

## Chapter I

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# Post-colonial writing and literary translation

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Analysis of literary texts emerging from peoples who have been colonized or oppressed invites metaphor: the criticism of such texts speaks, for example, of voices silenced, margin and centre, and epistolary exchange.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps this is so because of cognitive processes themselves. In speaking of unfamiliar or new phenomena, humans often adapt the language of similar though disparate objects and action. Figurative language is used: in English, for example, the newly invented vehicle propelled by an internal combustion engine was sometimes known as *the horseless carriage*.<sup>2</sup> The penchant for metaphorical speech about post-colonial literature suggests that critics view it as a new literary phenomenon about which we do not as yet know how to speak directly, a type of writing for which we do not as yet have an adequate vocabulary. Because metaphoric speech is cognitively pervasive, a normally harmless and time-honoured linguistic practice, the approach could be extended; metaphors are to hand. Mirrors come to mind as appropriate figures, for example: the writing of post-colonial authors or those from subaltern cultures as a house of mirrors in which the reader and writer alike risk being lost in the tangle, confusion and redundancy of reflections; as the mirror in St Paul's trope, in which one as yet sees only darkly rather than face to face; or, to adapt Joyce's aphorism about Irish art, as the cracked looking-glass of a servant. And let us not forget the mirroring in the well-used figure of Caliban's rage.

Translation might be used as such a metaphor, but this is not what I am about here. Translation as metaphor for post-colonial writing, for example, invokes the sort of activity associated with the etymological meaning of the word: translation as the activity of *carrying across*, for instance, the transportation and relocation of the

bones and other remains of saints. In this sense post-colonial writing might be imaged as a form of translation (attended with much ceremony and pomp, to be sure) in which venerable and holy (historical, mythic and literary) relics are moved from one sanctified spot of worship to another more central and more secure (because more powerful) location, at which the cult is intended to be preserved, to take root and find new life. There is, of course, much in this metaphor that bears reflection (mirroring again) in relation to many works emanating from former colonies, and the metaphor is suggestive of certain perils faced by writers in these circumstances.<sup>3</sup>

However that might be, in this enquiry I am not using translation as a metaphor of transportation across (physical, cultural or linguistic) space or boundaries: instead, interlingual literary translation provides an *analogue* for post-colonial writing. The two types of intercultural writing are essentially distinct, but they have enough points of contact that exploration of the two in tandem and comparison of the two – investigation of the commonalities and the differences – results in new insights about both. Moreover, because literary translation is a phenomenon that can be charted for more than two millennia with an almost coeval critical and theoretical literature about it, many of the workings of literary translation are reasonably well understood. Thus, the comparison of literary translation and post-colonial writing is particularly apt to shed light on the latter more recent literary phenomenon, an understanding of which can benefit from the body of knowledge that has been built up in translation studies.

Significant differences between literary translation and post-colonial literature are obvious and should be addressed from the outset. The primary difference is that, unlike translators, post-colonial writers are not transposing a text. **As** background to their literary works, they are transposing a culture – to be understood as a language, a cognitive system, a literature (comprised of a system of texts, genres, tale types, and so on), a material culture, a social system and legal framework, a history, and so forth. In the case of many former colonies, there may even be more than one culture or one language that stand behind a writer's work. **A** translator, by contrast, has seemingly a much more limited domain, only a single text to transpose. **As** perspectives from general systems theory and semiotics suggest, however, this difference is more apparent than real, for the same cultural complexity facing a post-colonial or minority-culture author is implicit in any single text of the same

culture: Ivir (1987: 35) goes so far as to claim that translation means translating cultures not languages.<sup>4</sup> Thus, a literary translator is *de facto* concerned with differences not just in language (transposing word for word, mechanically), but with the same range of cultural factors that a writer must address when writing to a receiving audience composed partially or primarily of people from a different culture. The culture or tradition of a post-colonial writer acts as a metatext which is rewritten – explicitly and implicitly, as both background and foreground – in the act of literary creation. The task of the interlingual translator has much in common with the task of the post-colonial writer; where one has a text, however, the other has the metatext of culture itself.

**A** more significant difference in the two literary activities has to do with the parameters of constraint. **A** translator is faced with a fixed text (one usually freely chosen, to be sure, but fixed nonetheless); such a fixed text includes cultural and linguistic elements that are givens for the translator and that typically involve factors that are particularly problematic for the receiving audience. Thus the translator is faced with the dilemma of faithfulness: to be 'faithful', such problematic factors must be transposed despite the difficulties they might cause to the sensibilities or cognitive framework of translator or audience; in obscuring or muting the cultural disjunctions, the translator ceases to be 'faithful' to the source text. This constraint of a text with cultural givens in a fixed ordering is a major factor behind the discourse regarding literalism that has been part of discussions of translation for some centuries.<sup>5</sup> **A** post-colonial writer, by contrast, chooses which cultural elements to attempt to transpose to the receiving audience.

**An** author can choose a fairly aggressive presentation of unfamiliar cultural elements in which differences, even ones likely to cause problems for a receiving audience, are highlighted, or an author can choose an assimilative presentation in which likeness or 'universality' is stressed and cultural differences are muted and made peripheral to the central interests of the literary work. Similarly, linguistic features related to the source culture (such as dialect or unfamiliar lexical items) can be highlighted as defamiliarized elements in the text, or be domesticated in some way, or be circumvented altogether. The greater element of choice in the construction of an original literary text means that in the hands of a skilled writer it is easier to keep the text balanced, to manage the information load, and to avoid mystifying or repelling elements of the receiving

audience with a different cultural framework. Because a translator begins with a text intended for an audience in the source culture, however, it is not uncommon that elements that are difficult for the receiving audience will cluster; a translated text more than an original piece of literature thus risks losing balance at critical moments, making the information load too great for comfortable assimilation by the receiving audience. These differences are somewhat mitigated in practice by the choice actually exercised by translators in deciding which elements of a text to preserve in translation (Tymoczko 1995); at the same time writers are not necessarily so free as might be imagined, constrained as they are by history, myth, ideology, patronage and affiliation, which set bounds on the presentation of the source culture in the literary work. Thus, the two types of writing converge on the shared limit defined by cultural interface.<sup>6</sup>

It is tempting to identify the greater range of paratextual commentary permitted to the translator as another difference between literary translation and post-colonial writing. In the form of introductions, footnotes, critical essays, glossaries, maps, and the like, the translator can embed the translated text in a shell that explains necessary cultural and literary background for the receiving audience and that acts as a running commentary on the translated work. Thus, the translator can manipulate more than one textual level simultaneously, in order to encode and explain the source text. This, too, is a distinction that may be more seeming than real between these two types of intercultural writing. Particularly in contemporary literary works aimed at intercultural audiences, it is not uncommon to find maps, glossaries, appendices with historical information, or introductions describing the cultural context of the work, while experimental formal techniques and multilayered textual strategies may even permit the use of embedded texts, footnotes and other devices constituting more than one textual level. Authors also frequently provide introductions and postscripts, write critical essays commenting on their own texts, or facilitate 'authorized' commentaries on their work.' Indeed, we better understand why post-colonial authors embrace such textual types and such literary strategies by considering the functions of similar elements for translators.

Thus, although there are differences between literary translation and post-colonial writing, such differences are more significant *prima facie* than they are upon close consideration. The two types of textual production converge in many respects; as the metaphor

of translation suggests, the transmission of elements from one culture to another across a cultural and/or linguistic gap is a central concern of both these types of intercultural writing and similar constraints on the process of relocation affect both types of texts. To these constraints let us now turn. It is abundantly clear from the theory and practice of translation that no text can ever be fully translated in all its aspects: perfect homology is impossible between translation and source.<sup>8</sup> Choices must be made by the translator; there are additions and omissions in the process, no matter how skilled the translator. Some of the differences between text and translation have to do with incompatibilities between the substance of any two linguistic systems, and it is for this reason that J.C. Catford defines translation as 'a process of substituting a text in one language for a text in another', involving the replacement of source-language meanings with alternate receptor-language meanings (Catford 1965: 1, 20, 35-42). Many of the differences between source text and translation are inescapable, resulting from the shift from the obligatory features of one language to the obligatory features of another. Other shifts have a cultural basis; the translator must decide how to handle features of the source culture (e.g. objects, customs, historical and literary allusions) that are unfamiliar to the receiving audience, adapting and modifying the source text in the process, if only through the process of explanation.<sup>9</sup> Still other differences have to do with information load: in trying to adapt the multiple layers of information in a text to a new reception environment, a translator will almost inevitably produce a longer text. Even that eventuality does not result in a full capture and transposition of all the coded information.<sup>10</sup>

A translator's refractions of a source text have analogues in the choices a minority-culture writer makes in representing the home culture, for no culture can be represented completely in any literary text, just as no source text can be fully represented in a translation. Selectivity is essential to the construction of any piece of literature, particularly when the intended audience includes readers who are unfamiliar with the cultural subject." Not everything in a post-colonial cultural metatext can be transposed in a literary format; just as literary translations are typically simpler than their source texts, so post-colonial authors of necessity simplify the cultural fields they write about. Like translators, they will be criticized accordingly. The greater the distance between an author's source culture and the receiving culture of the author's work, the greater will be

the impetus to simplify. A minority-culture or post-colonial writer will have to pick aspects of the home culture to convey and to emphasize, particularly if the intended audience includes as a significant component international or dominant-culture readers; similarly, a literary translator chooses an emphasis or privileges an aspect of the text to be transposed in translation (e.g. linguistic fidelity, tone, form, cultural content, or some combination thereof). Another name for the choices, emphases and selectivity of both translators and post-colonial writers is *interpretation*. Judgement is inescapable in the process; 'objectivity' is impossible. And just as there can be no final translation, there can be no final interpretation of a culture through a literary mode. There is no last word.<sup>12</sup>

Such a process of selectivity and interpretation is ideological and will inevitably invite controversy. The political censure that post-colonial writers are subject to from their fellow citizens can be given an intellectual context in the proverbial denigration of translation as a process; the Italian aphorism about translation, 'traduttore, traditore', says it succinctly. The ideological valences of post-colonial literature are spectacularly obvious in cases where feelings run so high about the portrait of the source culture that the very life of an author is in jeopardy, but the case of Salman Rushdie is only a limiting example of the way in which post-colonial literature can become the battleground of ideological disputes. Many post-colonial writers choose to live abroad, writing about their culture of origin from the vantage point of another nation, in part because of the ideological pressure and censure – both implicit and explicit political constraint – that they are subject to within their native framework. Joyce is an example of such a writer, and he was outspoken about the impossibility of writing freely about his culture from within Ireland, making explicit the necessity he saw of exile if he was to be an artist.<sup>13</sup> Translation is generally a less heated affair at present, but the process of translating texts from minority cultures can in fact become fraught for ideological reasons (Simms 1983), while in the past translation has produced its own martyrs to ideology.<sup>14</sup>

Various well-known problems of translation can be related to marked features of post-colonial writing. There are, for example, often perturbations in the lexis of a translation. In source texts to be translated translators are presented with aspects of the source culture that are unfamiliar to the receiving audience – elements of the material culture (such as foods, tools, garments), social structures (including customs and law), features of the natural world (weather

conditions, plants, animals), and the like; such features of the source culture are often encoded in specific lexical items for which there are no equivalents in the receptor culture or for which there are only extremely rare or technical words. In the face of such a crux, a translator has a variety of choices: to omit the reference or pick some 'equivalent' in the receptor culture on the one hand, and on the other to import the word untranslated (with an explanation in a footnote perhaps), add an explanatory classifier or an explicit explanation, use a rare or recondite word of the receiving language, extend the semantic field of a word in the receptor language, and so on.<sup>15</sup> The use of rare or untranslated words in translations and the inclusion of unfamiliar cultural material are not necessarily defects of translated texts: translation is one of the activities of a culture in which cultural expansion occurs and in which linguistic options are expanded through the importation of loan transfers, calques, and the like. The result is, however, that translations very often have a different lexical texture from unmarked prose in the receptor culture.

Similar features are to be found in the lexis of post-colonial texts as writers struggle to translate the cultural metatext, and similar lexical solutions can be discerned as well. In *A Grain Of wheat*, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o imports without explanation words for plants (e.g. *Mwariki*, p. 125), tools (e.g., *panga* and *jembe*, pp. 6, 8), garments (e.g. *Mithuru*, *Miengu*, p. 180), and dances (p. 205), among others, where the category of the words is made clear by context or collocation. In *A Man of the People* Chinua Achebe also imports African words into English (e.g. *lappa*, a garment), but more typically uses established English equivalents for African cultural concepts that are part of his English dialect (e.g. *head tie*, *pit latrine*, *highlife*). Another tactic is exemplified by Buchi Emecheta, who introduces African words, for which she then provides explicit explanations: 'he . . . paid ten shillings towards his *esusu*, a kind of savings among friends whereby each member of the group collected contributions in turn' (*Joys of Motherhood*, p. 147). The same technique is found in Bapsi Sidhwa's introductions of '*bijli*: a word that in the various Indian languages, with slight variations stands for both electricity and lightning', '*Choorails*, witches with turned-about feet who ate the hearts and livers of straying children', or 'a plump, smiling bowlegged Sikh priest, a *granthi*' (*Cracking India*, pp. 30, 31, 63). In *Midnight's Children* Rushdie takes an assimilative approach to lexis in a key metaphor, using *pickle* where he might have chosen *chutney* as representing the source culture concept more precisely.<sup>16</sup>

Other lexical anomalies can also be identified in both literary translations and post-colonial writings. Features of the source language or the source culture in both types of intercultural transposition are associated with variant semantic fields for words, with non-standard frequency distributions of particular lexemes, and with non-standard patterns of collocation. These aspects of translation have been discussed extensively in the literature about translation (cf. Nida 1964: 137–40), and similar features are found in post-colonial writing. Thus, for example, Ngāugāi uses the term *ridge* in a non-standard sense to refer to villages and their territory; his use of the English *taste* is also non-standard: ‘Did he himself taste other women, like Dr Lynd?’ (*Grain of wheat*, p. 157); ‘Come, man. You must have tasted her. How do her goods taste?’ (*Gain of wheat*, p. 160).

In both cases the sense is clear, though the English is non-standard; the usage seems to represent the semantic fields of words in Ngāugāi’s language which have been represented by literal English equivalents. By contrast, in the following sentences, spoken by a woman in Achebe’s *A Man of the People*, it is the unusual collocation that strikes the reader: ‘... she is our wife ...’ (p. 36); ‘We are getting a second **wife** to help me’ (p. 36); ‘... our new wife ...’ (p. 88). In standard English the word *wife* does not collocate with the first-person plural unless the speaker is royalty and, moreover, only lesbian women refer to their wives, but neither of these conditions obtains in Achebe’s text. In both respects, then, Achebe’s usage is non-standard: the Nigerian custom of multiple wives forces the linguistic variation in his text, much as it might in a translation.

For various reasons such as these, therefore, the metatext of an unfamiliar culture in a post-colonial text is a factor in the wide range of lexical items in some post-colonial works, many unfamiliar to the ordinary reader in the dominant culture. The size of James Joyce’s vocabulary in *Ulysses* stands as an early example of the phenomenon in English; it results in part from Joyce’s transposition of lexemes referring to Irish culture, his use of words that derive from Irish, and his representation of Irish dialects of English speech which include archaic words, imports, loan translations and words with lexical meanings, semantic fields or semiotic values that differ significantly from those of standard English (Wall 1986; Tymoczko 1994: 229–30). Salman Rushdie is a contemporary writing in English who has an unusually varied lexis, particularly in *Midnight’s Children*; as in the case of Joyce, Rushdie’s rich word-hoard is not

simply attributable to his wit and literary sensibility, but to the cultural substratum of his work as well.

Often unfamiliar cultural information does not simply reside in lexical items, but is a more diffuse presence in a source text. A translator may be faced, for example, with a myth, custom or economic condition presupposed by a text, but not located explicitly in it. If such implicit information is to be made accessible to the receiving audience, it must be presented either through explicit inclusion in the translation or through paratextual devices.<sup>17</sup> In post-colonial texts parallels are apparent, and many tactics used by contemporary minority-culture writers to deal with such problems are familiar to literary translators. Customs, beliefs and myths are frequently explained explicitly in post-colonial literature, much as they must be in translations, and the following is illustrative:

The feast of the New Yam was approaching and Umuofia was in a festival mood. It was an occasion for giving thanks to Ani, the earth goddess and the source of all fertility. Ani played a greater part in the life of the people than any other diety. She was the ultimate judge of morality and conduct. And what was more, she was in close communion with the departed fathers of the clan whose bodies had been committed to earth.

The Feast of the New Yam was held every year before the harvest began, to honor the earth goddess and the ancestral spirits of the clan. New yams could not be eaten until some had first been offered to these powers. Men and women, young and old, looked forward to the New Yam Festival because it began the season of plenty – the new year. On the last night before the festival, yams of the old year were all disposed of by those who still had them. The new year must begin with tasty, fresh yams and not the shriveled and fibrous crop of the previous year. All cooking pots, calabashes and wooden bowls were thoroughly washed, especially the wooden mortar in which yam was pounded. Yam foo-foo and vegetable soup was the chief food in the celebration. So much of it was cooked that, no matter how heavily the family ate or how many friends and relatives they invited from neighboring villages, there was always a large quantity of food left over at the end of the day. The story was always told of a wealthy man who set before his guests a mound of foo-foo so high that those who sat on one side could not see what was happening on the other, and it was not until late in

the evening that one of them saw for the first time his in-law who had arrived during the course of the meal and had fallen to on the opposite side. It was only then that they exchanged greetings and shook hands over what was left of the food.

(Achebe 1991: 37–8)

Similarly in a minority-culture text, mythic allusions may require an explicit presentation of the myth at some point in the text, as in translations (where such allusions are typically explained in the footnotes or prefatory material). Thus, when Toni Morrison wishes to use the myth of the African slave who flies away home to Africa, she cannot suppose that most of her white American or international audience will know the tale, so she must provide a version explicitly in the text (Morrison 1978: 326–7; cf. Lester 1970: 147–52). The same is true about information related to historical events and historical figures which is frequently made explicit in post-colonial literature, as in literary translations. It is probably for this reason that in chapter 2 of *A Grain of Wheat* Ngũgĩ gives a version of the colonial history of Kenya, and he makes the historical background explicit at other points as well where necessary for an uninformed international audience. Although Rushdie has left the myth of Shiva largely implicit in *Midnight's Children*, thus risking its being missed by non-Indian readers, he is explicit about corresponding historical information having to do with the formation of the states of India and Pakistan.<sup>18</sup>

When a literary work is intended for an audience that shares the culture of the text, such customs, myths and historical information can and generally do remain implicit, whether that audience is from a dominant or marginalized culture, because the audience can be counted upon to recognize the allusions and to have the requisite cultural background. It is telling that translators moving from a dominant-culture source text to a minority-culture audience often leave dominant cultural materials implicit, presupposing knowledge of the mythic allusions, historical events or customs of the dominant culture: such a stance is part of the assertion of hegemony. A text produced in this way participates in the assertion of cultural dominance, defining what constitutes the domain of knowledge necessary for public discourse. Thus, in both literary translations and original literary works, the necessity to make cultural materials explicit and to foreground potentially unfamiliar cultural materials affects primarily the movement of a cultural substratum from a marginalized

culture to a dominant culture and it is associated with a negative cline of power and cultural prestige. In post-colonial writing the amount of cultural material that is explained explicitly serves as a kind of index of the intended audience and of the cultural gradient between the writer/subject and the audience, with greater amounts of explicit material indicating that a text is aimed at the former colonizers and/or a dominant international audience. In such cases cultural background is, so to speak, explicitly 'frontloaded' for the reader.<sup>19</sup>

Prevailing Western standards of literature, however, exclude instructional or didactic literature; although such a posture is by no means universal in literature, with many oral traditions combining instruction and entertainment easily, it has been an aesthetic standard in the West since the Romantics. Thus 'frontloading' cultural information or foregrounding material that is normally presupposed in an intracultural text – resulting in the more highly explicit quality of both post-colonial literature and translations – potentially compromises the literary status of a text *per se*. The text begins to read more like an instructional or didactic work, rather than a piece of imaginative literature. When such a text is also full of specialized or unfamiliar words, unusual grammar and other linguistic anomalies, the explicitly informative elements of the text combine with the dense information load from the language itself to work against other features of the text that are perceived as literary. These are risks shared by both translators and writers of post-colonial and minority-culture literature. Yet both translators and post-colonial writers are caught in the dilemma of producing texts with large amounts of material that is opaque or unintelligible to international readers on the one hand or having large quantities of explanation and explicit information on the other hand. Either choice threatens to compromise the reception of the text as literature. A third alternative – suppressing the distinctive qualities of the writer's culture and language – compromises the writer's own affiliation with his or her culture and probably the very reasons for writing, just as a translation which is highly assimilated or adapted to the standards of the receiving culture raises questions of 'fidelity'.

In translation studies a distinction is often made between 'bringing the text to the audience' and 'bringing the audience to the text'. The same type of distinction can be projected with respect to post-colonial writing: some texts make more severe demands on the audience, requiring the audience to conform to the beliefs, customs, language and literary formalism of the source culture, while other

works conform more to the dominant audience's cultural, linguistic and literary expectations, as we have seen. In translations the greater the prestige of the source culture and the source text, the easier it is to require that the audience come to the text. In post-colonial writing there is an analogue in the prestige of the author: the greater the international reputation of an author, the greater the demands that can be placed upon an international audience. One avenue of research that suggests itself, accordingly, is to test post-colonial writing to see if there is a correlation between the success of the writer and growing demands on the audience to conform to the ways, beliefs and language of the culture being portrayed.<sup>20</sup>

The problem of information load in both translations and post-colonial writing is not restricted to unfamiliar cultural material such as customs, history or myth, and material culture. Even proper names if they present unfamiliar phonemes or foreign phonemic sequences can cause problems for the receptor audience of both post-colonial literature and literary translations, while finding ways to transpose the semantic meanings of names may be of concern to both the writer and translator.<sup>21</sup> Similarly, transposing the literary genres, forms, proverbs and metaphors of the source culture will be equally problematic to translators and post-colonial writers alike. Each will struggle with the question of naturalizing material to the standards of the receiving audience; each will consider whether to adopt representations that tend towards formal or dynamic standards.<sup>22</sup> Such dilemmas influence the representation of the largest elements of text (e.g. genres, character types, plot materials) down to the smallest (phonemes, lexis, idiom, metaphor).

Indeed, in Gideon Toury's terms, both types of intercultural writing involve norms: preliminary norms involving general principles of allegiance to the standards of the source culture or the receptor culture, as well as operational norms guiding the myriad small choices that are made in textual and cultural transposition (Toury 1995: 53–69; cf. Holmes 1994: 81–92). The discernment of such norms is essential to any analysis of a translation, but it is essentially impossible to determine from the vantage point of the receptor culture alone; typically judgements about translations are made by people who know both the source language and the receptor language, and can evaluate the adaptations and adjustments in the transposition on the basis of both languages and cultures. This situation should strike a cautionary note about criticism of post-colonial works: detecting the norms governing cultural

transposition in a piece of post-colonial writing is an equally important point of departure for an evaluation of the aims and achievements of the work, but at the same time it is difficult to do without a standpoint in both cultures that permits comparison.<sup>23</sup>

Recent work on translation theory and practice indicates the importance of patronage as a determinant of translation practice, and this is another area that bears on post-colonial writing. Patrons – once wealthy aristocrats – now take the form of presses and publishing houses, universities and granting agencies, which are in turn dependent on such groups as a readership, a critical establishment or government officials. Patrons determine the parameters of what is translated just as they determine parameters of what is published; that the effects of patronage are currently achieved largely through self-censorship does not invalidate the point. Studies of translation are increasingly alert to the circumstances under which books are chosen for translation and translations are published,<sup>24</sup> and similar questions are relevant to post-colonial writing. Literary merit, though not insignificant, is rarely the only or even the chief issue to consider in answering such questions. Here it is germane that many – perhaps most – post-colonial writers who have achieved an international reputation also reside in foreign metropolitan centres; the **risk** of such a choice is, of course, that the demands of international patronage **will** compromise the form, content and perspective of the post-colonial works **themselves**.<sup>25</sup>

The demands of patronage are intertwined with questions of audience, which is an important element in translation norms and strategies. Not only will factors such as the belief system or the values of an audience affect the translation strategy, but the nature of the audience itself will determine translation norms.<sup>26</sup> Issues about intended audience are often deceptive; for example, paradoxically translations are at times produced for the source culture itself when, say, a colonial language has become the lingua franca of a multicultural emergent nation or of a culture that has experienced a linguistic transition of some sort. The most efficient way of addressing such a nation after a colonial period may be through translation into the colonizers' language. A translation of this type, however, is produced within an ideological climate that is quite different from a translation oriented primarily at an international audience, and the translation strategies are, accordingly, divergent (cf. Simms 1983). In recent years translation studies have turned increasingly to such issues of audience, opening up profitable lines

of investigation, and they are no less relevant to post-colonial texts. Reception theory has indicated the central importance of the audience or implied reader in the production of literary texts, of course. But even more basic economic and ideological questions about audience must be asked that have close parallels to the questions asked about the audiences of translations. Who is a writer writing for? Is the audience primarily an audience within the post-colonial culture? Is the work addressed primarily to the former colonizers or is the audience an international culture, neither primarily the former colony nor the former colonizer? Writing strategies will differ considerably depending on the audience, and critics must be alert to such factors.

In the case of post-colonial writers, the question of an international audience – neither primarily former colony nor colonizer – is in turn related to a marked trend at present towards the internationalization of literature. It becomes increasingly hard to define national traditions of the modern novel, for example, for more and more the novel has become an international genre with writers influenced by and influencing other writers from different linguistic traditions. Thus, Faulkner has influenced Garcia Marquez, who in turn influences writers in English. Borges speaks of himself as an English writer who happens to write in Spanish. At the same time American cultural and economic hegemony means that to succeed as writers, many authors feel an imperative either to write in English or to be translated into English: being marketed in the United States is often seen as an essential index of international success which in turn augments an author's reception at home. Thus the international audience of a post-colonial writer might be, in fact, first and foremost an American audience, with the drama of colony and colonizer – or of author and cultural establishment – being played out for arbitration on an American stage. Where Tagore – through auto translation – turned for acceptance to the literary world of the colonizing power (Sengupta), contemporary post-colonial writers have a different set of priorities. The ways in which such considerations impact on text production have been partially explored with reference to translation; the intersection of literary systems, their symbiotic and dependent relations, have been productive avenues of enquiry that can offer models for the study of post-colonial and minority-culture writing.<sup>27</sup>

The case of Ngũgĩ is instructive with respect to these issues of internationalization, patronage, audience, and the extent to which

an audience is 'brought to the text'; Ngũgĩ also illustrates the fine line between post-colonial writing in a metropolitan language and literary translation. In 1977, after writing several successful novels in English, Ngiugiii turned to writing in his native language, Gĩkũyũ; since then his literary works have been accessible to international audiences only through literary translation. Ngũgĩ's linguistic shift was prompted in part by a crisis having to do with audience:

I came to realise only too painfully that the novel in which I had so carefully painted the struggle of the Kenya peasantry against colonial oppression would never be read by them. In an interview shortly afterwards in the *Union News* . . . in 1967, I said that I did not think that I would continue writing in English: that I knew *about* whom I was writing, but *for* whom was I writing?

(Ngiugiii 1993: 9–10)

Influenced also perhaps by his growing international reputation (cf. *ibid.*: 5), in *A Grain of Wheat* Ngũgĩ already exhibits a growing confidence in the demands he can place upon his international readers: he uses 'resistant' strategies of writing, embedding without explanation Gĩkũyũ words and phrases in his text. Through these means he implicitly shifts to the standards of his own culture, even while writing in English. In *Moving the Centre* Ngiugiii writes that his shift of language was related to his desire to make connections with the forms and modes of oral literature in his culture (Ngũgĩ 1993: 21), but issues having to do with the ideology of language are central for Ngũgĩ, including his belief that languages should meet as equals (*ibid.*: 35, 39). The politics of post-colonial writing, thus, brings Ngũgĩ to the importance of translation; he writes, 'Through translations, the different languages of the world can speak to one another. . . . Interlanguage communication through translation is crucial' (*ibid.*: 40).<sup>28</sup>

Translation is frequently a source of formal experimentation in receptor cultures, as translators import or adapt the genres and formal strategies of the source text into the receptor system. Because translation is at times one locus in a literary system where formal experimentation is more easily tolerated, translation can even become an 'alibi' for challenges to the dominant poetics. Translation was used by modernists in this way, and Pound is one of the foremost examples. When translation acquires prestige, in part because

it is associated with literary innovation, one even finds the phenomenon of pseudo-translation, in which an innovative, original literary work masquerades as translation.<sup>29</sup>

There are analogues in post-colonial and minority-culture writing. In twentieth-century literature formal experimentation is widespread, but, even so, formal innovation is a notable characteristic of these forms of intercultural writing. Indeed, post-colonial and minority literatures are literary domains in which challenges to dominant standards of language, poetics and culture are frequently advanced, where literature is expanded through new mythic paradigms and archetypal representations, new formal resources and paradigms, and revitalized language, including new mythopoeic imagery. As with translations, innovative formalism often reflects the literary system of the post-colonial or minority culture itself, and the writer may introduce various forms of indigenous formalism to the dominant culture. Joyce does this in *Ulysses*, importing the standards of Irish epic, elements of Irish poetic form, characteristics of Irish prose, and structures of Irish narrative genres into his English-language masterwork.<sup>30</sup> The dramatic forms of Wole Soyinka stand as another example of innovative formalism that is indebted to the indigenous literature of a post-colonial culture, while even the most superficial reading of Amos Tutuola's *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* must come to terms with its Yoruba poetic sensibility (cf. Thelwell 1994: 188 ff.).

But formal experimentation may also have to do with other aspects of the interface of two cultural systems. As an author strives to represent the experiences or beliefs of a minority culture that differ from those of the dominant culture, it may be necessary to develop new forms which are not part of the dominant receptor system in order to signal or encode such alternate experiences or beliefs. Thus, Zora Neale Hurston in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* uses a divided narrative voice, shifting between a literate voice in standard English and a highly idiomatic black voice. The unreconciled tension between the two forms of narration are 'a verbal analogue of her double experiences as a woman in a male-dominated world and as a black person in a non-black world, a woman writer's revision of W.E.B. Du Bois's metaphor of "double-consciousness" for the hyphenated African-American'; her voice captures, as well, the fragmentation of modernity (Gates 1990: 193–4). At the same time, Hurston's narrative voice is also collective rather than individualistic, thus representing the 'collective spirit of African-American oral tradition' (Washington 1990: xii).

The appropriation of a dominant language for the aims of a former colony or an oppressed group and the shift of dominant poetics towards the standards of a minority or post-colonial people are potent means of realigning power structures in a shared cultural field and of asserting an independent world-view. In the Spanish-speaking culture area, the authors of the former Spanish colonies of Latin America have pioneered important formal strategies, including those of Magic Realism, and they have expanded the linguistic resources of literary Spanish in this century so as to express specifically the hybridity and specificity of Latin-American historical and cultural experience. In the English-language world this process has been in the making for 200 years as former colonies, including the United States and Ireland, have developed literatures in their own versions of English. In this linguistic sense, post-colonial literature like translation is subversive, and Heaney, speaking of Joyce's use of Dublin's demotic English, claims that Joyce turned English from 'an imperial humiliation' to 'a native weapon' (Heaney 1978: 40).

One of the most challenging features of writing about post-colonial and minority-culture literature is constructing a standard of judgement, for it is difficult to sort out the creativity of the writer from the deautomatization associated with the importation of new cultural materials, new poetics and new linguistic patterns derived from the cultural substratum of the author's culture itself. It is easy to overread such features as metaphor, linguistic transpositions of obligatory features of a native language, or shifts in frequency distribution associated with a variant dialect; a critic may take the cultural givens of a post-colonial writer as authorial creativity. While it is clear that the author exercises mastery in selection, the extent to which the author creates may be less clear. How is the critic to evaluate such neologisms as Ngũgĩ's 'birth-motions' or 'love-mates' (Ngũgĩ 1986: 203), or Achebe's 'cowrie-shellee'<sup>31</sup> (Achebe 1989: 14)? Is Tutuola's *drinkard* an 'error', a lexeme from his dialect of English, or a brilliant, innovative portmanteau word? An author may even have a vested interest in concealing the debt of a text to the native culture, fearing that his or her own authorial status may be compromised.<sup>32</sup> Paradoxically, even when the innovative elements of a specific text may not be personally invented by the author, post-colonial authors nonetheless remake the languages and literatures of their former colonizers through the importation and adaptation of native mythos, mythopoeic imagery, an alternate lexis, vibrant textures of idiomatic speech and new formalisms, as

we have seen. It is ironic that the rich presence of these elements confers prestige in contemporary post-colonial literature while the same elements have been so often rejected in translations.

Most literary phenomena are defined by more than their content. Though certain types of the novel – such as the picaresque or the Bildungsroman or anti-Utopian literature – are defined primarily with reference to their subject matter, this is rarely done with larger literary categories: American literature is not defined as being about America, nor is every work of literature written by an American relevant to American literature *per se*. Similarly, post-colonial literature as a literary phenomenon is more than just literature about a former colony or by a citizen of a former colony. Criticism about post-colonial literature and minority-culture literature will benefit from a clearer sense of the parameters that are characteristic of post-colonial and minority-culture literatures; several such parameters have emerged through the comparison of these bodies of literature with literary translations, an analogous form of intercultural writing. Comparisons of the type suggested here help to define the boundaries of these cohesive groups of literary works, indicating commonalities of linguistic texture and form, as well as challenges of the artistic task. Just as descriptive approaches to translation avoid the pitfalls of certain vicious circles having to do with normative standards, so a stronger sense of the ways in which post-colonial literature is a self-standing type of writing will help move the criticism beyond repetitive ideological debate or a sophisticated form of assimilative cannibalism in which post-colonial works are appropriated or swallowed whole into hegemonic canons of world literature.

## Notes

- 1 See Ngiugui 1993; Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 1989. Strictly speaking the purview of this investigation is broader than post-colonial writing *per se* and includes minority-culture writing that involves the negotiation of significant cultural and / or linguistic boundaries, as, for example, is the case with African-Americans and Irish writers. Thus, examples from such writers as Zora Neale Hurston and Toni Morrison, as well as James Joyce, are relevant to some of the points raised here.
- 2 Jakobson (1959: 234–5) gives other examples of this type of metaphorical speech about new phenomena; see also Lakoff and Johnson 1980.
- 3 Cf. Bhabha 1990: 292–3, 314–20, and sources cited for instances of the use of translation as a metaphor for post-colonial writing.
- 4 See also Pym 1992; Lefevere 1992b: 51–8; Even-Zohar 1990: 74 ff.; Snell-Hornby 1990: 81–2, and sources cited.
- 5 Nida discusses literalism in 1964: ch. 2; cf. 184 ff., 213 ff. See also Bassnett 1991: ch. 2.
- 6 The question of information load as a controlling factor in the construction of intercultural writing – particularly in the shaping of the fictive world – should be closely attended to in the analysis of any specific literary work. Post-colonial texts, like literary translations, can also be examined for places at which they risk becoming opaque to an international audience, such spots revealing pressure points of cultural constraint on the writer.
- 7 Joyce is an early example of the latter strategy; he facilitated the ‘authoritative’ studies of both Stuart Gilbert and Frank Budgen, both of which introduced important cultural and textual contexts to readers.
- 8 See, for example, the discussions in Bassnett 1991: ch. 1 and Jakobson 1959.
- 9 On the differences that result from shifts between obligatory features of different languages, see the examples in Catford 1965: chs 3, 5, 12; on shifts having to do with cultural differences, see the examples in Nida 1964: 215–18, 228–9, 235–7. See also Bassnett 1991: ch. 1.
- 10 Discussions are found in Nida 1964: chs 4–6. Note especially the ways in which referential meanings are language-bound insofar as semantic fields are inherently related to contrasting words, linguistic hierarchies, and so forth within any single language.
- 11 The creation of all literary worlds involves selection, not merely representation. Both the inclusions and omissions of post-colonial authors are significant; indeed the silences are as revealing as the subjects spoken of in these literary texts.
- 12 Bhabha 1990 attempts to displace the discourse of historicism which has dominated critical approaches to post-colonial authors in favour of seeing them as interpreters of the nation as metaphor, open-ended as the image of the past is projected into the performative world of the present and future. See esp. pp. 292–3, 303–7 and sources cited. Cairns and Richards offer a case study of the ways in which over time authors create shifting symbolic images of their people and their nation within the changing political and ideological contexts of colonization and decolonization. Literary translations can similarly be viewed as metonymic refractions of original literary works and, ultimately, ideological representations of the underlying source cultures of those literary works; see Tymoczko 1995.
- 13 The question of exile and post-colonial writing is taken up and reappraised by Brennan 1990, esp. pp. 60–6; note Brennan’s assessment of the relationship between exile and patronage.
- 14 See, for example, the history of Bible translators discussed by Bassnett 1991: 45–50; Nida 1964: 14 ff.
- 15 Nida 1964: ch. 10 offers examples.
- 16 There are, of course, symbolic reasons for his choice of *pickle*.
- 17 Examples of such problems can be found in Lefevere 1992a: 22–9. Other complex types of diffuse cultural material that both translators and writers struggle to communicate include elements of the habitus (see Bourdieu 1977), as well as pervasive cultural metaphors (see Lakoff

- and Johnson 1980); these issues are, however, beyond the scope of this essay.
- 18 In this discrepancy we see Rushdie's priorities for communication with his readers; at the same time the ironizing of history and the unreliable historical narration in the text are probably obscured for most international readers whose ignorance hampers recognition of Rushdie's rhetorical strategies.
  - 19 A writer like Joyce who does not provide explanation (of customs, beliefs, social structure, politics, history, geography, language, and so forth) for his international readers assumes a political stance resistant to hegemony (cf. Sommer 1992), but also risks alienating the international readership.
  - 20 An example suggesting this trajectory is Achebe's careful explanation of the kolanut ceremony in *Things Fall Apart* (Achebe 1991: 9–11) which contrasts markedly with his later treatment of the same ceremony in *A Man of the People* (Achebe 1989: 91) in which no explanation is provided. One can also project an alternative trajectory in which growing international success leads an author to a somewhat cynical accommodation to the standards of the dominant-culture audience.
  - 21 For examples, see Ngũgĩ 1986: 14; Emecheta 1979: 11. Nida discusses issues in translating names (1964: 193–5, 2334).
  - 22 Types of translation strategies are discussed in Bassnett 1991: 23–9 and Nida 1964: ch. 8.
  - 23 Consider, for example, the problems of interpreting Rushdie's versions of history discussed above; see also the discussion in Tymoczko 1994 of the skewed readings of Joyce produced by critics with inadequate knowledge of his Irish cultural context.
  - 24 For a discussion of patronage and translation, see, for example, Lefevere 1985 and 1992b.
  - 25 As, for example, Brennan claims (1990: 63 ff.).
  - 26 Thus, for example, translators must take into account the literacy levels of their audience (Nida 1964: 129 ff., 143–4).
  - 27 See, for examples, the essays in Even-Zohar 1990; Hermans (ed.) 1985; and Lefevere and Jackson (eds) 1982.
  - 28 On resistant strategies of writing and translation see Sommer 1992; Venuti (ed.) 1992 and Venuti 1995.
  - 29 These points are taken up in Even-Zohar 1990: 45–51; Kálmán 1986; Lefevere 1979; Toury 1985: 20 ff. and 1995: 40–52; Venuti 1995.
  - 30 See Tymoczko 1994: chs 3, 5 and 6.
  - 31 Referring to a cataract.
  - 32 Joyce, for example, seems to have deliberately suppressed his debt to Irish formalism for both intrapsychic and practical reasons pertaining to patronage (Tymoczko 1994: chs 1, 9). Conversely in judging a translation, a reader may be deceived into overreading a text as 'universal' by a translator's assimilative strategies of rendering the text; Fitzgerald's infamous translation of Omar Khayyam's *Rubaiyat* comes to mind.

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