

The Testimonial Imperative: Reflections on Saer's *The Witness*

Richard Elliott

Introduction

He is awakened by the bells tolling the Angelus. In the kingdoms of England the ringing of bells is now one of the customs of the evening, but this man, as a child, has seen the face of Woden, the divine horror and exultation, the crude wooden idol hung with Roman coins and heavy clothing, the sacrificing of horses, dogs and prisoners. Before dawn he will die and with him will die, and never return, the last immediate images of these pagan rites; the world will be a little poorer when this Saxon has died.

- Jorge Luis Borges, 'The Witness'

Gide's old age and death (which I read about in Mme van Rysselberghe's Cahiers de la Petite Dame) were surrounded by witnesses. But I do not know what has become of these witnesses: no doubt, in most cases, dead in their turn: there is a time when the witnesses themselves die without witnesses. Thus, History consists of tiny explosions of life, of deaths without relays.

- Roland Barthes, 'Deliberation'

In their individual ways, Borges and Barthes both elucidate a common point: the precariousness of history's role as witness. Their words seem exceptionally relevant to me when considering why the act of witnessing is so important to us and the role played in our lives by loss. What follows is a set of reflections launched by a consideration of a novel, *The Witness*, by Juan José Saer. They do not lay a claim to any sort of definitive reading of the novel any more than they hope to exhaust the theories of postcolonialism, poststructuralism or anthropology on which they are based. What they aim toward is a theorisation of loss that attempts to wrest the latter from connotations of nostalgic apathy towards a brighter role as instructive agency. They ask, after Barthes: Are we only destined to 'deaths without relays'?

Barthes himself provides one possible answer to this question which, with its emphasis on the scriptural, seems to be an appropriate starting point:

Death, real death, is when the witness himself dies. Chateaubriand says of his grandmother and his great-aunt: "I may be the only man in the world who knows that such persons have existed": yes, but since he has written this, and written it well, we know it too, insofar, at least, as we still read Chateaubriand.¹

It is to this last point that I want to first draw attention. The importance of the writer, the written word and the reader as witnesses to what has been lost underlies many of the reflections which follow. Also under consideration is the role of writing in constructing history, a point on which Michel de Certeau is not far removed from Barthes: 'In combining the power to keep the past (while the primitive "fable" forgets and loses its origin) with that of indefinitely conquering distance (while the primitive "voice" is limited to the vanishing circle of its auditors, writing *produces history*.'²

Anthropologists, of course, might wish to tell a different story and de Certeau is not deaf to their claims. There is always, he observes, something that does not return from the scene of investigation: 'it is the "un-heard that purloins the text or, more precisely, is stolen from the thief, it is exactly what is *heard* but not understood, hence ravished from the body of productive work: speech without writing, the song of pure enunciation, the act of speaking without knowing – a pleasure in saying or hearing.'³ Yet, a fascination with such sources of pleasure can nudge the anthropologist away from objective truth, according to Jacques Derrida, who takes issue with Claude Lévi-Strauss's conclusions that the Nambikwara of *Tristes Tropiques* are closer to nature (the "grace" that we have "fallen" from) due to their unfamiliarity with writing. The argument, as summarised by Catherine Belsey, runs thus: 'Lévi-Strauss has reversed Western ethnocentric values in their conventional form. Instead of despising the Nambikwara, he idealizes them. But because his reversal of values stays within the same theoretical framework, it simply reproduces in another mode the ethnocentrism it was designed to challenge.'⁴

Another point to be considered and which serves to bookend the discussions that follow, is illustrated by a point Clifford Geertz makes concerning Lévi-Strauss's work: 'the final message of *Tristes Tropiques*, and of the *oeuvre* that unfolds from it, is that anthropological texts, like myths and memoirs, exist less for the world than the world exists for them.'⁵ Heeding the message, there follows in anthropology a crisis of self-consciousness with questions being raised as to the motives implied and methods employed in pursuing what had hitherto been seen as a natural curiosity about the unknown world. Tied to concerns raised by postcolonial theory and the poststructuralism that so influenced many of its thinkers, anthropology finds itself in an awkward position:

The gap between engaging others where they are and representing them where they aren't, always immense but not much noticed, has suddenly become extremely visible. What once seemed only technically difficult...has turned morally, politically, even epistemologically, delicate.⁶

I mention de Certeau's and Geertz's comments here because both are concerned with the relationship of the "being there" of anthropological fieldwork to the "being here" of attempting to represent certain types of otherness to those who have not witnessed them. Both are also concerned with the act of writing (de Certeau with the distinctions between the oral and the scriptural, Geertz with 'the anthropologist as author') and I want to examine the importance of writing and recording as acts of witnessing by looking at a novel by a writer who has described his work as a 'speculative anthropology'. In suggesting the necessity of recording acts of trauma and loss I hope to show that the work can still exist as much for the world as the world for the work.

Juan José Saer's *The Witness*

On 8 October 1515, Juan Díaz de Solís, veteran of numerous expeditions to the Americas, set sail from the Spanish port of Lepe with two accompanying ships. His mission was to take possession of South America in the name of the Spanish monarch. During his voyage, which consisted of a southward exploration of the southern cone incorporating Rio de Janeiro, he discovered several "new" islands and coastal points. Having claimed them all for the crown he anchored in a wide river which he believed to be an inlet of the ocean and which he named the "Sweet Sea". This stretch of water, the last Solís would see, was subsequently discovered to be a river and for a period of time bore the navigator's name before assuming its present title of Rio de la Plata, or River Plate. Spying Indians on the shore, Solís took a party of men to land in order, according to most records, to capture the natives and transport them back to Spain. If this was the desire, the tables were quickly turned as the party were ambushed, killed, roasted and eaten by the Indians. Those who had stayed behind on the ships witnessed these events and returned to Spain, where the fate of the hapless Solís and his men entered the growing body of legends emanating from the mysterious New World.

One of the more recent fictionalisations of these events can be found in the first part of the 1983 novel *The Witness* by the Argentinean writer Juan José Saer. The book's nameless narrator is an old man recalling the exploits of his youth. Opening with a brief account of his orphanhood and adolescence in the ports of Spain, the tale effectively disembarks from the boy's decision to find work on a boat travelling to the newly discovered lands to the west. The discovery of the "Sweet Sea" is duly related, as is that of the fateful landing party on the shores of the river. The twist in Saer's account is that he has his narrator find himself the sole survivor of the ambush and a subsequent captive of the Indians, who carry him and his dead companions far away to their jungle village on the shore of another river. It is thus the narrator, rather than the ships' crews (who henceforth vanish from the narrative), who witnesses the cooking and eating of his former companions. This process, described by Saer in great imaginative detail, is followed by a stint of excessive drinking and in turn by an orgy involving all the members of the tribe and a subsequent sickness that overtakes them, leaving many dead or seriously ill.

The narrative then proceeds to detail the narrator's subsequent life in the village and his observations of the Indians' habits and lifestyles. As a part of their community for ten years it is not long before he forgets nearly all of his earlier life in Europe. The reality of the jungle becomes his reality as he matures into an adult and learns to adapt to the people and place. He never comes in this period of his life to fully understand the ways of his hosts though he is able to faithfully log the physical nature of many of their customs; only later will he attempt to approach an understanding of the metaphysical aspects of what he has witnessed. He learns the basics of the Indians' language and comes to fulfil a rudimentary function in the workings of the village. The initial curiosity of the tribe towards him wears off over time and he is left fairly well to his own devices.

Only one aspect of the tribe's behaviour continues to bother him. Once a year a group of Indians will set off along the river only to return a few days later with the dead victims of a raid on one of the neighbouring villages. On every such occasion there will follow days of feasting, drinking, orgiastic excess and sickness. And in each case there will be a representative of the victims left alive and kept for a short while in the village. These prisoners are invariably far more aware of their position than was the narrator and tend to look on him and their captors in disdain. After a certain period

of captivity they are set free and sent in a boat loaded with provisions back up or down the river from whence they came.

Eventually the same fate befalls the narrator. One day, after ten years of sharing every aspect of the Indians' lives (the annual festivities aside), he is escorted to a canoe and pushed away down the river. As he leaves the Indians fall over themselves to leave a lasting impression on him, some racing his canoe along the river bank and one swimming alongside until he is exhausted. After a day's journey downriver the narrator heads for the shore to sleep, where he is discovered the following morning by Spanish sailors. At first suspicious of him – for he has all but lost his ability to speak Spanish – he is able eventually to communicate his tale and a party is sent to try and locate the Indians' village. Finding it abandoned they press on inland only to discover and slaughter the tribe. As the ship on which the narrator returns to Spain leaves the river behind the bodies of Indians and Spaniards float past the bows.

Back in Spain the narrator is taken in by a kindly priest, who writes down with interest an account of his adventures and takes it upon himself to educate the young man, teaching him to read and write in several languages. Following the death of his teacher the narrator leaves the monastery that has been his home since his return and takes to wandering around the country from one menial job to another. He feels a permanent sense of listlessness, finding the trappings of civilisation as experienced in his homeland somehow lacking in comparison to his adopted home with the Indians. At one point he falls in with a group of travelling actors and collaborates with them on a heavily fictionalised account of his youthful adventure. The play is an international success and as it tours Europe he becomes wealthy from his share of the profits. Tiring of this life, he leaves the company, taking with him three children he has adopted following the murder of their mother. He settles in a remote city and sets up a printing house to provide an income and a trade for the children as they grow older. Never entirely free from the memories of his time with the Indians he sits down in old age to write the memoir that is the text of Saer's book. The latter third of the book is devoted to a series of observations on the metaphysical nature of the Indians' worldview.

Reflections...

...On Witnessing at Several Removes: Translation, Language and Fictive Historiography

It seems to me that there are numerous paths of interest to follow from a reading of Saer's narrative. Those that I intend to pursue here, as mentioned above, circle mostly around the anthropological aspects of the novel - in particular the challenges thrown at anthropology by postcolonial theory and a line of defence it throws back by way of its belief in the importance of witnessing. The first question that might reasonably be asked at this point is how we could treat a work of fiction as a work of anthropology, however 'speculative'. For Clifford Geertz the first task of the anthropologist as writer was to convince his or her reader of the genuineness of the 'being there', to evoke a sense of place in such a way as to elide all doubts that the chronicler had recorded life just as it was in that place. There was, however, no great doubt that what was being related had in fact taken place and was a firsthand account. We can make no such claim for Saer's book, which, following Baudrillard, is so obviously a product of the postmodern tendency to present simulacra, in this case the simulation of the sort of historical chronicle familiar to anyone who has studied the conquest of Latin America.

Seen from this view Saer's work is as absurd as that of Pierre Menard, the eponymous character of a tale by Saer's predecessor Jorge Luis Borges. There Borges had Menard write, word for word and line for line, the text of *Don Quixote* as if for the first time and without recourse to the original. This futile work did, however, yield something great for Borges' narrator upon the reading of it: a new way of imagining not just seventeenth-century Spain, but the shaping of history itself:

It is a revelation to compare Menard's *Don Quixote* with Cervantes's. The latter, for example, wrote (part one, chapter nine):

...truth, whose mother is history, rival of time, depository of deeds, witness of the past, exemplar and adviser to the present, and the future's counsellor.

Written in the seventeenth century, written by the 'lay genius' Cervantes, this enumeration is a mere rhetorical praise of history. Menard, on the other, writes:

...truth, whose mother is history, rival of time, depository of deeds, witness of the past, exemplar and adviser to the present, and the future's counsellor.

History, the *mother* of truth: the idea is astounding. Menard, a contemporary of William James, does not define history as an inquiry into reality but as its origin. Historical truth, for him, is not what has happened; it is what we judge to have happened. The final phrases – *exemplar and adviser to the present, and the future's counsellor* – are brazenly pragmatic.⁷

It seems safe to assume that for Saer, a keeper of the Borgesian tradition, *The Witness* might perform a similar feat of reinvention. Yet, where Borges has satirical fun by having Menard's work transcend the limitations of time and place that had made Cervantes little more than a prisoner of the prejudices of his time, Saer's task can be seen as rather more serious. Numerous though contemporary chronicles of the conquests may be, Saer is aware of their role, for the most part, in justifying conquest and colonisation by relating the New World as a land of savagery and darkness: a land, above all, without God. From this premiss he surmises an account that may in the final analysis be no more fictitious than those which have preceded it, removed even as it is by half a millennium. In a process similar to that in which 'the invasion of the 17th century by the 20th century and vice versa' in Borges's tale creates a dialogic possibility, so Saer's account is illuminated by, among other (post)modern intellectual inquiries, the concerns of postcolonial theory.⁸

The seeming anachronism of situating the conquest of the Americas within contemporary postcolonialism is a subject to which I will return below. For now, I wish to mention some more ways in which *The Witness* is removed from a true sense of 'being there'. The first will become clear if I stress that I am writing here about *The Witness*, the 1990 English translation by Margaret Jull Costa of Saer's original Spanish text *El entenado*. The "problems" start with the title itself. Although, as will already be clear, the English title is more than appropriate, stressing as it does the role of the narrator as witness to events (the expedition, the slaughter of his companions, the Indian rituals) and experiences (the customs of his own people as much as those of the Indians, monastic life, surrogate fatherhood), it is not a literal translation. *Entenado* is an archaic Spanish word whose nearest modern meaning would be

“stepchild” (for which word *hijastro/a* is now used). As Gabriel Riera has observed of the English translation, by placing an emphasis on its juridical and testimonial aspects it situates the account among ethnological texts, leading to some of the problems already alluded to. Further, it lessens the imaginative metaphorical play of the novel by ignoring the ambiguity of orphanhood, bastardy and adoption implicit in the Spanish title.⁹ Riera also notes the French translation, *L'ancêtre*, as maintaining some of this ambiguity. It is true that surrogate parenthood and childhood play a crucial role in Saer's text and it is entirely possible to base a series of readings solely on such a theme. I shall mention more about some of the suggestions thrown up by such readings a little later.

Other concerns about inconsistencies between the original and its translation need not concern us further. My discussion hinges on the latter and, like most readers of translated works, I place my trust in the translator to provide an accurate version of the events being narrated. I consider both Borges's observation that 'the English and Spanish languages are...two possible ways of viewing and ordering reality' and Walter Benjamin's that 'a translation comes later than the original, and since the important works of world literature never find their chosen translators at the time of their origin, their translation marks their stage of continued life.'¹⁰ I then take solace in the notion that translation is yet another form of witnessing and of keeping alive that which is threatened with loss.

Yet there are two problems that arise from Borges's comments on language as a way of 'viewing and ordering reality'. The first relates to the structuralist and poststructuralist contention that language, rather than cataloguing perception, precedes it and produces it. Such a view is taken to particular extremes in the psychoanalysis of Jacques Lacan, whose view that the unconscious is structured like a language leads him to claim that 'it is the world of words that creates the world of things – the things originally confused in the *hic et nunc* of the all in the process of coming-into-being – by giving its concrete being to their essence, and its ubiquity to what has always been: *χτῆμα ἐξ ἀεί*.'¹¹

The second objection, closely related to the first and yet conceivable separately to it, is that found in attempting to catalogue the unknown: how to name things for which there are as yet no names? This is a theme that numerous writers from the Americas have looked at and which is well expressed by the Cuban novelist Alejo Carpentier in *The Harp and the Shadow*, his fictionalised account of

Columbus's voyages of discovery. Carpentier's Columbus finds that he is required to describe the new world he has discovered but can find no words to do so due to the total difference between all he sees here and all he previously knew. His Lacanian side allows him to believe initially that 'things that have no names cannot be imagined'; yet he feels equally convinced, against Lacan, that things come before their description but that 'the words would *not reveal the thing*, if the thing were not already known'. In preparing his letters to the king he strikes a compromise:

I say that the blue mountains I can see in the distance are like those of Sicily, though they are nothing like those of Sicily. I say that the grass is as tall as that of Andalusia in April and May, though there is nothing here that is anything like Andalusia. I say nightingales are singing when I hear twittering little gray birds with long, black beaks that are more like sparrows. I allude to the fields of Castile, here where not a single thing recalls the fields of Castile.¹²

Carpentier here reminds us that immediate perception is also an act of translation and that phenomenology might yet prove as valid a route as poststructuralism in getting to the heart of the matter. Yet the matter is already compromised by the translation, a compromise common to colonial and postcolonial writing and to which I will now turn.

...On Latin American Intellectuals and the Crisis of Mimicry

There is yet another remove which it may seem pertinent to note and that is Saer's position as an Argentine writer in Paris. It has long been a tradition of Latin American writers and artists to make a home for themselves in Europe. For many, such as Carpentier, this has been a necessity due to the political climes of their homeland; for others, such as Saer, the career opportunities have simply proved far more valuable overseas. This journey is often represented as one from the periphery to the centre and it brings with it a questioning of allegiances; does the writer stay true to his or her native culture or do they submit to the compromises of their adopted homeland? Of the major (or popular) Latin American and Caribbean writers of the twentieth century it is hard to think of many who have escaped such a fate. Borges, Pablo Neruda, V.S. Naipaul, Derek Walcott, Mario Vargas Llosa, Isabel Allende: all have been accused of neglecting the essential concerns of their cultures in the pursuit of international

literary or political ambition. The evidence with which they are damned is multifarious but three distinct traits can be identified.

Firstly, there is the question of language. This stems from the challenges already alluded to above by Carpentier's fictional Columbus, namely how to translate a new world experience into the language of an old world that has no frame of reference for it. One response to this has been to suggest that, following the forced adoption of the coloniser's tongue, the colonised artist has been left little choice but to imitate the coloniser's culture, becoming in effect one of Naipaul's "mimic men". The alternative has often been seen to be an investment in indigenous language and culture and a shunning of the coloniser's voice. Following Naipaul, these two positions have fuelled a debate that has flourished within Caribbean literature, where writers such as Edward Brathwaite have advocated a rejection of the fatalism of the Naipaulian view in favour of an exploration of the African and Indian roots of Caribbean society. The dialectic has found its fullest synthesis in the work of Derek Walcott, whose combining of the European and African traditions represents perhaps the truest reflection of reality in the Caribbean. For Walcott it is as foolhardy and shortsighted to attempt to merely forget the European culture as it is impossible to regain the African. Against the "back to Africa" movements he illustrates how far Caribbean blacks have already come from the "homeland"; the distance travelled in space and time is too great to reverse. It is better therefore to witness the birth of a new and polyglot language. The result, in the hands of a poet of Walcott's abilities, is work that can stand with the best of the cultures from which it draws its inspiration.

This debate has not, of course, been concentrated in the Caribbean. From postcolonial Africa, Chinua Achebe and Ngũgĩ Thiong'o take positions roughly equal to Walcott and Brathwaite respectively. Both writers make the same distinction between language as communication and language as native identity ('carrier of culture' in Thiong'o's words). Yet Achebe finds the English language more than suitable for African writers to use. As an inheritance of colonialism it is an unasked-for presence but it is one which will not go away by merely ignoring it; rather the African writer can enliven it by incorporating into it the sensibilities of a different cultural experience, a different worldview. For Thiong'o, however, it is a political imperative (as it was for Braithwaite) to write in his mother tongue (Gĩkũyũ).¹³ And for James Baldwin the position of the black writer in white America was analogous: 'My quarrel with the English language', he observed, 'has been that the language

reflected none of my experience....Perhaps the language was not my own because I had never attempted to use it, had only learned to imitate it.'¹⁴

A second trope of criticism in this area is lack of local colour. Jean Franco, for example, takes issue with Borges for removing many of his tales from any clear sense of locality and for emphasising the metaphysical over the physical. For Franco and others, this is a somewhat treacherous act in that it implies a luxury of thought that cannot be taken for granted in a country still torn by political strife. A cursory glance at the most famous of Borges's works, his *Ficciones* and *El Aleph*, would seem to support this view in that they contain apolitical stories that are more about cerebral play than commitment to nationalist pride. Yet further familiarity with Borges' work would yield not only a wealth of local detail (particularly in early and late work, such as *Fervour of Buenos Aires* and *Doctor Brodie's Report*) but a questioning of the necessity for further immediate specular reflection. Borges, Carpentier, Walcott and Saer would all seem to argue that the specular image hides deeper philosophical depths which they have as much right to explore as First World intellectuals. This is not an abstention from politics (and all these writers *have* been politically important in their time, regardless of any intention otherwise) but a suggestion that not all answers are to be found in the local. Indeed the abstention from universal debates is something that is likely to contribute to greater cultural isolation, leaving the formerly colonised periphery forever in the throes of a dying nativism. And the lack of recognition afforded the contributions by Latin American thinkers to the intellectual tradition is something most are acutely aware of. One of Borges's translators, James Irby, was moved to observe in 1962 that 'not being French has undoubtedly also relegated Borges to comparative obscurity in the English-speaking countries, where it is rare that a Hispanic writer is ever accorded any major importance at all.'¹⁵ What was true then is as true now, despite the so-called Latin American literary "boom" of the 1960s-80s. As for the theoretical tradition, the attention lavished on German philosophy and French poststructuralism is generally at the expense of any consideration of Hispanic contributions, a situation that strikes one as particularly odd when practised by North American academics. In such a situation the intellectual from the margins who would deign to be heard in the centre is damned from within and without.

Finally, where local colour is abundant and even when language is not an issue, there is the sense in which, as mentioned earlier the world exists only for the

writer and not vice versa. As Timothy Brennan says of Carpentier, he 'has often been baited as being a Francophile aesthete slumming in the New World'.¹⁶ The same could be said for Saer. Yet in an argument reminiscent of the "local colour" one, Carpentier made his position clear: 'I've taken my stand precisely against the exotic...What I want is that the elements of Latin America be integrated into a universal culture'.¹⁷ Similarly, as Iraset Páez Urdaneta writes of the frequent but fleeting allusions to Argentina in Borges's work, 'the implication that *argentinidad* [in the work]...is gratuitous is as empty as debating whether Hemingway's work is less North American than Faulkner's. What defines Hemingway as North American is precisely what prevents him being *un-North American*.'¹⁸

...On The Importance of the Colonial Encounter in Latin America

As what I have been talking about relates to certain concerns of postcolonial theory I should perhaps attempt to justify, before returning to Saer, the inclusion of a five hundred year old conquest in a field marked more often than not by a reflection of more contemporary histories.

Anne McClintock, for one, is suspicious of 'turning back the clocks and unrolling the maps of "post-colonialism" to 1492' for fear that the multiplicity of times and places can only overwhelm or be overwhelmed by 'a singular, monolithic term' such as post-colonialism.¹⁹ Yet numerous Latin American artists and intellectuals have found it both productive and necessary to take into account 'the whole story' as it were, recognising the importance of engaging with a history that did not, after all, begin with twentieth century economic imperialism. I have already mentioned the dialogic possibilities suggested by Saer's and Borges's work but it is perhaps worth briefly stressing just how prevalent the simultaneity of history is in Latin American culture. Like the streets of Cuzco, lined with Spanish churches built atop Incan foundations, much Latin American literature presents jarring historical contrasts. As one of Carpentier's characters in *The Lost Steps* remarks after an observation that the Venezuelans seem to be living in different centuries, 'You must remember that we are accustomed to living with Rousseau and the Inquisition, with the Immaculate Conception and *Das Kapital*.'²⁰

Because so much in Latin American history has arrived from abroad (which is, of course, the other point Carpentier's character is making) the telescoping of history

found in works such as García Márquez's *100 Years of Solitude* and João Ubaldo Ribeiro's *An Invincible Memory* is as explicable as it is inevitable. The remembering of the past is something that is taken more seriously in Latin America than it is in North America, a fact emphasised by Carlos Fuentes, who argues that 'Latin American culture, the culture in which we write, in which we create today, is permeated by the event of the conquest and by the world preceding the conquest.... The past is present in Latin America; the past is past in the United States.'²¹ This is one reason, of course, why North American postcolonial theorists might question the validity of 'turning back the clocks'; to them the multicultural present is simply more important.

I think another response can be made to McClintock's reservations against the expansion of the postcolonial project. If postcolonialism as a theoretical approach was born of the recognition of a mutual relevance among a range of concerns from disparate sources, and if its strength can be seen to reside in the interrelation of those sources towards a common goal of 'at least' some form of global emancipation, the suggestion that such a goal might better be served by dismantling the very heterogeneity that brought forth such a possibility seems both perverse and destructive.

...On Cannibalism

As the spectacular centrepiece of Saer's novel is the preparation and consumption of a group of Spanish sailors by South American Indians, it is perhaps worth a brief diversion to ponder on the metaphors of anthropophagy. It has been argued, convincingly, that the idea of the cannibal was propagated to justify conquest of large parts of the Americas, Africa and Asia. As the ultimate cipher of savagery in the west, the eating of one's fellows was portrayed as ultimate proof of the godlessness of these societies. With the Church at the height of its powers at the times of the Iberian conquests it is not hard to perceive how persuasive an argument this would have been to many.

Fascination with such otherness was another notable factor. As João Cezar de Castro Rocha points out, the linking of Brazil with anthropophagous rituals took place from the very start of the mapping of the territory and contributed to the objectifying of the country as an exotic museum piece.²² It was as a response to this that Oswald

de Andrade launched his 'Manifesto antropófago' in 1928, in which he answered to 'the objectification of Brazilian culture by transforming European subjects into metaphorical objects of consumption.'²³ The idea of cultural cannibalism was later taken up by the Tropicalismo movement of the late 1960s. As one of its chief figures, Caetano Veloso stated, 'We Brazilians, should not imitate, but rather devour new information, wherever it comes from.... The idea of cultural cannibalism fitted our Tropicalist purpose like a glove. We were 'eating' both the Beatles and Jimi Hendrix'.²⁴

Another comment to make here, and one that brings Lacanian psychoanalysis to the fore again, is the link between cannibalism and the mourning or celebrating of loss. As Catherine Belsey summarizes, 'Lacan perceives heroism as the pursuit of the lost object – whatever the cost', the implication being that the cost is inevitably death: 'love of the lost object and the death drive are inextricably entwined with one another in desire.'²⁵ The cannibalistic and orgiastic excesses of Saer's Indians are an example of this death drive/desire:

They did it against their will, as if it were impossible for them to abstain or as if the recurrent urge was not the appetite of each individual Indian but of that dark something that ruled them. Allowing oneself to be eaten was demeaning not only because of the shameful voluptuousness it revealed but also, indeed above all else, because becoming the object of an experience was to plunge oneself completely into the outer world, to lose one's reality and put oneself on a par with the inert and unformed, to become bound up in the soft dough of appearances.²⁶

It turns out that they too have a form of sublimation – in the sense that Freud associates civilisation as the process of sublimation of sexual desire – as their practice stems from a civilised version of their former selves; the elaborate setting up and ordering of the debauchery stem from a desire *not to eat each other*. This is made clear in the later meditations of the narrator as he ponders the meanings of their ritual:

Finding an alternative to that mutual predatoriness changed them. They turned towards the outside world and became the tribe that formed the centre of the world, ringed by a horizon whose outer limits became more problematic the further it was from that centre. Despite the fact that they too were from that unlikely world, they struggled up to a new level of existence. Thus, even while their feet were still sunk deep in the primeval mud, their heads, liberated, inhaled the clean air of truth. (139)

...On the Other as Mother

The reference in the quotation above to the 'primeval' provides a good example of another trope of otherness in the new world encounter. On hearing the narrator's story in *The Witness* the priest Father Quesada remarks that the Indians must have been the true descendants of Adam. Saer has accurately identified a tendency in the chronicles of the conquest, laden as they are with religious imagery, to represent the newly discovered lands as prelapsarian paradises. This is a trait which has survived into postcolonial times and can be traced in the voices of the colonised and enslaved as much as in the contradictory romanticism of the colonisers and enslavers. bell hooks, for example, talks about the 'Western sensibilities' of African Americans who 'want to re-evolve and remember Africa', and which is 'a very nineteenth-century way of thinking, a reflection of the ways in which the West has always remembered Africa nostalgically'.²⁷ Paul Gilroy mentions how 'that state of being closer to nature is seen as a state of simple bliss. It gets connected to an argument about individuality and the desirability of finding harmony by being dissolved into the general will'.²⁸

The loss associated with such thinking is that of loss of contact with the mother, a concept central to Lacanian psychoanalysis. The mother figures both as the provider and the figure of plenty from whom we have been untimely removed, as Stuart Hall points out:

It is because this New World is constituted for us as place, a narrative of displacement, that it gives rise so profoundly to a certain imaginary plenitude [sic], recreating the endless desire to return to 'lost origins', to be one again with the mother, to go back to the beginning.[...] And yet, this 'return to the beginning' is like the imaginary in Lacan – it can neither be fulfilled nor required, and hence is the beginning of the symbolic, of representation, the infinitely renewable source of desire, memory, myth, search, discovery – in short, the reservoir of our cinematic narratives.²⁹

Edward Said suggests that the writing of history, especially the history of the other, entails a similar process of home-searching. Referencing Gaston Bachelard's concept of a poetics of space, Said talks about the desirability of the other in both spatial and temporal terms:

[S]pace acquires emotional and even rational sense by a kind of poetic process, whereby the vacant or anonymous reaches of distance are

converted into meaning for us here. The same process occurs when we deal with time. Much of what we associate with or even know about such periods as “long ago” or “the beginning” or “at the end of time” is poetic – made up. For a historian of Middle Kingdom Egypt, “long ago” will have a very clear sort of meaning, but even this meaning does not totally dissipate the imaginative, quasi-fictional quality one senses lurking in a time very different and distant from our own. For there is no doubt that imaginative geography and history help the mind to intensify its own sense of itself by dramatizing the distance and difference between what is close to it and what is far away.³⁰

The allusion to Bachelard is that past and distance become things we can inhabit, a return to the home. For all the immediate phenomenology of home as something instinctively perceived, then, we also define home as that which we have not yet become comfortable in but of which we are desirous.

...On the Child as Savage, the Savage as Child

When not viewing the New World as a place of ancestry it is equally common to see its people as in some way immature, a notion that the terms ‘developed’ and ‘underdeveloped’ tend to underline. The attachment of these adjectives to concepts like ‘world’ – as in ‘the underdeveloped world’ – is only one among many confluences of childhood with otherness and savagery. There is a whole vocabulary of such equations, built, it could be argued, on the anthropological profiling of non-western peoples. To take an (almost) random example, the following passage from a lecture by Jean-François Lyotard illustrates the trait. He is speaking on the nature of subjectivity in adults and children:

But endowed with the means of knowing and making known, of doing and getting done, having interiorized the interests and values of civilization, the adult can pretend to full humanity in his or her turn, and to the effective realization of mind as consciousness, knowledge and will. That it always remains for the adult to free himself or herself from the obscure savageness of childhood by bringing about its promise –that is precisely the condition of humankind.³¹

Just prior to this Lyotard talks about the child’s position as ‘hostage of the adult community’ and its ‘lack of humanity’. He is talking here about human development but it is difficult not to read into these terms the language of civilisation/barbarism

that was built on the New World encounter and subsequent colonialism. Therefore, as readers, we are drawn to another comparison (albeit unintentional) between colonial and infant subjectivity, the latter asserted again in psychoanalytic speech, Lyotard's language and ideas here being not far removed from those of Lacan on the entry of the infant into the Symbolic order through the mastery of language.

In the arts there has long been a tendency to associate childhood with savagery. To take four examples from film adaptations of novels, Peter Brook's *Lord of the Flies* (1963), François Truffaut's *L'enfant sauvage* (1969), Hugh Hudson's *Greystoke* (1984), Kinji Fukasaku's *Batoru rowaiaru* (2000) all explore in varying ways the effects of a child or group of children left to fend for themselves in the wild. If such treatments can tend to seem little more than controlled experiments, it is perhaps worth noting the extent to which the development of the child forms the basis of the psychoanalytic theory so often used in turn to "explain" the postcolonial situation.

One problem with mapping psychoanalytic theory, at least in its Freudian and Lacanian guises, onto the colonial subject and onto any particular postcolonial project resides in what might be termed the *metaphorics of subjectivity*. Subjectivity, for Freud and Lacan, is something forged in childhood and centres itself within the roles of infant, mother and father. As the subject is most often examined from the point of view of the child's development, there is a tendency to conflate child and subject. We can see how this becomes problematic when such a notion of subjectivity is transferred to the colonial subject, for it renders that subject in a permanent position of childhood to the parental role of the coloniser, whose lack and desire, if we are to follow the metaphor of this relationship further, is what creates both colonial subject and colonial subjectivity. Now while this is a situation which can be read in the position of Frantz Fanon, Edward Said and others taking a clearly oppositional view to colonialism, it also epitomises the position criticised by Gayatri Spivak and others in that it places agency in the hands of the coloniser and, by equating colonised subjectivity with infancy, disallows any form of equality that might allow agency on the part of the colonised.

The former position is one that is often seen in the colonial encounter, that moment that precedes colonialism proper but which is instrumental in providing evidence crucial to a justification of colonialism. Saer's novel takes place at the point of that encounter and implicitly suggests, through its position as a post facto work, the

events which are underway even at the time of the narrative's closure and which are to find their fullest and bloodiest expression in the years immediately following. Saer's narrator, assuming his role as chronicler of this encounter (one of many roles he undertakes within the narrative), is often "guilty" of emphasising the childlike nature of the natives.

...On Your Mother Too: Youth as Newness in Postcolonialism

However, for many artists and thinkers of countries struggling with the challenges of the postcolonial situation in whatever guise, the conflation with the experience of their community and a sense of youthfulness is a positive one. Here the metaphors of emerging generations overthrowing the tired regimes of the old (colonial) order serve as expressive markers of the ways that newly liberated societies learn to cope with the "burden" of independence. Of the numerous approaches to this in the arts we might consider just a few: Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, in which the protagonists grow up alongside the newly independent India; the oedipal battles of many of Gabriel García Márquez's works, especially the labyrinthine power struggles that characterise the history of modern Latin America; the poetry of Derek Walcott, dealing as it does with the "bounty" and the burden of the English language, the mix of the various languages left behind in the polyglot Caribbean, and the task (Adam's own, as Walcott often reminds us) of naming; and, most recently, the so-called "new wave" of Mexican cinema which includes such symbolism-laden films as Alejandro González Iñárritu's *Amores Perros* (2000) and Alfonso Cuarón's *Y tu mamá también* (2001). Regarding the latter, Cuarón has spoken of wanting to ally his tale of boys coming of age with that of "adolescent" Mexico becoming an adult country. For Cuarón this is a deeply political film, a point he underlines through the names of his protagonists: Ana Cortés, Tenoch Iturbide and Julio Zapata.³² This latter technique also highlights the telescoping of history into a dialogic confrontation in a manner similar to that undertaken by Borges, García Márquez and Ribeiro. Furthermore, Cuarón, like Carpentier, expresses the desire to use local detail but make universal art from it.

...On The Conquest of the Mind: postcolonialism and psychoanalysis

A less controversial link between postcolonial and psychoanalytic theory than that which equates coloniality with infantile savagery is that of the *practical* rather than theoretical processes involved in both concerns, for example the practice of psychoanalysis as a means to free the analysand from present neurosis/psychosis by remembering and talking through past traumas. Here childhood refers only to the past rather than to a helpless state (although the two are still often conflated) and therefore the metaphorical transfer of childhood to colonised subject refers to the colonised past rather than the helplessness of the colonised. As Leela Gandhi writes:

If *postcoloniality* can be described as a condition troubled by the consequences of a self-willed historical amnesia, then the theoretical value of *postcolonialism* inheres, in part, in its ability to elaborate the forgotten memories of this condition. In other words, the colonial aftermath calls for an ameliorative and therapeutic theory which is responsive to the task of remembering and recalling the colonial past.³³

If there is a danger here, as I suspect there is, of blurring the distinctions between the individual and the collective, it might prove more profitable to think of this power play as taking place between groups of people all of whom carry within them elements of split subjectivity, all of whom enact roles contingent on their ability to engage with those splits. If we then find that, through economic, political and ideological domination, one group finds itself in a rather better position to engage with and act upon the impulses that split implants in them, we might find a possible way to map such psychoanalysis onto both the colonial and postcolonial situations.

One way of doing this might be to look at Lacan's notions of the Imaginary and Symbolic orders. To do so we need to move away from the association - mentioned above - of the Imaginary with the infantile. Though Lacan develops his concept of the Imaginary through an analysis of the Mirror Stage in child development, he makes it clear throughout his work that the Imaginary is a permanent state, not one that is left behind with the child's entry into selfhood and the Symbolic order through language acquisition. The Imaginary represents a constant threat of reversion, a point that highlights the crucial aspect of value judgements in Lacanian psychoanalysis. Put very simply, for Lacan the Symbolic order is something to be

aspired to and the Imaginary something to be despised. This is because Lacan has developed his concepts with the analytic session in mind. Like Freud encouraging his patients to annul the repressed fantasies of their past and become functioning subjects of the present, Lacan's goal is to free the analysand from an obsession with the Imaginary and accept the rational functionality of the Symbolic. This rational aspect is important; though Lacan speaks of the Imaginary as an order (*ordre*) it might ultimately be said to represent a site of "disorder", a word that features frequently in his work. The battle between the rational and the irrational is one that is fought throughout Lacan's texts both thematically and structurally. Before setting up the Real as his third order (that which is beyond the Symbolic, that which cannot be imagined or explained by language) Lacan situated it in opposition to the Imaginary through a similar process of rationalisation by using Hegel's notion that 'everything which is real is rational (and vice versa)'.³⁴

That such an emphasis be placed on rationalisation in Lacan's work is perhaps not surprising. The psychoanalytic project set in motion by Freud demanded the rigour of a systemisation, topography and logical-analytic method in order to achieve its aim as a science. What is interesting, however, in the context of the themes under discussion here, is how this particular process of explaining the inexplicable (the inexplicable before Freud, before Lacan) might be mapped onto the process of explaining the inexplicable other in the colonial encounter. As practitioner and theorist, Freud represents the mighty trio of Columbus, Cortés and Las Casas, discoverer, conquistador and moral chronicler of the unconscious. Lacan, a later settler, follows suit in chronicling this "new world". This is perhaps stretching analogy too far but it is probably worth bearing in mind, when confronting the hypnotically dazzling brilliance of Lacanian theory, what dangers it might conceal. Is there, we might well ask, a correlation between the desire to be the interpreter of the uncanny and the restorer of reason with the desire to colonise the physical subject? Rephrasing Spivak with psychoanalysis *as a practice* in mind, we might also ask: can the analysand speak? And can the subaltern be any other than the analysed?

...On the impossibility of communication

In returning to *The Witness*, I want to look at the ways the child/parent relationships suggested by the novel (the importance of *el entenado*) work alongside

those of the ethnographic elements of the text (the importance of *the witness*). Saer's orphaned, uneducated and inexperienced narrator finds a very real and much-needed nurturing within quite distinct communities. If parents can be said to introduce the infant to the Symbolic order, this role is one very much taken on by the these communities in the novel. The whores and sailors of the Spanish docks for whom he runs errands provide his first initiation into the Symbolic. This is subsequently overturned by his sojourn with the Indians who, for all the childlike attributes he grants them, become surrogate parents to him. The Spanish priest who takes him in on his return to Spain is likewise a parent figure. As with his real parents he is separated from each in turn in a constantly renewing orphanhood. As he moves in and out of the realm of each community that which has preceded is always like a half remembered dream, a state to which he ultimately designates his entire life up to the moment of writing, by which point it is he who has become a surrogate parent.

One of Saer's major themes within the book is the role of memory and fantasy and the mind's construction of reality. These and other themes are woven into the preoccupation the narrator experiences with the ambiguity of language. His incomprehensibility of and simultaneous curiosity about both his hosts' language and their reasons for treating him the way they do bear important similarity's to the Lacanian notion of the confusion of the infant, as summarised by Bruce Fink:

The child latches onto what is indecipherable in what its parent says. It is interested in that certain something which lies in the interval between the parent's words. The child tries to read between the lines to decipher *why*: She says X, but why is she telling me that? What does she want from me? [...Children] are concerned to secure (themselves) a place, to try to be the object of their parents' desire – to occupy that between-the-lines "space" where desire shows its face, words being used in the attempt to express desire, and yet ever failing to do so adequately.³⁵

This failure to communicate desire is illustrated in *The Witness* by the constant inability of the narrator to understand what is required of him during his stay with the Indians. However, there is also the slippery nature of language itself to contend with. The Indians, who from the start refer to him as *def-ghi*, use a language whose signifiers, to the narrator's mind and in translation into his language, bear numerous and contradictory meanings, a kind of Derridean *différance* which does not even have to be pursued along a chain of signifiers to realise the essential ungraspability of meaning already inherent in language items. However, in a kind of reversal of the

Derridean dissolution of meaning, here meaning can be pursued by attempting to find what the numerous meanings of a term have in common. The “meaning” of the term *def-ghi* is illustrative here and, as arguably *the* crucial point of the text, it is worth quoting at length:

It was years before I could sift out some meaning from their opaque language and glimpse (for I could never be sure I was right) the exact meaning of those two shrill, swift syllables which they used to designate my person. Like all the other syllables that made up the Indians' language those two sounds, *def-ghi*, had many disparate and contradictory meanings. *Def-ghi* was what they called people absent or asleep, or people who were tactless, or visitors who overstayed their welcome; and *def-ghi* was the name they gave to a bird with a black beak and green and yellow plumage that they would sometimes tame and which made them laugh because it repeated certain words they taught it, as if it really had the gift of speech. *Def-ghi* was also the name given to certain objects the Indians put in the place of someone who was absent and which they used to represent the person at meetings [...]. *Def-ghi* was what they used for things reflected in water; something that lasted a long time was *def-ghi* [...]. And *def-ghi* was a man who went on ahead of an expedition and came back to report what he had seen, or a man who went to spy on the enemy and brought back details of their movements, or a man who in certain meetings would sometimes start to make a speech out loud as if talking to himself. All these things and many others were *def-ghi*. After long reflection I decided that the reason they had given me that name was because they wanted me to share some common essence with everything else that was *def-ghi*. They wanted me to reflect like water the image they gave of themselves, to repeat their gestures and words, to represent them in their absence, and, when they returned me to my fellow creatures, they wanted me to be like the spy or scout who witnesses something that the rest of the tribe has not yet seen and retraces his steps and recounts it, meticulously. Threatened by everything that controls us from the dark and keeps us outside in the open until the day we are plunged by one sudden capricious gesture back into the indistinct, the Indians wanted there to be a witness to and a survivor of their passage through this material mirage; they wanted someone to tell their story to the world. (143-144)

Not only does the process of understanding take years, it also takes the influence of another father figure, the priest who teaches him Latin, Greek and Hebrew (a further attempt to grasp meaning in the elusive multiplicity of language) and, most crucially for his eventual task, reading and writing. On first encounter with Father Quesada's teachings however, the narrator is unclear as to their purpose, echoing the Lacanian confusion of the infant once again:

Teaching me [these subjects] was the least of it: what he found hard was convincing me of their value and importance. For him they were tools which could be used to grasp and manipulate the incandescent world of the senses; for me, fascinated as I was by the contingent, it was like going out to hunt a beast that had already devoured me. (105)

The realisation of the importance of reading and writing, when it does eventually come, is central to the very narrative in which we read his words. Without these skills, 'the one act which might justify my life would have been beyond my reach' (105). In these explorations of attempts by the protagonist to find meaning in the Indians' and Father Quesada's languages we can detect the 'Other's desire' of which Lacan spoke.

...On Justifying One's Use of the World: The Anthropologist as Witness

This observation by Saer's chronicler, that the 'one act which might justify [his] life' is a memorial (and his philosophical musings on the nature of memory, veracity and dream are clearly here subsumed by the urgency of his desire, or duty, to testify) returns us to the observation made at the start of these reflections and will now hopefully help bring them to a close. That observation was that the world exists for the individual – that is, for selfish reasons – and not vice versa. That the reverse can be true is illustrated in the preceding paragraphs but what is not immediately clear is the potential synthesis of both lines of argument.

That synthesis is the consideration that the imperative of witnessing (and the reasons *why* it is imperative will derive their foundation from each individual's own agenda) may come about only as a result of the practical use of that which is witnessed. Or, to put it another way, only after one's use of the world can one see the necessity in guarding and maintaining the world's usefulness for others. If there occurs in anthropology what Paul Rabinow, following Paul Ricoeur, calls 'the comprehension of the self by the detour of the other', and if, in writing, what Saer calls 'el pasado como rodeo' (the past as evasion, diversion), it need not follow that the only result will be the selfishness and apathy.³⁶ Perhaps the self, on finding itself, is in a better position to serve the world.

The details of the world are an important ingredient in this, a fact emphasised in Keith Basso's ethnography. Basso is interested in how sense of place is connected with education. The landscape of the Apache people with whom he converses is a tool

used in the teaching of moral tales to the community's children. Social mores are then established through allusions to the landscape rather than castigation. An innovative use of place is thus established, one that emphasises how the physical world takes a part in focusing the mind:

You can no more imagine an Apache sense of place without some notion of Old Man Owl, smooth minds, and what occurred at Grasshoppers Piled Up Across than you can fancy a native New Yorker's sense of place without comparable ideas of Woody Allen, subway rush hours, and strolling in central Park on the first warm day of spring. Everything, or almost everything, hinges on the particulars, and because it does, ethnography is essential.³⁷

Writing from a British perspective and having been to neither of these places I find, though both scenes are in one sense foreign to me, I am far more knowledgeable about the second foreignness. That Basso can then familiarise me with the first through his work and convince me why it might be important for me to know as much about Old Man Owl as I do about Woody Allen is a vindication of his defence of ethnography.

Basso points out how, in the case of the Western Apache people, this epistemology is itself being colonised by imported knowledge via modern schooling. While the Apache are committed to contemporary methods of education – and are therefore not set up as in any way opposed to the principal of universal rather than local education – there is a concern (one that Basso shares with the older members of the community with whom he is engaged in dialogue) about the disappearance of an alternative and complimentary way of learning and seeing the world. Though Basso claims to be more concerned with espousing the transcultural possibilities suggested by a focus on a sense of place than with describing a particular people, it is clear that his work is acting as the witness of a dying cultural practice. Through his anthropology the possibility of its rebirth can at least exist.

Conclusion: Towards a theorising of loss?

We can see from the example of the mingling of psychoanalytic and postcolonial discourse that there are useful illustrations to be had from the merging of the personal and the political (a project, of course, which also grounded much feminist theory). A

bringing together of these spaces is also, I would suggest, necessary for the grounding of a theorising of loss. At the same time, such a theorising would do well to keep in mind the power of texts (musical, visual, scriptural) in witnessing loss. In the words of Roland Barthes, 'literature [...] cannot be abandoned, so long as the evils subsist to which it bears witness'.³⁸

What may seem difficult to keep a clear head about is how one justifies not only the study of loss but one's right to pursue such a study. Motives in such emotional cases are always questionable. It could be argued for instance that Saer, in suggesting the necessity of witnessing, is justifying the act that makes witnessing possible – in this case colonialism, in others anthropology. However, in his case, the crucial justification seems to be the agency granted the indigenous population of his "new world". Furthermore, there is little sense of victimhood on the part of these others. Rather, they enjoy a sense of victory over neighbouring tribes and foreign invaders alike. Given that fact, they are nonetheless acutely aware of the precariousness of their existence, a precariousness that we are told is something innate to the culture but which we, as readers acquainted with history, cannot fail to read as some kind of awareness of the apocalypse to come at the hands of the colonisers. Saer can be accused of letting the colonisers off the hook by incorporating their arrival and destruction of the Indians into the Indians' own fatalistic worldview. Yet rather than conflating colonisation with divine right, Saer attempts the impossible task of looking at the encounter of the two worlds through the eyes of the other. Knowing the difficulties involved he presents this view as a translation, the viewpoint of another, more familiar to history, the chronicle of the one who went and brought back their story, the witness.

This proto-Lévi Strauss had none of the soul-searching of the modern anthropologists detailed in Geertz's study; the narrative would lose much of its persuasive power were this to be so. Yet a change does come over him. Having gone there under the false consciousness of colonisation – or, at the very least, adventure - he cannot shake for many years the ideas of savagery with which he has been inculcated and of whose veracity he seems to find more than ample proof. Later he changes his views and comes to a mature reflection of what he has witnessed. Through him, the necessity of his having witnessed becomes apparent to the modern reader. The text has reclaimed the other side of the story, or rather, *an* other side to the story, the side that gives voice to the voiceless. It is not a reclamation in which the

subaltern truly speaks for, as we know, we are reading a fictionalised account of a New World meeting written by a modern expatriate Argentinean writer using the narrative device of a sixteenth century explorer's memoir, an example in many ways of what Geertz calls 'the un-get-roundable fact that all ethnographical descriptions are homemade, that they are the describer's descriptions, not those of the described.'³⁹ But it is a reclamation of human dignity, fictitious though the tale might be, that might otherwise have gone untold. It is the story of a loss. Who is thus qualified to tell that story? The answer, the novel seems to tell us, must be whoever is willing and able to do so because to not do so is to forget and to forget is not to learn.

Notes

¹ Roland Barthes, *The Rustle of Language*, trans. Richard Howard (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989), 362-3.

² Michel de Certeau, *The Writing Of History*, trans. Tom Conley (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 215.

³ De Certeau, *History*, 227.

⁴ Catherine Belsey, *Poststructuralism: A Very Short Introduction* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 76-77.

⁵ Clifford Geertz, *Works and Lives: The Anthropologist as Author* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), 48.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 130.

⁷ Borges, *Labyrinths: Selected Stories and Other Writings*, ed. by Donald A. Yates & James E. Irby (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970), 69.

⁸ Thomas H. Ogden, 'Borges and the Art of Mourning', in *Psychoanalytic Dialogues*, 10/1 (2000), 76.

⁹ Gabriel Riera, 'La ficción de Saer: ¿una "antropología especulativa"? (Una lectura de *El entenado*)', in *MLN*, III/2 (March 1996), 374.

¹⁰ Jorge Luis Borges, *Doctor Brodie's Report*, trans. Norman Thomas di Giovanni & the author (London: Penguin, 1976), 9; Walter Benjamin, 'The Task of the Translator: An Introduction to the Translation of Baudelaire's *Tableaux parisiens*', in *Illuminations*, ed. by Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zorn (London: Pimlico, 1999 [1970]), 72.

¹¹ Jacques Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (London & New York: Routledge, 1989, 72 (the Greek is 'an everlasting possession', from Thucydides (see fn on p. 120)) .

¹² Alejo Carpentier, *The Harp and the Shadow*, trans. Thomas and Carol Christensen (London: Andre Deutsch, 1990), 86-87.

¹³ Chinua Achebe, 'The African Writer and the English Language', in *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader*, 428-434; Thiong'o, Ngũgĩ, 'The Language of African Literature', in *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader*, 435-455; On language and identity, see also Amin Maalouf, *On Identity*, trans. Barbara Bray (London: Harvill, 2000).

¹⁴ James Baldwin quoted in Chinua Achebe, 'The African Writer and the English Language', in *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader*, 434.

¹⁵ James Irby, Introduction to Jorge Luis Borges, *Labyrinths*, 23.

¹⁶ Timothy Brennan, Introduction to Alejo Carpentier, *Music in Cuba*, ed. by Timothy Brennan, trans. Alan West-Durán (Minneapolis & London: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 39.

¹⁷ Quoted in *ibid.*, 42.

- ¹⁸ Iraset Páez Urdaneta, Introduction to Jorge Luis Borges, *Ficciones – El Aleph – El Informe de Brodie* (Caracas: Biblioteca Ayacucho, 1986), xxi. My translation.
- ¹⁹ Anne McClintock, 'The Angel of Progress: Pitfalls of the Term "Post-Colonialism"', in *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader*, 294.
- ²⁰ Alejo Carpentier, *The Lost Steps*, trans. Harriet de Onís (London: Victor Gollancz, 1956), 53.
- ²¹ Quoted in the introduction to Carpentier, *The Harp and the Shadow*, xi.
- ²² João Cezar de Castro Rocha, 'Brazil as exposition', *CiberLetras*, 8 (Jan. 2003). <http://www.lehman.cuny.edu/ciberletras> (2 Dec. 2003).
- ²³ Ibid. See also Oswald de Andrade, 'Manifesto antropófago', *A utopia antropofágica*, (São Paulo: Editora O Globo, 1990). English trans. in *Latin American Review* 14/27 (1991), 35-47.
- ²⁴ Quoted in de Castro Rocha, *ibid.*
- ²⁵ Catherine Belsey, *Poststructuralism*, 91, 92.
- ²⁶ Juan José Saer, *The Witness*, trans. Margaret Jull Costa (London: Serpent's Tail, 1990), 138. Henceforth all page references to this novel will appear in parentheses in the text.
- ²⁷ Paul Gilroy, 'A Dialogue with bell hooks', in *Small Acts: Thoughts on the Politics of Black Cultures* (London: Serpent's Tail, 1993), 211.
- ²⁸ Ibid.
- ²⁹ Stuart Hall, 'Cultural Identity and Diaspora', in *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader* ed. by Patrick Williams & Laura Chrisman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 402.
- ³⁰ Edward Said, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1995), 55.
- ³¹ Jean-François Lyotard, 'Introduction: About the Human', in *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington & Rachel Bowlby (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), 4.
- ³² An illuminating interview with Cuarón regarding the political symbolism of the film can be found on the DVD of *Y tu mamá también* (Icon Home Entertainment D093778, 2002). The protagonist's names derive from the following: Hernan Cortés (1485-1547), Spanish conquistador; Tenocha, the Aztec name for themselves (also Tenochtitlan, the great Aztec city state); Agustín de Iturbide (1783-1824), emperor of Mexico 1822-23; Emiliano Zapata (1879-1919), Mexican rebel leader.
- ³³ Leela Gandhi, *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998), 7-8.
- ³⁴ Quoted in Dylan Evans, *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis* (London & New York: Brunner-Routledge, 2001), 159.
- ³⁵ Bruce Fink, *The Lacanian Subject: Between Language and Jouissance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 54.
- ³⁶ Rabinow and Ricoeur quoted in Geertz, 92; Saer quoted in Riera, 371.
- ³⁷ Keith H. Basso, 'Wisdom Sits in Places: Notes on a Western Apache Landscape', in *Senses of Place*, ed. by Steven Feld & Keith H. Basso (Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, 1996), 84.
- ³⁸ Barthes, *Rustle*, 364.
- ³⁹ Geertz, 144-5.

Bibliography

- Achebe, Chinua, 'The African Writer and the English Language', in *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader*, ed. by Patrick Williams & Laura Chrisman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 428-434.
- Avelar, Idelber, 'Restitution and Mourning in Latin American Postdictatorship', *Boundary 2* 26/3 (1999), 201-224. Available online at <http://muse.jhu.edu/demo/boundary/v026/26.3avelar.html> (25 Oct 2003).
- Barthes, Roland, 'Deliberation', in *The Rustle of Language*, trans. Richard Howard (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989), 359-373.
- Basso, Keith H., 'Wisdom Sits in Places: Notes on a Western Apache Landscape', in *Senses of Place*, ed. by Steven Feld & Keith H. Basso (Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, 1996), 54-90.
- Belsey, Catherine, *Poststructuralism: A very Short Introduction* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).
- Benjamin, Walter, 'The Task of the Translator: An Introduction to the Translation of Baudelaire's *Tableaux parisiens*', in *Illuminations*, ed. by Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zorn (London: Pimlico, 1999 [1970]), 70-82.
- Borges, Jorge Luis, *Labyrinths: Selected Stories and Other Writings*, ed. by Donald A. Yates & James E. Irby (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970).
- Borges, Jorge Luis, *Doctor Brodie's Report*, trans. Norman Thomas di Giovanni & the author (London: Penguin, 1976).
- Borges, Jorge Luis, *Ficciones – El Aleph – El Informe de Brodie* (Caracas: Biblioteca Ayacucho, 1986).
- Bowie, Malcolm, *Lacan* (London: Fontana, 1991).
- Carpentier, Alejo, *Music in Cuba*, ed. by Timothy Brennan, trans. Alan West-Durán (Minneapolis & London: University of Minnesota Press, 2001).
- Carpentier, Alejo, *The Lost Steps*, trans. Harriet de Onís (London: Victor Gollancz, 1956) [originally pub. in Spanish as *Los Pasos Perdidos* (Mexico: E.D.I.A.P.S.A., 1953)].
- Carpentier, Alejo, *The Harp and the Shadow*, trans. Thomas and Carol Christensen (London: Andre Deutsch, 1990).
- Casey, Edward S., 'How to Get from Space to Place in a Fairly Short Stretch of Time: Phenomenological Prolegomena', in *Senses of Place*, ed. by Steven Feld & Keith H. Basso (Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, 1996), 13-52.
- de Castro Rocha, João Cezar, 'Brazil as exposition', *CiberLetras*, 8 (Jan. 2003). <http://www.lehman.cuny.edu/ciberletras> (2 Dec. 2003).
- de Certeau, Michel, *The Writing Of History*, trans. Tom Conley (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988).
- de Certeau, Michel, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984).
- de Certeau, Michel, 'Montaigne's "Of Cannibals": the Savage "I"', in *Heterologies: Discourse on the Other*, trans. Brian Massumi (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986), 67-79.

- Evans, Dylan, *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis* (London & New York: Brunner-Routledge, 2001 [1996]).
- Fanon, Frantz, 'On National Culture', in *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader* ed. by Patrick Williams & Laura Chrisman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 36-52.
- Feld, Steven & Basso, Keith H. (eds.), *Senses of Place*, (Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, 1996).
- Fink, Bruce, *The Lacanian Subject: Between Language and Jouissance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995).
- Franco, Jean, 'Beyond Ethnocentrism: Gender, Power and the Third-World Intelligentsia', in *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader*, ed. by Patrick Williams & Laura Chrisman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 359-369.
- Freud, Sigmund, *The Freud Reader*, ed. by Peter Gay (London: Vintage, 1995).
- Gandhi, Leela, *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998).
- Geertz, Clifford, *Works and Lives: The Anthropologist as Author* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988).
- Gilroy, Paul, 'A Dialogue with bell hooks', in *Small Acts: Thoughts on the Politics of Black Cultures* (London: Serpent's Tail, 1993), 208-236.
- Goldberg, David Theo & Quayson, Ato (eds.), *Relocating Postcolonialism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002).
- Hall, Stuart, 'Cultural Identity and Diaspora', in *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader* ed. by Patrick Williams & Laura Chrisman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 392-403.
- Julien, Isaac & Mercer, Kobena, 'De Margin and De Centre', in *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, ed. by David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen, 450-464.
- Lacan, Jacques, *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (London & New York: Routledge, 1989 [1977]).
- Lacan, Jacques, *The Language of the Self: The Function of Language in Psychoanalysis*, trans. Anthony Wilden (Baltimore & London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1982 [1968]).
- Loomba, Ania, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* (London & New York: Routledge, 1998).
- Liotard, Jean-François, 'Introduction: About the Human', in *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington & Rachel Bowlby (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), 1-7.
- Maalouf, Amin, *On Identity*, trans. Barbara Bray (London: Harvill, 2000).
- McClintock, Anne, 'The Angel of Progress: Pitfalls of the Term "Post-Colonialism"', in *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader*, ed. by Patrick Williams & Laura Chrisman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 291-304.
- Merleau-Ponty, Maurice, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (London & New York: Routledge, 2003 [1962]).
- Ogden, Thomas H., 'Borges and the Art of Mourning', in *Psychoanalytic Dialogues*, 10/1 (2000), 65-88.

Riera, Gabriel, 'La ficción de Saer: ¿una "antropología especulativa"? (Una lectura de *El entenado*)', in *MLN*, III/2 (March 1996), 368-390.

Saer, Juan José, *The Witness*, trans. Margaret Jull Costa (London: Serpent's Tail, 1990) [originally pub. in Spanish as *El Entenado* (Buenos Aires: Folios, 1983)].

Said, Edward, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1995 [1978]).

Said, Edward, 'In Conversation with Neeladri Bhattacharya, Suvir Kaul, and Ania Loomba', in *Relocating Postcolonialism*, ed. by David Goldberg, & Ato Quayson, Ato (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 1-14.

Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', in *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader* ed. by Patrick Williams & Laura Chrisman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 66-111.

Stern, Mirta E., 'El espacio intertextual en la narrativa de Juan José Saer: instancia productiva referente, y campo de teorización de la escritura', in *Revista Iberoamericana*, 49/125 (1983), 965-981.

Thiong'o, Ngũgĩ, 'The Language of African Literature', in *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader* ed. by Patrick Williams & Laura Chrisman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 435-455.

Williams, Patrick & Chrisman, Laura (eds.), *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).