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Publishing, prizes and postcolonial literary production

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A new urge to understand the local vis-à-vis the global has materialized in commercial strategies – such as, for example, the leading role of powerful literary agents, publishing houses' promotion campaigns, international literary prizes, media coverage, internet sites – which all allow for the successful marketing of postcolonial writers to an international readership. This chapter addresses the relationship between postcolonial literature and the publishing industry, and focuses in particular on how institutions such as literary prizes have contributed towards shaping the field and have influenced the level of production, consumption and distribution.

Over the last three decades, in fact, unprecedented numbers of postcolonial authors have successfully managed to acquire visibility, celebrity and a lasting place in the canon by being awarded important literary prizes, such as the Nobel, Commonwealth, Pulitzer, Neustadt, Booker, Orange and many others, paving the way for a new, young generation of postcolonial literary jet-setters. Besides presenting an overview of the major authors who have entered the literary pantheon of the Nobel (Wole Soyinka, Nadine Gordimer, V.S. Naipaul, J.M. Coetzee), of the Booker (Salman Rushdie, Keri Hulme, Michael Ondaatje, Chinua Achebe), of the Commonwealth (Amitav Ghosh, Rohinton Mistry, Zadie Smith, Andrea Levy) or of the Neustadt (Nuruddin Farah, Patricia Grace), to name but a few laureates, this chapter also focuses on minor literary prizes that struggle to promote postcolonial literature in the vernacular languages, such as the African Noma literary prize or the Indian Sahitya Akademi award, or prizes that concentrate on specific geographical areas such as the Macmillan literary prize and the Caine Prize, both for Africa.

Nobel Prize in Literature (1901)

The Nobel Prize in Literature is one of the most cherished and authoritative institutions in the literary field and is considered to be the highest achievement a

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living author can aspire to. One of the general requirements set by the Swedish Academy is that the prizes should be conferred on candidates who have bestowed 'the greatest benefit on mankind', by moving literature 'in an ideal direction'.[1] Richard Jewell commented that the understanding of the idealistic tendency as intended by Alfred Nobel (who was a utopian idealist, a radical anticleric and an unmarried man) was turned upside down by the Academy which, particularly in the first decade, gave a conservative turn to the notion of idealism interpreted more literally as the ideas of 'great style' and of 'universal interest'.[2]

As with any prize, the Nobel Prize is based on a process of inclusion and exclusion. It is not only renowned for its prestigious list of distinguished laureates but also for its resounding omissions. The list is haunted by the ghosts of many monumental figures for whom this illustrious prize remained elusive: Leo Tolstoy, Joseph Conrad, Henrik Ibsen, James Joyce, Henry James, Virginia Woolf, Franz Kafka, Marcel Proust, Jorge Luis Borges, Italo Calvino, Maguerite Yourcenar, to name but a few. As Burton Feldman notes: 'As the list of laureates makes clear, the Nobel Prize in literature is still far from being the global award it claims to be. Its prizes have repeatedly gone to writing in a few major European languages, primarily English, French, German, Spanish.'[3] The history of the Nobel Prize does, indeed, see the prize being awarded to a disproportionate number of Scandinavian writers (almost one-seventh of the total), and the lack of the award to any writers from India apart from Tagore (who won the 1913 prize for a translation of his work), from Brazil or the Netherlands, and no Nobel Prize for work written in the Bantu or Malayalam languages, or any other 'minority language'.

One reason for this is the limited linguistic competence of the Swedish Academy jury. This renders the Nobel committee overly dependent on translations, the quality of which is notoriously capricious and also politically and commercially biased. Whereas the Nobel Prizes in science and peace are truly international awards, the prize in literature is not. However, moving beyond its familiar linguistic horizons will not, as such, make the prize international. An attempt was made in the last decade to have the prize compensate for its shortcomings and to redress the accusations that the prize is patriarchal and eurocentric. There has been, for example, an attempt to close the gender gap. Only eleven women have been literary laureates in almost a century: six in the first ninety years, and five since 1991 (Gordimer, 1991, Morrison, 1993; Szymborska, 1996, Jelinek, 2004; and Lessing, 2007). As Jewell wrote:

> Feminist critics earlier in the century may have been somewhat mollified by the fact that from 1926 through 1945, four of fifteen winners were women. Yet since

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> World War Two until recently, when Nadine Gordimer was chosen, during a 45-years period only one woman, a German Swede (Nelly Sachs) was selected. So bad is this record that it begs the question of culture and 'great literature' from a gender perspective: are female Euro-American authors even less able to produce literature for the great Western canon than are non-Euro-American people? [4]

It is interesting to explore the relationship between the Nobel Prize in Literature and the Third World Writer, later to be included under the banner of postcolonial writing.

If the Nobel Prize has been slow to recognize the talents and literary worth of authors from non-Western countries or from former European colonies, writing in the language of their former masters, it now seems that the Nobel Prize is attempting to make up for lost time. The new policy since the 1980s has been to open up the prize to a more global dimension of what was, until then, perceived to be world literature. A considerable number of postcolonial writers have been awarded the prestigious prize over the past few decades.

Wole Soyinka

The prize's reputation as a purely European affair changed when Wole Soyinka was awarded the prize in 1986, followed by the Egyptian Mahfouz in 1988, and shortly afterwards by the anti-apartheid writer Nadine Gordimer in 1991, by the Caribbean poet Derek Walcott, well-versed in European styles and genres, in 1992, by the first African American writer, Toni Morrison, in 1993, by another Caribbean novelist, V.S. Naipaul, in 2001, by another South African, J.M. Coetzee, in 2003 and by the Rhodesian/English Doris Lessing in 2007.

Wole Soyinka was the first African to win the Nobel Prize. Born near Ibadan, Nigeria, of the Yoruba tribe, Soyinka is world renowned for his numerous dramatic works, novels, essays and poems. He was educated in Nigeria as well as in the UK, where he studied at the University of Leeds. Soyinka attracted international attention for his outspoken criticism of the Nigerian government, particularly during the civil war. Soyinka appealed in an article for a ceasefire between opposition groups and the government. As a result, he was arrested in 1967, accused of conspiring with the Biafran rebels, and held as a political prisoner for twenty-two months until 1969.

Soyinka's struggle for freedom of speech in Nigeria might have made him a better candidate for the Nobel Peace Prize, but it certainly made him a stronger candidate to become the first African Nobel laureate for the literature prize as he was already well known in Sweden as a political dissident. The Nobel Prize does, in fact, have a long record of writers whose political views conflict with those of their country's regime. Examples are the dissident writers of the former Soviet

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Union, including Aleksandr Isayevich Solzhenitsyn (1970). In the past Russian writers, such as Pasternak (1958), were forced to decline the award out of fear of being stripped of their citizenship were they to travel to Sweden to accept it.

Gordimer, awarded the prize in 1991, was also singled out for her lifelong battle against the apartheid regime in South Africa, which fell in 1990 with the release of Nelson Mandela. Somehow the Nobel, in an attempt to become more diversified and inclusive of Third World culture, blatantly applies Jameson's concept that 'all third-world texts are necessarily … allegorical, and in a very specific way: they are to be read as what I will call *national allegories*'.[5] The Nobel follows Jameson's dictum which assumes that the Third World intellectual's position is always political in one way or another, as there is no division between the private and the public, and that the individual story is not libidinal but always collective, implying that Third World literature is more realistic and less sophisticated in its representational strategies as it always accounts for a position of embattlement.

Soyinka had been passed over the year before in favour of the French *nouveau roman* writer Claude Simon. This led to outrage in Nigeria and other African countries as people there clamoured for the long-overdue Nobel Prize to be awarded to a writer from the African continent. However, Soyinka had his own national detractors who were not easily charmed by the lustre of the Nobel Prize. The Igbo literary critic and newspaper columnist Chinweizu commented that Soyinka's selection by the Swedish Academy did not mean recognition of Nigeria's or Africa's exceptional literary achievement, but that is was simply a reconfirmation of European prejudices about African cultural heritage.[6] The prize was indeed perceived as small-minded and at times openly uneducated and colonialist as it recognizes that strand of African literature written in European languages, bestowing recognition only on African writers who write in accordance with the concept of literary excellence held by a group of Europeans. Therefore, for Chinweizu to embrace the prize meant a rejection of Africa's indigenous and vernacular tradition in favour of European hegemony. He coordinated the attack on Soyinka and the Nobel Prize in the pages of the African journal *Transition*, denouncing Soyinka as a 'Euromodernist' who assiduously aped the practices of twentieth-century European modern poetry. In Africa, wrote Chinweizu, the Nobel can be won only by a writer who carefully applies just enough 'Africanesque patina and inlays to satisfy the Western tourist taste for exotica. Such works become sophisticated literary versions of airport art. It is thus that the Eurocentric disorientations induced by the Nobel prize divert some African writers… from devoting their full energies to developing African… literature.'[7]

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This squabble did not go unnoticed by the Swedish Academy, which had decided in the early 1980s to expand its area of interest and prestige to a more global dimension, also in the light of what was going on with other literary prizes, such as the Booker, which, since 1981, had significantly changed the perception of global literature with *Midnight's Children*. However, the question was, who would be the right candidate for such a change in direction? Who could embody the principles of the Nobel Prize and still be able to cater to a new audience more global in taste and imbibed with a new postcolonial awareness?

For years the name of Léopold Sédar Senghor has circulated as a Nobel favourite. A giant of African literature, founder of the Negritude movement and the first president of independent Senegal for almost two decades, he combined both political commitment and a literary rootedness in African cultural traditions. He was admitted in 1984 to the French Academy, one of the most prestigious and also chauvinistic institutions of French culture. The Academy has only forty seats and its members are selected for life. Even today the French Academy allows for little diversity among its members. After Senghor, the writer and translator François Cheng became the first Asian to be a member of the Academy in 2002, and Assia Djebar was admitted in 2005 as the first writer from the Maghreb to achieve recognition. The first woman to be admitted to the Academy was Marguerite Yourcenar in 1985.

This serves to emphasize the considerable status Senghor had achieved when the Swedish Academy decided to pass him over for the much younger anglophone Soyinka. The choice was interpreted as favouring postcolonial, avant-gardist and therefore more globally palatable writing over the old, anti-colonial, black nationalist and francophone writer. In his article James Gibbs mentions that there was speculation that to pass over Senghor was a way of punishing the French for Sartre's famous refusal to accept the Nobel Prize.[8] Besides being seen as a struggle between two linguistic centres of power, Paris and London, it was as if the rhetoric of authenticity based on black national identity had served its purpose for the anti-colonial struggle, which had lost its cachet in the 1980s in the new era of rampant globalization. As James English writes:

> it was a language suited to cultural nationalism rather than to cultural globalism, being rooted in a paradigm of resistance that, as Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri argued, has become increasingly anachronistic and ineffective with the rise of a new, transnational form of sovereignty (which they call 'empire'). Senghor's discourse of black cultural nationalism lacked a strategy for articulating in this new context the particular without the universal, or for putting local forms of cultural capital into circulation in a rapidly evolving marketplace of 'world' culture.[9]

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The story goes that Soyinka himself was opposed to the Negritude movement, being in favour of a more cosmopolitan aesthetics. The debate was unleashed in an article that Soyinka published in 1975 in *Transition*, one of the leading intellectual African magazines, of which he was then editor. In the article he attacked the followers of the *authenticité* school for producing a kind of 'neo-Tarzanism', naïvely based on a poetics of pseudo-tradition based on native resources. Soyinka was therefore one of the most outspoken critics of Negritude which, in his eyes, encouraged African self-absorption and affirmed one of the central eurocentric prejudices against Africans, namely the dichotomy between European rationalism and African emotionalism which he expressed in the famous mocking comment that 'A tiger does not proclaim its tigritude. . .it acts.' Soyinka's formalist procedures positioned him better in Europe than in Africa. Soyinka was also nominated for the Neustadt Prize in 1986, thanks to the support of Maya Angelou, but the prize eventually went to the Swiss Max Frisch. Obviously success in Western and European circles made him prey to the accusations made by the supporters of cultural authenticity such as Chinweizu, who considered Soyinka's literature a sell-out to the West. For the critics at home he had been effectively manipulated to function as a neo-colonial insider in the demolition of the reputations of 'authentically indigenous Nigerian writers'.[10]

Soyinka was much more in line with the tradition of liberal humanism advocated by the Swedish Academy, in which the universal could be marketed thanks to the local inflection without risking becoming embroiled in national culturalisms. The Nobel Prize was indeed awarded to Soyinka for his being a cosmopolitan writer whose African roots happened to provide one of the many ingredients for his complex and highly personal vision. The award was presented to Soyinka by the secretary of the Swedish Academy for having managed to 'synthetise a very rich heritage from [his] own country, ancient myths and old traditions, with literary legacies and traditions of European culture'.[11] The press saw him as someone 'who in a wide cultural perspective and with poetic overtones fashions the drama of existence'.[12]

Despite its new policy of diversity, the Nobel committee aimed, above all, to honour a new brand of world literature, which could be identified with local roots or regional sites of production but which transcended the local in its achieved form of transcendent humanity. Therefore, the prize may have a postcolonial or multicultural flavour but it must always engage with an articulation across national boundaries, striving for a global reach, both in aesthetic and economic terms. This aspiration often implies the recognition of a 'local' or, to put it even better, a non-Western writer as a spokesperson for and

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representative of their community of origin. However, this aspiration also implies disjunction, as the laureate must be able to rise above a kind of universalized definition of literary worth and imaginative power which often has to appeal to a cosmopolitan audience. As English writes:

> The prize has become a means of articulating, across the various and far-flung sites of its production, a particular category of literature that might be recognized as properly 'global', a literature whose field of production and of reception could be mapped – and whose individual works could be valued – only on a world scale.[13]

It is interesting to note that in the Swedish Academy press release for the so-called 'postcolonial authors' there appears to be a balancing act between the supposed tokenism for the exotic other and the emphasis on a kind of transcendental literary quality that manages to capture the essence of humanity.

Mahfouz was, for example, praised as a writer 'who, through works rich in nuance – now clear-sightedly realistic, now evocatively ambiguous – has formed an Arabian narrative art that applies to all *mankind*'.[14] In a similar vein, Gordimer was signalled out as someone 'who through her magnificent epic writing has – in the words of Alfred Nobel – been of very great benefit to *humanity*'.[15] For Walcott the speech runs as follows: 'Walcott's style is melodious and sensitive. It seems to issue principally from a prolific inspiration. In his literary works Walcott has laid a course for his own cultural environment, but through them he speaks to each and *every one of us*.'[16]

V. S. Naipaul

In the speech for the press release, V. S. Naipaul was praised 'for having united perceptive narrative and incorruptible scrutiny in works that compel us to see the presence of suppressed histories', and further 'Naipaul is Conrad's heir as the annalist of the destinies of empires in the moral sense: what they do to *human beings*. His authority as a narrator is grounded in his memory of what others have forgotten, the history of the vanquished.' Or 'His travel books allow witnesses to testify at every turn, not least in his powerful description of the eastern regions of the Islamic world, *Beyond Belief*. The author's empathy finds expression in the acuity of his ear.'[17]

V. S. Naipaul is an interesting laureate whether or not we wish to include him in the postcolonial pantheon. The Nobel Prize was conferred just after the attack on the Twin Towers, when tension between East and West, the so-called 'clash of civilization', was reaching an explosive dichotomization. The Swedish Academy briefly discussed suspending the prize due to the US strikes on Afghanistan, but finally decided it was appropriate to rise above current events,

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and present the award, in its 100th anniversary year. Therefore the choice of V. S. Naipaul as the marker of these two crucial events could not but generate further controversy.

In his novels V. S. Naipaul celebrates the struggle with the primitive colonial background of Trinidad, prey to apathy and doomed to failure, and the need to find the centre, therefore not endorsing the postcolonial critical paradigm of contesting Western master narratives but, on the contrary, embracing them. In his many travelogues, the most well known of which is the India trilogy,[18] Naipaul has a mordant and unforgiving vision of the countries he visits. His two travelogues through Muslim countries, *Among the Believers* (1981) and *Beyond Belief: Islamic Excursions among the Converted Peoples*, (1998) are no exception, though the *New Republic* hailed the first as 'the most notable work on contemporary Islam to have appeared in a very long time'.[19]

In these books Naipaul presents a vision of Pakistan, Iran, Indonesia and Malaysia through interviews which are at times repeated with the same people in order to arrive at an understanding of Islamic fundamentalism. In the prologue to *Beyond Belief*, Naipaul notes that he has written 'a book about people . . . not a book of opinion'. However, his claim is not completely justified as he writes: 'There probably has been no imperialism like that of Islam and the Arabs. . . .Islam seeks as an article of the faith to erase the past; the believers in the end honor Arabia alone, they have nothing to return to.'[20] Naipaul views Islam in the Indian context as even worse as he states that Islam has been far more disruptive than British rule.

V. S. Naipaul had been mentioned as a possible candidate for the Nobel for several years. However, the awarding of the prize after 9/11 was perceived by many Muslim communities as an obvious provocation. An Iranian newspaper denounced Naipaul for spreading venom and hatred[21] and BBC *Newsnight* concentrated on Inayat Bunglawala of the Muslim Council of Britain, who thought the award was a 'cynical gesture to humiliate Muslims'.[22] As French writes: 'At this point in British history, when the sensational and immediate matter above all else and fame was becoming more important than the achievements that might give rise to fame, Naipaul's half century of work as a writer seemed less significant than his reputation for causing offence.'[23]

Naipaul's two books on Islam were condemned at the time they were written, particularly in the Muslim world. However, after 9/11 they were hailed by Western liberals as prophetic and illuminating. On the receipt of the Nobel the *Guardian* commented that 'In recent years, political comment has been read into the award . . . Naipaul, though undeniably a colossus of the book world on literary merit alone, is also no stranger to political controversy.

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He caused an outcry earlier this month by comparing Islam's effects on the world to those of colonialism.' The article continues by quoting Naipaul's vision of Islam that he sees having a calamitous effect on converted peoples, pointing in particular to Pakistan. Naipaul describes the 'abolition of the self demanded by Muslims' as worse than 'the similar colonial abolition of identity'. In answer Ahmed Versi, the editor of the *Muslim News*, described Naipaul as 'basically a Hindu nationalist, who has a deep dislike of Muslims'. The *Guardian*'s article continues by quoting Horace Engdahl, the secretary of the Swedish Academy, who conceded that Naipaul might be seen as a political winner, but added:

> I don't think we will have violent protests from the Islamic countries and if they take the care to read his travel books from that part of the world they will realise that his view of Islam is a lot more nuanced . . . What he's really attacking in Islam is a particular trait that it has in common with all cultures that conquerors bring along, that it tends to obliterate the preceding culture.[24]

Interestingly enough, writers such as V. S. Naipaul, but also Soyinka and J. M. Coetzee, are often accused by their own communities of having compromised their aesthetics and political stance in the name of a generalized humanity, and therefore against the principle of postcolonial critique which aims to subvert master narratives and Western representational strategies.

The Booker Prize for Fiction (1968)

The Booker Prize, established in 1968, is perceived to have a multicultural consciousness and a postcolonial cachet, and is considered to be one of the most prestigious awards for the book of the year. When the Booker Prize was first established, the aim was to create an English-language Prix Goncourt, an award that would encourage the wider reading of the very best in fiction across the UK and the Commonwealth.

The Booker Prize is also interesting from a postcolonial perspective because, even though it has a reputation as a postcolonial literary patron, the sponsor is a corporate agricultural enterprise whose financial resources emanate from a sugar plantation (Demerara) in Guyana. The Booker company, founded in 1834, achieved rapid prosperity under an exploitative colonial regime, which somehow contradicts the charitable nature of the Book Trust which, since 1971, has administered the Booker Prize for Fiction. Sponsored by Booker plc, it soon became one of the most prestigious cultural institutions in the field of literary awards. In 2002, sponsorship was transferred to an investment

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company, the Man Group plc, and the Booker Prize became the Man Booker Prize for Fiction.

The Booker Prize is particularly influential for the postcolonial field, as, since its inception, it has recognized writers of the calibre of V.S. Naipaul (*In a Free State*, 1971), Nadine Gordimer (*The Conservationist*, 1974) long before they achieved wide international appeal, and in their case, the Nobel Prize. The Booker Prize also launched and treasured bright new talent, such as Salman Rushdie who won the prize for his *Midnight's Children* in 1981, which was later awarded the Best of the Booker for the award's twenty-fifth anniversary in 1993 and again for its fortieth anniversary in 2008. Apart from Rushdie, who has been repeatedly shortlisted and longlisted for his many other books (*Shame*, 1983; *The Satanic Verses*, 1988; *The Moor's Last Sigh*, 1995; *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*, 1999; *Shalimar the Clown*, 2005; *The Enchantress of Florence*, 2008), Indian writers do particularly well in the Booker and successful winners have included Arundhati Roy for *The God of Small Things* (1997), Kiran Desai for *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006), a prize that eluded her mother Anita Desai who was shortlisted three times without ever making it to the big prize (For *Clear Light of Day*, 1980, *In Custody*, 1984; *Fasting, Feasting*, 1999), and Aravind Adiga for *The White Tiger* (2008), the same year that Amitav Ghosh was also shortlisted for his *Sea of Poppies*.

Luke Strongman points out several trends within the colonial/postcolonial themes that underlie the Booker Prize. For example, there is the celebration of several novels that express nostalgia for the Raj: J. G. Farrell's *The Siege of Krishnapur* (1973), Ruth Prawer Jhabvala's *Heat and Dust* (1975) and Paul Scott's *Staying On* (1978). Another strand analysed by Luke Strongman is the end of metanarrative, in which diverse postcolonial prize-winning novels are linked by their postmodern narratives and exploration of postmodern society in the aftermath of empire. As he writes, these novels:

> trace empire's edge, the borderline between empire and 'Other', the transition from modernity to postmodernity: geographical, racial, psychological limits, the liminal spaces and time zones in which territories are mapped, the boundaries of discourse established and dissolved, periods in which the narratives of history are deformed and reformed, and the dissolution of the binding force of empire.[25]

In this league he lists Booker novels such as Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981), Ben Okri's *The Famished Road* (1991), Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient* (1992). Strongman also lists several critical voices that express 'post-colonial pessimism' by voicing the disaffection and malaise linked to migrant displacements and colonial folly: V.S. Naipaul's *In a Free State* (1971); Nadine

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Gordimer's *The Conservationist* (1974); J. M. Coetzee's *Life and Times of Michael K* (1983); Keri Hulme's *The Bone People* (1985); Peter Carey's *Oscar and Lucinda* (1988). Recent novels such as Peter Carey's *True History of the Kelly Gang* (2001) and J. M. Coetzee's *Disgrace* (1999) could probably be added to this latter category of Strongman's subdivision.

Keri Hulme

Strongman places Keri Hulme's *The Bone People* (1983, 1985) on the list of 'postcolonial pessimism'. The prize was accepted on her behalf by a singing collective of Maori tribeswomen, which led to the scandal of racial inauthenticity as Keri Hulme is anglophone and only one-eighth Maori blood, but most importantly she was raised and educated as a white anglophone in New Zealand.

Keri Hulme's novel *The Bone People* was published in 1983 with a very small non-profit feminist press. It received few reviews in the Maori and alternative press. This was Hulme's first novel, although she had previously published poetry and short stories, and it was characterized by a strange mix of genres and languages. The novel was not a serious candidate for the international marketplace, which was another reason for surprise when *The Bone People* won the Booker Prize in 1985. The British press seized upon the race controversy surrounding the author, who was published as a Maori writer across national borders. The scandal about cultural inauthenticity fanned the cultural wars taking place in the 1980s in the United States, with increasing white resentment for the opportunistic appropriation of positive discrimination policies. The Booker Prize, continuing its well-established reputation of attracting media attention through the provocation, scandal and dispute surrounding *The Bone People*, was once again the perfect reason to provoke the by now well-established tradition of Booker-bashing. Since 1981, the year of *Midnight's Children*, the prize had gone to writers from India, Australia (Keneally), South Africa (Coetzee) and New Zealand, and the Booker was accused of accommodating an overdose of postcolonial political correctness. For *The Bone People* it was interesting that race as a point of controversy was chosen at a time when multiculturalism in literature was being placed high on the agenda in the United States. It was a moment at which established old national canons were starting to disintegrate in favour of racially defined sub-literatures, making the balancing act between aesthetic and sociological interest a reason for controversy in its own right. One of the aims of the Booker Prize was indeed to attract attention and conquer the US market, also by embracing these controversies, and by competing with the American Pulitzer

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Prize, which is seen as the Booker's major rival. One of the limitations of the Booker Prize is indeed that it is not open to books published in the US, and that it accepts nominations of original full-length novels, written in the English language, by a citizen of either the Commonwealth of Nations or Ireland, which therefore excludes the US. The latter, in turn, only awards the Pulitzer Prize (which is mostly renowned for its prize for journalism but which does have a special category for fiction) for distinguished fiction by an American author, preferably dealing with American life. *The Bone People* ended up being one of the Booker's most controversial selections, which led to an avalanche of publicity for the Booker, the author and the novel. As James F. English writes:

> The novel's allegorization of colonial contact through a trauma and recovery-paradigm centered on familial dysfunction and child abuse, coupled with its unabashedly New Age mysticism, should, I think, be taken neither as representative tendencies of specifically Maori literary culture nor as telltale symptoms of contamination and inauthenticity that expose Hulme's Pakeha roots. They are, rather, signal features of a properly global brand of indigenousness, in this case of Maoriness that can hold its value as much on the world wide field of English letters (the field onto which, after all, the Pegasus is supposed to translate 'indigenous' writing). It is just such universally recognizable signs of indigenousness that prizes celebrate across all domains of 'world culture'.[26]

By being the only winner of a truly global prize, *The Bone People* consequently became the archetypal Maori novel in the pantheon of world literature, turning Keri Hulme into the most famous contemporary Maori writer and therefore erasing her mixed European origins. In this case the shift from capital to clamour and finally to canon has been rather swift: *The Bone People* is safely established as the Maori entrance into the world literature canon and has been included in the syllabi of postcolonial and world literature courses, becoming a classic, a world-certified, globally consecrated Maori novel. As James F. English further writes: 'The book is in this respect a typical product of world literature: a work of subnational literature whose particular (New Age, magical indigenousness) form of subnationality is the basis of its eligibility for global renown, and whose global renown in turn secures its place on the field of subnational or indigenous writing.'[27]

The Booker Prize has been surrounded by many other controversies of an ethnic or postcolonial nature. When John Berger won with *G* in 1972, he denounced the prize from the stage because of Booker's record of 'sweated black labour in the West Indies', deriving its income from sugar factories in Guyana. Berger announced that he was giving half his prize money to the Black Power movement, which had disbanded two years earlier.

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The Booker Prize is also characterized by scandals of a more trivial nature, such as the repeated references to the misbehaviour of Salman Rushdie who, when his novel *Shame* was passed over for J. M. Coetzee's *The Life & Times of Michael K* (1983), pounded his fist on the table saying that the judges knew 'fuck all' about literature. Or, for example, when the BBC's live broadcast showed Ian McEwan leaving the award ceremony gala dinner at the British Museum with his entourage. McEwan was running for the Booker Prize for the second time with his novel *Black Dog* (in 1981 he was shortlisted for *The Comfort of Strangers*) and was clearly disappointed not only at not being awarded the prize (he was to receive it later for his novel *Amsterdam*, 1998) but also because the jury did not even manage to find an outright winner and awarded the prize jointly to Michael Ondaatje for his masterful *The English Patient* (1992) and to Barry Unsworth for *Sacred Hunger* (1992).

Michael Ondaatje

Michael Ondaatje represents an interesting postcolonial author, as he not only achieved international status thanks to the Booker Prize, but reached stellar fame with the successful Hollywood adaptation of his convoluted novel at the hand of the British director Anthony Minghella. Many works of Booker prize-winners have been adapted either for film or television. Some of them fall into the category of Raj nostalgia, such as James Ivory, *Heat and Dust* (1983), based on Ruth Prawer Jhabvala's novel (1975), and the BBC television serialization of *The Raj Quartet* based on Paul Scott's imperial oeuvre.

Though the cinematic plundering of literary texts is as old as the film industry itself, and institutionalized in the *dual* screenwriting Oscar category, the Booker Prize has been a remarkably consistent source of adaptations. However, as Philip French wrote:

> Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient* (winner in 1992) is an immensely complex piece of storytelling, looking at the war from the viewpoint of four sharply contrasted characters living at a shattered villa in Tuscany during the months leading up to V-E Day in May 1945. It is a subtle meditation on history, nationality, warfare, loyalty and love, but it is also a gripping mystery story.[28]

French reports the difficulty of translating Ondaatje's highly poetic language and complex storyline into effective cinematic language, and praises Minghella's successful work as director, the camera work, the exemplary photography, editing and first-class performances which make *The English Patient* a technical miracle. The film won nine Academy Awards and was considered to be a critical

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and commercial success. However, *The English Patient* clearly shows the path taken by a postcolonial novel, which is turned through adaptation into a successful and outspoken exotic product, a Hollywood production at its best.

What at the literary level is a complex postmodern novel about the impossibility of rendering the concept of nation and identity, if not through different unreliable viewpoints or by elisions, becomes a love story in the desert, with stereotypical representations. The complexity of flashbacks in the narration are simplified for cinematographic purposes into a linear, progressive narration with the four narrative viewpoints reduced to two (British Katherine and Almásy, the mysterious English Patient). The roles of Kip, the Indian sapper, and of Hana, the vulnerable French-Canadian nurse, are pushed to the background, making an empty concept of the counterhistory advocated by Ondaatje.

Many critics were outraged at the romanticization of the character of Almásy, a German Nazi spy. Other postcolonial critics were appalled at the marginalization of the role of Kip who was introduced by Ondaatje to bring corrections to Western history, where, for example, the role of the Indians in the British Army is often silenced and erased, and of Hana who represents the role of carer but also the combative role of women on the frontline.

To conclude, whereas Ondaatje's novel was seen as a complex and multilayered postcolonial statement, Minghella's film was accused of reproducing an orientalistic story in which central characters such as Kip and Hana become mystical others.

This case illustrates how the institution of literary prizes has helped cannibalize and commercialize 'otherness' by marketing the exotic and authenticity appeal of postcolonial literatures. However, it is only when such honoured postcolonial texts are adapted for film and television, or even for musicals, that the true impact and magnitude of these commercial institutions is evidenced, as with *The English Patient*. Nonetheless, the wide appeal of a Hollywood movie revitalizes the interest in and sales of the adapted novels, which continue to have a parallel life of their own, and whose counterhegemonic strategies remain effective.

In the case of the Booker Prize, which is still considered to be the literary patron of postcolonial literature, at least in the English language, the question is whether the prize has successfully furthered the development and spread of postcolonial literature and the prestige of postcolonial writers or whether it has narrowed down the field to a handful of names that appear time and again on the long-and shortlists.

The Belgian economist Victor Ginsburgh analysed whether the Booker Prize had a durable impact on the success and sales of the winners from 1969 to 1982. He evaluated the level of reprints ten years after a book was nominated or

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shortlisted, and he showed that the winners' longevity is no greater than that of their shortlisted peers. He concluded that awards are bad indicators of the fundamental quality of literary work or talent, since most of the choices made by judges in aesthetic competitions do not stand the test of time.[29] Obviously these whimsical results are because the Booker is awarded for the book of the year, which is something that is more fickle and erratic in the long term than prizes conferred for an author's entire oeuvre. This is why the Booker decided in 2005 to launch a prize in a different category: the Man Booker International Prize.

The Man Booker International Prize (2005)

The Man Booker International Prize was created in 2005 to redress the anglocentric bias of the Booker Prize. It is awarded every two years to a fiction writer of any nationality, provided that the work is written or is available in English. The prize, worth £60,000, is for the writer's whole oeuvre, and it also focuses beyond the Commonwealth and Ireland. In a way it competes with the Neustadt Prize, which is also awarded every two years for lifetime achievement. The inaugural prize went to the Albanian poet Ismaël Kadare in 2005, and the second to Chinua Achebe in 2007. This was a long-awaited prize for the Nigerian writer, who in 2008 celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of the publication of his *Things Fall Apart*, the most influential modern African novel.

Achebe had previously been under the banner of the Booker Prize for a long time. His fifth novel *Anthills of the Savannah* (1987), about a military coup in a fictional West African nation, was a finalist for the Booker Prize. The novel was hailed by the *Financial Times* as follows: 'In a powerful fusion of myth, legend and modern styles Achebe has written a book which is wise, exciting and essential, a powerful antidote to the cynical commentators from "overseas" who see nothing ever new out of Africa.'[30] Achebe was considered to be the writer who had long deserved recognition, but the prize went to Penelope Lively's novel *Moon Tiger* (1987).

The Man Booker International Prize does not have the tradition and resounding appeal of the Booker Prize, but it does capitalize on the lifetime achievement of writers who might otherwise have been overlooked over the years for linguistic and commercial reasons.

The Neustadt International Prize for Literature (1969)

The Neustadt was originally established in 1969 under the heading of Books Abroad International Prize for Literature before assuming its present name in

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1976. The Neustadt is considered to be a conscious global alternative to the eurocentric Nobel Prize and it is one of the very few international prizes for which poets, novelists and playwrights are equally eligible. The prize has been awarded to many postcolonial authors of the calibre of Patricia Grace (New Zealand) in 2008, Assia Djebar (Algeria) in 1996, and Kamau Brathwaite (Barbados) in 1994, Raja Rao (India) in 1988, and many others nominated for their lifelong work, such as Wole Soyinka, Chinua Achebe and Mahasweta Devi and so forth.

The Neustadt is a truly multilingual, multicultural event, with both juries and nominees drawn from various countries and linguistic backgrounds. It is a biennial award established to promote a regional university, the University of Oklahoma, and its quarterly journal, *World Literature Today*. The prize is awarded in every even-numbered year and taps into the international mechanism of literary awards and financial prestige in order to promote the local, by adhering to a global formula with a global reach and impact.

Nuruddin Farah

The Neustadt Prize for Literature has brought important writers into the international spotlight such as Nuruddin Farah (b. 1945), who received the prize in 1998. A writer of Somali origin, Nuruddin Farah was declared persona non grata in his native country, and after many migrations (India, Italy, Nigeria, Kenya) he settled in South Africa, where he lives in voluntary exile. Farah writes about the destiny of his shattered Somalia, from which he was forcibly removed, and is also an outspoken intellectual who denounces the fate of migrants and refugees. He accuses the European Union of being just another scapegoat for 'postcolonial responsibility'. The European Union is, according to Farah, another empire of a more sophisticated order, which has taken on the role of negotiating away the imperial responsibilities of countries such as Britain, France, Portugal, the Netherlands and Italy. The people of this new empire are barricading themselves within an empty rhetoric of fear and helplessness. Farah addresses the responsibilities of the European Union, because he too has occupied the ambiguous territory of colonization and was forced to see himself as someone else's invention.[31] At the International Literary Festival of The Hague, Farah gave the winter lecture in January 2009 entitled 'A Sense of Belonging – A Contemporary Story on Migration'. In this lecture, in which he combines his personal story with that of many other migrants and refugees, he said:

> I do not know what an American or a European would make of the complicated nature of my life, including the fact that even though I wanted it, I could not

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> continue travelling on a Somali passport after January 1999, because no country would issue visas to me, nearly a decade after the collapse of the structures of the state. It would not make sense to an American or a European to hear that, to spare me becoming stateless and a refugee, half a dozen African governments bestowed their nationalities on me – to facilitate my travel across borders. Now that I feel more at home in Cape Town than ever before, following the collapse of my marriage, and because my children love visiting me here, where they have many of their friends, maybe the time has come for me to add the South African nationality to the half dozen citizenships I've held since my birth.[32]

He points out that since 9/11 the status of the immigrant is further complicated by the issue of religion, blurring the insider/outsider differences within each European entity, with the Muslims seen and dealt with as undesirable aliens, even if they are nationals. He proclaims that after 9/11 Europeans have become inherently discriminatory towards Muslims whatever their provenance, and look upon them with dread. Whereas discrimination against black people may take more subtle forms, the manner in which Muslims are dealt with is blatantly racist and demeaning. Farah also described the particular quality of his profession as a writer which he compares to that of map making:

> I think of my novels as a cartographer might think of her/his relationship to the maps she/he draws, in which representations of the curved surface of the Earth are made flat in order to represent it in a deductible, calculable format – scientifically, aesthetically. This way, the curved surface of the three dimensional space is skilfully represented in two dimensions with readable, speedily communicable, accurately calculable, balanced surfaces. The cartographer's representation of the three dimensional space is in correlation of the two-dimensional one, which represents the imagined, rendering it into its visible equivalent. This, to my mind, is comparable to the exiled novelist's writing about an imagined place, which she/he equates to its invented reality.[33]

Farah concludes that his life in exile is not just a question of loss, but that exile has, at the same time, afforded him the opportunity to become himself, a writer with a wider, more inclusive world vision, who owes his persona to a world much larger than the one he was born into, a world unknown to his parents and to his other family members, and who fearlessly tackles some of the most unpalatable topics.

These are the writers cherished and lauded by the Neustadt Prize, which has rightly been defined as the 'more globally conscious alternative to the Nobel'.[34] And yet Farah is named by many as the most important African candidate for the Nobel Prize in Literature. This makes competition among literary prizes even more rewarding for the celebrated authors. But it is also a

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kind of vicious circle as the prizes tend to circulate among a restricted number of authors, who become the epitome of literary prestige. In many cases the prize works, as George Bernard Shaw so poignantly put it, 'as a life belt thrown out to a swimmer who has already reached the shore'.[35]

The Commonwealth Writers' Prize (1987)

The Commonwealth Writers' Prize is of particular interest for the field of postcolonial literature as its launch in 1987 dealt with a controversial but also almost obsolete category. As Salman Rushdie wrote in *Imaginary Homelands* in 1981, 'Commonwealth Literature does not exist' except as a ghetto of the standard British curriculum. Rushdie criticized the term for artificially linking writers of disparate origin and aesthetic principles. To further quote Rushdie:

> by now 'Commonwealth Literature' was sounding very unlikeable indeed. Not only was it a ghetto, but it was actually an exclusive ghetto. And the effect of creating such a ghetto was, is, to change the meaning of the far broader term 'English literature' – which I'd always taken to mean simply the literature of the English language – into something far narrower, something topographical, nationalistic, possibly even racially segregationist.[36]

The prize, organized and funded by the Commonwealth Foundation in collaboration with support from the Macquarie Foundation, was set up to promote outstanding literary talent existing in many parts of the Commonwealth, whose work makes a significant contribution to contemporary writing in English. The Commonwealth Foundation established the Commonwealth Writers' Prize in 1987 'to encourage and reward the upsurge of new Commonwealth fiction and ensure that works of merit reach a wider audience outside their country of origin'. The prize is therefore intended for four regions (Africa, Canada and the Caribbean, Europe and South Asia, Southeast Asia and South Pacific) offering both a prize for best book and a prize for best first book for each region plus an overall winner in both categories. Each year the final award programme is held in a different country, rotating around the different Commonwealth regions. There are a number of interesting winners, in both categories, who did not manage to reach more publicized prizes such as the Booker, or who recur on the Booker longlist without making it to the shortlist. Examples include Rohinton Mistry (Commonwealth Prize twice for *Such a Long Journey* in 1992 and for *A Fine Balance* in 1996) or Vikram Seth (*A Suitable Boy*, 1994), Caryl Phillips (*A Distant Shore*, 2004) or best First book such as Vikram Chandra (*Red Earth*, *Pouring Rain*,

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1996) and Zadie Smith (*White Teeth*, 2001). These are books that otherwise would not have achieved a network of international publicity. There is also overlap between the Commonwealth Prize and the Booker Prize, as for example in the case of J.M. Coetzee (*Disgrace*, 2000) who also won the Booker Prize in 1999, or Peter Carey (*True History of the Kelly Gang*, 2001) who also won the Booker Prize in 2001. Rohinton Mistry was shortlisted for the Booker Prize in 1996 with *A Fine Balance*, whereas Zadie Smith was shortlisted for the Booker Prize in 2005 for a different book, *On Beauty*. There is also overlap between the Commonwealth Prize and other prizes, such as the Orange Prize for fiction, a prize exclusively bestowed to female writers, from all over the world writing in English, and comprising a female jury. When the prize was launched in 1996 writers such as A.S. Byatt protested saying that these initiatives were the kind of action that would intensify the ghettoization of women writers, and that to launch such as prize was in itself deeply sexist. However, as Richard Todd writes: 'women buy and read more fiction than men, probably write more, but win fewer prizes and less recognition in the world of prize culture. Until recently women have been grotesquely under-represented, for instance, in Booker juries.'[37] And the Orange Prize with its system of long- and shortlists has certainly helped to increase the visibility of female writers and to scout new postcolonial talents such as Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, a Nigerian writer who was shortlisted for *Purple Hibiscus* in 2004 and who won the Orange Prize for fiction in 2007 with *Half of a Yellow Sun*. The Orange also confirmed discoveries made by the Commonwealth Prize, such as Zadie Smith shortlisted in 2001 for *White Teeth* (shortlisted again in 2003 for *The Autograph Man*) and who won the Orange Prize in 2006 for *On Beauty*. Another overlap between the Commonwealth and the Orange Prize is, for example, Andrea Levy who won the prize for *Small Island* in 2004 and the Commonwealth Prize in the same year.

Despite its function as a promoter of literatures in English from the Commonwealth region, the prize made a somewhat anachronistic entrance in 1987, which marks the beginning of what would become postcolonial studies, with its different genealogy and critical take on the idea of literature in English from the former colonies. Commonwealth literature was established around 1950 and referred to English-language literature from the former British colonies. It therefore included writers from white settler communities (Australia, Canada) and writers from countries who fought in order to achieve independence from British rule. As an area of study it became an institution thanks to the first university chair at Leeds University in 1972 with William Walsh. However, the term 'Commonwealth literature' continued to be contested as it reaffirms the centrality of the English language, and the British

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nation, once the empire had been dismantled. The prize's inception in 1987 came therefore at a time when the category of 'Commonwealth literature' had truly started to fall into disrepute, substituted by a much more politically engaged and globally resonant term such as 'postcolonial literature', which would open the field to areas and languages beyond the anglophone world, though that will remain the reference parameter for a long time to come. It is not surprising that the Commonwealth Foundation decided to reactivate the value of the term by launching a prize in the global marketplace under new rules of art which foresee a specific economy of prestige in which literary merit is filtered through many agents with marketing and ideological interests.

Amitav Ghosh

These considerations make the controversy surrounding Amitav Ghosh all the more poignant. In 2001 Ghosh declined the best book award for the Eurasian region of the Commonwealth Writers' Prize for his *The Glass Palace*, on the grounds that he was unaware that his publishers had entered the book for this prize and he objected to the classification of 'Commonwealth Literature'.

Ghosh's main objection to the contest was that only English-language writing is eligible for the awards, excluding books in the vernacular. In his open letter to the contest administrators he says:

> As a grouping of nations collected from the remains of the British Empire, the Commonwealth serves as an umbrella forum in global politics. As a literary or cultural grouping however, it seems to me that 'the Commonwealth' can only be a misnomer so long as it excludes the many languages that sustain the cultural and literary lives of these countries (it is surely inconceivable, for example, that athletes would have to be fluent in English in order to qualify for the Commonwealth Games).

And further along in the letter:

> The issue of how the past is to be remembered lies at the heart of *The Glass Palace* and I feel that I would be betraying the spirit of my book if I were to allow it to be incorporated within that particular memorialization of Empire that passes under the rubric of 'the Commonwealth'. I therefore ask that I be permitted to withdraw *The Glass Palace* from your competition.

Ghosh concludes:

> My objections to the term 'Commonwealth Literature' are mine alone, and I trust you will understand that I could hardly expect to sustain them if I allowed one of my books to gain an eponymous prize.[38]

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In the end these kinds of scandals, though negative, refocus media attention on the prize and on the existence of the term 'Commonwealth literature'. Ghosh was shortlisted in 2008 for the Man Booker Prize for his novel *Sea of Poppies*. The prize went to another Indian writer Aravind Adiga for *The White Tiger*. Gaiutra Bahadur wrote that it would have been a bit of a joke played by history if the Man Booker Prize had gone to *Sea of Poppies* by Ghosh. This in light of the fact that

> the novel tells the story of 'coolies' forced to leave India to cut cane on plantations much like the ones owned by the Bookers. Josiah Booker I, the Liverpool merchant who struck out to Demerara in 1815, not only helped provide Ghosh with a backdrop for his historical epic through his demand for near-slave labour, but posthumously provided the Kolkata-born writer with a £2,500 check for representing those near-slave labourers in prose.[39]

This leads to an examination of literary prizes established outside the Western publishing industry centres to account for alternative modalities of evaluation and prestige. I restrict myself here to the Caine, Macmillan and Noma prizes for the African continent and to the Sahitya Akademi Award for the Indian subcontinent.

African literary prizes[40]

The exponential growth of literary prizes, not all on the same level of commercial visibility, aesthetic recognition or financial reward, has begun to make conspicuous inroads into remote regions of Africa. The establishment of new prizes creates a kind of joint venture between pure development aid in the old forms and new commercial structures for the distribution of cultural capital. So, in 2002, we saw the appearance of the New Macmillan Writer's Prize for Africa.

Before the Macmillan prizes became prominent, another prize drew the attention of the international public, the Caine Prize for African Writing. The prize is named after the late Sir Michael Caine, former chairman of Booker plc. The prize was first awarded at the Zimbabwe International Book Fair 2000 in Harare, and in 2001 at the Nairobi Book Fair. The winner is announced at a dinner in Oxford in July, to which the shortlisted candidates are all invited. The prize aims to give visibility to a literature formerly the sole turf of the Heinemann African Writers Series, and to boost the short-story genre that has a long and strong tradition in African countries but which tends to be ignored on the literary prize circuit. The three African winners of the Nobel

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Prize in Literature, Wole Soyinka, Nadine Gordimer and Naguib Mahfouz, are patrons of the Caine Prize and this should guarantee quality and prestige. Ben Okri, chairman of the judges for the Caine Prize 2000, stated:

> I believe the Prize will achieve excellence and transform perceptions. Whatever helps the literature of Africa enriches the literature of the world.

However, a guideline for submission runs as follows: 'The Prize is awarded to a short story by an African writer published in English, whether in Africa or elsewhere (indicative length, between 3000 and 10,000 words).' This already reinstates the exclusive realm of writing in the English language. The other problematic category is the specification of the notion of African writer: '"An African writer" is taken to mean someone who was born in Africa, or who is a national of an African country, or whose parents are African, and whose work has reflected African sensibilities.' This latter guideline leads us to a new, and dubious, category of 'reflecting African sensibilities' which stretches the imagination and is projected as literal, as if that quality could be measured and agreed upon without hesitation. This supports and reinforces the view, as Huggan writes:

> of African literature as primarily an export product, aimed at a largely foreign audience for whom the writer acts, willingly or not, as cultural spokesperson or interpreter. This view is of course simplistic, overlooking as it does the geographical complexities of audience formation (local, metropolitan, trans/national, diasporic, etc.), as well as the intrinsic nexus of related historical reasons for the primacy of European languages in the development of African literature as a recognised literary/cultural field.[41]

Another African prize is the Noma Award for Publishing in Africa, established in 1979, whose principal aim is the encouragement of publication in Africa of works by African writers and scholars. The US$10,000 prize is awarded annually for an outstanding new book in any of the following three categories: (i) scholarly or academic; (ii) books for children; and (iii) literature and creative writing. Although literature is one of the categories in which books must be submitted, and works of fiction and poetry have won the prize on a number of occasions, the Noma Award is a book prize; it is not a literary award, as it is frequently and mistakenly described.

Books are admissible in any of the languages of Africa, both indigenous and European. The award is open to any author who is indigenous to Africa, but entries must be submitted through publishers. This submission guideline is more in tune with the complexities of the African continent, with its broad multilinguistic composition and a need for strong pedagogical input (offered

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by the scholarly and academic category). However, the difficulty of evaluating texts in different languages, referring to diverse unique traditions and cultural backgrounds, makes for insurmountable problems when assessing the work through translations, referees and committees. The selection inevitably involves levelling the richness and diversity on offer, and does not solve the problems of oral works that cannot be submitted in this format. Furthermore, the Noma Award has very little visibility on a global scale and within the internationalization of literature it barely manages to compete with other ventures that more rapidly hurl African literature into the limelight.

Conferring prestigious literary prizes has meant that many African authors and books have acquired visibility across Africa and throughout the world. Again, these prizes are pretty much Western based and dependent on a system of value judgments not untouched by the definition of African aesthetics as more sociologically marked and resting upon anthropological notions of exoticism and 'African sensibilities'. Authors such as Soyinka received the Nobel Prize (1986) along with Nadine Gordimer and Coetzee, who doubled up with other prizes such as the Booker, which was also received by Ben Okri. Nuruddin Farah received the Neustadt Prize (1998), Chinua Achebe the Commonwealth Prize (1972) and the Man Booker International Prize in 2007, and Ama Ata Aidoo the Commonwealth Writers' Prize for the Africa Region (1992). African writers writing in French received the Prix Goncourt such as Tahar Ben Jelloun 1987, while Assja Djebar received international prizes in Germany and the United States (Neustadt, 1996).

If we compare these cases with the winners of the Noma Award for Publishing in Africa (Mongane W. Serote and Meshack Asarem, 1982; S. Khodja & Charles Mingoshi, 1992; K. Toure, 1996; D. Samb, 1999; Kimani Njogu & Rocha M. Chimerah, 2000) we get a clear picture of the different impact of the various prize-giving institutions. When positioned in the old imperial centres, in alliance with the capitalist centres of the new global order, literary prizes manage to either overrule or overshadow the more localized enterprises, though the latter are more in keeping with a sustainable development of literature.

Indian literary prizes: the Sahitya Akademi Award (1954)

The Sahitya Akademi Award is a literary honour in India. Established in 1954, it is awarded annually by the Sahitya Akademi, India's National Academy of Letters, for outstanding literary works published in any of the twenty-four

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major languages of India, including English. These languages include Assamese, Bengali, Bodo, Dogri, Gujarati, Hindi, Kannada, Kashmiri, Konkani, Maithili, Malayalam, Manipuri, Marathi, Nepali, Oriya, Punjabi, Rajasthani, Sanskrit, Santhali, Sindhi, Tamil, Telugu and Urdu. The prize is intended to keep alive the dialogue among the various linguistic and literary zones and groups also through seminars, lectures and symposia, to increase the pace of mutual translations.

Writers in the English language who have received the prize include authors who have been recognized by other international prizes (Anita Desai, 1968; Vikram Seth, 1988; Amitav Ghosh, 1989; Sunetra Gupta, 1996; Amit Chaudhuri, 2002). However, the prize demonstrates that the most interesting things happening in Indian literature are not in English, but produced in the many other languages, and they are often not translated either into English, or any of the other languages.[42] This would contest once and for all Rushdie's claim in the Vintage anthology issued in 1997 to celebrate the fifty years of India's independence:

> This is it: the prose writing – both fiction and non-fiction – created in this period by Indian writers *working in English*, is proving to be a stronger and more important body of work than most of what has been produced in the 16 'official languages' of India, the so-called 'vernacular languages', during the same time; and indeed, this new, and still burgeoning, 'Indo-Anglian' literature represents perhaps the most valuable contribution that India has yet made to the world of books.[43]

For a writer who had once accused Commonwealth literature of being an exclusionary ghetto, this claim sounds like a repetition of Macaulay's statement made in 1835, more than 150 years previously. When Macaulay had been asked to give his views as to whether education in India should be imparted in the 'traditional' mode with Sanskrit and Arabic as the foundation and mediums or whether a 'modern/non-traditional' method with English as the medium and as the source of knowledge should be adopted, he opted for the latter and his view prevailed. Macaulay's notorious 'Minute on Indian Education' (2 Feburary 1835) was the result, in which he stated that:

> I have no knowledge of either Sanscrit or Arabic. But I have done what I could to form a correct estimate of their value. I have read translations of the most celebrated Arabic and Sanscrit works. I have conversed both here and at home with men distinguished by their proficiency in the Eastern tongues. I am quite ready to take the Oriental learning at the valuation of the Orientalists themselves. I have never found one among them who could deny that a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia. The

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> intrinsic superiority of the Western literature is, indeed, fully admitted by those members of the Committee who support the Oriental plan of education.[44]

This dismissal of Indian literature in vernacular languages is something that still stands today in the avalanche of globalization that favours a rather limited array of linguistic diversity, due to the homogenization brought about by the advancement of new media technologies. However, it also marks the increasing corporate conglomeration of the publishing industry and the annexed award industry, which makes diversity and localization a new important element of global consumption but which also pushes minority languages and small publishing houses to the margins of bankruptcy, when not in line with the modes of production and circulation.

Conclusion: capital, celebrity, canon

There are several cautionary tales surrounding the role that the glamour of literary prizes offers to literature. As James English writes 'But we will see as well, that for all they have done to improve the competitive position of local and minor cultures, the institutions and marketplaces of global prestige have been at best a mixed blessing for those engaged in the ongoing project of cultural postcolonization.'[45]

This line of argumentation is sustained by the fact that even though over the past two decades an increasing array of postcolonial authors have been awarded prestigious international literary prizes, ranging from the international and more prestigious Nobel Prize, to the commercial Booker, to the respectful American Pulitzer, to an old regime prize such as Commonwealth or to other minor national prizes (Derek Walcott, V. S. Naipaul, Salman Rushdie, Arundhati Roy, Michael Ondaatje, Ben Okri, Chinua Achebe without excluding the subcategory of Commonwealth authors, Peter Carey, J. M. Coetzee, Margaret Atwood, Nadine Gordimer, Keri Hulme and so on), this does not necessarily imply an expanded audience awareness of the differentiations and complexities of postcolonial literatures. On the contrary, as Huggan argues, it has 'paradoxically narrowed this awareness to a handful of internationally recognised postcolonial authors'.[46]

First of all, it most often concerns authors who have already achieved international prominence, so that while bestowing prizes may reinforce their critical visibility, it more significantly promotes both the authors and their publishing houses commercially. A second point is that the process of canonization which in recent years has become progressively susceptible to the influence of market forces loses, at least in the short term, its critical edge

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and incorporates award-winning authors as forms of bland multiculturalization of the canon. Typically this generally involves granting access to postcolonial authors as remakers and respondents of an established and consolidated Western tradition (the rewriting of Western literary genres, the problem of intertextuality, the abrogation and appropriation of the English language). Thirdly, it almost automatically makes a cultural commodity of postcolonialism, which glamorizes the exiled, cosmopolitan and diasporic authors as the best spokespersons for former colonial outposts which are still under the spell of exoticism and colonial nostalgia. Finally, the crucial movement in the current era towards the absolute relocation of the English language as the international and neo-imperial lingua franca pushes an enormous amount of literatures written in other languages, not only major European ones, but in particular the numerous languages of Africa, South Asia and the rest of the world, towards the abyss or towards total disappearance from the international podium. Translation as a form of redemption and rescue functions only marginally as a system of rebalancing, considering that translation is subject to a far-reaching range of ideological distortions of its own.

However, as I have argued elsewhere,[47] the awarding of prestige not only confirms older mechanisms of canonization and new forms of neo-colonialism, namely that postcolonial texts considered to a certain extent innovative and subversive become neutralized by their inclusion in the international aesthetic circle and consumption for their exotic otherness. It also significantly points towards a shift in the aesthetic of reception which makes the so-called international paradigm of aesthetic evaluation and appreciation open up to more diversified and unfixed criteria of recognition which reflect societal and aesthetic changes at large. Therefore, it is important to distinguish a short-term from a long-term canon: the short-term canon is much more prey to the fleeting seduction of the forces of global capital and of the glitz and glamour of star celebrity annexed to the literary prize industry; the long-term canon, instead, is clearly a better indicator of the slow transformation of the value-endowed paradigm attached to postcolonial literature which is here to stay.

Notes

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