Fictional Citizens of the World? Postcolonial Cosmopolitanisms and their Western Reception

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I

"Cosmopolitanism" has a long history as an age-old cultural aspiration that has found a new lease of life in the globalized world of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries; and this essay endeavours to address a range of issues surrounding the varied contemporary uses of the word in literary and cultural contexts, viewing these against its usage in earlier eras.

It engages with a number of questions. What exactly constitutes "cosmopolitanism" today? Should we regard it as a term that describes a particular cast of mind, a geopolitical situation or an ethical obligation? How does it relate to globalization (another chameleon term) and other economies and discursive systems that have crossed national boundaries, such as colonialism and postcolonialism (another term that gets used in an increasingly varied set of ways)? Is it reasonable to speak of cosmopolitanism in the singular or should we be talking about cosmopolitanisms plural? And do contemporary uses of the term have much in common with earlier understandings of what might constitute "cosmopolitanism"?

The essay particularly concerns itself with the Western reception of postcolonial literary cosmopolitanism*s*. Answering one of the above questions immediately, I would suggest that the plural *is* essential, because non-Western cosmopolitanisms span a continuum of positions. This continuum extends from offering the possibility of a genuinely egalitarian humanism that cuts across national and communal divisions, such as those fabricated by European and American (neo-) colonialism at one extreme, to being co-opted into "global" discursive economies that have been, and despite challenges from electronic publishing, often still are dominated by the multinational publishing houses of New York and London. The central part of the essay reviews some earlier cosmopolitanisms, not in an attempt to provide any kind of comprehensive historical overview, but rather as a means of contextualizing patterns that recur today. Within this framework, it then discusses texts by two of the Anglophone Caribbean's most acclaimed writers, V.S. Naipaul and Derek Walcott, both of whom have been awarded what many would regard as the ultimate cosmopolitan honour, the Nobel Prize for Literature.[1]

As a prologue, the essay offers a few remarks on the Western reception of two recent Indian-set texts; and it concludes with a short epilogue on another work with a South Asian setting, which very clearly operates within a globalized environment, but appears to do so self-consciously, by foregrounding the problematics inherent in its positioning and, the essay argues, without commodifying its South Asian setting to suit Western appetites.

II

Mr Premier,

Sir,

Neither you nor I can speak English, but there are some things that can only be said in English.[2]

These, of course, are the words with which Balram Halwai, the eponymous white tiger of Aravind Adiga's 2008 Man Booker Prize-winning novel, begins the first of a series of nightly missives to the Chinese premier, Wen Jiabao, who is about to visit Bangalore. The premier supposedly "wants to know the truth about Bangalore"[3] and Halwai, a self-styled entrepreneur, says that he is uniquely qualified to tell him this. His life-story, which

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he relates to the premier in seven nightly instalments, is a vehicle for illustrating the dark underbelly that lies beneath the economy of such Indian boom cities as Bangalore.

The novel obviously found favour with the Booker judges, being preferred to the more established Amitav Ghosh's *Sea of Poppies*, another novel with an Indian setting that was shortlisted for the 2008 Prize, and more generally *The White Tiger* received plaudits in the British and North American press. So, one wants to ask, what elements contributed to its success in the West. Commentators such as Graham Huggan[4] and Sarah Brouillette[5] have discussed factors that have contributed to the acclaim showered on certain types of postcolonial writers in the global literary market-place, and Adiga certainly seems to have found an effective recipe to satisfy Western tastes. In his case, the main ingredients would appear to revolve around two things. First, the mode of the novel: although his epistolary method is monologic – the Chinese premier does not write back – the sense of an addressee is omnipresent. Second, the topicality of his subject-matter, which, it seems, does just enough to tell the West, or at least the Booker judges and a majority of the novel's non-Indian readers, something new about modern, globalizing India.

That said, the mode of the fiction is, I would suggest, problematic from the outset. Halwai says that like the premier he cannot speak English and yet, from this opening letter onwards, he writes to him in a polished, cosmopolitan English, which contains few of the idioms that characterize the various linguistic continua of Indian Englishes. Halwai is a self-appointed interpreter of India for the Chinese premier, but if we take one step back from him and consider the author behind him and the context in which the novel appeared – it was first published by a division of Simon and Schuster in the US and by a division of Grove Atlantic in the UK – his acting as an interpreter of the contemporary Condition of India for the Chinese premier seems to be an alibi for the fact that *The White Tiger* is directed towards a Western readership. If Adiga had simply had Halwai write his letters to a Western recipient, the brokerage involved in his exposÈ of what he refers to as the "Darkness" underlying the Indian economic boom would have been fairly clear. As it is, Adiga displaces his act of interpreting onto a supposed dialogue (really a monologue), in which the addressee is a figurehead for another rapidly expanding Asian nation. The West does not figure overtly in this equation, and the use of English, which neither the narrator nor the recipient of his nocturnal letters is supposed to be able to speak, appears disingenuous, even if one allows a certain amount of artistic license. The main addressee of Adiga's novel, as opposed to Halwai's letters, seems to be the Western reader.

The particular target reader would appear to be someone who knows enough about India to have moved beyond Orientalist perceptions that reduce it to an imaginative playground for older Western fantasies – fantasies built around Raj nostalgia, notions of mystic spirituality and the various other exoticist discourses that have historically characterized Western views of South Asia. This reader would seem to be hard-nosed enough to know that India is a booming economy, thriving on Western outsourcing: a land of call centres, Bollywood movies and entrepreneurs! Adiga plays on this by going one step further and exposing the supposed "Darkness" beneath this superstructure, which may be unfamiliar to his supposedly discerning Western reader. Halwai's claim that he is uniquely qualified to explain India – and of course his assumption of this role of cultural interpreter highlights the extent to which the novel is directed towards an outside audience – rests on his having risen from humble rural beginnings, through the ranks of Delhi's professional drivers, an interstitial class who remain exploited by the Indian elite, to become a successful Bangalore entrepreneur.

The formula is fairly similar to that of Danny Boyle's Oscar-winning *Slumdog Millionaire* (2008), which also purports to explain the dark side of the new India to a Western audience, doing so through the mediation of formulaic elements likely to strike a chord in their experience, such as the internationally disseminated *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire* programme. Boyle's film is more obviously the work of an outsider; and arguably even less socially incisive than *The White Tiger*, particularly because the "feel good" nature of its rags-to-riches story can be seen as a variant on the American Dream, with the added ingredient of slum squalor thrown in as a kind of inverted exoticism. Intentionally or otherwise, *Slumdog Millionaire* also employs a new kind of stereotyping, likely to appeal to twenty-first century Western audiences. In short, both *The White Tiger* and *Slumdog Millionaire might* seem to be cosmopolitan texts, if approval in the global market-place is a criterion for cosmopolitanism, but given the extent to which they compromise perceptions of India by selling images of poverty to the West, seeing them as cosmopolitan threatens to render the very notion of cosmopolitanism suspect. However, before one completely discredits its possible value, it is useful to turn back to earlier interpretations of "cosmopolitanism", which show that historically the word has been employed to identify widely divergent positions. It is impossible to trace a straightforward linear genealogy for a term that has been used in a multitude of ways across the centuries,

by different cultures and groupings, to promote widely differing agendas, but one can nevertheless discern recurrent patterns, which refract interestingly on recent usages of "cosmopolitanism".

III

Originary accounts of cultural formations often lead into blind alleys, since finding a moment of supposed genesis closes down the possibility of digging into the prehistory of that moment: for example, locating the foundations of Western culture in Classical Greece is persuasive, until one excavates further and finds oneself unearthing some of its "Afroasiatic" roots.[6] With this caveat, if we look at cosmopolitanism's etymological roots, most commentators trace them back to the Greek *kosmopolites*. However, according to Sheldon Pollock, the word is only recorded once in the classical Greek archive, in a frequently quoted utterance of the Cynic philosopher, Diogenes,[7] who styled himself a cosmopolite, or citizen of the world. There are other scattered, non-Greek classical uses,[8] but cosmopolitanism clearly was not a term that was in general currency in ancient Greece, or Rome. And, given the emphasis on the centrality of civic polity in the Greek city-state, it seems reasonable to see Diogenes' affiliative identification of himself with the cosmos rather than the city as an attempt to distance himself from the norms of the Athenian polis, where he spent most of his life. According to the sources that have come down to us, Diogenes may or may not, as legend would have it, have lived in a barrel,[9] but he almost certainly cultivated the life-style of a dog – the word "cynic" meant "canine" (*kynikos* = dog), not what we understand it to mean today.[10] Diogenes appears to have been something of a loner and a scant respecter of reputations, someone who was at odds with the Greek polity. Interestingly, he was also a migrant. He was born in Asia Minor and it seems reasonable to speculate that he may have seen himself as an outsider in the Athens of Aristotle and his contemporaries. In any case, he clearly represents a particular kind of cosmopolitan outlook and I would like to imagine him as an early instance of a migrant sensibility that refuses to accept the *mores* of the society into which it has come.

The origin of the *term* may be traced back to Diogenes, but he should not be allowed a monopoly of early versions of the *concept*. His "dissenting claim"[11] that he was a citizen of the world may have been at odds with the prevalent beliefs of Athenian society, but in Anthony Appiah's view the Greek Cynics' paradoxical emphasis on their belonging both to their local world *and* the universe was the forerunner of similar currents of thought

in the philosophy of the Roman Stoics and Pauline theology; and, jumping forward through the centuries, Appiah detects similar acts of self-positioning in the thinking of Enlightenment figures such as Voltaire and Kant.[12] Appiah's primary emphasis is on the ethical duties that stem from a belief in cosmopolitanism – answering another of this essay's opening questions, one view of cosmopolitanism *does* view it as primarily concerned with ethical obligations – and in this respect his line of enquiry has much in common with twentieth-century philosophers such as Jacques Derrida, who have debated the responsibilities involved in extending hospitality to "strangers": the sub-title of Appiah's book, *Cosmopolitanism*, is "ethics in a world of strangers". For Appiah, it seems, we are all fellow-strangers, but Derrida's primary concern, as outlined in his essay "On Cosmopolitanism",[13] is with *Europe's* extension of hospitality to its others, not with the situations in which these others find themselves. To be fair, "On Cosmopolitanism" was produced in response to "a particular request: [...] an invitation to address the International Parliament of writers in Strasbourg in 1996, on the subject of cosmopolitan rights for asylum-seekers, refugees and immigrants",[14] and so perhaps it should simply be seen as a clarion call to those hosting non-European migrants to behave more ethically, rather than as a defection from his Algerian-Jewish origins. In any case, following Hannah Arendt, Derrida considers whether, given the fact that "international law is limited by treaties between sovereign states", there is "any hope for cities exercising hospitality".[15] He offers the notion of "cities of refuge", cities that are idealistically linked with the Parliament of Writers that he is addressing, as a possible solution to the problems created by nation-states. However, the concern with how *Europe* treats its refugees still constructs a Eurocentric host/stranger binary. There is no real emphasis on mutual belonging, reciprocity or dialogue, no sense of a two-way dialogue, no voice for the postcolonial citizen in this conversation.

This seems far removed from the position I am attributing to Diogenes, a position which suggests a very different view of what cosmopolitanism might be, since it distances itself from the establishment's view of "belonging". Diogenes repudiates civic allegiance and, assuming we are prepared to see him as a migrant, then he neatly removes himself from the position of being constructed as the poor relation in an asymmetrical host/stranger binary. In short, one might see him as embodying a postcolonial position. After all, sections of Asia Minor had been under Greek colonization for several centuries by the time when he lived. Be this as it may, in such a reading Diogenes positions himself very differently from

Derrida, who worries away at the problem of how *we* (specifically a Eurocentric international community of writers) should be treating *others*. Derrida's remarks seem to offer a *monologue* across boundaries –rather like those of Adiga's Balram Halwai.

Both the Diogenes and the Derrida positions are fundamentally concerned with *internal* cosmopolitanisms – cosmopolitanisms which, whether they relate to an individual or a community, propose a model for behaviour *within* a society. Historically, other forms of cosmopolitanism have been more outward-looking, more interested in extending a culture's sphere of influence regionally or globally. Looking for such formations today, one immediately thinks of the economic globalization sought by multinational companies and the exceptionalism that has particularly characterized American views of the nation's role in the world. Much the same could be said of British colonial discourse a century ago, and throughout the course of history numerous other hegemonies have endeavoured to spread their supposedly "cosmopolitan" values regionally or globally, through military force, mercantile networks or cultural or religious dissemination – or a mixture of these. For ease of reference, I will term these "expansive cosmopolitanisms" to distinguish them from what I am calling "internal cosmopolitanisms". And just as Diogenes and Derrida seem to articulate very different notions of internal cosmopolitanisms, there are similar variations in expansive cosmopolitanisms.

Sheldon Pollock posits the simultaneous emergence of two major expansive cosmopolitan systems at the beginning of the first millennium (of the Common Era): Latin and Sanskrit. He argues that they were remarkably similar in seeing "literary communication […] as unbounded, unlocated, unobstructed – writing of the Great Way instead of the small place".[16] Latin's influence, as Pollock sees it, spread throughout the first millennium, with the Christian church supplanting the Roman Empire as its promulgator. In contrast, he says, the Sanskrit cosmopolis "never sought to theorize its own universality",[17] "never demarcated [its space and power] in any concrete fashion" and, unlike Rome, never made any attempt to transform the world into a metropolitan center. In fact, no recognizable core/periphery conception ever prevailed in the Sanskrit cosmopolis".[18] So, in Pollock's account, Latin and Sanskrit had similar functions at opposite ends of "Eurasia", until their influence was eroded in the second millennium – what Pollock calls "the vernacular millennium" – when the more or less simultaneous emergence of vernaculars at the two ends of Eurasia challenged their cosmopolitan

hegemonies, but they operated in radically different ways: Sanskrit through an untheorized praxis that opened up egalitarian dialogues across borders; Latin initially through travelling as "the language of a conquest state" and later as "the language of a missionizing and later a conquest church".[19]

Seeing Latin as coercive and imperialistic and Sanskrit as a dialogic set of practices that operated without assuming a "superior" role in an asymmetrical power relationship could perhaps provide us with a model for two major forms of expansive cosmopolitanism that have flourished in different incarnations across the centuries and continue to do so today. Instances of this abound throughout history and in all corners of the globe. Later in the second millennium, the spread of Confucianism through Southeast Asia affords examples of both forms and Pheng Cheah distinguishes two types of cosmopolitanism among Southeast Asian Chinese. He describes one type as "celebrated by neo-Confucianists", links this with "colonial regimes and their postcolonial successor states" and characterizes it as "mercantilist", "recidivist, chauvinistic, immutable, and a cause of the ethnic enmity that has shaped most postcolonial societies in Southeast Asia. In contradistinction [the second type] *huaqiao* cosmopolitanism […] is measured by generous action and self-sacrificing political action."[20] And, interestingly, Pheng goes on to say that in "contemporary globalization", the former, mercantilist, strain overshadows the latter "to the point where it has almost completely disappeared".[21] It may be reductive to draw too close an analogy between the two forms of expansionist Chinese cosmopolitanism detected by Pheng and Pollock's account of the differences engrained in the much earlier Latinization and Sanskritization of large sections of the Indo-European world, but arguably both pairings exemplify contrary impulses in expansive cosmopolitanisms and could be equated to colonial and post-colonial perceptions of the phenomenon.

So the reference-points I propose to bring to bear on the literary texts discussed in this essay involve two opposed pairings. *Internal* cosmopolitanisms look inwards and tend to take issue with the political establishment: Diogenes' version by distancing itself from the Athenian polis and claiming world citizenship from an individualistic point of view; Derrida's version through the suggestion that a "city of writers" may offer hospitality, where the nation-state has failed. *Expansive* cosmopolitanisms also seem to move between two very different discursive practices, exemplified by Pollock's contrast between the Latinization and the Sanskritization of large sections of the Indo-European world and loosely

analogous to colonial and post-colonial forms of intercultural transmission, with the latter opening up far more room for dialogue.

IV

The most common English rendition of Diogenes' *kosmopolites* has been "citizen of the world" and V.S. Naipaul uses this term in the Prologue to his Booker Prize-winning work *In a Free State* (1971), ostensibly to represent the kind of anguished anomie suffered by a rootless cosmopolitan. This Prologue is entitled "The Tramp at Piraeus" and the narrator/protagonist, a Naipaul-like figure,[22] encounters the eponymous tramp, not a million miles away from Diogenes' Athens, on a steamer making a two-day crossing from Piraeus to Alexandria. Initially the narrator likens the tramp to "the romantic wanderer of an earlier generation",[23] but the ensuing action presents him as a misfit. The tramp tells one of their fellow-passengers that he has been travelling for thirty-eight years and has been "around the world about a dozen times", following this up with a comment that New Zealanders are "a cut above the Australians", before going on to ask, "But what's nationality these days?" and saying that he thinks of himself as a "citizen of the world".[24] If, though, one expects his cosmopolitanism to have given him the ability to make himself at home anywhere, the sequel suggests the exact opposite. The tramp is persecuted by his cabin-mates for an unspecified offence and comes across as a social pariah, a personification of a version of cosmopolitanism that is at home *nowhere*.

Arguably Naipaul deserves credit, here and elsewhere in his earlier work, for identifying displacement and migration as a central defining experience of life in the second half of the twentieth century, doing so before this was widely recognized, but in each of the five component parts that make up *In a Free State*, the free state in question comes across as a fraught nervous condition. Each section demonstrates the ironies surrounding supposed "freedom", suggesting parallels between the independences recently attained by ex-colonial territories and the psychology of characters who have been "casualties"[25] of Empire – a term Naipaul uses in the Prologue to describe Egyptian Greeks, making a return visit to their former homeland aboard the steamer.

The tramp of the Prologue is represented as a travesty of a world citizen and this prefigures a focus on the negative dimensions of nomadic freedom that continues throughout through *In a Free State*; its perspective is a world away from the emphasis on the positive potential

of nomadism that one finds in the work of thinkers like Deleuze and Guattari.[26] But something else needs to be said here: mediating the representation of the text's various displaced characters is the guiding authorial presence of the narrator. He steps to the fore as the "I" persona of the Prologue and Epilogue, but, although he is less obviously in evidence in the voices of the three fictions that these frame, his world-view seems to be implicit throughout. This narrator presents himself as a detached observer of personal and political free states, not exactly viewing them as an ethnographer, though some of Naipaul's non-fiction lays itself opens to this charge, but as an urbane cosmopolite who offers insights into the consequences of the geopolitical changes attendant upon the end of colonialism. Viewed in this light, the narrator seems to be a latter-day Cynic, a Diogenes who is alert enough to see the extent to which older conceptions of rootedness and belonging have collapsed and does not shirk from presenting himself as displaced,[27] but nevertheless assumes the right to comment on failed cosmopolites such as the tramp. Unlike Diogenes, he travels and so an expansionist cosmopolitan view of the world is implicit, but this remains uncompromisingly individualistic. He never departs from a highly subjective conservative point of view that negates the possibility of any kind of collective cosmopolitanism.

In a Free State won the Booker Prize and throughout his career Naipaul has been regaled with accolades and literary awards. Despite losing favour in academe, he was knighted in 1990, he was the first recipient of the David Cohen Prize for lifetime achievement by a living British writer in 1993 and was awarded the Nobel in 2001. Brilliant prose stylist that he is, he has travelled the world, making a career out of illustrating the failings of both fundamentalist thinking and rootless cosmopolitanism, while effectively separating himself off as a more superior kind of cosmopolite and finding favour with large sections of the Western literary establishment as such. If, though, cosmopolitanism involves initiating dialogues across boundaries and developing an appropriate set of ethics for Appiah's "world of strangers", I would suggest that Naipaul's work has very little to offer in these respects.

V

The Caribbean's other Nobel literary laureate, Derek Walcott was born around the same time as Naipaul, two years earlier in 1930, and like Naipaul can be seen as a product of the elite Caribbean schools of the late colonial

period, which provided writers as diverse as Naipaul, Walcott, Wilson Harris, George Lamming and Kamau Brathwaite with a thorough grounding in Western literary culture, and also with the tools to contest the values supposedly being inculcated in them by their educational curricula. While Naipaul's response was to distance himself from the colonial aspects of his "origins", Walcott's cosmopolitanism has been of an altogether different kind. In *Omeros* (1990), the text singled out for particular mention in the Nobel citation, he both universalizes and particularizes his equivalent of *The Iliad*, replacing the Aegean with the Caribbean and locating the poem's main action in St Lucia. The relationship with Classical epic may at first sight suggest that *Omeros* is a Caribbean adaptation of a Homeric "original" and Walcott has frequently been referred to as a Caribbean Homer.[28] This is not altogether inappropriate, since *Omeros* claims epic status for the Caribbean and the St. Lucian fishermen who are at its centre, and the epic was not just the loftiest of forms in the Aristotelian hierarchy of genres, but also a form widely considered to be encyclopaedic, "the story of all things".[29] But viewing Walcott in this light raises issues about what "Homer" connotes and Walcott dislodges him from the role often assigned to him at the headwaters of *Western* European culture by reassigning his *Greek* name to him; and in addition to this he suggests a very different etymology for "Omeros":

> [. . .] and *O* was the conch shell's invocation, *mer* was
> both mother and sea in our Antillean patois,
> *os*, a grey bone, and the white surf as it crashes
>
> and spreads its sibilant collar on a lace shore.[30]

This passage can be seen as a metonym for what the whole of the poem is doing. *Omeros* does not simply reclaim Homer from Western European appropriation by using the *Greek* form of his name. It creolizes the non-Westernized Greek form by proposing that its elements have a provenance in the St. Lucian shoreline and seascape as mediated by the local "Antillean patois". And Walcott goes further still, when he provides Omeros with an African ancestry by identifying him with a blind St Lucian Odysseus/Homer figure, Seven Seas, who is also called St. Omere.

This complex of associations represents a form of linguistic cosmopolitanism, a heteroglossic practice which destabilizes attempts to assert sovereignty over the meanings of words. The sounds of the sea and the local Francophone vernacular take their place in a patchwork of references that unstitches the kind of classical cosmopolitanism (here Greek rather than Latin) perpetuated by the English colonial system and the overall effect is to undermine monologic views of language. To take just one aspect of this from the passage: the invocation that is a staple ingredient of the openings of classical epics is replaced here by the sound and shape of the conch shell, which functions both as a trope for the Caribbean natural world and as a call to African ancestry. The Western European view of Homer as the precursor of all subsequent writers is replaced by a view that cosmopolitanizes him as the common property of peoples of all cultures. Europe is provincialized by the poem's setting the *Iliad*-like elements of its narrative in the Antilles and its making the Caribbean sea a central protagonist. Walcott refuses to acknowledge any kind of dependent relationship on the Western tradition, insisting instead that *Omeros*'s St Lucian characters are the equivalents, not derivatives, of seminal Western heroic figures. Protagonists such as Achille, Philoctete and Helen clearly share names with characters in *The Iliad*, but such names are far from extraordinary in St. Lucia, which has long been known as the "Helen" of the West Indies[31] and where names from classical culture were frequently imposed when slaves were divested of their African names and rechristened. As one reads the poem, these characters claim an autonomy that sets them apart from their Greek namesakes. Beyond this, *Omeros* charts a broad range of cosmopolitan travels across cultures – south-north, north-south, east-west and west-east – and its movements across the Atlantic retrace the journeys of both the second leg of the triangular trade, the infamous Middle Passage, and the third, the voyage from the Caribbean to Europe, investing both with multiple new meanings. *Omeros* is as much a Caribbean *Odyssey* as an *Iliad* and the various Odyssean travellers of the text include an "I" persona, who moves easily between countries and continents, exhibiting none of the unease of Naipaul's tramp, nor the narrator of *In a Free State*'s Diogenes-like dissociation of himself from the world around him. *Omeros*'s cosmopolitanism grounds itself in a highly local rural/maritime Caribbean world, but journeys outwards from this into more obviously cosmopolitan environments; and although it too can focus on an individual traveller who voyages restively between countries and continents, this figure is part of an ensemble cast, which asserts the importance of community in the quest for a cosmopolitan sensibility.

Pollock sees vernacular systems as challenging the expansive cosmopolitanisms of Latin and Sanskrit, and vernacularization is obviously one attractive route for post-colonial writing to take. In the Caribbean it has been followed by poets such as Michael Smith, Mutabaruka,

Jean "Binta" Breeze and often, though not always, by Kamau Brathwaite. Walcott is less obviously committed to vernacularization, but his early work often refers to Dante,[32] one of the key Western figures in the vernacular revolution of the second millennium, and throughout his oeuvre he conflates the vernacular with the cosmopolitan. In an often-quoted passage from his poetic autobiography, *Another Life* (1973), he writes of his early commitment to "Adam's task of giving things their names",[33] referring to the St. Lucian landscape as "a virginal, unpainted world"[34] and saying:

> [. . .] no one had yet written of this landscape
> that it was possible, [. . .]
> whole generations died unchristened,
> growths hidden in green darkness, forests
> of history thickening with amnesia.[35]

In a 1989 interview, he spoke about his attempt to recapture the particular "tactile"[36] quality of specific St. Lucian trees and plants on the printed page, a process which one can see at work in a poem such as "Cul de Sac Valley", in which, as in several of his poems,[37] he sees himself as a carpenter, fashioning verse from the raw materials of the local landscape and the vernacular idioms of St. Lucia's Francophone Creole:

> A panel of sunrise
> on a hilltop shop
> gave these stanzas their shape.
>
> If my craft is blest;
> if this hand is as accurate, as honest
> as their carpenter's,
> every frame, intent
> on its angles, would
> echo this settlement
> of unpainted wood
> as consonants scroll off my shaving plane
> in the fragrant Creole
> of their native grain;
>
> from a trestle bench
> they'd curl at my foot,
> C's, R's, with a French
> or West African root
>
> from a dialect throng-
> ing, its leaves unread
> yet light on the tongue
> of their native road;

> but drawing towards
> my pegged-out twine
> with bevelled boards
> of unpainted pine,
>
> like muttering shale,
> exhaling trees refresh
> memory with their smell:
> *bois canot*, *bois campeche*,
>
> hissing: *What you wish
> from us will never be,
> your words is English
> is a different tree.*[38]

Bringing what Walcott perceived as the hitherto unwritten St. Lucian world into literature was, of course, a project that had social implications; it represented an attempt to invest trees such as the breadfruit and mango with the same status as the elm and the oak[39] and to reclaim ordinary St. Lucian lives from the legacy of the "nameless, anonymous, hopeless condition"[40] of slavery, but although this project of wanting to name a supposedly unnamed landscape could be seen to involve an absorption in the local and the vernacular, the notion of Adamic naming is idealistic and, as is often the case in Walcott, an attempt to wipe the historical slate clean. What he is actually doing, I would suggest is cosmopolitanizing the local, insisting on its distinctiveness while making it accessible to an international audience. Writing from a very localized, non-metropolitan standpoint, he brings something new into being without pandering to metropolitan tastes.

VI

Virtually all postcolonial writers who are published in the West run the risk of being co-opted into "global" discursive economies controlled by Western publishing houses, succumbing to what Graham Huggan terms the "alterity industry".[41] That said, responses to this, as I have said, operate along a continuum which extends from a locally committed humanism that erodes national and international divisions, to selling out and very consciously ministering to Western tastes. Among the possibilities in the middle of the continuum is a strategic use of alterity that acknowledge the kind of mediation involved through the use of self-referential allusions to the problem.

One form of this is the introduction of an outsider/ insider figure into a postcolonial society as a means of foregrounding the brokerage involved in writing for a

"global" readership – a highly self-conscious redeployment of the device of using an expatriate figure as a prism for providing an international audience with insights into a local society. Michael Ondaatje's *Anil's Ghost* (2000 is a novel that employs this strategy.

Ondaatje's protagonist, Anil, is a forensic anthropologist, who comes to Sri Lanka to investigate alleged abuses of human rights for a Geneva-based organization. Like Ondaatje, she is Sri Lankan-born and North American-resident and during her first night back she contemplates the difference between her perceptions of the island while she has been away and the situation in which she now finds herself. The novel says "she had now lived abroad long enough to interpret Sri Lanka with a long-distance gaze. But here it was a more complicated world morally".[42] Throughout, *Anil's Ghost* Ondaatje foregrounds the potential pitfalls of using a Western character, even if Sri Lankan-born, as a focalizer and towards the end a metanarrative passage ironically summarizes "the history of the last two hundred years of Western political writing"[43] as characterized by books and films which conclude with the expatriate character leaving the non-Western world. In short, the novel seems to invite questions about its own positioning, as the work of a non-resident Sri Lankan-born writer. Unlike Ondaatje's earlier prose work about Sri Lanka, *Running in the Family* (1982), *Anil's Ghost* takes a political theme and avoids any obvious use of exoticization of its subject, but this does not necessarily exempt it from being a product of "the alterity industry".

In many ways, Anil's difficulty in interpreting the Sri Lankan situation is posing the question, "*How*, even with a degree of insider knowledge, can the cosmopolitan outsider read across cultures?" The plot[44] contrasts Anil's perspective on the apparent human rights violations she is uncovering with those of a range of elite and subaltern Sri Lankan "insiders", most notably an archaeologist Sarath, who has been delegated to investigate the alleged abuses with her. Sarath appears to be burying himself in the past to avoid confronting contemporary atrocities, but eventually sacrifices himself, so that Anil can take evidence of the government's responsibility for crimes away from the island. So the action of *Anil's Ghost* involves cross-cultural co-operation, in which the local elite – and also local subalterns – collaborate in a cosmopolitan alliance that allows them to be equal players. The novel seems to put the case for the teaming of the idealistic diasporic professional and the pragmatic local expert in the struggle against human rights abuses. And, in suggesting this, it seems to validate its own positioning, which involves a similar dialogue between "outsider" and "insider" epistemologies.

Anil's Ghost does not end with Anil flying off to the West, mission accomplished. That would be too much like "the history of the last two hundred years of Western political writing" that it critiques. Its final section takes another direction. It has a local artisan, an eye-painter named Ananda, reconstructing the face of a Buddha that has been blown up by thieves. Foreign experts are supposed to have provided "authority and guidance" for this project, but "political turmoil"[45] keeps them away. So Ananda, a self-styled craftsman rather than an artist, is the sole author of the reconstructed Buddha and his performing the eye ceremony leaves the novel ending with a creative act that can be seen as a trope for a new vision of Sri Lanka, fashioned from an ancient practice; and *Anil's Ghost* finally seems to align its own artistic approach with this kind of reconstruction. This conclusion gives subaltern creative agency, not Anil's work nor Sarath's sacrifice, the last word. The novel links cosmopolitan and local professionals as collaborators in the struggle against state terrorism, but does not do so at the expense of ignoring the suffering of local subalterns who have been the victims of such brutality, nor at the expense of denying them agency. Its own multiple angles of focalization shadow its themes and overall it can be seen as a blueprint for an ethical approach in which the privileged and under-privileged contribute to a cosmopolitanism of the kind Pollock finds in the Sanskrit cosmopolis of the first millennium. In *Anil's Ghost*, the various characters become citizens of the world in a way that Naipaul's tramp never is.

NOTES

1. Walcott in 1992; Naipaul in 2001.
2. Aravind Adiga, *The White Tiger*, 2008; London: Atlantic Books, 2009, p. 3.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 4.
4. Graham Huggan, *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins*, London and New York: Routledge, 2001.
5. Sarah Brouillette, *Postcolonial Writers in the Global Literary Marketplace*, Basingstoke and New York: Macmillan, 2007.
6. See Martin Bernal's monumental work on this in *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization*, Vol. I: *The Fabrication of Ancient Greece, 1785-1985*, London: Free Association Books, 1987; Vol. II: *The Archaeological and Documentary Evidence*, London: Free Association Books, 1991; Vol. III: *The Linguistic Evidence*, London: Free Association Books, 2006. Also Martin Bernal, *Black Athena Writes Back: Martin Bernal Responds to His Critics*, ed. David Chioni Moore, Durham, NC and London: Duke UP, 2001.
7. Sheldon Pollock, "Cosmopolitan and Vernacular in History", in *Cosmopolitanism*, ed. Carol A. Breckenridge, Sheldon Pollock, Homi K. Bhabha and Dipesh Chakrabarty, Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2002, p.50, n. 24.
8. Pollock also mentions Philo, the (Jewish) Greek philosopher

of Alexandria, *ibid.*. See too Martha Nussbaum on Zeno's notion of the world city, cited in Robert Fine, *Cosmopolitanism*, Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2007, p. 14

9. According to Gilbert Murray, *Five Stages of Greek Religion,* the barrel was "a large pitcher, of the sort used in primitive [sic] times for burials", cited by Bertrand Russell, *A History of Western Philosophy*, London: Allen and Unwin, 1946, p. 254.

10. *Ibid.*

11. Fine, *Cosmopolitanism*, p. 14.

12. Anthony Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism*: *Ethics in a World of Strangers*, 2006; London: Penguin, 2007, pp. xii-xiii.

13. Jacques Derrida, "On Cosmopolitanism" ("Cosmopolites de tous les Pays, encore un effort", Paris: Editions GalilÈe, 1997), in *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness*, trans. Mark Dooley and Michael Hughes, London and New York: Routledge, 2001.

14. Simon Critichley and Richard Kearney, Preface to Derrida, *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness*, p. viii.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 8.

16. Sheldon Pollock, "Cosmopolitan and Vernacular in History", p. 22.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 26.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 27.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 24.

20. Pheng Cheah, "Chinese Cosmopolitanism in Two Senses and Postcolonial National Memory", in *Cosmopolitan Geographies: New Locations in Literature and Culture*, ed. Vinay Dharwaker, New York and London: Routledge, 2001, pp. 133-68, p. 156.

21. *Ibid.*

22. Naipaul has referred to himself as being "totally involved" with all the characters of *In a Free State*, "Life on Approval", Naipaul interviewed by Alex Hamilton, *The Guardian*, 4 October 1971, p. 6.

23. Naipaul, *In a Free State*, 1971; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973, p. 10.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 9.

25. *Ibid.*, p.10.

26. See particularly Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. Brian Massumi, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987.

27. Cf. Naipaul's frequent categorization of himself as displaced, e.g. in two interviews published in the same year as *In a Free State*: "Without a Place", Naipaul interviewed by Ian Hamilton, *The Times Literary Supplement*, 30 July 1971, pp. 897-8; and "The Writer as Colonial", Naipaul interviewed by Adrian Rowe-Evans, *Transition*, 40 (1971), 56-62.

28. As Paula Burnett points out, after the publication of *Omeros* and the Royal Shakespeare's Company's staging of Walcott's play, *The Odyssey* (1992), it became commonplace for the press to refer to him in this way. See Burnett, "Hegemony or Pluralism? The Literary Prize and the Post-Colonial Project in the Caribbean", *Commonwealth Essays and Studies*, 16, 1 (1993), 14.

29. Northrop Frye, "The Story of All Things", in Frye, *The Return of Eden: Five Essays on Milton's Epics*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1965, pp. 3-31.

30. *Omeros*, London: Faber, 1990, p. 14. Cf. my discussion in *Derek Walcott*, Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1999, pp. 150-58.

31. Not only because of the beauty of its landscape, but also because the island was fought over by the British and the French and changed hands more than a dozen times, before eventually becoming a British colony in 1802.

32. E.g. the title of *Another Life*, London: Jonathan Cape, 1973, which among other possible references alludes to the opening of the *Divine Comedy*. The third line of the poem, "in the middle of another life"   (p. 3), echoes the beginning of *Inferno*: "Nel mezzo del cammin di nosta vita".

33. *Another Life*, p.152. The phrase originates from the Cuban novelist Alejo Carpentier's *Los pasos perdidos* (1953) and is quoted by Walcott as the epigraph to Book Two of *Another Life* (p. 42).

34. *Ibid.*, p. 152.

35. *Ibid.*, p. 53.

36. Walcott interviewed by Melvyn Bragg*, The South Bank Show*, ITV, 1989.

37. E.g. "Crusoe's Journal", where he likens the prose of *Robinson Crusoe* to the use the protagonist makes of the materials he recovers from the wrecked ship:
[. . .] even the bare necessities
of style are turned to use,
like those plain tools he salvages
from shipwreck, hewing a prose
as odorous as raw wood to the adze.
(*The Castaway and Other Poems*, London: Jonathan Cape, 1965, p. 51);
and comments such as the following on his Methodist upbringing: "There's [Ö] a very strong emphasis on carpentry in Protestantism, in making things simply and in a utilitarian way", "The Art of Poetry", Walcott interviewed by Edward Hirsch, in *Critical Perspectives on Derek Walcott*, ed. Robert D. Hamner, Washington: Three Continents Press, 1993, p.70.

38. *The Arkansas Testament*, London: Faber, 1987, p. 10.

39. Walcott interviewed by Melvyn Bragg, South Bank Show, ITV, 1989.

40. *Ibid.*

41. Huggan, *The Postcolonial Exotic*, *passim*, particularly p. vii.

42. *Anil's Ghost*, London: Bloomsbury, 2000, p. 11.

43. *Ibid.*, p. 287.

44. For a fuller account, see my essay, "'Out of Place'? The Poetics of Space in Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* and Michael Ondaatje's *Anil's Ghost*", *Commonwealth Essays and Studies*, 31, 2 (2009): 32-43.

45. *Anil's Ghost*, p. 301.