Language issues are never very far from Anderson’s consciousness. Two essays reprinted in his Language and Power (1990), “The Languages of Indonesian Politics” (1966) and “Sembah-Sumpah: The Politics of Language and Javanese Culture” (1984), delve into the problem of how Indonesian, rather than Javanese, came to be the national language. Taking issue with those who view the language of Indonesian politics as a pathology (notably, the American anthropologist Clifford Geertz and Swiss linguist Herbert Leuthy), Anderson contends that national consciousness in postcolonial Indonesia is shaped as a synthesis of politics and culture. That Javanese, the mother tongue of the majority of Indonesians and especially of those who have wielded the most political clout, was not a suitable national language had little to do with supposed sensitivities of the minority populations. Instead, Anderson shows the impossibility of thinking modern thoughts in a language fraught with centuries of domination by a princely caste in precolonial times. An added complication added by Anderson is that Javanese has a high and a low form used according to caste. Considering that literary Javanese always used the high form, the rigid hierarchical social structure thus enforced made that language unsuitable to a nation imagining itself into existence.

Anderson shows that with the advent of print capitalism in the Netherlands East Indies writing in Javanese became obsolete. In co-opting the traditional elite, the Dutch made the traditional literature obsolete because its chief topics, the mystery of traditional Javanese religion and the battlefield exploits of native heroes, seemed ineffectual in the face of decisive Dutch victories in the colonial wars. Consequently, writers attempting to ingratiate themselves with the colonial power and perhaps be heard in the metropole wrote in Dutch. Those who wished to address the natives of the Indies wrote in a form of trade Malay that eventually became known as Indonesian. This language became a fertile ground for writers taking a cultural stand against the Javanese language and a political one against the Dutch and their local subalterns. When General Suhrato came to power in a coup in 1965, Anderson and two colleagues at Cornell University circulated their preliminary analysis. Because their informants might be sanctioned, Anderson and his colleagues asked that those receiving the draft treat it confidentially. Nonetheless, the “Cornell Paper,” as it came to be called, was leaked, and in 1972 Anderson was forbidden to enter Indonesia, an order that stood until early 1999 in the post-Suhrato era. Anderson turned his attention to Thailand and, later, the Philippines. The immediate product of his studies on Thailand, which Anderson calls Siam in deference to notable Thai scholars, at odds with the pretensions of ethnic inclusiveness of successive governments, was In the Mirror (1988), an anthology of short stories critical of the effects of the American military on Thai society in the era of the Vietnam War. His extensive historical and critical introduction, which takes up nearly one-third of the book, makes clear that the Thai claim to never having been a colony is a hollow one, given the compromises that had to be made with the British to the west, in Burma, and the French to the east and north in Cambodia and Laos, as well as U.S. neocolonialism in the immense military buildup of the 1960s.

Another attempt to rescue an anticolonial writer from near oblivion is the recent edition of a novella attributed to Carlos Bulosan titled All the Conspirators (1998), with a lengthy historical and critical introduction written by Anderson and his coeditor, Caroline S. Hau. Two aspects of that introduction are important from a postcolonial point of view. One is the theme of these writings, a bitter denunciation of U.S. racism with respect to Filipinos. The other is the paradoxical use of the colonial languages by Filipino writers.

Anderson has many intellectual forebears. Among those whom he acknowledges are Wittgenstein, Auerbach, Benjamin, and, of course, Marx. The notion that print capitalism—radio, television, and electronic communication—was everywhere a precursor to nationalism adumbrates Benjamin’s theories concerning mechanical reproduction. Less obvious is the influence of his brother, Perry Anderson, the widely quoted theorist of British Marxism and longtime editor of the New Left Review, whose essays have dealt with such influential twentieth-century thinkers as Braudel, Sartre, Gramsci, Althusser, and E. P. Thompson. In the introduction to Language and Power he writes of his joy in discourses with his brother and credits him with providing “a broadly Marxist optic” (10) that enabled him to bring his early studies of Indonesia into comparative perspective.


Roger J. Jiang Bresnahan

Anglophone Literatures

This is a disciplinary field that links together all writing produced in English, inclusive of British and occasionally of so-called minority or multicultural American texts as well, although the usual category for the latter is “literature of the Americas.” All of the texts once understood as Commonwealth are now more widely understood as anglophone, with the semantic change signaling a de-emphasis of static imperial relations between the metropolitan homeland and its protectorates. Canonical value is no longer imagined to be held exclusively by the center, as it was with the discipline of Commonwealth literature. In fact, critics such as C.I.R. James have argued that the “best” writing in English in the twentieth century was produced by writers who are not themselves English, from James Joyce and Joseph Conrad, to Derek Walcott, J. M. Coetzee, and Kamau Brathwaite. The international popularity, critical acclaim, and prizewinning status of novels written in English by non-English writers confirm this. Understanding most of twentieth-century writing in English as anglophone acknowledges the difficulties, if not impossibilities, of establishing national identifications for the vast number of transnational or migrant writers who are born in one country and then choose (or are forced to choose) to live in another. In this respect, English studies has swerved away from a nation-based paradigm and toward one that is language-based. "Anglophone
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literature” also acknowledges the increased production and availability of literary texts from all over the world, although one important pitfall of this expansion of the canon is advocacy criticism, whereby the value of “marginal” writers is determined in relation to the literary value of the center. Such a global literary web also suggests the possibilities of interconnectedness among texts produced in different parts of the world, whether it be through thematic, problematic, style, or narrative structure. A significant and much commented-upon group of anglophone texts are those that fall into the category of “rewriting empire” because they annotate, parody, and otherwise rework the major canonical tropes and figures that have contributed to an understanding of the “Third World” and its subjects. For example, such texts as The Tempest, Robinson Crusoe, Jane Eyre, Kim, and Heart of Darkness and the figures of Prospero, Caliban, Bertha Mason, and Friday have been reframed and represented by such authors as Brathwaite, Walcott, Coetzee, Michelle Cliff, Chinua Achebe, Jean Rhys, and Michael Ondaatje. Insofar as the disparate anglophone texts may be said to share disparate concerns, they also may be said to allow for the identification of connections, particularly in their concern with the materiality of violence, Western commodities, migrancy, nativism, identity and alienation, and the imperial force of English.

The field of anglophone literatures is made up of diverse texts, all of which are written in English. An important question to ask, then, is what ultimately links, for example, Jamaica Kincaid to Wole Soyinka or to Salman Rushdie. One answer to this question has to be that there is a certain connection between the English language and colonialism. The authors understood as anglophone belong to different historical and cultural moments (e.g., South Africa, Pakistan, Antigua), and they belong to distinct moments and distinct spaces, yet they are all still readable if one knows English. This raises an interesting paradox: a sense of the different moments and practices of readings, on the one hand, and an apparent commonality and ease of translation, on the other. Yet, this act of translation is erroneous insofar as one cannot comprehend all of the texts equally; certain cultural references or rhetorical styles might always be “foreign” or ungraspable. Thus, the discussion of writing in English presumes a kind of unity and singularity, a unified literature in English, but multiplicity and differences are ineluctable: the field must instead be understood as literature in English. Such a designation is necessary in order to account for the varieties of English that are circumscribed as anglophone, and naming individual dialects such as Jamaican English, Scots, and Nigerian English is not sufficient to account for the innumerable differences in languages among all of the “new” Englishes. These differences, which result from the use of pidgins, Creoles, nation languages, neologisms, Standard English, and a hybridity of languages, have been significant enough to prompt the critical suggestion that anglophone literatures would benefit from the methodological approaches of comparative literature and linguistics.

The imperial force of language has become a central thematic in twentieth-century literature and criticism, and the institutionalization of imperial languages (English, French, Spanish) within the colonies has been registered within anglophone literary texts as both a destructive imposition and as a productive, enabling, or even necessary force. Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Chinua Achebe have most prominently taken these respective positions within the context of what can be framed as a debate on the use of English by African writers. (It is important to note that this debate on the politics of writing in English is not alone in its basic premise, which is that there is no material difference in the facility with which non-native speakers work within the language.) Achebe articulates both the necessity and the advantages of writing in English in terms of the international audience and currency of the language and in terms of its cultural and literary inheritance. He does, however, allow for English as performing a colonization of the mind, a position most famously taken by Ngugi, who reads language as colonialism’s weapon of choice. Ngugi argues that English functions as the language of capital, industry, technology, and war and that the phenomenon of Africans writing in English suggests that the situation for “Third World” writers is neocolonial, rather than postcolonial. Contemporary arguments that have followed in Ngugi’s wake have held that the imagined diaspora of English is not just a matter of anglophone unity but also a matter of an anglophone identity intimately allied with a civil and thinly disguised cultural identity. In such a context, to command someone to write in English is not just to command the use of a grammar or vocabulary or to command the demonstration of a technical literacy but is also to command the performance of a particular cultural identity. Such a power/knowledge critique of a one-way flow of information, from the center to the margins, has been modified by an understanding of the use of English as an appropriation, counterhabitation, and dismantling of a dominant language. It follows that the ultimate argument, made by Chinua Achebe and others, for the use of English depends upon the refashioning and making “new” of English. Such a refashioning finds its perfect metaphor in the title of Louise Bennett’s (Jamaica) poem, “Colonisation in Reverse” (1949), which is about the phenomenon of black Britain and is itself written in a dialect of English.

One reaction to the “new” Engishes from the metropole has been that the uses of English by anglophone writers have been read as part of the unintelligible background noise of the colony and of the metropole—as imperfect, impure corruptions of a Grand (literary and linguistic) Tradition. But they also have to be read as highly innovative and even emancipatory, whereby a postcolonial writer might appropriate English in order to subvert the tyranny of an imposed colonial language by making a home within it. Amos Tutuola’s The Palm-Wine Drinker (1952) is an early and important example, as is Ken Saro-Wiwa’s Sozaboy: A Novel in Rotten English (1985). What Tutuola, Saro-Wiwa, Michelle Cliff, and Sam Selvon achieve in their novels is precisely that: the inhabitation, making indigenous, and subterranean reworking of English. These writers are not in the position of assimilation or mimicry or simply producing
literature in the canonical or generic mode of the West, but they are instead producing a hybrid cultural form. They are at once severing language from some of its cultural associations (severing English from its ties to Western power and rewriting its racist and colonial ideology) and realigning language and culture (providing oppositional representations of “Nigeria” or “Jamaica” in a new language). Their work promises to reconfigure the association of English with power, empire, nation, and culture, and it suggests the extent to which there are fundamental differences between “English literature” and “literature in English.” Other Nigerian writers commenting upon the relations between English and power and contributing to a “new” English include Achebe, Gabriel Okara, Ben Okri, Buchi Emecheta, Femi Osofisan, and Soyinka.

The “literatures” component of anglophone literatures is equally important, encompassing as it does the classical generic modes of poetry, novels, stories, memoirs, essays, and plays but including as well a number of oral modes such as dub poetry, folk poetry and folk songs, praise songs, calypso, dread talk, curses, and word-songs. These oral modes have directly contributed to the emergence of anglophone Caribbean literature (also named West Indian) as an academic field, insofar as their translation into print form has secured an international audience and insofar as they have helped to inaugurate a literary tradition with which contemporary writers remain in conversation. An important early moment in this field was the BBC-sponsored radio program Caribbean Voices (begun 1946), a weekly program broadcast to the West Indies that helped to launch the careers of Selvon, V. S. Naipaul, Michael Anthony, George Lamming, and Andrew Salkey. A diasporic Caribbean literary community with profound ties to Britain was the result, and the fifty or so books produced by British Caribbean novelists between 1948 and 1958 constitute one of the most significant cultural phenomena at the ends of the British empire. Selvon’s The Lonely Londoners (1956) was the first Caribbean novel written entirely in the literary demotic and among the first to present Caribbean speech as dignified, natural, and something other than a curiosity. Calypso has had a profound influence on Selvon and Caribbean literature as a whole, as has jazz, and Jamaican writing in particular has evolved in relation to reggae, of which dub poetry, which involves reading against the rhythm of the bass line, is the quintessential form. Black British dub poets such as Linton Kwesi Johnson, Benjamin Zephaniah, and Michael Smith have found a significant audience in London and New York, and they have turned their attention to the problem of race relations in contemporary Britain, much as migrant Caribbean writers living in the United States have turned their attention to race relations here (Paule Marshall, Jamaica Kincaid, Clift).

Anglophone Caribbean writing is composed of African, East Indian, Carib, and other indigenous cultural influences, but an important divide is epitomized by Derek Walcott and Kamau Brathwaite, insofar as Walcott generally writes in standard English and has achieved a place within mainstream world literature, and Brathwaite generally writes in what he terms “nation language.” Another way of tracing the contours of the field is generational (not by age but by moment of publication), with the following writers grouped in the first wave: Louise Bennett (Jamaica), Erna Brodber (Jamaica), Wilson Harris (Guyana), Merle Hodge (Trinidad), C.I.R. James (Trinidad), George Lamming (Barbados), Paule Marshall (Barbados), V. S. Naipaul (Trinidad), Jean Rhys (Dominica), Andrew Salkey (Jamaica), and Sam Selvon (Trinidad). The second wave of Caribbean writers would include Kamau Brathwaite (Barbados), Jean Binta Breeze (Jamaica), David Dabydeen (Guyana), Jamaica Kincaid (Antigua), Earl Lovelace (Trinidad), Grace Nichols (Guyana), Caryl Phillips (St. Kitts), Olive Senior (Jamaica), Derek Walcott (St. Lucia).

Black British writing links together not just Caribbean migrants but African and South Asian as well. Among the more prominent literary figures tied in some way both to Britain and to a South Asian diaspora are Salman Rushdie and Hanif Kureishi. Kureishi is a novelist and short story writer, but some of his most important work has been screenplays (My Beautiful Laundrette [1986] and Sammy and Rosie [1988]), which indicate the extent to which anglophone literatures include all media forms. Other writers who have produced notable works for visual media include Ken Saro-Wiwa, who wrote and directed the popular and critically acclaimed Nigerian sitcom Basi and Company (1987), and Michael Ondaatje, whose novel The English Patient (1992) was translated into a popular film. The South Asian diaspora has produced some of the most prominent “postcolonial” writers, critics, and critical studies essayists, and after the publication of Rushdie’s Midnight’s Children (1981), a retroactive genealogy of what has also been variously termed as subcontinental, Indo-Anglian, and South Asian literature has been drawn back to Rabindranath Tagore. Such a genealogy includes colonial-era texts by Rudyard Kipling and E. M. Forster and Sri Lankan, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Indian, and Burmese writers such as Ondaatje (novels), Rushdie (novels, stories), Bapsi Sidhwa (novels, Anita Desai (novels), Kamala Das (poetry), Rohinton Mistry (novels), R. K. Narayan (novels), Nayantara Sahgal (novels), Vikram Seth (novels, poetry), Arundhati Roy (novels), Sujata Bhatt (poetry), Sara Suleri (memoirs), and Wendy Law-Yone (novels).

British literature itself is a problematic category, given the most recent revival of Scots, led by award-winning and popular writers James Kelman (novels, stories), Irvine Welsh (novels, stories), Duncan McLean (stories), Janice Galloway (novels), Alex Hamilton (stories), A. L. Kennedy (novels), and Andrew Crumey (novels). Traces of linguistic and cultural autonomy, if not nationalism, are present in the latest generation of Scottish writers, as is anticolonial sentiment. So too, English–Irish colonial relations figure prominently in Irish writing of this century, from James Joyce and W. B. Yeats, to Flan O’Brien (novels), Seamus Heaney (poetry), Eavan Bolland (poetry), Brian Friel (plays), and Roddy Doyle (novels). Anglophone literatures also encompass other national literatures annotated in this volume: Australian, Canadian (English), Filipino, Irish, Native American, New Zealand/Maori, South African, Sri Lankan, and Zimbabwean.