of the (self imposed!) lyrical disciplines of the immensely difficult Art or Craft of English poetry. (“The Poetry of Mtshali” 160–161)

Livingstone’s diagnosis here of a “weakness in form,” paired with his exhaustive list of poetic mechanics, hardly convinces the reader that he is calling for blacks poets to institute

“*self imposed*” lyrical disciplines. His “advice” about how to properly form a poem comes across as thinly veiled paternalism that, instead of acknowledging and learning from other poetic systems, automatically assumes their deficiency. (This is not so different from how Tippu Tip’s *Maisha* was read over the past hundred years.)

After this catalog of formal poetic shortcomings, Livingstone continues to expound on the “weakness” he finds with this succinct phrase: “merely blurted out angers against concrete, or Whitey, are a weakness” (161). In part because of his statements on the formlessness of Black Consciousness poetry (which he rather glibly referred to as “Polit-Lit” [Wilhelm 9, 10]), and in part because of his poetry’s lyrical attention to form, Livingstone’s imagist modus operandi would bring him under close scrutiny in the 1970s and 1980s. The jeremiad against concrete didn’t help; it seems to replicate almost perfectly the racial-cum-aesthetic structure that admires concretion only if no actual concrete is involved, in which the force of concretion as figure stems entirely from its being unsullied by the physical properties of its metaphorical vehicle. It is as though the “whitey” Livingstone referred to were merely an analogue of the “concrete” he imagined black poets as angry with, a reflection of the relative political blankness of the concrete Image, when juxtaposed with the grubby realities of everyday life.

The distance between metaphorical and literal concrete was smaller than Livingstone could have imagined. One of the poems anthologized by Royston in *To Whom It May Concern* was by Mmutlanyane Stanley Mogoba, now known for his leadership of the Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC) in the 1960s, his imprisonment, and his subsequent nonviolent anti-apartheid activism as bishop of the Methodist Church. Mogoba was sent to Robben Island, the notorious prison just off the coast of Cape Town, after he was convicted in 1963 for

furthering the aims of an unlawful organization (the PAC).¹³⁹ Mogoba published only three poems, all of which were written while imprisoned from 1963 to 1966. One, titled “Two Buckets” reflects on the propinquity between those belabored opposites, the clean and the dirty;¹⁴⁰ this is “Cement”:

An unprecedented abundance of cement
Below, above and all round
A notorious capacity to retain cold
Without an equal facility for warmth

Inside is captured a column of air
And a solid mass of human substance
A pertinent question poses itself:
Which loses heat to which?

As complete an enclosure as possible
Throwing its presence all around
Until recognized by all five senses
Achieving the results of refrigeration

Hovering relentlessly is the stubborn stillness
Permeating both solid and gas
A free play of winged imagination
And the inevitable introspection
Stretch themselves painfully over
The reluctant minutes of the marathon day. (51)

Mogoba’s fixation on the monotony of his material surroundings, in this case the cement composing and encasing his cell, spirals ever more tightly over the course of the poem. Basic concerns about temperature present themselves—questions of survival—that prompt a “pertinent question” about the transferal of heat between solid mass and air. The question,

¹³⁹ Mogoba recounts, “The major evidence against me at my trial was that I had advised certain youths to burn a Dutch Reformed Church. The truth is I had strongly advised them against this action—and they listened to me. So, I actually went to gaol for having saved a Dutch Reformed Church building!” (qtd in Villa-Vicencio 191).

¹⁴⁰ “A sleepy voice / from the confined space: / ‘Beware of the bucket / Move to the left; / sleep there. / Any false move, / You fall into a lavatory bucket, / Or into drinking water next to it” (“Two Buckets” 50).

“Which loses heat to which?”, is simultaneously fundamental and removed from all sense of the particularity of the present, or presence. The absence of all but the hard limiting space prompts a heightened awareness of the senses, so that the conclusion of this poem does not transcend, but reduces. Senses cede their particularity to a synesthetic taste, touch of cold. The most basic of things—air, mass, heat, cold, solid or gas—interweave and overlap with the lines that separate them; the quotidian overwhelms the sublime; we are awed not by the spectacle, but by its utter lack.

The stasis of this poem, and its small square-footage, undermines the implicit narrative of South African cohesion and grandeur by poets like Pringle and Slater, or the purportedly apolitical vision of natural space, as in Livingstone. Mogoba’s poem thus fluctuates between the intensely local space of the cell and the diffuse space of the natural-philosophical question, and so creates a new kind of national South African landscape—the cement prison cell. The political exigence of Mogoba’s recasting serves as a powerful backdrop to a poem that modestly announces its subject as “cement.”

As the Mogoba–Livingstone, literal-metaphorical concrete opposition shows, during this tumultuous period in South Africa—and, indeed across the African diaspora—a new formula emerged: white writers use metaphor and subtlety; blacks use realism and protest. This neat division of poetic and racial labor was noted by Lionel Abrahams in an essay published in *New Nation* in February 1970. After discussing the merits and the style of Black Consciousness poets, he arrives at a section where he compares the literary and artistic aspects of black versus white poetry:

I have so far evaded the difficult question of how the verse of these writers measures as poetry, as linguistic art. [...] ‘White’ poets ordinarily prefer metaphors, the more hidden the better. The obliqueness of this mode

permits the unity of focus, swiftness of adjustment and exquisite precision necessary to a microscopic scrutiny of experience. [...] The usages and powers are appropriate to the intimate exploration of individual world of feeling. The realization of such worlds is a natural human 'luxury' ordinarily available to any with sensitivity and imagination enough to desire and dare the self-extension. But this 'luxury' is precisely one which South African group-obsession denies to our black poets (Marxist orthodoxy, similarly, would like to deny it to poet of the Communist world). The poetry itself testifies—with an authority no politicians' assertions can even aspire to—that, willynilly, inside their skins, these black writers know their place as atoms of a pass-shackled mass, and not all their sensibility can save their individual self-concepts from the stunting effects of their enforced identification with a social (or rather a 'non-social') group. (141, 142)

Writing about the individual experience was a luxury denied black poets; the poetry they created necessarily rose from the reality of their inescapable blackness. According to this logic, the literature written by oppressed groups in South Africa would necessarily be *read* as—if not *written* as—entangled with the limitations placed on their physical and psychological freedom. Abrahams uses this division between poetic types to argue for the worth of black poetry, but the same argument could be used to racist ends. It was within this system of differences between the engaged and the indifferent, the journalistic and the sublime, that Wellek and Warren's *Theory of Literature* could come to serve as a guide to the South African censorship board, because it authorized distinctions between aesthetics and politics as central to the definition of poetry and poetic interpretation.

According to arguments on both sides of the apartheid struggle, the particular histories and social conditions of blacks and whites brought forth the black realist and the white metaphorical aesthetic. White poetry, though unethical because apolitical, was yet literary, precious, and universal; black poetry, though "realist" and political, was outside the poetic, with its quotidian expressions of injustice. Abrahams' essay, written over four decades ago, raises an important question about the way that we read these historically

opposed modes—the white lyric and the Black Consciousness poem—now. To begin with, among other things, we can notice that any reading can reduce the differences between poems literally about concrete to ones making figurative use of concretion to a difference of degree rather than kind. That is, we can recognize not only that Livingstone’s imagist *concretion* is actually about the hard, realistic edges of the aestheticized object, but also that Mogoba’s *cement* is about the metaphorical penumbras of real ones. Their opposition within the discourse *about* poetry does not need to carry over to the work of the poems themselves, or does so only if one reads them from the outset as uncomplicated expressions of two “schools” or attitudes towards the work of poem-making.

This is one option—to apprehend and resist the racialized interpretation of the modernist poem. Critics like Michael Chapman have in the waning years of apartheid and after, read white and black poetry of the 1960s and 1970s as a holistic expression of “modern South African poetry.” Both black and white poets have remade the traditional English settler lyric into a modern, distinctly South African poetry, he argues. Chapman’s comprehensive study, aptly titled *South African English Poetry: A Modern Perspective*, defines “modern” South African poetry as that which displays “a special kind of imagination, the central metaphors of which are change, transition and the plurality of culture” (10). In respective chapters on Livingstone, Ruth Miller, and Sydney Clouts, and in a chapter on Soweto poets, Chapman analyzes poems according to their exhibition of these very broad metaphors. In his concluding remarks, Chapman summarizes the ways in which that modernity operated in the writing of white and black poets:

The “African” observations of a Livingstone or a Clouts may often involve either symbolist or anti-symbolist tactics reminiscent of the pioneering practices of poets such as Rimbaud or [William] Carlos Williams respectively.

By the same token, Soweto poetry may be discussed in relation not only to an African “subjective correlative,” but also to various postmodernist accents, including a socialist distrust of imaginative autonomy in the face of political facts as well as a projectivist, revolutionary “action” poetry. (273)

Chapman compares the white poets Livingstone and Clouts with white modernist forebears from elsewhere, and names their symbolist style as molding “African” observations. This pairing means, for him and other critics, that these poets utilize orthodox Western models of poetic innovation—linguistic density and metric freedom, for example—while using “specifically South-African subject matter”; hence, their “African” observations (155). The more recognizable modernist mode of Clouts and Livingstone has meant that their poems can be read outside their historical context and read as extensions of Western modernism, or according to broad scholarly approaches. Dan Wiley, for instance, has written articles analyzing Clouts’s poetry according to Deleuze and Guattari’s theories, and analyzing Livingstone’s poetry within an ecocritical framework. These white poets’ metaphors thus lift them easily outside their original apartheid-era contexts.

The modernity of black poets, on the other hand, is for Chapman marked by the postmodern, as “revolutionary” and “action-oriented,” as well as an African “subjective-correlative.” The postmodernity of the poetry, he says, arises from its “making familiar” rather than “defamiliarizing”; the “revolutionary” aspects of the poetry are its mode of direct address and its use for political ends. This last matter of the African subjective-correlative merits a pause: Chapman indicates here that the emotional energy of the poem is funneled not through the poem itself, but through the poet, thereby making the individual subject the extension and explication of the poem. Though he uses a more sophisticated literary language to describe black poetry than, say, Livingstone did, Chapman rehearses the typical

characterization of black and white poetry of the period. After all, “revolutionary” and “action-oriented” are related to “political”; “symbolic-romantic” to “aesthetic.”

Part of the reason Chapman’s method of theorizing a nonracial modern South African poetry wasn’t entirely successful is because he organizes it according to a vague heuristic—the modern—which means, in itself, almost nothing. As he’s using it here, it merely means a temporal break after which things changed; we’ve already seen how a similar historical moment did not automatically cause aesthetic unity. It actually, on the surface, drove blacks and whites further apart.

The second problem is that Chapman looks for cohesive *themes* within the poems’ content that will unify the two opposed schools, in this case “change, transition, and the plurality of culture.” Again, the broadness of these categories delimits the possibility of a precise examination of commonalities. It is relatively easy to think about how to historicize and contextualize someone like Douglas Livingstone’s poetic content, as Chapman has already done. Instead of searching for explicit *thematic* connections between Black Consciousness poetry and white lyric poetry, what would happen if we turned our attention to the level of form and technique, in order to begin to develop a coherent theory of a South African poetry? It’s harder to imagine how Livingstone’s tightly guarded formal poetic *techniques* might have been shifted, and his *aesthetic theory* affected by black poetics, even if he didn’t wish for it to happen—but it’s exciting to think about.

On the other hand, Chapman’s charge of the Black Consciousness poet as “subjective-correlative”: some poets in that group fashioned themselves as the “uneducated representative,” whose poetry hearkened back to a traditional poetics. The reason for this, as we saw in the introduction and throughout this chapter, had to do with the colonial

connotations of the lyric. But, many of the most famous Black Consciousness poets were learned and well read. The theories of black aesthetics available to us don't encapsulate the political poet who also can explicate the embedded theories of Zola and Brecht, as Mafika Gwala could (Gwala 37); who has been steeped in the traditions of African oral poetics but also read Langston Hughes and Ernest Hemingway, as Peter Abrahams and Miriam Tlali did (*Soweto Poetry* 29, 45). How might we form an understanding of African poetics that acknowledges these historical and formal differences, and, instead of seeing black aesthetics as “reacting to” the white lyric, and white aesthetics as “borrowing” and reusing what it will, as establishing a new, mutually constituted poetics that shows how *both* were changed during apartheid—and continue to be so as we read and reread today?

The task of the remainder of this dissertation is to think through just these questions.

Grey Aesthetics

A core principle of lyric poetry: the poem is a figural form, comprised of densely packed language. Lyric poetry in both the West and the East has for millennia signified via “codified emotions” and “intensification” through the use of “symbolism, figuralism, metaphor, [and] imagery” as Earl Miner has posited in his widely cited survey of poetic modes (88, 92). The metaphorical thickness of the lyric poem would seem, then, a rarely found universal, a rule by which to measure the aptitude and efficacy of the poem as poem.

Indeed, this definition of the lyric has wrought a mode of reading and criticism, codified most recently by the New Critics, governed by the presumed universality (and thus eminence) of this kind of verse. Before ceding to this universal just yet, let us turn to two poems from the 1960s, one written by Sydney Clouts, one by Mongane Wally Serote. Clouts

was a white poet who, they said, crafted laconic lyrics; Serote a Black Consciousness poet who hewed instruments for protest. The similarities and differences between them will allow us to return one last time to the problem of the whiteness of lyric.

Perhaps the height of a modernist sensibility in South Africa can be found in the work of Sydney Clouts. Clouts, who was born in Cape Town in 1926, immigrated to England in 1959. Despite his emigration, J. M. Coetzee has hailed Clouts's oeuvre as expressing an "unsettled" means of being in the South African landscape as the descendants of settlers, which is, for Coetzee, the most ethical mode of white writing (173). Coetzee's naming of Clouts's poetry as a "radical response" to the conventional narrative of settler poetry revises the narrative of critics like Guy Butler, who will here and forever serve as our figure of the apolitical aesthete. For Butler, Clouts's deft handling of poetic language means that his verse attains an "ability to accept, absorb and liberate the most unpromising, raw sense data, and make them numinous, and luminous, in [their] spatial world" (*Poetry* 74, 99). To translate: these are real lyric poems, rich in figura. Despite Coetzee's reading of Clouts's radicalism, the hard pull of formalism has meant that Clouts's work tends to be read only in comparison with his white contemporaries, or as part of a lineage that includes Blake and Coleridge.¹⁴¹

¹⁴¹ Which he is, to be sure, a part of. Michael Chapman devotes a chapter to Clouts in his book *South African English Poetry*. He calls Clouts "a poet of ideas" (152), and lauds his use of South African motifs. He seems, at the end of the day, to fall somewhere between Butler and Coetzee in his evaluation of the poet: he is both an intellectual (a true lyric poet) and uses South Africa as an ideal site for working out those ideas. See "Sydney Clouts," pp. 152-180. More recent work: Susan Joubert focuses on Clouts's Jewishness and his inability to connect with Africa as an intimate yet elusive space. Dan Wiley has written several articles on Clouts, most of which read his poems through an ecocritical lens (and as in dialogue with Coleridge and Blake). See "Lines of flight" and "Long and Wandering Forest".

“Around This Coast” (1965), for example, is typically read in terms of its recasting of the 1927 poem “Rounding the Cape” by Roy Campbell, who remains one of South Africa’s most famous poets.¹⁴² Whereas Campbell uses the trope of the Cape as an occasion to meditate on the troubled history of the fact of its repeated circumnavigation, Clouts uses that familiar roundness, or the aroundness, as an occasion to rearrange and strip away the elemental constructs of the history embedded in English itself, and thus the impossibility of certainty. Here is the poem:

Slow seafire fattens
the sea.
Skyrock mountaintop
Builds cold cloud.

Rockdrift,
seafat,
spill over;
fill spaces;

Nothing at angles
in sure places.
Moving, move;
We know where we are.

The laconic poem offers an image of the mountain, the sea, and the geographic locus of uncertainty between the two, the coast. Linguistic echoes of this fluidity resound in Clouts’s creation of compound words whose parts aggregate and disaggregate throughout the span of the poem: “seafire” in the first line separates in the second to become “the sea,” and later “seafat”; “skyrock” floats apart, so that “rock” may coalesce with “drift,” and so on. These somewhat nonsensical compound terms invest the poem with a sense of playfulness while

¹⁴² Coetzee describes as the earliest South African poem in which “the poet’s penetrating gaze reveals, not the superficial aesthetic form of the land, but an underlying prehistoric form threatening to erupt back into history” (*White Writing* 168). Here, for comparison, is Campbell’s first stanza of “Rounding the Cape”: “The low sun whitens on the flying squalls, / Against the cliffs the long grey surge is rolled, / Where Adamastor from his marble halls / Threatens the sons of Lusus as of old” (Macnab *A Century* 125).

they reinforce the paradox of the poem's final stanza: "nothing at angles / in sure places. [...] We know where we are." In rearranging the elements of life—rock, cloud, sea, fire—Clouts asks us to reconsider the uncertainty of understanding ourselves within the earth. The modernist victory would seem to end there, but it doesn't: Each word that forms a new compound in this poem—sea, fire, sky, rock, drift, fat—derives from an Anglo-Saxon root, as does every other word in the poem, apart from those that are Anglo-Norman, and so vaguely French. In tracing the etymology of some of those words, meanings become unstable, and come to correspond to their opposites, so that the ephemeral "cloud" becomes *clúd*, a mass of rock; the signifier of excess, fat, reverts to *fæt*, a vessel. In light of this, the last stanza could be read as a commentary on English itself, with a pun on "angles": Nothing in Anglo-Saxon resides in sure places, and those things we know through language (which, debatably, is everything) are certain only insofar as our language is.

Clouts, writing this poem in 1965, in some ways glories in the period's criticism of the Englishness of South African English-language poets by creating the ur-South African English poem—while at the same time, by using the most Englishy of Englishes, denies the possibility of such a thing. Despite the fact that, according to this reading, Clouts is meditating on the emptiness of a claim of an "authentic" poem of South African English expression—and thereby questions the essential purity of a linguistically based identity construct (which, again, is pretty much everything)—when we read this poem in isolation, the poetic form propels us toward a reading that emphasizes the numinous purity of the minimal, imagistic verse: word play, defamiliarization, alliteration, making the old new through latter-day kennings, even how the lines are arranged on the page. We know how to read this. Everything about it tells us that it is lyric poetry, and is as much reaching beyond

representation as it is trying to represent. It's not difficult to see why Clouts's poetry is rarely read in terms of its politics: partially because of the contrast between his work and traditional understandings of what "political" poetry looked like in South Africa, and partially because formalism has taught us how to read it.

Compare this poem to one published in the early 1970s by Wally Mongane Serote, one of the pioneers of Black Consciousness poetry. Serote's verse is usually read as "an uncompromising poetry of resistance [...] utilizing epic forms (in a highly contemporary, almost Brechtian sense) and traditional African oral techniques of repetition, parallelism and ideophones" (Chapman, *Soweto Poetry* 12).¹⁴³ Serote's shift away from the earlier modes of black writing, like that used in Oswald Mtshali's *Sounds of a Cowhide Drum*,¹⁴⁴ can be observed not only in the content of his poetry, but also in its presentation. In "Black Bells," he incorporates changes in typeface and "nonsense" words in order to think through the power and arbitrariness of language.

AND
Words,
Make pain,
Like poverty can make pain.
Words,
WORDS,
Like thought, are elusive,
Like life,
Where everybody is trapped.
.....
Words. Words. By Whitey.
No. No. No. By Whitey.
I know I'm trapped.
Helpless
Hopeless

¹⁴³ Chapman, Michael. Introduction to *Soweto Poetry*. Pp. 11-23.

¹⁴⁴ Published in 1971, *Sounds of a Cowhide Drum* "was directed in protest at a predominantly white 'liberal' readership, [...] selling a record number of copies for a book of poetry within South Africa" (11). Chapman, Introduction to *Soweto Poetry*. See also Ngwenya 503.

Trapped me whitey. Meem wanna ge aot Fuc
Pschwee e ep boobooduboooodu blllll
Black books,
Flesh blood shitr rr Hai,
Amen.

The explosive opening of this poem, “AND / Words,” says, as if everything in the world (in the now, in this present) is not enough, I have words to contend with. And words. Serote, like Clouts, is concerned with how language shapes and determines the lives of its speakers, though the reasons for this concern diverge sharply. Whereas Clouts returns to the roots of English to enunciate the unreliability of language, Serote in the final lines of the poem uses a combination of “improper” English (“Meem wanna ge aot Fuc”) and onomatopoeia (“Pschwee e ep boobooduboooodu blllll”) to emphasize the intractable boundaries not only between words and things, but also between the speaker and the language.

Besides the position from which they speak, what is the difference between these poems by Clouts and Serote? Is one more poetic, more political than the other? They’re both using poetry to work through the limits and possibilities of language, how geographical and linguistic boundaries end up making more or less sense based on one’s position vis-à-vis history, and critiquing those who want to control language in order to retroactively create a pure lineage of English and/or whiteness. I’ve described the lines from Serote’s poem as “onomatopoeic” but we could replace that with “echolalic”—which would bring us back to Wellek and Warren, who ask: “What is ‘pure’ literature? The phrasing of the questions implies some analytic or reductive process; the kind of answer arrives at conceptions of ‘pure poetry’—imagism or echolalia.” David Attwell, in examining these lines in “Black Bells” in the context of Serote’s early poetry, brings them to bear within the context of literary criticism—not Wellek and Warren, but Northrop Frye and Paul De Man and their work on

the lyric, particularly Frye's comment on the lyric poem as "babble[...], doodle [...], and riddle" (Attwell 150) and De Man's description of it as "an enigma which never stops reaching for the unreachable," a form that stretches toward purity (via approaching the musical). The lyric's modernity, elaborates Attwell, happens as the poem approaches "pure sound"; the onomatopoeic line of Serote's lyric "Black Bells," he says, "is not 'pure sound,' exactly, but the sound of anger and frustration [... which indicates] the subject's struggle to find a language in which to frame this headlong chaos" (153).¹⁴⁵ Notice how Attwell (almost absentmindedly, it seems) excepts Serote's echolalic innovation from the realm of "pure poetry." It is not pure sound because it is the sound of anger or frustration—which is to say: the expression of unmitigated emotion detracts from the purity of the sound. This is the fundamental difference between Clouts's poem and Serote's: not the form (which they have in common, more or less), but the collision of formalist expectations of the figural and linguistic density of the poem with its expression of what Wellek and Warren call "practical intent."

The results of that collision can, in part, be viewed in the uneasy, varied descriptions of Black Consciousness poetry by critics over the past fifty years: they have been described variously as the poetry of "the bloody, the ugly, the vulgar, the sordid, the apocalyptic, the frightening" (Glenn 70); poetry that "reads very directly, almost factually," versus "the interior and/or allegorical poems" of white poets (Haresnape 35); as "patently ideological, decidedly literalist and political in its themes, diction and imagery" (Ngwenya 507); as that which "proceeds from the concrete reality of the South African situation" (Ngara 133); as

¹⁴⁵ Serote's status as a "poet of modernity" is justified for Attwell in his use of the lyric for local purposes: "The lyric [...] gave to local poets a vehicle for expressing selfhood and autonomy, key features of modern, post-enlightenment thought" (152).

poems that “are as hard and material as the worlds out of which they are dragged,” have “explicit theses,” are “working objects,” are “tools for consciousness-raising” (Schwartzman 8, 9). All of these descriptions in one way or another fall under the purview of realism. The aesthetics of Black Consciousness, the aesthetics of protest, are thus entwined in yet unrecognized ways with the problems of realism, mimesis, poetry (versus narrative), which, I will suggest, prompted the displacement of the allegorical reading of the lyric poem to the poet himself or herself.

We would think that, with the problem of allegory in a non-Western context, that Jameson might be of some help. He tells us in the piece on third-world literature and allegory that the non-Western novel arrives in the West “as though already-read” because of a fundamentally divergent understanding (and experience) of categories like the subjective, the political, and the public (69). Such difference cultivates a narrative that, despite its surface mode of bildungsroman or existential critique, cannot but become an allegory for the nation when placed within the Western form of the novel (69). Jameson’s unwavering commitment to this mode of reading, presented in absolutes—“All third-world texts are necessarily...” (69); “in the third-world situation the intellectual is always...” (74); in all, “necessarily” and “must” are used 35 times in a 21-and-a-half-page essay—brought quick critique from scholars like Aijaz Ahmad, who argued that “Jameson’s own text is so centrally grounded in a binary opposition between a first and a third world it is impossible to proceed [...] without first asking whether or not [...] an accurate conception of literature can be mapped out on the basis of this binary opposition” (5). Ahmad concludes, as have many others after him, that Jameson’s opposed construction of the third and first worlds, as well as their literary modes and genres, require some modification.

Jameson's argument depends upon the mimetic constraints of the prose narrative, particularly the novel, and Ahmad himself plays into the other implicit binary in this piece—the opposition between poetry and prose. The directive to read third-world literature as national allegory stems from three intertwined factors: third-world uses of Western genre; the purported intimacy (or intertwining) of the political and the poetic, the public and private, in the third world; and, finally, the preeminence of prose, because of its mimetic ability.

This particular admixture of privileged reading categories (genre, politics, and mimesis), in our present context, produces a reading of the black poet's life—and his imprisonment, exile, or silencing—as an allegory of the national struggle, or the struggle for equality. This is because of what I've called poetic realism: the ideal Black Consciousness poem is perfectly mimetic, in the sense that there is apparently no space between the world of the poem and the world of the struggle, or the "real." Whereas in Homer (and in Tippu Tip, to a certain extent) the space between imagined world and real world is filled with detail that delimits the space available to the imagination, in Black Consciousness poetry, the imagined overlaps with the real through either the annihilation or modification of Western constructions of poetic form (usually, no detectable meter or rhyme; use of conversational rather than beautiful speech; focus on mundane events rather than sublime ones), so that the poem presents as a direct, concrete description, which displaces the imagined world by denying the possibility of a world other than the one in which it is being spoken. That is the political power of a Black Consciousness poem: the imagined world and the real world are so close as to seem to become one, and to suggest otherwise (or to suggest that there should be space between the two) becomes tantamount of a denial of the latter.

Jameson's third-world allegory becomes impossible, in a sense, since, as Lu Xun's cannibals show us,¹⁴⁶ the third-world allegory (as he imagines it) can generate an array of meanings that are nevertheless still directed toward the ultimate signified of the nation (Jameson 74); here, with Black Consciousness poetry, we are asked to read the poetic as real rather than as symbolic, and if there are any allegorical resonances or possibilities they, too, must be read if not toward the national, then toward the political and therefore the real. This "direct," "concrete," "utilitarian" mode of poetic expression thus acts as perfect allegory, one that reveals the allegorical's twinned relationship with its purported opposite, the real. This vacillation between the real and the allegorical (and the real as allegorical, and vice versa), is what enabled Denis Hirson's observation, quoted at the beginning of this chapter, about the intertwining of poets' lives and the strengthening of the apartheid state, to become theoretically, and in some cases, actually, true.

What does this mean for poetic realism? For one, the problem looks different if we think of it as a problem, not of *whether* the poem is allegorical, but of *how* the poem distributes what one might think of "allegorical energy" across the general field of content, history, and form. The middle term is crucial here—inserting it into a list that includes form and content allows us to see how the exclusion of the "historical" or the "real" from the

¹⁴⁶ Jameson uses Lu Xun's story, "Diary of a Madman" (1918), to work through the literal–metaphorical dyad in non-Western literature. Here: "For it should be clear that the cannibalism literally apprehended by the sufferer in the attitudes and bearing of his family and neighbors is at one and the same time being attributed by Lu Xun himself to Chinese society as a whole: and if this attribution is to be called "figural," it is indeed a figure more powerful and "literal" than the "literal" level of the text. Lu Xun's proposition is that the people of this great maimed and retarded, disintegrating China of the late and post-imperial period, his fellow citizens, are "literally" cannibals: in their desperation, disguised and indeed intensified by the most traditional forms and procedures of Chinese culture, they must devour one another ruthlessly to stay alive" (71).

realm of the aesthetic predisposes us to think, if not badly, then at least in limited binary terms, about the function of aesthetic objects.

For example: Mafika Gwala's well-known 1984 essay, "Writing As a Cultural Weapon." Gwala opens his piece with a retrospective on the development of the Black Consciousness aesthetic, and remarks on the difficulty of positioning himself as a black writer with an uncommon archive:

I wasn't going to be prolific for the mercenary publisher whilst knowing too well how relatively few of my fellow blacks had read as harmless a book as *Moll Flanders*, or *Anti-Dübring* for that matter. To try to discuss Zola, Brecht, Sholokov, Kazantzakis, Frank Norris, or André Malraux (to mention a few) can sometimes invite trouble in black intellectual circles. People will want to stick to African authors, even though you can trace the literary influence in most of those authors. (37)

Gwala, a well-read college dropout, explains the pressure to adhere to the "pure" lineage of black intellectual history, one that distances itself from the imperial influence of European literature and thought. In spite of his identification here of the interplay between European and African texts, he proceeds to describe the purview of the Black Consciousness movement since the 1960s as tightly local, as inspired by and imbricated with not the abstract, but with "the concrete, with what [the poets] had seen of the post-Sharpeville period until the 1976 [Soweto student protests]" (45). The concreteness of their inspiration—the deaths and confinement of black bodies—meant that, at the end: "Black writing cannot be divorced from the struggle for a free South Africa" (53). Gwala's essay thus shows the internal push and pull of the African literary archive within supposedly insular black South Africa, the diversity of poetry and poets (from well-educated to illiterate) who shaped the broad category of Black Consciousness poetry, and what is supposed to unify them: the belief in the necessity of art's use as a weapon for liberation.

This attachment to and the belief in the intricate link between concrete, real experience and its truthful, political expression formed the cornerstone of the movement's aesthetic. The poetry's rootedness in the reality of black life, and a belief in poetic form's ability to grasp and express truth guided the Black Consciousness ethos. Gwala again: "When you face a truth and there is challenging need to express it, you can most emphatically capture it through poetry, because there is no way you can twist it about in a poem. You have to bring out the truth as it is, or people will see through your lines. It is also through poetry that you find, most soberly, that there has never been such a thing as pure language" (Gwala 43). Gwala's statement, repeated in one form or another in many publications, espouses the realism and mimetic fullness of black poetry. The literary form acts as a heuristic for the real, or for the honest, since otherwise, "people will see through your lines." Though poetry is the heuristic for the experientially real or authentic, it is also the place where the impurity (or unreliability) of language is laid bare, where we recognize not only that "there has never been such a thing as pure language" generally speaking, but where, in particular, the limits of English can be stretched "so that it would accommodate [poets'] African background and ghetto ordeals" (Gwala 45). Gwala's tracing of the axes that coalesce in the Black Consciousness poem—African or local lineage (identity politics); the connection between the poem and the real (poem as proof-text); and language (the unreliability and flexibility of English)—traces also the foundational opposition between such a poem (which acts as a social form) and white South African poetic aesthetics.

What Gwala proposes was somewhat radical for the period and place: just as English is not a static cultural relic, but a dynamic medium; so is the lyric. By extension, his insistence on the poetic form's ability to test and capture the truth of "concrete reality" suggests that

“concretion,” here, means *malleability*. The protest poem thus resists not just the violence against and imprisonment of black bodies, but also the rigidity of Western categories of language and form, and the violence done in the anxious categorization of black poetic expression. He thus offers a “solution” to the problem of the African aesthetic¹⁴⁷ (and also the African intellectual archive) that resolves the tension between the opposed African “realist” and the European “formalist” aesthetic by recognizing both of them as operations within a system, one of whose many tasks is precisely to imagine certain kinds of categories, like “concrete” or “malleable,” “real” or “realistic,” or “formal” or “contextualized,” as somehow *prior* to the question of the aesthetic. Which, as Gwala suggests, they aren’t: the system concretizes, malleably, the meanings of the terms that seem to precede it.

Other solutions were possible, though they involved different relationships to the histories and localities of form. With the rise of Black Consciousness, many black authors came to see Western forms as tantamount to Western imperialism—which is to say, thinking and writing in these received, purportedly universal forms constituted a means of mentally taming black intellectuals and authors. That rejection meant a rejection of “white aesthetics” and a conscious drive to establish a “black aesthetics,” which also meant a return to a precolonial African poetics (Zander 14). The war on the European aesthetic was expressed in terms tantamount to the war on apartheid itself. In the introduction to his 1980 anthology *Forced Landing*, Motlhabi Mutloatse put it this way:

We will have to *donder* conventional literature: old fashioned critic and reader alike. We are going to pee, spit and shit on literary convention before we are through; we are going to kick and pull and push and drag literature into the form we prefer. We are going to experiment and probe and not give a damn what the critics have to say. Because we are in search of our true selves—

¹⁴⁷ A gesture to Haun Saussy, *The Problem of a Chinese Aesthetic*.

undergoing self-discovery as a people. [...] We'll write our poems in a narrative form; we'll write journalistic pieces in poetry form; we'll dramatise our poetic experiences; we'll poeticise our historical dramas. We will do all these things at the same time. (qtd in Zander 16)

Mutloatse declared that all black African writing ought to be within a new genre, which he named *proemdra* (*prose-poem-drama*). He described the genre as “an exciting experimental art form,” whose combination into an ur-form—which, he claimed, was closer to the original mode of African literary expression—was itself a political statement, in its rejection of Western categories and a pursuit of the “true self.”¹⁴⁸ Mutloatse wanted, then, not only to aggrate the three main strands of Western poetics into an encompassing genre, through which black Africans can enunciate a different, and separate, liberatory aesthetics.

Mutloatse wrote several *proemdras*, some that read like prose poetry and some that combined elements of drama, prose narrative, and poetry more clearly. The *proemdra* “Ngwana wa Azania: *A Proemdra for Oral Delivery*,” for instance presents a field of vignettes, which sound both like character descriptions in a film script and like vaguely allegorical stream-of-consciousness prose:

—This motherchild shall be protected and educated free of state subsidy in an enterprising private business asylum by Mr. Nobody. This motherchild shall mother the fatherless thousands and father boldly the motherless million pariahs. This nkgonochild shall recall seasons of greed and injustice to her war-triumphant and liberated Azachilds. This mkhuluchild shall pipesmoke in peace and tranquility of libertation [*sic*], and this landchild of the earth shall never be carved up ravenously again and the free and the wild and the proud shall but live together in their original own unrestricted domain without fear of one another, and this waterchild shall gaily bear its

¹⁴⁸ Karin Barber would disagree. She identifies, following Thomas Hale and others, the features of the African epic, as well as the workings of other genres in African societies. In the example of Rwanda, she writes, “we can see a whole configuration of interconnected genres which can be distinguished in terms of their degree of inaccessibility and the means by which this is achieved. The divisions between them do not correspond to etic categories such as myth, animal fable, epic and so on [...] but are drawn, rather, in ways that reflect local conceptions of social interests and status” (Barber 60).

load without a fuss like any other happy mother after many suns and moons of fruitlessness in diabolical inhumanity. (qtd in Zander 20–21)

As far as we can tell from this short excerpt, as a written piece, this proemdra isn't a radical generic departure; in fact, its distinctiveness in large part depends on the visual cue of the emdash at the beginning of subsequent sections to mark its formal difference. The title, though, indicates that this piece is meant for public oral performance, which aligns it with the tradition of public performance in most of sub-Saharan Africa (versus the public performance of drama alone in the East–West tradition).

In part because of the tension between the written artifact of the proemdras and (some of) their uses as ephemeral performance pieces, critics like Horst Zander have questioned the extent to which Mutloatse succeeded in annihilating Western forms. In the end, Zander argues, though he crafted a distinctly South African form (and a *1980s* South African form, at that), Mutloatse assumes the stability of those “Western” generic forms and divisions, and the resulting linguistic and formal bricolage ends up looking more like postmodernism than an completely separate literature (Zander 29).¹⁴⁹ Zander seems to miss the point, to say the least. In order to critique a category, some categorical stability needs to be assumed, so this can hardly be used as a criticism of Mutloatse's project. The problem, as we've seen, with formal categories in the South African context was not their inflexibility in practice, but their *creation* as inflexible at the level of discourse. This discourse-based power seems to be his target all along: The content and execution of the proemdras as totally new categorical oddities are, debatably, secondary to Mutloatse's conceptual framing of them as

¹⁴⁹ Others, like Priyamvada Gopal, disagree: “Horst Zander somewhat misses the point [...]. Mutloatse seeks less to create a recognizable generic hybrid of traditional Western literary genres than to push passionately at the boundaries of linguistic bricolage, refiguring multilingualism as a space of creatively politicized intersection. Language can both generate meaning through heteroglossia and render itself opaque, but either way, refuses assimilation and reconciliation” (197).

scatological fuck-yous to the white South African literary regime. The bonus for him, and for us, was the actual production of texts (or performances) that draw attention to not only the historical ebb and flow of generic divisions, but also to the propinquity between the hallmarks of postmodernism and precolonial African poetics.

Both Gwala and Mutloatse, then, mount critiques of categorization, as it relates to genre and to the systemic production of racialized aesthetics. And you'll remember that, as we saw with the Jameson remix, Black Consciousness poetic realism exposed the geminate relationship between the allegorical and the real, and formalism's excision of history from the reading of poetry. At the farthest limit of these particulars, we continue to deal with the separation of the aesthetic and the political—or the sublime and the quotidian, if you prefer.

Here's that limit in practice: The prominence of the Black Consciousness aesthetic began to wane alongside apartheid itself, and its end was pronounced publicly in 1989 by Albie Sachs, prominent member of the ANC and future justice of the first Constitutional Court. Sachs argued, controversially, "our members [of the ANC] should be banned from saying that culture is a weapon of struggle [...since the slogan] results in an impoverishment of our art [... T]he power of art lies precisely in its capacity to expose contradictions and hidden tensions" (qtd in Horn 538, 539).¹⁵⁰ Sachs's comments were controversial not only because of the suggestion that the struggle against apartheid had abated, but also because they hit upon the yet unresolved question of what South African art and culture should do, and because it suggested that a direct, utilitarian aesthetic that came mostly from the black

¹⁵⁰ This echoed Farouk Asvat's statement, "Slogan poetry merely stunts the growth of our people. If poetry is to be meaningful, it must not only capture the complex humanity of peoples' emotions, it must also interpret peoples' lives so that they can have a better insight into themselves" (qtd in Horn 537).

majority, was useful for about two decades, but not as a means to “expose contradictions and hidden tensions” of the human experience. The black African aesthetic thus was recategorized as useful and particular, rather than beautiful and universal.

Sach’s remarks indicate the extent to which, even now, that divide persists. After reading poetry written by both black and white poets during the 1960s and 1970s, as well as the criticism that has shaped our understanding of it, we can see the systematic integration of aesthetics and race, an integration that passes through the poem’s labor as a social form, and exits on the other side as what looks like two systems of poetic expression: a white formalist (apolitical) aesthetics, and a black realist political polemic. As a result of this variously aggregating and disaggregating system, whose vacillations are fueled by necessary anxieties about erasing particular histories while wanting to seek an ethical unity, the task of thinking a dynamic, non-binary system of South African poetics presents a knotty (or thorny) path to tread.

By way of conclusion, I want to offer a three main points, or tasks, for continued discussion, both here and for scholars of African literatures generally. First: We need redirect conversation about African and European poetics. J. M. Coetzee and David Attwell have given us a foundation for thinking about the workings of white and black writing in the colonial and apartheid periods; Gaurav Desai and others have sought to rethink African poetics based on the Indian Ocean influences of that region. In order to build on the work of these theorists, we must recognize the anxiety inherent to troubling the binaries of African and European, and, having this awareness, put aside the desire to critique how black artists (including or beyond poets) fulfill or don’t fulfill formalist or deconstructionist ideals of poetic expression, and, instead begin a genealogy of African poetics that neither rests on

the West and its forms, nor discounts those works showing signs of its arrival as imitative, reductive, or as always already colonized.

Second, we have very good theories of anti-colonial or postcolonial literature that don't know what to do with poetry. This, according to Jahan Ramazani, has to do with the privileging of the novel and its mimetic possibilities:

[P]ostcolonial criticism is largely grounded in mimetic presuppositions about literature. But since poetry mediates experience through a language of exceptional figural and formal density, it is a less transparent medium by which to recuperate the history, politics, and sociology of postcolonial societies; it is less favorable than other genres for curricular expeditions into the social history of the Third World; and, consequently, it is harder to annex as textual synecdoche for the social world of Nigeria, Trinidad, or India. (4)

What Ramazani describes as a problem of postcolonial criticism is actually a problem of criticism about non-Western literature in general, as we saw with the debate between Jameson and Ahmad. Though his purview could be widened to include poetry that isn't especially figurally or formally dense, the point remains. One of the best things that could happen for the study of non-Western literatures is the movement away from the novel as allegory for the nation—which could lead to a different, perhaps more humanist understanding of the non-Western world (as more than nationalist, post-nationalist, etc).

And, finally, our theories of poetics are based on the assumption that the separation between the sublime and the quotidian is a cultural universal, when it isn't. How would our poetic categories be altered, and our understanding of the aesthetic modified, if we rethought the division between prose, poetry, and drama based on the holistic, quotidian poetics of African societies (and other societies of the Global South)? Mthobisi Mutloatse tried to obviate this problem with the proemdra. That form, and the subsequent criticism of it, show how African poetics demonstrate a unique, if hardly paradigmatic, array of relationships

between the aesthetic and everyday life that is not included in the East/West structure developed most prominently by Earl Miner.¹⁵¹ The literature of the Global South (more narrowly Africa, indigenous South America, and Oceania), traditionally articulates itself through the everyday idiom rather than a separately defined aesthetics, which has either placed it outside the purview of aesthetic theory, or prompted formulations of a separate African poetics. Both alternatives treat Africa (and other sites of a quotidian poetics) as in some respects “outside” the world and the modern.

Leaving aside whether such a series of claims—that Africa is in some sense “outside” modernity—can be valid in the case of economic or political history, it seems uncontroversial at least to say that any history of world poetics cannot make similar claims. The global aesthetic must be modified to accommodate sub-Saharan Africa’s example of literary and aesthetic possibility. It is not, that is, simply a question of “adding” a new regional poetics to a catalogue of world poetic forms that includes the Greek, the Chinese, the Indic, the European, and so on, but rather of showing how the entire *system* of what we think of as global poetics alters via the inclusion of this new member. This means reimagining a comparative poetics from the ground up, of describing the structure of human social and epigenetic possibility as it is laid bare in the actual lived experiences and documents of the literary imagination, no matter where they take place. If we want to know how poetics works, then we need examples from the history of poetics—from *everywhere*.

My argument then aims not to close a discussion but to open it, to present scholars

¹⁵¹ Earl Miner’s foundational study, *Comparative Poetics*, delineates and explains highly general aesthetic categories—drama, narrative, and the lyric—through the lens of Eastern (Indian, Chinese) and Western (Greek) poetics. This holistic look at a world of poetic exchange has come to stand in for the whole world, *the* global poetics.

of African and postcolonial studies with a series of challenges and tasks whose outcomes will affect not only those “local” forms but the global ones that come to govern them, that too often, as I’ve suggested, fail to consider them when constructing the basic categories through which we understand the literary. We need to do our best to build our categories up from the widest possible variety of examples, and to say that, once again, here in an African context, we have a series of examples of the deployment of the aesthetic that ought to allow us to rethink the ways we understand not only African literature, but all literature.

WORKS CITED

- Abrahams, Lionel. "Black Experience into English Verse: A Survey of Local Black Poetry, 1960–1970." *Soweto Poetry*. Ed. Michael Chapman. Johannesburg: McGraw-Hill, 1982. 137–143.
- Abu-Lughod, Janet. *Before European Hegemony: The World System, 1250–1350*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1989.
- Africa is a Country*. "Rick Ross is a Country." <<http://africasacountry.com/rick-ross-is-a-country>>.
- "again, adv., prep., and conj." *OED Online*. March 2013. Oxford University Press. 21 May 2013. <<http://www.oed.com>>.
- Ahmad, Aijaz. "Jameson's Rhetoric of Otherness and the 'National Allegory.'" *Social Text* 17 (1987): 3–25.
- Ait-Touati, Frédérique. *Fictions of the Cosmos: Science and Literature in the Seventeenth Century*. Trans. Susan Emanuel. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011.
- Andrade, Susan Z. "The Problem of Realism and African Fiction." *Novel* 42.2 (2009): 183–189.
- Arendt, Hannah. "The Decline of the Nation-State and the End of the Rights of Man." *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. New York: Harcourt, 1973. 267–302.
- Attwell, David. *Rewriting Modernity: Studies in Black South African Literary History*. 2005; Athens, OH: University of Ohio Press, 2006.

- Auerbach, Erich. *Mimesis*. Trans. Willard R. Trask. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953.
- Barber, Karin. *The Anthropology of Texts, Persons, and Publics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.
- Barendse, R. J. *The Arabian Seas: The Indian Ocean World of the Seventeenth Century*. Armonk, NY and London: M. E. Sharpe, 2003.
- . "Trade and State in the Arabian Seas: A Survey from the Fifteenth to the Eighteenth Century." *Journal of World History* 11.2 (2000): 173–225.
- . *The Western Indian Ocean in the Eighteenth Century*. Vol. 1 of *Arabian Seas 1700–1763*. Leiden: Brill, 2009.
- Barney, Brett. "Whitman, Race, and Literary History: A Recently Recovered Dialogue." *Walt Whitman Quarterly Review* 20 (2002): 30–35.
- Behdad, Ali. *A Forgetful Nation: On Immigration and Cultural Identity in the United States*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2005.
- Belcher, Wendy Laura. *Abyssinia's Samuel Johnson: Ethiopian Thought in the Making of an English Author*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2012.
- Bernal, Martin. *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization*. London: Free Association, 1987.
- Bhabha, Homi. "Signs Taken for Wonders: Questions of Ambivalence and Authority under a Tree Outside Delhi, May 1817," *Critical Inquiry* 12 (1985): 144–165.
- . "Sly Civility." *Location of Culture*. London and New York: Routledge, 1994.
- Bird, Christiane. *The Sultan's Shadow*. New York: Random House, 2010.

- Bontinck, François, trans. *L'autobiographie de Hamed ben Mohammed el-Murjebi Tippu Tip (ca. 1840–1905)*. Brussels: Académie royal des sciences d'Outre-Mer, 1974.
- Bose, Sugata. *A Hundred Horizons: The Indian Ocean in the Age of Global Empire*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006.
- Braudel, Fernand. *Civilization and Capitalism 15th–18th Century: The Perspective of the World*. Vol. 3. 1979; Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992.
- Brode, Heinrich, trans. "Autobiographie des Arabers Schech Hamed bin Muhammed el Murjebi, genannt Tippu Tip." *Mittheilungen des Seminars für Orientalische Sprachen an der Königlichen Friedrich Wilhelms-Universität zu Berlin* 5 (1902): 175.
- Brode, Heinrich. *Tippoo Tib: The Story of His Career in Zanzibar and Central Africa*. Trans. H. Havelock. 1905; London: Arnold, 1907.
- Brustad, Kristen E., and Michael Cooperson, et al. *Interpreting the Self: Autobiography in the Arabic Literary Tradition*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001.
- Burton, Richard F. *Falconry in the Valley of the Indus*. London: John Van Voorst, 1852.
- . *The Lake Regions of Central Africa: A Picture of Exploration*. 2 vols. New York: Horizon Press, 1961.
- . *Zanzibar; City, Island, and Coast*. 2 vols. London: Tinsley Bros, 1872.
- Butler, Guy, ed. *A Book of South African Verse*. London: Oxford University Press, 1959.
- , et al. Editorial. *New Coin Poetry* 1.1 (1965): 1.
- . "Home Thoughts." *Africa South* 1.1 (Oct–Dec 1956): 124–128.
- Cameron, Verney Lovett. *Across Africa*. New York: Harper and Bros., 1877.
- Campbell, Gwyn, ed. *The Indian Ocean Rim: Southern Africa and Regional Co-Operation*. London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003.

- . "The Role of Africa in the Emergence of the 'Indian Ocean World' Global Economy." *Eyes Across the Water: Navigating the Indian Ocean*. Ed. Pamila Gupta, Isabel Hofmeyr, and Michael Pearson. Pretoria: University of South Africa Press, 2010. 156–196.
- Cavafy, C. P. "The God Abandons Antony." Trans. George Vassopoulo. *Pharos and Pharillon*. By E. M. Forster. 2nd ed. London: Hogarth Press, 1923. 56.
- . "Απολείπειν ο θεός Αντώνιον." *The Website of the Official Cavafy Archive*. <www.kavafis.gr>.
- Chapman, Michael. *A Century of South African Poetry*. Johannesburg: Ad. Donker, 1981.
- . *Douglas Livingstone: A Critical Study of his Poetry*. Johannesburg: Ad. Donker, 1981.
- . *South African English Poetry: A Modern Perspective*. Johannesburg: Ad. Donker, 1984.
- , ed. *Soweto Poetry*. Johannesburg: McGraw-Hill, 1982.
- Chaudhuri, K. N. *Asia before Europe: Economy and Civilization of the Indian Ocean from the Rise of Islam to 1750*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990.
- Chaudhuri, Nirad C. "Passage to and from India." *Encounter* (June 1954): 19–24.
- Clouts, Sydney. "Around This Coast." *New Coin* 1.2 (1965): 1.
- Coetzee, J. M. *Giving Offense: Essays on Censorship*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996.
- . *White Writing: On the Culture of Letters in South Africa*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1988.
- Coffman, Jr., Stanley K. "'Crossing Brooklyn Ferry': A Note on the Catalogue Technique in Whitman's Poetry." *Modern Philology* (May 1954): 225–232.
- Cope, Jack. "A Turning Point in South African English Writing." *Cruix* (Nov. 1970): 10–20.
- Curran, Brian A., Anthony Grafton, Pamela O. Long, and Benjamin Weiss. *Obelisk: A History*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2009.

“Death of Tippoo Tib.” *The Times* [London] 15 June 1905: 5.

DeLoughrey, Elizabeth M. *Roots and Routes: Navigating Caribbean and Pacific Island Literatures*.

Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2010.

Desai, Gaurav. *Commerce with the Universe: Africa, India, and the Afrasian Imagination*. New York:

Columbia University Press, 2013.

---. “Oceans Connect: The Indian Ocean and African Identities.” *PMLA* 125.3 (2010): 713–720.

Dimock, Wai Chee. “The Egyptian Pronoun: Lyric, Novel, the *Book of the Dead*.” *New*

Literary History 39 (2008): 619–643.

Diop, Cheikh Anta. *The African Origins of Civilization: Reality or Myth*. Trans. of sections of

Antériorité des civilisations négres and *Nations négres et culture*. Trans. Mercer Cook. New

York: L. Hill, 1974.

Driver, Felix. “Distance and Disturbance: Travel, Exploration and Knowledge in the

Nineteenth Century.” *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 14 (2004): 73–92.

Erkkila, Betsy. *Whitman the Political Poet*. New York and Oxford: Oxford UP, 1989.

“Exploration and Travel.” *Science* 29 April 1887: 408–410.

Farrant, Leda. *Tippu Tip and the East African Slave Trade*. London: Hamilton, 1975.

Fitzgerald, Percy. *The Great Canal at Suez: Its Political, Engineering, and Financial History*. 2 vols.

London: Tinsley Brothers, 1876.

Forster, E. M. *Alexandria: A History and a Guide*. Intro. Lawrence Durrell. 1922; New York:

Oxford University Press, 1982.

---. “The Beauty of Life.” *Albergo Empedocle and Other Writings*. Ed. George H. Thomson. New

- York: Liveright, 1971. 169–175.
- . “The Creator as Critic.” *The Creator as Critic*. Ed. Jeffrey M. Heath. Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2008. 64–98.
- . *A Passage to India*. 1924; San Diego: Harcourt & Brace, 1984.
- . *Pharos and Pharillon*. 2nd ed. London: Hogarth Press, 1923.
- . “Three Countries.” *The Hill of Devi*. Ed. Elizabeth Heine. Abinger Edition. vol. 14. 1953; London: Edward Arnold, 1983.
- Furbank, P. N. *E. M. Forster: A Life*. New York and London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977–1978.
- Gardiner, Michael. “Time to Talk: Literary Magazines in the Pretoria–Johannesburg Region, 1956 to 1978.” *Art Archives–South Africa*. <http://www.art-archives-southafrica.ch/PDFs/Gardiner_survey-SA-poetry_1956-1978.pdf>.
- Geider, Thomas. “Early Swahili Travelogues.” *Matatu* 9 (1992): 27–65.
- “Geographical Discoveries in Central Africa.” *The Times* [London] 8 October 1850: 7.
- Gikandi, Simon. “Contested Grammars: Comparative Literature, Translation, and the Challenge of Locality.” *A Companion to Comparative Literature*. Ed. Ali Behdad and Dominic Thomas. Chichester: Blackwell, 2011. 254–272.
- . “Provincializing English.” *PMLA* 129.1 (2014): 7–17.
- Gilroy, Paul. *The Black Atlantic*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993.
- Glassman, Jonathon. *War of Words, War of Stones: Racial Thought and Violence in Colonial Zanzibar*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2011.
- Glenn, Ian. Rev. of *A New Book of South African Verse in English*, by Guy Butler and Chris

- Mann. *English in Africa* 6.2 (Sept 1979): 70–72.
- Golden, Arthur. “Passage to Less than India: Structure and Meaning in Whitman’s ‘Passage to India.’” *PMLA* 88.5 (1973): 1095–1103.
- Gopal, Priyamvada. “The Limits of Hybridity: Anglophone Postcolonial Poetry.” *The Routledge Companion to Experimental Literature*. Ed. Joe Bray, Alison Gibbons, and Brian McHale. New York: Routledge, 2012. 182–198.
- Gopinath, Prasseda. “An Orphaned Manliness: The Pukka Sahib and the End of Empire in *A Passage to India* and *Burmese Days*.” *Studies in the Novel* 41.2 (2009): 201–223.
- Grimaldo Grigsby, Darcy. *Colossal: Engineering the Suez Canal, the Statue of Liberty, Eiffel Tower, and Panama Canal*. Pittsburgh and New York: Periscope, 2012.
- Gwala, Mafika. “Writing As a Cultural Weapon.” *Momentum: On Recent South African Writing*. Eds. M. J. Daymond, J. U. Jacobs, and Margaret Lenta. Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 1984. 37–53.
- Haddad, Emily. “Digging to India: Modernity, Imperialism, and the Suez Canal.” *Victorian Studies* 47.3 (2005): 363–396.
- Halim, Hala. *Alexandrian Cosmopolitanism: An Archive*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2013.
- Hallett, Robin. “The European Approach to the Interior of Africa in the Eighteenth Century.” *Journal of African History* 4.2 (1963): 191–206.
- Haresnape, Geoffrey. “‘A Question of Black and White?’ The Contemporary Situation in South African English Poetry.” *Poetry South Africa: Selected Papers from Poetry ’74*. Ed. Peter Wilhelm and James A. Polley. Cape Town: Ad. Donker, 1976. 35–46.

- Hawley, John C., ed. *India in Africa, Africa in India*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2008.
- Hayot, Eric. *Chinese Dreams: Pound, Brecht, Tel quel*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press: 2004.
- . "On Literary Worlds." *MLQ* 72.2 (2011): 129–161.
- . *On Literary Worlds*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2012.
- Heath, Jeffrey M., ed. *The Creator as Critic*. Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2008.
- Hegel, G. W. F. *The Philosophy of History*. Trans. J. Sibree. New York: Colonial Press, 1899.
- Herz, Judith Scherer. "The Remaking of the Past in Forster's Non-Fiction." *Twentieth Century Literature* 31.2–3 (1985): 287–296.
- Hirson, Denis, ed. *The Lava of This Land: South African Poetry 1960–1996*. Evanston, IL: Triquarterly Books, 1997.
- Ho, Engseng. *The Graves of Tarim: Genealogy and Mobility across the Indian Ocean*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2006.
- Hofmeyr, Isabel. "Africa as a Fault Line in the Indian Ocean." *Eyes Across the Water: Navigating the Indian Ocean*. Ed. Pamila Gupta, Isabel Hofmeyr, and Michael Pearson. Pretoria: University of South Africa Press, 2010. 99–108.
- . "The Black Atlantic Meets the Indian Ocean: Forging New Paradigms of Transnationalism for the Global South—Literary and Cultural Perspectives." *Social Dynamics* 33.2 (2007): 3–32.
- . *Gandhi's Printing Press: Experiments in Slow Reading*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013.
- . *The Portable Bunyan: A Transnational History of "The Pilgrim's Progress."* Princeton: Princeton

University Press, 2004.

Hope, Christopher. "Poetry and Society." *Poetry South Africa: Selected Papers from Poetry '74*. Ed.

Peter Wilhelm and James A. Polley. Cape Town: Ad. Donker, 1976. 134–141.

Horden, Peregrine, and Nicolas Purcell. "The Mediterranean and "The New Thalassology.""

American Historical Review 111.3 (2006): 722–740.

Hubbard, Gardiner G. "Africa, Its Past and Future." *Science* 18 January 1889: 42–50.

Irele, F. Abiola. "Introduction: Perspectives on the African Novel." *The Cambridge Companion*

to the African Novel. 1st ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009. 1–14.

"The Isthmus of Suez." Review. *The Athenaeum* 25 August 1855: 965–966.

Jameson, Fredric. "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism." *Social*

Text 15 (Autumn 1986): 65–88.

JanMohamed, Abdul. "The Economy of Manichean Allegory: The Function of Racial

Difference in Colonialist Literature." *Critical Inquiry* 12 (1985): 59–87.

---. *Manichean Aesthetics: The Politics of Literature in Colonial Africa*. Amherst: University of

Massachusetts Press, 1983.

Joubert, Susan. "The Unresolved Shibboleth: Sydney Clouts and the Problems of an African

Poetry." *Theoria* 75 (May 1990): 87–106.

Julien, Eileen. "On Speaking and Hearing: Toward a Free and Liberating Discourse." *The*

Surreptitious Speech. Ed. V. Y. Mudimbe. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press,

1992. 423–427.

Kadir, Djelal. *Columbus and the Ends of the Earth: Earth's Prophetic Rhetoric as Conquering Ideology*.

Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992.

- Karabell, Zachary. *Parting the Desert*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003.
- Kennedy, Dane. *The Highly Civilized Man: Richard Burton and the Victorian World*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007.
- Kermode, Frank. "The One Orderly Product: E. M. Forster." *Puzzles and Epiphanies: Essays and Reviews 1958–1961*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962. 79–85.
- Kernaghan, W. "Suez. A Maritime Canal." *The Economist* 18 August 1855: 898–899.
- Kirkwood, Mike. "The Colonizer: A Critique of the English South African Culture Theory." *Poetry South Africa: Selected Papers from Poetry '74*. Ed. Peter Wilhelm and James A. Polley. Cape Town: Ad. Donker, 1976. 102–133.
- Klopper, Dirk. "The Lyric Poem During and After Apartheid." *The Cambridge History of South African Literature*. Ed. David Attwell and Derek Attridge. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2012. 587–606.
- Knox-Shaw, Peter. "Defoe and the Politics of Representing the African Interior." *The Modern Language Review* 96.4 (2001): 937–951.
- Kruger, Loren. "Black Atlantics, White Indians, and Jews: Locations, Locutions, and Syncretic Identities in the Fiction of Achmat Dangor and Others." *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 100.1 (2001): 111–143.
- Kyle, Keith. *Suez: Britain's End of Empire in the Middle East*. Palgrave: New York, 2003.
- Lanone, Catherine. "Negotiating Colonial Contradiction: E. M. Forster's and V. S. Naipaul's Negative Landscapes." *Reflective Landscapes of the Anglophone Countries*. Ed. and intro. Pascale Guibert. Amsterdam, Netherlands: Rodopi, 2011.
- de Lesseps, Ferdinand. *The Isthmus of Suez Question*. London: Longman, Brown, Green, and

Longmans, 1855.

---. *The Suez Canal: Letters and Documents Descriptive of Its Rise and Progress in 1854–1856*. Trans.

N. d'Anvers. London: Henry S. King and Co., 1876.

Lionnet, Françoise. *The Known and the Uncertain: Creole Cosmopolitics of the Indian Ocean*.

Mauritius: L'Atelier d'écriture, 2012.

Lionnet, Françoise, and Shu-Mei Shih, eds. *The Creolization of Theory*. Raleigh: Duke

University Press, 2011.

Livingstone, David. *The Last Journals of David Livingstone, in Central Africa, from 1865 to His*

Death. Vol I: 1866–1868. Ed. Horace Waller. London: John Murray, 1874.

Livingstone, Douglas. "Fringes." *New Coin* 1.3 (1965): 4.

---. "The Poetry of Mtshali, Serote, Sepamla and Others in English: Notes towards a Critical

Evaluation." *Soweto Poetry*. Ed. Michael Chapman. Johannesburg: McGraw-Hill, 1982.

157–161.

Lovell, Mary S. *A Rage to Live: A Biography of Richard and Isabel Burton*. New York:

W. W. Norton, 1998.

Macnab, Roy, ed. *Poets in South Africa, An Anthology*. Cape Town: Maskew Miller, 1958.

al-Mahruqi, Muhammad. *Mughamir 'Umani fi adghal Ifriqiya: Hayat Hamad ibn Muhammed ibn*

Jum'ab al-Murjebi al-ma 'ruf bi-Tibu Tib, sirab dhatiyab. Muscat: Muassast 'Uman lil-

Sihafah wa-al-Anba wa-al-Nashr wa-al-Plan, 2005.

Martin, Denis-Constant. "Out of Africa! Should We Be Done with Africanism?" *The*

Surreptitious Speech. Ed. V. Y. Mudimbe. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press,

1992. 45–58.

- Mason, John B. "Walt Whitman's Catalogues: Rhetorical Means for Two Journeys in 'Song of Myself.'" *American Literature* 45.1(1973): 34–49.
- Matar, Nabil. *Europe through Arab Eyes, 1578–1727*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2008.
- Mawdsley, Emma, and Gerard McCann. *India in Africa: Changing Geographies of Power*. Cape Town: Fahamu/Pambazuka, 2011.
- May, Brian. "Romancing the Stump: Modernism and Colonialism in Forster's *A Passage to India*." *Modernism and Colonialism: British and Irish Literatures, 1899–1939*. Ed. Richard Begam and Michael Valdez Moses. Durham: Duke University Press, 2007. 136–161.
- Mbembe, Achille. "At the Edge of the World: Boundaries, Territoriality, and Sovereignty in Africa." Trans. Steven Rendall. *Public Culture* 12.1 (2000): 259–284.
- McDonald, Peter. *The Literature Police: Apartheid Censorship and Its Cultural Consequences*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009.
- Medalie, David. *E. M. Forster's Modernism*. New York: Palgrave, 2002.
- Mendenhal, Allen. "Mass of Madness: Jurisprudence in E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India*." *Modernist Cultures* 6.2 (2011): 315–337.
- Miner, Earl. *Comparative Poetics: An Intercultural Essay on Theories of Literature*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990.
- Moffat, Wendy. *A Great Unrecorded History*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2010.
- Mogoba, Mmutlanyane Stanley. "Cement." *To Whom It May Concern: An Anthology of Black South African Poetry*. Johannesburg: Ad. Donker, 1974. 51.
- . "Two Buckets." *To Whom It May Concern: An Anthology of Black South African Poetry*.

- Johannesburg: Ad. Donker, 1974. 50.
- Moretti, Franco. *The Atlas of the European Novel: 1800–1900*. London: Verso, 1999.
- Morey, Peter. “Postcolonial Forster.” *The Cambridge Companion to E. M. Forster*. Ed. David Bradshaw. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007. Cambridge Collections Online.
- Mudimbe, V. Y. *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988.
- Murphey, Rhoads. “On the Evolution of the Port City.” *Brides of the Sea: Port Cities of Asia from the 16th to the 20th Century*. Ed. Frank Broeze. Sydney: New South Wales University Press, 1989. 223–246.
- Murray, Dorothy. “The Bushveld Tree.” *New Coin* 1.2 (1965): 6.
- Newbury, Colin. “Great Britain and the Partition of Africa, 1870–1914.” *The Nineteenth Century*. Ed. Andrew Porter. Vol. 3. *The Oxford History of the British Empire*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1999. 624–650.
- Ngara, Emmanuel. *Ideology and Form in African Poetry*. London: James Currey, 1990.
- Ngũgĩ i wa Thiong’o. *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*. London: J. Currey, 1986.
- Ngwenya, Thengani H. “Black Consciousness Poetry: Writing against Apartheid.” *The Cambridge History of South African Literature*. Ed. David Attwell and Derek Attridge. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013. 500–522.
- Nuttall, Sarah. *Entanglement: Literary and Cultural Reflections on Post-Apartheid*. Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2009.
- Ojwang, Dan. “In a Restless State: Mercantile Adventure and Citizenship in the

- Autobiography of Nanji Kalidas Mehta (1888–1969).” *Africa Today* 57.3 (2011): 57–75.
- . *Reading Migration and Culture: The World of East African Indian Literature*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.
- Okpewho, Isidore, ed. *The Heritage of African Poetry*. Harlow, UK: Longman, 1985.
- Okunoye, Oyeniya. “The Critical Reception of Modern African Poetry.” *Cahiers d’Études africaines* 176 (2004): 769–791.
- Oliver, Roland, and Anthony Atmore. *Africa Since 1800*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.
- Oliver, Roland, and G. N. Sanderson, eds. *From 1870–1905*. Vol 6. *The Cambridge History of Africa*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985.
- Page, Melvin Eugene, and Penny M. Sonnenburg, eds. *Colonialism: An International, Social, Cultural, and Political Encyclopedia*. Vol 1. Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2003.
- Painter, David S. “Oil and the American Century.” *The Journal of American History* 99.1 (2012): 24–39.
- Parry, Benita. *Delusions and Discoveries: Studies on India in the British Imagination 1880–1930*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1972.
- . *Delusions and Discoveries: Studies on India in the British Imagination 1880–1930*. 2nd ed. London: Verso, 1998.
- Paryz, Marek. *The Postcolonial and Imperial Experience in American Transcendentalism*. New York: Palgrave, 2012.
- Pearson, Michael. *The Indian Ocean*. London and New York: Routledge, 2003.

- Pesek, Michael. "Cued Speeches: The Emergence of *Shauri* as Colonial Praxis in German East Africa, 1850–1903." *History in Africa* 33.1 (2006): 395–412.
- Piggford, George. "The *Via Negativa* in Forster's *A Passage to India*." *Through a Glass Darkly: Suffering, the Sacred, and the Sublime in Literature and Theory*. Ed. Holly Faith Nelson, Lynn R. Szabo, and Jens Zimmermann. Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2010. 223–232.
- Pratt, Mary Louise. *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*. New York and London: Routledge, 1992.
- Pringle, Thomas. "Emigrant's Song." *The Centenary Book of South African Verse (1820–1925)*. London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1925. 151.
- Ramadan, Abdel Moneim. "Funeral for Walt Whitman." Trans. Michael Beard and Adnan Haydar. 2012. *Words without Borders*. <www.wordswithoutborders.org>
- Ramazani, Jahan. *The Hybrid Muse: Postcolonial Poetry in English*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001.
- Ricoeur, Paul. *The Rule of Metaphor*. Trans. Robert Czerny. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977.
- Rockel, Stephen J. *Carriers of Culture: Labor on the Road in Nineteenth-Century East Africa*. Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2006.
- Rollins, Jack D. *A History of Swahili Prose. Part I: From Earliest Times to the End of the Nineteenth Century*. Leiden: Brill Archive, 1983.
- Rothman, Norman C. "Indian Ocean Trading Links: The Swahili Experience." *Comparative Civilizations Review* 46 (2002): 79–90.

- Royston, Robert, ed. *To Whom It May Concern: An Anthology of Black South African Poetry*.
Johannesburg: Ad. Donker, 1974.
- Said, Edward. *Culture and Imperialism*. New York: Random House, 1993.
- . *Orientalism*. 1978; New York: Vintage, 2003.
- Saussy, Haun. *The Problem of a Chinese Aesthetic*. Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1993.
- Scheuller, Malini Johar. *U.S. Orientalisms: Race, Nation, and Gender in Literature, 1790–1890*.
Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998.
- Schwartzman, Adam. *Ten South African Poets*. Manchester: Carcanet, 1999.
- Segalen, Victor. *Essay on Exoticism: An Aesthetics of Diversity*. Trans. Yaël Rachel Schlick.
Durham: Duke University Press, 2002.
- Sharpe, Jenny. “The Unspeakable Limits of Rape: Colonial Violence and Counter-
Insurgency.” *Genders* 10 (1991): 25–46.
- Sheriff, Abdul. *Slaves, Spices and Ivory in Zanzibar: Integration of an East African Commercial Empire
into the World Economy, 1770–1873*. London: James Currey, 1987.
- Slater, Francis Carey. *The Centenary Book of South African Verse (1820–1925)*. London:
Longmans, Green and Co., 1925.
- Smith, Alison. Historical introduction, *Maisha ya Hamed bin Muhammed el Murjebi, yaani Tippu
Tip*.
- Smith, Sidonie, and Julia Watson. *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives*.
Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010.
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. “Foreword: Cosmopolitanisms and the Cosmopolitical.”
Cultural Dynamics 24(2–3): 107–114.

- Stanley, Henry Morton. *In Darkest Africa: Or, The Quest, Rescue, and Retreat of Emin, Governor of Equatoria*. 2 vols. 1890; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1913.
- . *How I Found Livingstone; Travels, Adventures and Discoveries in Central Africa: Including an Account of Four Months' Residence with Dr. Livingstone*. London: Sampson Low, Marston, Low, and Searle, 1872.
- . *Through the Dark Continent: Or, the Sources of the Nile around the Great Lakes of Equatorial Africa, and Down the Livingstone River to the Atlantic Ocean*. 2 vols. New York: Harper, 1878.
- Steevens, G. W. *Egypt in 1898*. New York: Dodd, Mead, 1898.
- Suleri, Sara. *The Rhetoric of English India*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992.
- Swayne, Mattie. "Whitman's Catalogue Rhetoric." *Studies in English* 21 (1941): 162–178.
- "This Way to India." *New York Evening Post* 11 May 1869: 2.
- Tippu Tip. *Maisha ya Hamed bin Muhammed el Murjebi, yaani Tippu Tip; Kwa Maneno Mwenyewe*, Supplement to the East African Swahili Committee Journals 28(2) & 29(1), 1958/59.
- Vilakazi, B. W. "In the Gold Mines." *The Centenary Book of South African Verse (1820–1925)*. London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1925. 96.
- Villa-Vicencio, Charles. *The Spirit of Freedom: South African Leaders on Religion and Politics*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996.
- Wallerstein, Immanuel. *World-Systems Analysis: An Introduction*. Raleigh: Duke University Press, 2004.
- Warren, James Perrin. "'Catching the Sign': Catalogue Rhetoric in 'The Sleepers.'" *Walt Whitman Quarterly Review* 5.2 (1987): 16–34.

- . "Reading Whitman's Postwar Poetry." *The Cambridge Companion to Walt Whitman*. Ed. Ezra Greenspan. Cambridge University Press, 1995. *Cambridge Collections Online*.
- Wellek, René, and Austin Warren. *Theory of Literature*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Co., 1949.
- Wertheimer, Eric. *Imagined Empires: Incas, Aztecs, and the New World of American Literature, 1771–1876*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.
- Wesley, John. *Thoughts upon Slavery*. London, R. Hawes: 1774. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*. Gale.
- White, Hayden. "The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality." *Critical Inquiry* 7.1 (1980): 5–27.
- Whitman, Walt. *The Collected Writings of Walt Whitman*. Volume II: Prose Works 1892. Ed. Floyd Stovall. New York: New York University Press, 1964.
- . *The Collected Writings of Walt Whitman*. Volume IV: Notebooks and Unpublished Prose Manuscripts. Prose Works 1892. Ed. Edward F. Grier. New York: New York University Press, 1984.
- . "Passage to India." *Leaves of Grass*. New York: Airmont, 1965. 285–292.
- Wiley, Dan. "Douglas Livingstone's Poetry and the (Im)possibility of the Bioregion." *The Bioregional Imagination; Literature, Ecology, and Place*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2012. 312–328.
- . "'Lines of flight': Sydney Clouts's Birds." *Alternation* 16.2 (2009): 126–151.
- . "'Long and Wandering Forest': Sidney [sic] Clouts, Geophilosophy and Trees." *Alternation* 14.2 (2007): 72–96.

Wilhelm, Peter, and James A. Polley, eds. *Poetry South Africa: Selected Papers from Poetry '74*.

Cape Town: Ad. Donker, 1976.

Wittman, Richard. "Space, Networks, and the Saint-Simonians." *Grey Room* 40 (2010): 24–49.

Woolf, Virginia. "The Novels of E. M. Forster." *The Death of the Moth and Other Essays*.

eBooks@Adelaide. 2006. <<http://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/w/woolf/virginia/w91d>>

Wright, David. Rev. of *Poets in South Africa*, ed. Roy Macnab. *Poetry* 95.4 (Jan. 1960): 244–247.

Zander, Horst. "Prose-Poem-Drama: 'Proemdra'—'Black Aesthetics' versus 'White

Aesthetics' in South Africa." *Research in African Literatures* 30.1 (1999): 12–33.

Zarobila, Charles. "Walt Whitman and the Panorama." *Walt Whitman Review* 25 (1979): 51–

59.

Vita
Michelle G. Decker

Education

- Ph.D. Comparative Literature. (English minor). The Pennsylvania State University. 2014.
M.A. Comparative Literature. The Pennsylvania State University. 2009.
B.A. Comparative Literature. The Pennsylvania State University. 2006. *summa cum laude*.

Fellowships and Awards

- 2013 Liberal Arts Superior Teaching and Research (STAR) Award
2013 Harold F. Martin Graduate Assistant Outstanding Teaching Award
2012 Africana Research Center Humanities Dissertation Fellow (PSU)
2011 Institute for the Arts and Humanities Summer Residency Fellowship (PSU)
2011 Graduate Research Exhibition, 3rd place winner in the Arts & Humanities
2010 Critical Language Scholarship for Arabic, U.S. Department of State

Publications

- “The ‘Autobiography’ of Tippu Tip: Genre, Geography, and the African Indian Ocean,”
forthcoming in *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies*.
“Aimé Césaire,” *Routledge Encyclopedia of Modernism*, forthcoming in 2014.
“Négritude,” *Routledge Encyclopedia of Modernism*, forthcoming in 2014.

Conference presentations and invited talks

- “The ‘Autobiography’ of Tippu Tip: Genre, Geography, and the African Indian Ocean,”
Centre for Indian Studies at The University of the Witwatersrand, July 22, 2013.
- “How to Read Literature via a Nineteenth Century Kiswahili Poem,” American Comparative
Literature Assoc., 2013.
- “African Interiors: The Autobiography of Tippu Tip,” American Comparative Literature
Association, 2012.
- “The African 1980s,” American Comparative Literature Association, ACL(x) session, 2012.
- “Thinking beyond the Region,” Penn State Comparative Literature Luncheon, Panel
Discussion, 2012.
- “Functional Literature: ‘Al-Inkishafi’ and African Ruins,” African Literature Association,
2012.
- “Bloomsbury’s South Africans,” Modernist Studies Association, 2009.
- “Slavery, Memory, and the Middle Space,” American Comparative Literature Association,
2008.