XII. United States of America

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1. Introduction

Reluctant as one might be to rehearse in yet another form the popular myth of American exceptionalism, it still seems appropriate, maybe necessary, to begin this essay by remarking that in some respects the USA has historically held, and still holds today, a unique position among the nations that came out of the British Empire. This uniqueness is, for one thing, a mere matter of the gargantuan proportions and potency of this ever-growing immigrant country, as well as of the great diversity of its now just over 300 million people. But it also lies in the USA's highly ambiguous role in world history, in particular the history of colonialism. The earliest territory to break away from English imperial rule, the USA became the world's first modern democracy, providing a positive model of decolonisation, nation-building and political reform for numerous countries, many of them represented in this collection. Yet, despite its self-proclaimed commitment to the principles of liberty, equality and tolerance, the new American nation-state, from the moment of its inception, also engaged, and arguably still is engaging, in various forms of colonisation, both internally as well as externally. The USA continued, even exacerbated, the oppressive policies of Britain towards North America's indigenous population and maintained the institution of slavery for almost another hundred years, thereby permanently incorporating "many of the defining features of European colonial networks – including the colour-line – into its economic and cultural life" (Singh and Schmidt 2000, 5). Right after its consolidation, the country also turned into an aggressively expanding imperial power which began to conquer the North American hemisphere during the mid-1800s. And today the USA can be said to exert (quasi-)colonial rule over several regions of the globe through different degrees of cultural, political and, most importantly, economic domination backed up by an unmatched military apparatus. Indeed, as the world's largest economy, and the only remaining super-power after the fall of the Soviet Union, it has in some respects assumed, and probably eclipsed, the historical role of the British Empire at the zenith of its might.

Just as the USA itself (as well as the colonies which preceded the American nation-state) is a giant but still expanding 'multiverse' of ethnicities and cultures, interacting and often violently struggling with each other, the body of anglophone writings we customary refer to when using the term 'American literature' is characterised by a breath-taking heterogeneity of radically different literary traditions.[1] As a result of the country's deeply para-

[1] In keeping with what is still common usage, I will use 'American Literature' as a convenient short-hand for all anglophone writings produced on present-day US territory, even though I am aware of the growing controversies about the ideological implications of doing so. To employ the term in such a nation-centred sense is, of course, as much of a reductionism as the habitual identification of America with the USA when in fact, as Djelal Kadir has pungently remarked in a recent essay, "America is a bicontinental hemisphere between the Atlantic and the Pacific Ocean that extends on a north-south-axis from the Arctic to Antarctica" (Kadir 2003, 11). Kadir is only one voice among a growing number of critics who have pointed out the nationalist agenda and/or imperialistic power-interests informing what they denounce as a rhetorical malpractice, and demanded a terminological reform reflecting a

doxical history, these diverse traditions which have come out of the present-day US-territory are defined by multiple tensions and conflicts between each other, but also within themselves. Each one of them is a contested, ever-shifting terrain on which the discourses of colonialism, racism, and imperialistic monoculturalism have constantly overlapped, crisscrossed and clashed with the discourses of anticolonial resistance, democratic egalitarianism and cultural pluralism. What makes American literature in English more or less unique, then, is its arguably unparalleled multiplicity of incommensurably divergent voices productively engaging in cross-cultural dialogue and dispute, but also aggressively attempting to subdue or silence each other. Maybe not even in contemporary multicultural Britain itself has the English language proliferated into such an amazingly varied polyphony.

The acknowledgement, appreciation and systematic academic study of this polyphonic nature of American literature is, of course, a fairly recent achievement, and was only slowly won in the so-called 'culture wars' during the past few decades, which brought with them massive canon-revisions; a process that can easily be traced by comparing the last three editions of the *Norton* or *Heath Anthology of American Literature*. The corresponding increase in the mass and diversity of literary texts read and taught at American universities has gradually eroded the traditional notion of its ideal unity, and now has reached a point at which, in the view of many scholars, the definitonal centre 'American literature' itself will not hold anymore. This centrifugal tendency is reflected and simultaneously reinforced by far-reaching theoretical re-orientations in American (literary) studies over the last few years, which have now 'officially' been given the label of a 'transnational turn'.[2] It seems worthwhile to dwell briefly on what is often seen as a watershed in the history of American (literary) studies, and to elucidate its major implications, since the same theoretical development that is presently transforming the discipline also informs this textbook.

Although the word 'transnationalism' has already gone the way of all critical jargon and become so fraught with different meanings that it is virtually impossible to reconcile them in one overall definition, the main intellectual trend associated with the term can still be described as a gradual shift of the established viewpoint on American literature. The direction of this shift has been away from a primarily intrinsic perspective towards a more or less extrinsic one. Traditional American (literary) studies assumed a primarily intrinsic perspective, in the sense that it tended to approach its subject from the inside out: i.e. by looking at individual texts, already presupposing the existence of a self-contained, unitary body of national literature in which it was to be situated. This body was

'hemispherical awareness'. Cf., for instance, the 1991 essay "The End of 'American' Literature: Toward a Multicultural Practice" by Jay, or the collection *Reinventing the Americas* (1986) by Chevigny and Laguardia.

[2] I am referring here to the title of the 2004 keynote address by the president of the American Studies Association, Shelley Fisher Fishkin, which is reprinted in the *American Quarterly* as "Crossroads of Cultures: The Transnational Turn in American Studies." The programmatic turn away from a nationalist and/or nation-centred model of reading and teaching American literature has been one of the major trends in the discipline for more than five years now, and is a hallmark of the self-styled 'New Americanist'-movement. Publications related to this trend are far too numerous to be cited here. For the student looking for an introduction to 'transnational' studies, a good place to start is the 2003 Special Topic-issue of *PMLA* entitled "America: The Idea, the Literature." A short-list of important collections in the field would probably include Pease 2002, Rowe 2002, as well as Singh and Schmidt 2000. For significant contributions in German American Studies to 'transnational studies', see, for example, the two volumes by Frank 1999 and 2000, as well as Lenz and Ling 2000, and Riese 2000.

believed to be contradistinguished from other national literatures by certain qualities of 'literary Americanness' which in turn were seen as expressive of certain national characteristics. And although the increasing emphasis put on issues of race, class and gender since the 1980s led to an acknowledgement of an "intra-American cultural pluralism" (Messmer 2003, 52), it initially did not challenge nationality as the defining framework which dominated and ultimately contained all other levels of identity-formation reflected in literary texts.

Determined to shatter what one farsighted scholar more than ten years ago called "the most enduring of Americanists' illusions" – namely, the "notion that there is some cultural totality of American experience, whose origins could be traced and plotted" (Eakin 1991, 12) – scholars subscribing to the transnational paradigm share, by way of contrast, a more extrinsic perspective, in that they tend to approach the subject of American culture and literature from the outside in. That is to say, they seek to de-naturalise, or reveal the arbitrariness of the definitional boundaries circumscribing the traditional notion of one overarching American (literary) culture by restoring the many liminal voices which had either been forcibly (re-)integrated into the centre or completely suppressed by American (historiographical) nationalism. At the same time, these revisionist scholars have been eroding the linear historical narrative of an autonomous, self-contained and self-evolving national literature, thereby foregrounding the dependency of even the so-called classics of American literatures – those canonical Anglo-American authors who had traditionally been ascribed the most distinctive quality of literary Americanness – on a multiplicity of transnational and cross-cultural interrelationships.

What has emerged from these critical interrogations is a general understanding that the nation should no longer be seen as the basic unit of, or sole frame for, cultural and literary analysis. Instead of thinking about American culture and literature as a collective singular, we should, rather, conceive of an ever-shifting and tangled "web of contact zones" (Fisher Fishkin 2005, 21) between a plurality of different American cultures and literary traditions interacting not only with each other, but also with cultures and literary traditions outside the nation-state. In other words, the many literary traditions which have historically evolved on US territory should not be integrated into any totalising vision of a unified and externally autonomous whole, nor are these individual traditions, despite all their substantial differences, to be regarded as discrete, stable or unified entities. They should, rather, be seen as highly heterogeneous, creolised and therefore interdependent cultural formations which have constantly been re-defined through processes of transculturation inside as well as across national borders.

One the one hand, then, the comparativist and transcultural perspective on anglophone literatures which is encouraged by this volume, and the theoretical approach suggested by the editor, provide a very fitting framework for a critical, up-to-date discussion of American writings in English which tries to break out of the old nationalistic mould. To convert such a discussion into an alternative but at least remotely comprehensive and yet accessible survey of all the anglophone literary traditions in the USA seems, on the other hand, to be an overwhelming challenge, if not an outright impossibility. Because of their radical diversity and non-synchronous development, no single historical account of such limited scope as the textbook format demands could possibly do justice to the particularity of these numerous traditions and the different ways in which they, at very different points in time, employed the three discursive modes outlined in the introduction. In fact, any attempt to tell such a homogenising story of how American literature as an imaginary whole moved from a colonial to a more dialogical mode of transculturation would run the danger of imposing yet another 'master narrative' blotting out important distinctions and power-relations between the respective literatures.

Faced with the necessity of working in an exemplary fashion, I thus decided, for reasons of comparability, to focus mainly on Native American and African American writings in English. While these two traditions are different enough to give the reader a glimpse of America's fascinating literary diversity, they are, at the same time, in many respects similar enough to be inserted into a comparable narrative sequence. Grafted onto non-Western, oral cultures, both of these anglophone literatures came into being through the colonisation (if we use that term in a broader sense) of their people by the British, and developed within a historical matrix of ruthless subjugation, exploitation, and disenfranchisement on the part of the dominating Anglo-American culture which, in different forms and to different degrees, lasts until the present moment. As a consequence of this ongoing oppression and marginalisation of their respective people, African American and Native American writings have for the longest time been strongly concerned with creating modes of "ideological resistance" (Said 1994, 209) to the discourses of colonialism, first by protesting from within, and then by writing against or re-writing it. Only during the course of the 20th century, when the socio-political circumstances of their people slowly became (slightly) less oppressive, black authors, as well as writers of indigenous ancestry, have more frequently experimented with new discursive modes of transculturation (often involving a productive engagement with the precolonial traditions of their ancestors) which are based on less asymmetrical power relations. This historical sequence of dominant discursive modes seems to be one described by many other literary traditions across the globe which evolved among non-European ethnic groups living within, or in contact with, former British settler colonies. Through my admittedly restrictive choice, I thus hope to facilitate and encourage fruitful comparisons, not only between these two American literatures but also with some of the other anglophone literary traditions discussed in this collection.

As necessary or even productive as such restrictions might be, they also and inevitably create 'blind spots' of which the reader should be aware – especially when they are as extensive as in this case. My choice of examples means that the numerous other so-called American minority literatures must go completely unmentioned, something that might not be easily forgiven considering the richness of, say, Chicano literature or the Asian American literary tradition. And even though the first portion of the survey section is dedicated to the Anglo-American literature, it will have to be sharply focused on issues of (post-)coloniality or transculture, and, more specifically, on the ways in which this tradition interacted with Native American or African American (literary) cultures. Of course, it would simply be wrong to assume (and it is in no way implied) that such a focus brings into view the essence of this copious and complex literary tradition. Examining Puritan texts for their representation of Indians, or analysing postcolonial strategies of 'writing back' in texts of the American Renaissance, surely can shed some light on important aspects, but it falls woefully short of revealing the multi-faceted nature of these writings. To look at the history of Anglo-American literature through the lens of my argument will indeed mean having to overlook many of the most important movements and figures, especially as we move into the 20th century. Knowing full well that mine will probably be one of the first introductions to discuss American literature without even hinting at Realism and Imagism, or even mentioning renowned figures like Emily Dick-

inson, or the Nobel Prize winners Eugene O'Neill and John Steinbeck, I can only hope that the reader might in some ways profit from its unusual approach, and otherwise refer him or her to more traditional historical surveys.[3]

2. Historical and Political Contexts

When looking at the colonial history of the territory we now call the United States of America, it is difficult, but at the same time very important, for an adequate understanding of that period not to reduce it to a pre-history of the nation, or to read it as an anticipation of its future character.[4] Contrary to the nationalist teleology which still dominates popular perception, there was no 'high road' leading straight from Columbus' discovery of the American continent in 1492 (named after Amerigo Vespucci by the German cartographer Martin Waldseemüller in 1507), via the Pilgrim Fathers' arrival at Plymouth Rock in 1620, to the year 1776 when the thirteen English colonies declared their independence from the motherland, thereby forming the core of what would consequently develop into a nation-state reaching from the Atlantic to the Pacific coast. And it would be equally wrong to see the initially rather small British foothold in North America as the one centre from which we should define this territory's entire colonial history. It resembles, rather, a tangled network spun between different colonial centres and their regional sub-centres, which were all characterised by great cultural and linguistic diversity.

After Juan Ponce de León's 'discovery' of Florida in 1513, which marks the beginning of continuous European contact with North America, this network developed quickly and constantly changed in an extremely chaotic manner through the struggles between the five original major European colonial powers. Besides England, which actually joined the competition last, Spain, France, Portugal and Holland were the key players in the colonisation of America's northern hemisphere. After the first two centuries, however, the latter two had effectively been eliminated from the contest, which, at the beginning of the 18th century, left three consolidated colonial centres on the map of the present USA: while English rule was at that time still restricted to the colonies of the north-eastern Atlantic seaboard, the entire southwest of the Pacific coast (including most of what is now California, Texas and New Mexico) as well as Florida were part of the Spanish empire, and only gradually came into the possession of the USA in the decades following the American Revolution. At the beginning of the 18th century, France still claimed for

[3] Students are encouraged to complement their reading with one of the much more comprehensive 'general introductions' to American literature held by any library. Besides the multi-volume *Cambridge History of American Literature* (1994-), which has already become a standard work, I can only point out a few titles among the great number of single-volume introductory histories. Most prestigious and comprehensive is probably still *The Columbia Literary History of the United States* (1988), edited by Emory Elliot. Richard Gray's more recent *History of American Literature* (2004) has the advantage of being more in tune with present theoretical developments. As a very short crash-course in the history of American literature, Ruland's and Bradbury's *From Puritanism to Postmodernism* (1991) is still useful. On the German market, the *Metzler Amerikanische Literaturgeschichte* (1996), edited by Hubert Zapf, has firmly established itself as the first choice.

[4] The two general textbooks I have regularly consulted for this historical survey are Tindall's and Shi's *America: A Narrative History* (2003) and Heideking's *Geschichte der USA* (2003). My main reference for colonial history has been Middleton's *Colonial America* (2002).

itself the territory of Louisiana, which covered the entire area within the basin of the Mississippi river extending from La Nouvelle Orléans to French Canada. After a century of bitter rivalry, however, England succeeded in ousting France from North America in the Seven Years War (known in the USA as the French and Indian War, and dating from 1755-1763) which resulted in Canada becoming British together with what was then called the Ohio territory, a huge region around the Great Lakes north and west of the Ohio River. Louisiana was ceded to the Spanish empire, only to be returned in 1800 to Napoleon, who then sold it three years later to the USA. And even though all of these possessions eventually came to be incorporated in a predominantly English-speaking American nation-state, the Spanish and the French colonial presence not only left a rich historical heritage (including a substantial body of literature), but also significant traces which can still be seen in the contemporary cultural life of these regions.

Of course, these competing centres of European colonisation were not only defined through their interaction with each other but also by their encounters and conflicts with indigenous peoples. Despite the fact that the colonists in North America often followed the pattern which had been established in the Southern part of the hemisphere, and acted as if the land they were fighting over was free to take, it had in fact been inhabited for ages by a large native population. Its exact size prior to 'first contact' is, of course, impossible to determine with any certainty, but is now often estimated to have stood somewhere between four and seven million people north of the Rio Grande.[5] This population, which was collectively labelled 'Indian' by the English, who adopted Columbus' misnomer "Los Indios," was far from constituting a homogeneous body. Instead, it consisted of an enormous variety of very different language-families and individual tribal cultures, ranging from the pueblo civilisations of the southwest and the nomadic people of the Great Plains, to the semi-sedentary tribes of the Algonquin family which lived along the North-eastern Atlantic coast. For all of these cultures, however, the encounter with the Europeans proved to be catastrophic long before the systematic displacement of the remaining tribes during the 19th century even began. Mainly caused by the spreading of 'imported diseases', but also through relentless warfare and the deprivation and destruction of their resources, the indigenous population of North America underwent a dramatic decline to under one million during the first 200 years of colonial history, leading some historians to speak of the 'American Indian Holocaust' (cf. Thornton 1987 and Stannard 1992). Among the survivors, traditional forms of life were constantly eroded by the forces of missionising and often violent acculturation.

While the once so rich diversity of the Native cultures was dwindling rapidly, that of the British 'colonial centre' correspondingly increased with its growing population and the charting of new territories. By the 18th century, one can already talk about three regional sub-centres with societal structures, economies and (literary) traditions that were distinguished from each other to such a degree that these differences would far outlive the foundation of the nation-state, and exert considerable influence on the internal history of the USA. The founding of Virginia (1607/1624) not only marked the beginning of permanent British presence in North America, but also formed the nucleus of a distinctive group of southern colonies – namely, Maryland (1634), the two Carolinas (1653/1729 and 1670/1729) and Georgia (1732/1752) – which would later develop into the region

[5] For an overview of the discussions on pre-contact population, see Thornton 1987. Estimates have oscillated between less than one million and as much as 18 million, but today most scholars today seem to settle somewhere in the middle.

generally known as 'the South'.[6] The southern colonies usually grew out of entrepreneurial enterprises – either by companies or individual proprietors – and were ruled by a 'planter aristocracy' who traded with staple crops such as tobacco, rice, indigo and, later on, cotton. The demand for cheap manual labour created by the expanding plantation economy also led to the increasing importation of slaves, most of whom came from a portion of West Africa stretching from the Senegal river through the Congo area. From the first twenty slaves sold to Virginia settlers in 1619, the slave population grew to just under 700,000 by the time of the first US-census in 1790, and had by then long become the backbone of the agricultural system of the south, which was in turn fuelling the newly founded nation's entire economy.

The second regional sub-centre of British colonial rule in North America, the so-called middle colonies, comprising New York (1624/1685), New Jersey (1633/1702), Pennsylvania (1643), and Delaware (1638, part of Pennsylvania after 1682), were all characterised by their great proportions of non-English speaking European settlers – mostly Germans and Dutch, but also Scandinavians – many of whom belonged to various Protestant minority groups. Like them, the English colonists, who began to establish themselves in the New England region in the first third of the 17th century, were also looking to escape religious intolerance and persecution at home. At the same time, however, the so-called Puritan settlers of what would ultimately evolve into the colonies of Massachusetts (1691) – a merger of the Plymouth Plantation (1620) and the Massachusetts Bay Colony (1630) – Connecticut (1635), Rhode Island (1636), New Hampshire (1623/1679) and Maine (1623 as part of Massachusetts/1691), were driven by a strong missionary impulse. They were not only (as their name, originally a term of abuse, suggests) hoping to purify the Church of England of its remaining Catholicism by setting up for emulation an exemplary church system and model society based on strict Calvinist beliefs. Convinced of their special role in God's providential plan, they also saw their colonies as a pattern to be followed in the cultivation of the godless wilderness further west, and even conceived of the 'New England Way' as the path to the regeneration of the whole world.

It has often been argued – both in an affirmative and in a critical sense – that this missionary impulse outlived the demise of the Puritan theocracy, and was passed on in secularised form from the Pilgrims to the Founding Fathers, who attempted to create a model nation through the American Revolution. Yet the Declaration of Independence is at least as much a practical-minded list of very specific charges brought against the English king by its colonial subjects as it is the high-flying proclamation of a religiously charged republicanism determined to establish a new world order for the ages. Indeed, the ensuing war should not be interpreted as the product of any single cause or ideological motivation – be it the dream to lead the world into a new enlightened age of freedom, equality and justice, or the selfish urge for unrestrained economic and territorial expansion. It is more useful, rather, to think about the American Revolution in terms of a dynamic interaction between the colonists' frustrated urgings to redress various acute grievances – such as the legal encroachments on their rights as English citizens, or the various taxes imposed on them to cover the costs of the Seven Years War – and certain long-term motivations. The most important of these are probably the growing Whig ideology amongst the colonial elite, the economic push for emancipation from the strait-

[6] Where two dates are given, the first one indicates the first permanent settlement by Europeans, and the second the time when the territory became a royal colony.

jacket of the British mercantile system, and a wide-spread sense of religious anxiety and expectancy.

As astonishing as the highly unlikely military victory of George Washington's rebel troops, sealed by the Treaty of Paris (1783), was the successful process of nation-building that followed, particularly if one considers the diversity and conflicting interests of the three former colonial sub-centres whose delegates affirmed a common constitution in 1787. What held them together through the highly unstable period of the Early Republic was not only an increasingly stronger nationalist discourse built around the symbols of what has been called the American civil religion, but also the willingness to make political compromises, even where it meant modifying the new ideal hailed in the Declaration of Independence, "that all men are created equal [and] endowed by their creator with inalienable rights." The infamous removal of the slavery passage from that document, and the indirect affirmation of the right to own slaves under the new constitution (which, however, nowhere mentions the word), foreshadowed the many compromises that were struck during the antebellum period in order to preserve national unity.

Although the importation of slaves was prohibited throughout the nation in 1808, and all Northern states – where it had also existed but never played such a significant role – abolished slavery between 1774 and 1804, the South was thus able to preserve its 'peculiar insitution', which was not only a system of the utmost cruelty but also one of self-sustaining growth. Until the eve of the Civil War, the slave population on the plantations skyrocketed to just under 4,000,000, which was about one-third of the entire Southern population. This demographic development deepened the sectional divide between the agricultural and traditionalist South, on the one hand, and an industrialising, urban North on the other in which a fervent, religiously motivated abolitionist movement became ever more vociferous. It was this ultimately irreconcilable clash between 'two civilisations', struggling for dominance as the admission of new states threatened to expand slavery and thereby upset the balance of power, that lay at the heart of the Civil War (1861-1865). The victory won by the Union under President Lincoln at the cost of more than 600,000 deaths preserved the nation, and made possible the 13th and 15th Amendments to the constitution, which outlawed slavery and granted suffrage to black men. It did not, however, guarantee that African Americans in the post-Reconstruction South could actually exercise their new constitutional rights. Nor did the Civil War end the wide-spread racism, or the institutional segregation which continued to permeate all of American society to different degrees and was legally sanctioned by the infamous Supreme Court ruling *Plessy vs. Ferguson* in 1896. Another hundred years would have to pass until the Civil Rights Movement finally instigated judicial decisions (most importantly the *Brown vs. Board of Education* ruling of 1954) and new legislation (most importantly the Voting Right Acts of 1965) banning at least all legal forms of segregation.

Besides the sectional divide between North and South and the colour-line, there was, of course, another battle-front – unfortunately more often in a literal than in a metaphorical sense – at which the USA was being shaped into its present form: the changing frontier(s) of America's territorial expansion. Within roughly one hundred years after the Revolution, the nation increased its territory from the 891,364 square miles of the thirteen original states to 3,623,420 square miles of the present fifty. What fuelled this acquisitional frenzy (in addition to the systemic pressure generated by a capitalist economy) was the notion of a rising American 'Empire for Liberty', which had already been formulated by the Founding Fathers. Among subsequent generations, it grew into a popular ideol-

ogy of expansionism, at the heart of which lay the sentiment that it was, in the often quoted words of John L. O'Sullivan, America's "manifest destiny to overspread and to possess the whole of the continent which Providence has given us for the development of the great experiment of liberty and federative self government."[7] Large parts of this continental empire were ceded by the retreating colonial powers of Europe, beginning with the 828,000 square miles of land added by the Louisiana Purchase of 1803, which doubled the size of the then-existing nation.[8] From this enormous terrain between the Mississippi River and the Rocky Mountains, thirteen future states would be carved in the course of the following decades. In 1821, Florida was bought from Spain, and in 1848, Britain ceded the Oregon territory below the 49th parallel, which includes the present-day states of Idaho, Washington, Oregon and parts of Wyoming, and Montana. The last major territorial acquisition in the west came in 1861 when the US government purchased the Alaska territory from Russia. Texas, on the other hand, was forcibly wrangled from the newly founded Mexican republic by American settlers and annexed by the USA in 1845. This, in turn, triggered an unequal war with Mexico (1846-1848) that resulted in the incorporation of what became New Mexico and California. The annexation of the Philippines and Hawaii as some of the spoils of victory in the Spanish-American War (1898) ushered in a new era of US imperial expansion into the Pacific and Asia, which it has ever since defined as part of its sphere of vital national interests. The pursuit of these interests not only led to the ultimate clash with the rivalling imperial power of Japan during World War II, but also contributed to the post-war conflicts with Communist China which were fought out first in Korea and then in Vietnam (1964-1975).

The often fierce resistance which the native peoples of the West mustered against the annexations of their home territories in the second half of the 19th century would ultimately prove hopeless. One after another, the tribes all had to succumb to the US military and yield to the systematic dispossession and displacement by white settlers, a process which was given an air of legality through treaties that were usually imposed by force and frequently broken. The way in which such actions were legitimised by the ideology of 'Manifest Destiny' is maybe best expressed in the rhetorical question which President Harrison asked the American public in 1841: "Is one of the fairest portion of the globe to remain in a state of nature, the haunt of a few wretched savages when it seems destined by the Creator to give support to a large population and to be the seat of civilisation?" (qtd. from Gray 2004, 102). For the "wretched savages," civilisation had in store not only relocation and confinement to reservations, a pattern established by the Indian Removal Acts of the 1830s and universally enforced by the General Allotment or Dawes Act of 1887, but it also brought an almost complete loss of tribal authority and the destruction of their traditional ways of life. At the end of the so-called Indian Wars of the West in the 1890s, the total indigenous population had been depleted to about 228,000. From this nadir it slowly recovered after Native Americans were granted citizenship in 1924, and

[7] By extension of the same logic, the USA came to define not only the North American but also the South American continent as its own 'natural sphere of influence', an idea famously expressed in President James Monroe's annual message for 1823 (the so called Monroe Doctrine), which asserted that the "American continents [...] are henceforth not to be considered as subjects for future colonizations by any European powers."

[8] The initial phase in building this continental empire was the 'westward movement' released by the Northwest Ordinance of 1787, an Act of Congress which opened for settlement the so-called Northwest Territory (the formerly British Ohio country), which would later be organised as the states of Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin and Minnesota.

by the passage of the Indian Reorganisation Act of 1934, an important part of the New Deal legislation which allowed for partial self-government by the reservations. Despite these substantial outward improvements, and the cultural revival of the 'Indian Renaissance' since the 1970s, tribal life in the USA is still in many respects a marginalised 'culture of poverty' beset with massive problems such as alcoholism, unemployment, and racial prejudice.

In part, the land-hunger to which the indigenous tribes fell prey was caused by massive immigration into the new nation which radically inflated its proportions and structurally changed its original composition of four million Europeans (mostly English, Welsh, Scotch-Irish and German) and one million African slaves. For most of the 19th century, the demographic growth-rate stood at around 30% every ten years. After that it slowed down considerably, reaching – except for the 7.2% during the Depression decade between 1930 and 1940 – an all-time low of 9.8% between 1980 and in 1990. From there, it picked up again to 13.2% in the following decade, amounting to an amazing 32.7 million people – the largest numerical increase in US history. According to the Census Bureau's 'population clock', the 'official' population today (summer of 2006) stands at roughly 299 million, making it the third-largest population in the world. And, with the exception of the baby-boom era of the 1950s, these staggering growth-rates have always primarily been due to the naturalisation of foreign-born individuals. The patterns of immigration, however, have considerably changed over time.

A large majority of the 47 million people who sought a new home in the USA between 1820 and 1975 emigrated from Europe (35.9 million) and other countries of the Western Hemisphere (8.3 million), while only 2.2 million came from Asia during that period. In the course of the 1970s this pattern of immigration altered significantly after the Immigration Act of 1965 abolished the discriminatory quotas favouring Northwestern Europeans. Now Latin American (mostly from Mexico, Cuba, and the Dominican Republic) and Asian immigrants (mostly from Vietnam, the Philippines, Korea and China) began to outnumber European immigrants. Between 1980 and 2000, these minority groups grew eleven times faster than the non-Hispanic white population. Of the 33.5 millions foreign-born US citizens (11.7% of the population in 2000), 53.3% were born in Latin America, 25.0% in Asia, and only 13.7% in Europe, while the remaining 8.0% were born in other regions of the world. While German, Irish, and English remain the largest ancestries according to the census of 2000, these groups had each decreased in size by at least 8 million and by more than 20% since 1990. The number of people who reported African American ancestry increased by nearly 1.2 million, or 4.9%, between 1990 and 2000, making this group the third-largest ancestral aggregate. The population of many ancestries, such as Mexican, Chinese, Filipino, and Asian Indian, expanded during this decade, reflecting sizable immigration, especially from Latin America and Asia. And several small ancestry populations, including Brazilian, Pakistani, Albanian, Honduran, Trinidadian and Tobagonian, doubled at least.

As can be seen from these trends, ethnic diversity has constantly advanced in the USA. Around 1900, only one in eight persons was of a race other than white, whereas a century later this number had doubled. According to the American Community Survey of 2004, 67% of the people in the USA were White non-Hispanic, 14% Hispanic, 12% Black or African American, 1% American Indian and Alaska Native, and 4% Asian, while 5% were listed under the category 'Some other race'. Although Americans of English or Western European origin are, demographically speaking, on the retreat, they continue to

dominate the nation in political, economic, and cultural terms. What might be called 'official American culture' and its social as well as educational institutions are still predominately monolingual, and are regulated by Anglo-American traditions and values. Indeed, revisionist cultural criticism has demonstrated how these traditions and values continue to control normative definitions of Americanness, and has revealed the power interests at work in producing and sustaining the notion of a thus defined unitary national identity. These insights have also produced a different perspective on the processes of Americanisation which the different minority and immigrant groups of non-English origin have been subjected to in the past, or are presently undergoing.

According to traditional interpretative models, such as the *e pluribus unum* or melting-pot paradigm, the transition from being an immigrant, or former slave for that matter, to becoming an American national had been imagined as a largely monodirectional, benevolent and beneficial process of acculturation in which the baggage of old cultural identity (except for certain folkloristic traditions and exotic cuisine), could be absorbed into the new and superior national identity of free, enlightened citizenship. By way of contrast, recent scholarship tends to accentuate, on the one hand, the pressure and violence involved in, as well as the losses caused by, imposing normative constructions of Americanness on the factual heterogeneity of immigrant and minority cultures. On the other hand, many scholars stress that these homogenisation efforts have by no means entirely succeeded, and that the cultural change brought about by colonisation, slavery and immigration never was a one-way street. Instead, they conceive of the formations of many different American identities which are always – even in radically asymmetrical power constellations – bi- or multidirectional processes of transculturation affecting and hybridising both the dominating Anglo-American and the minority culture, albeit to different degrees depending on the historical circumstances.

This critical reassessment of the idea of 'Americanisation' not only pertains to domestic politics but also to an ideology seeking to re-make the world in America's image politically and economically. Although never unchallenged and at times – such as the periods after World War I – almost completely cancelled out by its rivalling ideology of a pragmatically minded isolationism, this missionary impulse to Americanise the world has in fact informed much of US foreign policy in the modern age. What its proponents still hail as America's mission to prepare the globe for freedom and democracy, its critics perceive as a new form of military, capitalist and cultural imperialism that came to replace its classic forms at the beginning of the 20th century, but is no less driven by self-interest and is equally pernicious for the many countries affected by it. While a first wave of massive resistance to the ideology of Americanisation was created by the disastrous Vietnam War, its current (academic) criticism is, of course, formulated under the impression of the recent 'wars on terror' in Afghanistan and Iraq which the recklessly unilateralist Bush administration launched after the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001.

Regardless of how much one agrees or disagrees with any sweeping condemnation of 20th- and 21st-century US foreign policy as imperialism, it cannot be denied that in the wake of the two World Wars America has indeed, by any historical standard, reached the status of "an empire that extends its economic, political, and military power around the globe" (Williams 1991, 364). Only two-hundred years after its separation from the British empire, the USA today has not only built its own far more extensive system of military bases by means of which it more or less directly controls many regions, and is able to rapidly deploy its armed forces to practically anywhere on this earth. Just like its predecessor, but on a much bigger scale, it also sustains what might be called a global political economy in which a worldwide network of American-owned corporations and banks undergirds the nation's geopolitical hegemony, which in turn guarantees the free flow of American capital and consumer culture.

3. American Literature in English

The Anglo-American Tradition

America, it has been argued, was not so much 'discovered' in the way an object is discovered by the natural sciences as it was 'invented' by a rapidly proliferating colonial discourse, to which authors from all the major European powers as well as from their new settlements across the Atlantic contributed (cf. O'Gorman 1961). Because it was inextricably intertwined with this larger, transatlantic discourse, it does not make good sense to project a proto-national(ist) paradigm onto the extremely heterogeneous body of pre-Revolutionary texts written in English by persons who had either temporarily been to the New World or had settled there permanently. To use the term 'Early American Literature' with reference to such writings is thus potentially misleading, since it suggests that from the beginning these authors felt and expressed a communal sense of Americanness that somehow foreshadowed the national identity of the USA. Such a sense of commonality, defined in contradistinction to the English mother-country, was, however, extremely slow in the making, and did not begin to emerge before the second half of the 18th century. If one wants to study the body of these English colonial texts in isolation at all, it therefore seems more appropriate to talk about the "Literature of British America" (Spengemann 1989, 36). But even though the authors of this particular literature certainly defined themselves as subjects of the British crown, this does not mean that they unequivocally felt, or were allowed to feel, themselves to be English in the same way someone from London did. In the multi-ethnic environment of North America, and within the constantly shifting political context of the British Empire, the different settler groups, rather, had to constantly (re-)negotiate their own regional identities, navigating between the hegemonic culture of the metropolitan centre and those cultures – indigenous, European, African – they encountered.

While it is undoubtedly true that in many respects America is the invention of Europe's imperial imagination, this "New World of Words" (Spengemann 1994) was not produced from scratch. Already the very first texts written by the Portuguese and Spanish explorers of the Americas testify to the inevitability with which cultural preconceptions of the Old World were brought to bear on the encounter with the *terra incognita* and its inhabitants in order to come to terms with the threatening newness, as well as to legitimate their ruthless colonisation. A number of these preconceptions had developed into a relatively fixed 'mental matrix' by the end of the 16th century when the English began to stake their claims on the Atlantic coast and to write their own narratives of exploration and settlement which represent the earliest form of English-speaking literature generated, not necessarily in, but by America. Notwithstanding all their veritable differences, John Smith's *Generall Historie of Virginia* (1624; in *Heath* A, 255-64), the first of several texts

he wrote to promote the Virginia enterprise, and William Bradford's *Of Plymouth Plantation* (written between 1630 and 1648; in *Heath* A, 324-47), the most famous account of the Puritan settlement, both illustrate two essential features of this matrix which not only defined English colonial discourse; they would also inform many future images and ideas of America during the period of westward expansion and beyond.

Drawing on the Biblical scriptures and the pastoral literatures of classical Antiquity alike, the New World is interpreted, on the one hand, by both authors as a utopian space of unrealised possibilities. While Smith, seeking to attract possible investors, describes Virginia as a bucolic land of abundant resources ready to be harvested, Bradford paints a picture of Cape Cod as a 'howling wilderness' that nevertheless awaits transformation into a second Garden of Eden as part of God's providential plan for his chosen people. As such virtually empty utopian spaces, the New World is, on the other hand, conceived of by both authors as being literally a 'virgin land', untouched or unclaimed by any people whose equal sovereignty, or even full humanity, they would acknowledge. In the words of Myra Jehlen, the colonial gaze of the English explorers and settlers "did not merely denigrate native civilization, it denied its existence, making the natives only an aspect of an inhuman wilderness" (Jehlen 1994, 39). Like their predecessors, such as the diaries of Christopher Columbus, as well as their successors, the immensely popular travel writings of the 18th and 19th century, these early English narratives of exploration and settlement are thus far from being merely descriptive or reflective. They constitute, rather, a powerful form of symbolic action in which the linguistic act of 'taking into possession' the land by naming and conceptualising it goes hand in hand with the factual expropriation of what they saw as barbarous 'savages'.

It would be wrong, however, to consider the role of Indians in the literature of British America in purely passive terms of victimisation and negation. Many of these writings in fact reflect the decisive influence which relations with Native American cultures exerted on the regional identities that developed during the 17th and 18th centuries in the different colonial sub-centres along the Atlantic seaboard. For the deeply pious Puritans of the New England colonies, for instance, which were by far the most literary productive of these sub-centres, the surrounding Algonquin tribes constituted a defining force in two opposite ways, both of which also permeate the various genres of their religious literature in different forms and to varying degrees: a) in the way in which settlers conceived of their endeavour as involving conflict with a threatening enemy, perceived as literally diabolic creatures against which they needed to defend and define themselves at all costs; and b) in the way in which there were undertakings to establish peaceful contact or dialogue with 'gentiles' whose successful conversion to Christianity was regarded by many as central to their God-given mission, and necessary evidence of their divine election. Although often not deliberate and largely unacknowledged, both of these modes of behaviour gave rise to different processes of transculturation that went far beyond the simple adoption of certain aspects of Indian material culture such as maize, canoes and moccasins. The purest embodiment of the latter extreme (i.e. the dialogic mode) is probably the writings of Puritan missionaries such as Roger Williams, whose intimate relationship with the Narragansett instilled in him a deep respect for their 'heathenish ways'. As a result, one can detect subtle elements of cross-cultural syncretism in the Christianity preached by his partly bilingual work *A Key into the Language of America* (1643; in *Heath* A, 347-65).

The former extreme (i.e. the conflictual mode) is most palpable in the 'captivity narratives', accounts of English hostages taken by Indian tribes. These writings constitute the first new genre contributed to English literature by America. Beneath the relentless rhetoric of hate with which many of these hostages, such as Mary Rowlandson – whose *A Narrative of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. M.R.* (1682; in *Heath* A, 440-68) is the best-known example of the genre – retrospectively seek to set themselves apart from the captors among whom they are forced to live, one clearly senses a deep-seated fear of 'going native' induced by involuntary adjustments to Indian habits. This again bespeaks a more general cultural anxiety about the dangerously blurry borderline between civilisation and savagery on which the Puritans' sense of self as Christians and cultivated Englishmen was predicated. Even though they had not come to America to replicate the old, but to establish a new and better England, such a self-definition depended precariously on recognition by the metropolitan centre.[9] This desired recognition, however, was increasingly withheld in the post-Restoration era, on the grounds that they had not only failed in their self-declared apostolic mission, but had actually succumbed to barbarity in the wilderness of America.

Similar fears of 'creolisation', and an even stronger anxiety of marginalisation, inform the largely non-religious, more neoclassical writings produced by the 'planter aristocracy' of the southern colonies. A good example of this is the travel narrative *The History of the Dividing Line betwixt Virginia and North Carolina*, and its unpublished satirical double *The Secret History of the Line*. Written by one of the greatest landowners in the region, William Byrd II of Westover, the texts recapitulate his journey through the "dreadful Swamp" in the disputed borderlands between Virginia and North Carolina. Far from the refinements of English culture, and amidst what he describes as a degenerate country population of cross-breeds, the narrator "often cast[s] a longing Eye towards England, & Sigh[s]" (in Imbarato and Martin 1994, 92). From the perspective of the centre, which Byrd still assumes here, the *colonists* have become culturally inferior American *colonials* (cf. Bauer 2003, 136) marked by an irreversible 'otherness'. In the long run, the internalisation and reversal of such symbolic acts of 'othering' would prove decisive in the process of creating an imagined community of Americans which preceded the settlers' political revolt. In the second half of the 18th century, the colonies, which were such an extremely diverse conglomerate, thus developed "a greater sense of American identity precisely through their subaltern relationship with Great Britain" (Giles 2001, 7). This mechanism is already adumbrated in Ebenezer Cooke's double-edged verse-satire *The Sot-Weed Factor* (1708; in *Heath* A, 723-41) in which the Maryland settlers are derogated by an equally ridiculed English narrator as a "detested race" for having acculturated to their slaves and the Indians.

After the War of Independence it did indeed, as conventional wisdom has it, become a major concern amongst the elites, North and South, that the political revolution should be followed by a cultural revolution ending the dominance of imported literatures – English literature in particular – or the servile copying of their models by native authors. Great importance was therefore ascribed to creating a more vital American culture of letters to

9 A text which illustrates the resulting rhetorical ballet between emphasising Puritan separation from the corruption of the Anglican Church, on the one hand, and insisting on filial commonality with the mother-country on the other, would be "A Dialogie Between Old England and New, Concerning Their Present Troubles" by Anne Bradstreet, who is widely recognised as British America's foremost colonial poet.

strengthen the still fragile nation-state. It is an oft-repeated oversimplification, however, that this soon topical call for a national literature – the best-known instances would probably be Ralph Waldo Emerson's "The American Scholar," and Walt Whitman's "Preface" to the 1855 edition of his *Leaves of Grass* (*Heath* B, 1609-21 and 2923-37) – necessarily implied an agenda of cultural separatism on the part of all of those who raised it. And it is equally reductive to argue that the rich and diverse body of novels, short stories, poetry, and essays created by the authors of the so-called 'American Renaissance' – such as Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, Margaret Fuller, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Edgar Allan Poe, and Herman Melville, to name but a few – should be read primarily as the attempt to realise such an agenda of cultural separatism. In the complex public debates over the future of American letters, it was, rather, just one party of radical literary nationalists, most prominently represented by the Young American group, whose primary agenda it was, in the words of William Gilmore Simms, "to put Americanism in our letters" (Simms 1999, 26), and who were therefore demanding an outright breakaway from Old World traditions in order to achieve a way of writing somehow homologous to the country's nature or history. Because of the inevitable performative problems that beset such a desire to express a literary Americanness in the language of the former mother-country, the texts of authors subscribing to such an agenda are riddled with anxieties and self-contradictions. And these can indeed, as critics such as Lawrence Buell have claimed, be described as typical of a postcolonial literature that attempts to define itself against the hegemonic culture of the mother-country, which, by that very logic of contradistinction, continues to dominate and overshadow it (cf. Buell 1999). While anxieties over the distinctive value of American (literary) culture certainly became less virulent in the post-Civil War era, the ideology of cultural nationalism and its inherent paradoxes was carried on into the 20th century by some groups in the succeeding generations of Anglo-American writers and critics, such as the so-called Seven Arts Group.

Although never entirely absent, such nationalistic concerns are, ironically, much less pronounced, however, in the works of most of the canonical antebellum authors cited above, whose ideal of an American literature tended to be much more broadly defined. Especially among those figures associated with the Transcendentalist movement, one finds instead visions of an American world literature, i.e. a literature where Americanness would be defined by its unparalleled creative receptivity to traditions from all over the world, including Asian religions and the Native American cultures. With their free-wheeling cross-cultural appropriations and transformations, Emerson's essays or Melville's *Moby Dick* (1851) not only engendered a new literary practice of experimental syncretism continued by a whole list of Anglo American works running all the way to modernist poetry such as T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* (*Heath* D, 1291-306) or Ezra Pound's *Personae* and the multicultural bricolage-texts of many postmodern authors. With their self-conscious engagement in decidedly global forms of transculturation, the above-mentioned mid-19th-century texts also mark a historical moment after which it becomes increasingly impossible to fit the further development of the Anglo-American literary tradition into any model neatly distinguishing between different phases in which the dominance of one discursive mode (such as colonial writings) gives way to that of another (such as postcolonial re-writings).

Even if one subscribes to the idea that the formation of Anglo-American literature between the eve of the American Revolution and the Civil War can partly be seen as a postcolonial phenomenon, one must avoid any binary logic of oppression and emancipation. Owing to its intertwinement with the discourse of slavery and its implications in the emerging American imperialism on the western frontiers, it cannot, as Paul Giles, following Edward Watts, has convincingly argued, simply be regarded as 'postcolonial' or 'anticolonial' in the sense of opposing a hegemonic British culture. The Anglo-American literature of that period, rather, embodies the internal contradictions of a settler culture that, while it to some degree still struggled with a self-image as subaltern colonial, was also acting as a colonising power itself (Giles 2001, 2).

An obvious example of such an involvement in the cultural mechanisms of colonial violence would be the reproduction of the image of the 'vanishing Indian' by countless Anglo-American writings during the 19th century and afterwards. Building on the Enlightenment construct of the noble savage as expressed in earlier texts – Thomas Jefferson's *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1787, *Heath* A 994-1010) or the Indian poems by Philip Freneau spring to mind – such highly popular texts as James Fenimore Cooper's Leatherstocking novel *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826) featured the death of heroic Indians as representative of a primitive civilisation that had reached the end of its 'life cycle', but whose natural virtues were being assimilated into the intellectually and morally superior culture of the advancing white frontiersmen. Simultaneously drawing on and feeding into the popular ideology of Manifest Destiny, such works were thus directly or indirectly legitimising the displacement and extinction of the indigenous population in the process of westward expansion by depicting it as something inevitable and natural that was dictated by the law of historical progress. Thoreau's celebration of nomadic Indian culture in *Walden: or, Life in the Woods* (1854, *Heath* B, 1753-87) as partly superior and a necessary antidote to the materialism of an Anglo-American society 'possessed by its possessions' is therefore a rather exceptional form of a more respectful and receptive transculturation that became prevalent only much later among 20th-century counter-culture authors such as Gary Snyder.

In very different forms and to very different degrees, many antebellum works of the Anglo-American tradition were also entangled in the discourse of slavery and its racist premises. At the one extreme of a wide-ranging spectrum were those Southern authors who defended the regional culture of the slave-holder states as the 'true soul' of the nation. The most subtle of these are the so-called Border Romances, such as *Woodcraft* (1854) by William Gilmore Simms, which celebrated the myth of the noble 'Southern cavalier'. A less subtle and aggressively anti-Northern justification of slavery is William J. Grayson's long poem "The Hireling and the Slave" (1856) which argued that the "Congo's simple child" (Grayson 1856, 31) working under the tutelage of his benevolent white master was in fact far better off than the white wage-slaves of the industrial North.

At the other extreme, we find the substantial body of literature produced by Northerners sympathetic to the abolitionist movement, ranging from the addresses of William Lloyd Garrison through the anti-slavery poetry of William Wadsworth Longfellow and John Greenleaf Whittier to *Uncle Tom's Cabin; or The Man That Was a Thing* (1852, *Heath* B, 2549-89), which is not just one of the most successful but probably also the single most influential book in American history. After all, Abraham Lincoln famously called its author, Harriet Beecher Stowe, "the little lady who started the great war." But for all its unequivocal condemnation of slavery, and its undoubted sympathy for the plight of the slaves, Stowe's novel is still a deeply racist work that carries a strong message of the African slaves' racial inferiority by portraying them as pitiful big children who love music and bright colours. Such deeply entrenched patterns of representational racism,

infantilising African Americans or relegating them to the role of funny side-kicks, are not only ubiquitous in even the most well-intended 19th-century works – one need only think of the character Jim in Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884) – but persist long into the 20th century. By (re-)creating, either deliberately or unconsciously, stereotypical images of blacks which, as Ralph Ellison so powerfully put in his essay "Twentieth-Century Fiction and the Black Mask of Humanity" (1953), were either completely "drained of humanity," or fell short of "possessing the full, complex ambiguity of man" (Ellison 1995, 81-2), many Anglo-American writers, at least until the post-war period – including its most respected avant-garde novelists such as Ernest Hemingway and William Faulkner – contributed to perpetuating the mentality that upheld segregation.

Beginning in the 1950s, and even more so in the decades following the Civil Rights era, this kind of literary racism has certainly diminished. While racism does remain a pervasive societal problem, and the power-relations between black and white remain asymmetric, the Anglo-American and the African American literary traditions have engaged in much more reciprocal ways of cross-cultural exchange and fertilisation. Black music has often served as an important medium in this respect. Ever since the Beat movement of the 1950s (which sought to model its spontaneous prose and poetry on be-bop), jazz, blues and more recently hip-hop have remained a frequent influence on the writing of many white authors. Inversely, leading African American novelists – for instance, Ralph Ellison in his *Invisible Man* (1952), Toni Morrison in *Beloved* (1987) or Charles Johnson in *Middle Passage* (1990) – use the improvisational model of blues to interweave themes and motifs from the canonical works of Anglo-American authors with the African American literary tradition, thereby seeking to establish a literary platform for dialogue and reconciliation (for more details, see section 4).

The African American Tradition

At the very beginning of the African American literary tradition stands the slave narrative in the broadest sense of the term (for a good introduction, see Dickson 2001). Except for a relatively small body of poetry, the overwhelming majority of works authored by North American slaves or freed blacks in the 18th century, but also through much of the 19th, fall into or blend the various sub-categories of the 'personal narrative' which also flourished among the white colonists, such as the spiritual autobiography or the captivity narrative. The earliest extant prose-piece written by a slave in North America, *The Narrative of the Uncommon Sufferings and Surprising Deliverance of Briton Hammon* (1760, *Heath* A, 1139-43), does in fact combine the two in a providential tale that serves to affirm the existing social order, including slavery. Until relatively late in the 19th century, when the African oral traditions had already been thoroughly transformed through more than two centuries of cultural contact, no attempts were made to preserve them by translation into English texts, either because it was deemed dangerous or simply judged as not worthwhile. This not only shows the disastrous loss of cultural heritage, as well as the rupture in their native identities which the members of African cultures experienced in the North American diaspora; it is also indicative of the (quasi-)colonial conditions under which the re-formation of their collective identity as African Americans took place.

If (former) slaves in British America and the early American republic were allowed to express themselves publicly in writing at all, they were forced to address their almost exclusively white audience in the language of their oppressors and through the literary forms sanctioned by white owners or patrons (who often acted as the amanuensis for illiterate slaves) on whom they always depended. And although these conditions severely restricted the potential for open ideological resistance, it would be misleading to conceive of these early writings by blacks simply as servile emulations of white literary models. All of these works are 'creolised' in nature, since their authors creatively adapted the English genres of life-writings to their specific situations and for their own needs. *A Narrative of the Lord's Wonderful Dealings with John Marrant* (1785; in Caretta 1996, 110-34), an account of the captivity and later voluntary stay amongst the Cherokees by North America's first black Methodist preacher, even provides an example of how these formulaic genres could be turned into the site of a more peaceful intercultural negotiation between African-, Anglo-, and Native Americans. And some of these early narratives, written under the patronage of (or dictated to) sympathetic whites, not only attack the slave trade or even, albeit less frequently, the institution of slavery itself, but also exhibit a potential for formulating more general criticism of the dominant culture, although the hegemony of the latter ultimately still remains acknowledged.

This basic tension between criticism and affirmation also characterises the works of the two earliest black poets to publish in British America, Jupiter Hammon, and Phillis Wheatley (for details, see section 4). Their pietist lyrics also clearly reveal the fundamentally ambiguous role that Christianity played in the life and writings of many African American authors up until the Civil War, and often beyond. Almost without exception deeply religious individuals, they, on the one hand, drew on the Bible and, more particularly, the egalitarian rhetoric of evangelical Christianity (often Methodism) as their main source of empowerment in the fight against slavery and racial injustice. On the other hand, their texts usually show an inability to even imagine African culture as comparable in value to that of Christian Europe, and therefore often betray a sense of racial inferiority which was partly instilled by their religious upbringing. A second source of (rhetorical) self-empowerment for early African American writings was the revolutionary ideology, with its promise of liberty and universal human rights, which then became inscribed in the nation's constitution.

With their topical invocations of the Declaration of Independence and the Bill of Rights, the 'orature' (printed speeches or sermons) by free Northern blacks agitating for emancipation around the turn of the century, such as Lemuel Haynes and Prince Hall, attest to the high-flying hopes triggered by the American Revolution. In his petition to the General Court of Massachusetts (1777), Prince Hall, for instance, argues, with direct reference to Jefferson's wording, that legislation must be passed through which the slaves will "be restored to the enjoyment of that freedom which is the natural right of all Men" (*Heath* A, 1061-2). And even when the hopes for immediate liberation were frustrated by political compromise, such rhetorical invocations remained a powerful rhetorical weapon with which black abolitionists, such as Frederick Douglass in his famous "What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July?" speech (1852; *Heath* B, 1946-65), would expose the apparent contradictions between the revolutionary ideology and the oppressive reality of a large part of America's population.

After the Revolution, the lot of most slaves not only failed to improve, but their situation actually got much worse during the first decades of the 19th century, when, due to the booming market for cotton, large-scale plantations became the heart of the South's agricultural system. As a result, the system of 'chattel slavery', with its even more inhu-

mane working and living conditions, quickly displaced older forms of domestic servitude. In opposition to this expanding system of exploitation, which 'bred', traded, and treated human beings like livestock, the abolitionist movement grew to be a powerful political force in Northern antebellum politics. And it was the demand of white abolitionist leaders like William Lloyd Garrison for the authentic voices of freed slaves that gave rise to what has been called the 'classical period' of the slave narrative in the more narrow sense of the term: between 1830 and 1865, hundreds of first-hand accounts (ranging from brief anecdotes to book-length narratives) of escapes from the horrors of slavery and the corruptions of Southern life into the free North were thus published. Building on earlier models, most importantly that of Olaudah Equiano's *The Interesting Narrative* (1789, see ch. III, Britain), these texts adhered to a strict genre formula "informed by the Judeo-Christian mythological structure on both the material and the spiritual levels" (Foster 1994, 84), in that the outward action – simultaneously mirroring the inward regeneration of the narrator – almost without exception follows a basic four-stage plot which parallels Biblical stories of captivity, exodus and arrival in the promised land. Such formulaic restrictions on their freedom of expression, together with the prefaces by an Anglo-American editor or amanuensis which usually framed their texts, clearly bespeak the problem that, even where slaves were granted the authority to raise their voice, the record of their experience was still being controlled, if not at times exploited, by their white collaborators. Yet the most accomplished of these 'classical' slave narratives, such as Frederick Douglass' *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* (1845, *Heath* B, 1882-946) and Harriet Jacobs' *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861; *Heath* B, 2029-55), managed at least partly to escape their literary 'enslavement'. On the one hand, they did fulfil with great success the expectations of their abolitionist target-audience (Douglass alone sold 30,0000 copies within the first five years) and became highly instrumental in politically galvanising the public above the Mason–Dixon Line On the other hand, they subtly manipulated the stifling conventions of the slave narrative in order to address controversial issues (such as Northern racism, or the value of legal freedom without social justice), but also to make room for creating complex forms of black literary subjectivity. In so doing, they laid the groundwork for the future rise of the African American autobiography and autobiographical novel (see Andrews 1986).

After the Civil War, the tradition of the slave narrative was continued most prominently by Booker T. Washington's influential *Up from Slavery* (1901; *Heath* D, 870-94), a text of racial uplift that primarily addresses problems of ex-slaves in a still segregated society, and suggests accommodationist strategies to overcome them. In their voluntary cooperation with sympathetic whites and in their reliance on strategies of non-violent 'moral persuasion' to gradually achieve greater racial equality, the authors of slave narratives generally stand in contrast to early propagators of more militant forms of resistance, such as David Walker and Henry Highland Garnet, and even more so to a new generation of black leaders like Marcus Garvey who advocated a collective return to Africa. Their opposition in many ways anticipates the clash between integrationist such as Martin Luther King Jr. and black nationalists/separationists such as Malcom X after World War II.

If the authors of slave narratives to a certain degree still had to serve as a mouthpiece of their white patrons, a new generation of black poets and novelists writing shortly before and after the Civil War gradually emancipated themselves from this quasi-colonial discursive bondage and achieved more distinctively autonomous forms of literary

self-expression. Among such early black novels, Martin R. Delany's *Blake; or, The Huts of America* (serialised in 1861-1862) is certainly the most revolutionary work, not just because its hero declares open war on slaveholding whites and propagates the regeneration of black civilisation in Africa through the return of the American slaves. It is also a technically more accomplished work of fiction than the first-published African American novel, *Clotel; or, The President's Daughter* (1853) by William Wells Brown (*Heath* B, 2612-21), who packaged his hopeful agenda of assimilation in a fairly hackneyed sentimentalist romance. Brown also published the first African American play, *The Escape; or a A Leap for Freedom* (1858), which, however, equally suffers from the rather heavy-handed didacticism with which the author hammers home his abolitionist message.

Towards the end of the 19th century, when racial segregation tightened its grip on American society (predominantly in the "Jim Crow" states of the South), the popular literary market for blacks became increasingly restricted to the so-called Plantation Tradition, a body of literature characterised by its nostalgic portrayal of the Old South and sentimentalising the 'peculiar institution' through its stereotypical depiction of infantile, contented slaves speaking Negro dialect. Significantly, it was within this context that the early collections of African American spirituals and folk tales – the most famous being probably the "Br'er Rabbit" trickster-stories – were produced by white authors such as Joel Chandler Harris, who accommodated what was told to them by former slaves and their free descendants to their reader's horizon of expectation (*Heath* C, 108-19). Yet even within this oppressive atmosphere, some pioneers of black fiction like Charles W. Chesnutt achieved the feat of being popular and critical at the same time. Chesnutt's *The Conjure Woman* (1899) is a collection of plantation stories that manage to address racial problems by skilfully manipulating characters and themes within a largely conventional frame. A much more outspoken work, James Weldon Johnson's *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (1912; in *Heath* D, 923-39), had to be published anonymously, and initially enjoyed a limited reception, even though today it is considered to be among the most significant African American novels of the 20th century.

While the earlier lyrical compositions of George Moses Horton, Frances Ellen Watkins Harper and James M. Whitfield still largely continued in the pietist vein of Wheatley and Hammon, African American poetry also entered a new era before World War I with some of the more daring pieces written by Paul Laurence Dunbar, such as "Sympathy" or "We Wear the Mask" from his collections *Lyrics of Lowly Life* (1896) and *Lyrics of the Hearthside* (1899; *Heath* C, 182 and 185). In the latter text, the poet addresses his anguish about having to hide his frustration behind a mask of servility and goodwill, a necessity that still plagues his own writing, which, especially in its use of 'Negro dialect', often acquiesces to the genteel conventions of the Plantation Tradition. The restrictions of these conventions on African American literature at large were only overcome after the Great War – the employment of black soldiers abroad was one important factor that strengthened the position of African Americans at home – and in the wake of two socio-political developments. First, there was a massive migratory movement from the rural South to the industrial North which created new forms of urban communities and cultural life in the predominantly black neighbourhoods of metropolitan centres like Chicago, New York, and Washington. Secondly, a new and more aggressive civil rights movement was inaugurated in 1909/10 with the founding of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), which rejected the accommodationism of Booker T. Washington, choosing instead to attack segregation and racism head-on. The leading spokesperson of

the NAACP, W.E.B Du Bois, also gave a theoretical framework to the cause through his scholarship as a sociologist and cultural critic. In the chapter "Of Our Spiritual Strivings" (*Heath* D, 897-902) in his groundbreaking study *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), which had a seminal influence on many African American writers, he introduced the concept of 'double consciousness', which defined the effect of internalised racism on black people as "the sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of the world that looks on in amused contempt or pity." And as an editor of *The Crisis*, the magazine of the NAACP, Du Bois published many of the writers who contributed to the so-called New Negro movement, a remarkable flourishing of African American art in general, and literature in particular, which reached its zenith in the mid-1920s.

Later dubbed the Harlem Renaissance for its main locale, this movement was seen by many of its participants as something similar to the campaigns for decolonisation and independence that gathered momentum in many regions around the globe. In the introductory essay to his enormously influential anthology *The New Negro* (1925), Alain Locke captures this widely felt sense when he declares that the collected specimen of "the unusual outburst of creative expression" among black artists were at once indicative of, and instrumental in furthering, a "racial awakening" that would eventually liberate Africans in the North American diaspora from the consequences of slavery and "the darkened ghetto of a segregated race life." He then explicitly compares the New Negro movement with the "nascent movements of folk-expression and self-determination" that accompanied the push for political decolonisation in Africa, India and Ireland. Like many black intellectuals of his generation, including Du Bois, Locke was influenced by the German Romantic tradition, and believed that "in the very heart of the folk-spirit (were) the essential forces" of cultural healing and artistic renewal (Locke 1992, xxv-xxvii). Accordingly, many authors of the Harlem Renaissance were not only looking to 'write back' to the denigrating representation of their people from within the discourse of the hegemonic white culture: i.e. by appropriating and re-shaping its literary tradition. In keeping with the ideas of a Romantic cultural nationalism and racial essentialism, they often turned to what was perceived as genuine African folk traditions, such as the spiritual, oral storytelling and blues music, and began to experiment with black vernacular as an artistic idiom. Most representative of this desire to valorise black folk culture would be the verses collected in Langston Hughes' *The Weary Blues* (1926), James Weldon Johnson's *God's Trombones* (1927), and Sterling A. Brown's *Southern Road* (1932), or the 'folk realism' of Zora Neale Hurston's novels, such as *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937). Among those works of the Harlem Renaissance which relied more on established forms of Anglo-American poetry, but are no less vocal about the horrors and frustrations of black experience in America, Claude McKay's *Harlem Shadows* (1922) and Countee Cullen's *Color* (1925) are probably the best known today.

Even though Cullen in no way ignored racial issues (how could he in a deeply segregated society?), he worried about being restricted to them, and always wished to be perceived primarily as "a poet, not a Negro poet." With his cosmopolitan ideal of authorship, Cullen does, at least to a certain extent, form a counter-position to most writers of the Harlem Renaissance, who, like Hughes, very self-consciously defined themselves as racial poets aiming for a 'literary blackness' in their writing that would give a voice to the dispossessed and speechless in the community. This contrast is significant, in that it prefigures a polarity in the further development of 20th-century African American literature

between the Black Arts Movement and those authors who distanced themselves from any form of social or cultural separatism based on notions of racial difference. In the generation of poets following the Harlem Renaissance, Melvin B. Tolson and Robert Hayden are probably the two major authors; even though they often engage with African American themes and traditions, they never confined themselves to cultural introspection, inclining instead towards a modernist syncretism akin to that of T.S. Eliot or W.H. Auden. Ideologically and aesthetically, the main trend in African American literature, however, went in the other direction during the 1930s and 40s, when black protest literature (now often associated with the term 'Chicago Renaissance') began its ascendancy.

With his landmark novel *Native Son* (1940) and autobiography *Black Boy* (1945), Richard Wright defined the genre's basic formula by employing a naturalist mode for his bleak representation of black ghetto life which was strongly informed by his socialist beliefs. Wright's hard-boiled realism and acerbic social criticism stood in marked contrast to the folk-nationalist tendencies of many Harlem Renaissance authors, and exercised a pervasive influence on a great number of black novelists through and beyond the 1960s, such as Chester Himes, Ann Petry, Margaret Walker, and James Baldwin. The so-called 'School of Wright' also had a strong impact on the rising generation of playwrights who established realist drama as the most successful branch of African American theatre. Even though they might not have embraced the same political agenda, both Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun* (1959) – widely considered her signal achievement – and August Wilson's cycle of critically acclaimed plays – including *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* (1985), *The Piano Lesson* (1987) and *Fences* (1986) – continued Wright's explorations of how race and class, identity problems and material poverty intersect in the continuing hardships which many African Americans experience.

Wright was also claimed as a 'patron saint' by the Black Arts Movement which grew out of the new and much more militant wave of black nationalism, and which gained momentum during the 1960s as a result of mounting frustration with (in the words of Malcom X) the 'token integrationism' achieved by the collaborative Civil Rights leaders. In many ways, the Black Arts Movement built on the Harlem Renaissance as well as the *negritude* movement of the 1940s in the French colonies. To a certain extent, it just reformulated more aggressively the older ideas of developing a distinctively black 'orature' – i.e. a literature rooted in oral traditions of the homeland – that would combat representational racism, and help to develop a new collective identity by conveying black pride and creating new enabling self-images for African Americans. Imamu Amiri Baraka (born Leroi Jones in 1934), one of the leading spokespersons and artists of the movement, expresses this desire when he calls upon his community in the poem "Ka 'Ba" "to make our getaway, into / the ancient image, into a new / correspondence with ourselves / and our black family," and celebrates his brothers and sisters as "beautiful people / with african [sic] imaginations / full of masks and dances and swelling charms" (*Heath* F, 2501). Where the movement went far beyond its predecessors, however, is in its propagation of a strong anti-white sentiment combined with ideas of black supremacy and racial separation, which were also preached by the Nation of Islam. This 'anti-racist racism' (Jean-Paul Sartre) often went hand in hand with Marxist-Leninist ideology that conceived of 'true art' as a weapon in the all-out fight for social revolution. Accordingly, Baraka and his fellow-travellers, such as Sonia Sanchez, Don L. Lee (aka Haki R. Madhubuti), Marvin X, and Gwendolyn Brooks during her radical phase, attempted to produce poetry and theatre as forms of revolutionary action that would lead to the overthrow of a deeply

racist social order, and achieve (more) political independence as well as the economic self-determination of the American black community. While it seems that the political agenda of radical separatism, which the Black Arts movement generally embraced, holds comparatively little influence today, its underlying racial ideology continues to play an important role in contemporary cultural life, albeit in different forms and guises. A racial essentialism certainly lies at the heart of the contemporary Africentrism movement in North America – most prominently represented by Molefi Kete Asante – which shares a complicated history with Black Nationalism. Africentric ideas of a racially defined unity between black people around the globe, and the idealisation of an 'aboriginal' African culture as a corrective to the corruptions of Euro-American modernism, resonate in the works of many contemporary black artists seeking to create a 'diasporic consciousness' in the USA.

Whereas Black Nationalism or Africentrism conceive of 'the black people' as a homogeneous, quasi-organic whole, and tend to equate racial integrity with "the integrity of black masculinity" (Gilroy 1993, 194), there were always critical voices from within that imagined community who, even though by no means averse to a new appreciation of the African heritage in the USA, insisted on the differences glossed over by the reductive logic of race. One of the most powerful and productive interventions (besides the rise of black gay and lesbian authors such as Baldwin and Audre Lorde) came from a number of black female authors who sought to establish in their very own ways what Alice Walker called a 'womanist aesthetic'. If some of them have admittedly – and for good reason – resisted being pigeonholed as feminist writers, it is still true that Walker in her novels *Merdian* (1976) or *The Color Purple* (1982), Maya Angelou in her autobiographical fictions like *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (1970), Gloria Naylor in her *The Women of Brewster Place* (1982), not to forget Nobel-Prize-winner Toni Morrison in her *The Bluest Eye* (1970) or *Song of Solomon* (1977), do share a common concern: giving voice to women doubly silenced by racism and sexism, and reclaiming the peculiarity of an often marginalised black female experience in American history.

An even more fundamental criticism of the ideas of racial essentialism and cultural authenticity has come from a scattered group of African American writers whose works more or less radically challenge what the critic Paul Gilroy called "the ethnic absolutism that currently dominates black political culture" (Gilroy 1993, 5). In the terminology defined by the editor of this volume, the opposition between the ideologies of Black Nationalism and Africentrism and the viewpoints of these writers can be described as the difference between an anti- or postcolonial, and a more transcultural or cosmopolitan mode of writing. Whereas the former defined themselves in dualistic opposition to the hegemonic power of a perceived racial as well as cultural 'Other' (i.e. the Euro-American oppressor), the latter emphasises the reciprocal "processes of cultural mutation and restless (dis)continuity that exceed racial discourse" (ibid., 2).

The first and probably still foremost among these authors is Ralph Ellison, one of the most highly respected African American novelists of the 20th century, who never subscribed to any essentialist notion of a separate black culture. Instead, in his art he worked towards a recognition of the fact that, to quote from his acceptance speech for the National Book Award, ethnically and culturally "America is woven of many strands" which cannot be disentangled (as racial essentialists on both sides would have it), nor should its texture be straightened out with the iron brush of cultural conformity. Instead, Ellison thought that it was America's seemingly paradoxical fate to become what it always had

been: namely, "one, and yet many [...]" (Ellison 1995, 577). In his attempt to translate his vision into artistic form, Ellison's masterpiece *Invisible Man* went far beyond the naturalist aesthetic of his mentor Richard Wright. On the level of narration, the novel is a probing philosophical investigation into the literally blinding effects of internalised racism on African American identity. By means of its narrative techniques, however, it undercuts the binary logic of racism which the protagonist has to experience in his journey through a deeply segregated America. Ellison takes up countless intertextual strands from such different cultural sources as ancient Greek mythology, European existentialism and psychoanalysis, classical Anglo-American novels as well as the oral forms of the black tradition, and twists them together into a densely allusive fabric which reflects his view of America's polyphonic culture.

Up until the 1970s, Ellison's viewpoint remained fairly exceptional, but since then others have come to share his emphasis on – as Charles Johnson phrased it in his essay "The Singular Vision of Ralph Ellison" – "the synthetic, creolizing process long at work in this country, making each and every one of us [...] a cultural mongrel" (Johnson 2003, 109). Besides Johnson, a number of prominent African American artists (usually leaning towards postmodern experimentalism) have taken something like a 'transcultural' turn seeking to address an increasingly diversified American reality which is characterised by dynamic processes of ethnic intermixture and fluid identities. Ishmael Reed, for instance, moved away from his uneasy alliance with the Black Arts Movement – the self-declared 'Neohoodooism' aesthetic of his celebrated early novels like *Mumbo Jumbo* (1972) and *The Last Days of Louisiana Red* (1974) had always emphasised the syncretic nature of (African-)American culture – and is now propagating the idea of the USA as the first universal or pan-cultural nation. Through his often sharply satirical art, but also through his work as the founder of the Before Columbus Foundation and as an editor of collections such as *MultiAmerica: Essays on Culture Wars and Cultural Peace* (1997), Reed has established himself as a leading spokesperson against racial essentialism and in favour of a genuinely multicultural society (see Mvuyekure 2004).

The Native American Tradition

Without wanting to gloss over any of the obviously important differences, it still seems legitimate to argue that in many ways the tradition of anglophone writing by Native American or so-called mixed-blood authors does follow a similar developmental trajectory as the African American tradition.[10] This is not only true for the late 20th century when the 1960s Black Arts Movement with its programmatic fusion of cultural production and anticolonial politics became the model for many minority culture revivals in the USA, including the so-called Indian Renaissance. It is also true for the traumatic birth of these two literary traditions: African and Native American literatures are both intercultural practices which were born out of an enormous historical catastrophe for their respective people, as a result of which the English language was forcefully inserted into an

10 The terms 'American Indian Literature' and 'Native American Literature' as used by most scholars today are, of course, more broadly defined. They refer not only to anglophone writings by authors of native or mixed-blood ancestry, but also to the rich 'oral literatures' that are still being practised today (as rituals, storytelling etc.) in the indigenous languages of the different tribes. In keeping with the format of this companion, I will only discuss these oral traditions insofar as they have shaped the writing practices of anglophone authors.

originally oral culture. Just as the transatlantic slave trade and the subsequent education of individual slaves in the colonies gave birth to African American literature, the emergence of an anglophone Native American literature is the consequence of the conquest of Indian lands and the ensuing spread of literacy through colonial politics of acculturation; starting with the rather insular efforts of early missionaries, and leading to the obligatory schooling of Native children in white-run schools at the beginning of the 20th century. Where early African American literature revolves around the effects of and the fight against slavery, early Native American literature inevitably reflects the often violent conflict with white settlers, and was often written to protest the dire consequences of removal and assimilation policies in the USA. In doing so, Indian (protest-)writers faced the same basic problems as early black abolitionists. Not only was access to publication highly restricted and always dependent on white patronage, but they also had to make their case in the language of the coloniser.

On its most basic level, these circumstances meant that early Native American authors had to designate themselves by using the European misnomer 'Indian', which lumps together all the different tribal cultures into one negative category, i.e. a category that marks a collective deficiency in relation to the changing self-definitions of Anglo-Americans (cf. Berkhofer 1979). Thus, the English word Indian either evoked for their (usually) white audience the stereotypical images of 'bloodthirsty redskins' lacking in the positive traits of European civilisation, or the 'noble savage' who is defined by the absence of its corrupting side-effects. Either way, such diction always proved a hindrance to a more differentiated representation of indigenous cultures in their own right. Similarly, early native authors had to adopt the settlers' literary forms in order to have their voices heard at all. Prior to the late 19th century, Native American oral traditions, just like those brought to the USA by the African slaves, were rarely transcribed into English, and their incorporation into literary writings was not deemed acceptable. But even when this became the case, it hardly seems appropriate to talk about authentic Indian literature, since all modern attempts to faithfully textualise oral traditions or translate them into the framework of Western literature constitute a deeply hybridised practice.

Most of the early writings consist of religious writings (such as sermons), political or journalistic texts, travel narratives, ethnohistories, and, most of all, personal narratives. All of these genres were based on Euro-American values and Christian beliefs and were originally designed to mediate Western forms of subjectivity that were in many respects difficult to reconcile with the authors' tribal identities. So, even if early Native American writers wanted to adequately express or valorise their cultural heritage, this proved extremely difficult to do. In most cases, they had a very troubled relationship to this heritage anyway, because almost all literate Indians had also been converted to Christianity, which inevitably removed them, to a further or lesser degree, from the ways of their ancestors. No longer identifying with the culture of their tribes, but never fully accepted by the hegemonic culture, these 'praying Indians' lived truly liminal existences, stuck in-between worlds and torn between loyalties.

A case in point is Samson Occom, a converted Mohegan and missionary among various New England tribes, whose *A Sermon Preached at the Executions of Moses Paul, an Indian* (1772), and *Collection of Hymns and Spiritual Songs* (1774; *Heath* A, 1122-37) were the first English publications by a Native American. Occom also marks the beginning of autobiographical writing by a North-American Indian (for details, see section 4), a genre which became the most popular form of expression for Christianised natives during the

19th century. Among its finest specimens are *A Son of the Forest* (1829) by William Apes, a Pequot who is today best known for his often anthologised manifesto "An Indian Looking Glass for the White Man" (*Heath* B, 1460-5), the Ojibwa George Copway's *The Life, History, and Travels of Kah-ge-ga-gah-bowh* (1847; *Heath* B, 1477-90), and, to cite a relatively late example, *Life Among the Piutes: Their Wrongs and Claims* (1883, *Heath* C, 554-66), by Sarah Winnemucca, of the Paiute nation. As with many early African American writings, these texts are characterised by a basic tension between criticism and affirmation of the white hegemonic culture: on the one hand, their authors strongly condemn racial discrimination against Indians, the violations of tribal rights or the unfairness of existing land contracts, and attack the policies of systematic displacement in the wake of the Indian Removal Act (1830). And, despite their strong Christian loyalties, some of these early Indian autobiographers even express a tentative sense of tribal pride, and demonstrate an appreciation of their ancestral culture, not only on the level of argument but also through their modes of writing. Albeit to varying degrees, they attempted to transform the self-centred model of modern Western autobiography by blending personal and tribal history, (auto-)ethnographic accounts of traditional customs, and myths. On the other hand, however, they tend to affirm indirectly the ideological premises of the colonial discourse against which they struggle. This paradox is perhaps most apparent in the way they present their own life stories as examples of a successful English education and spiritual transformation. Even though this is done in order to refute white stereotypes of the 'brute Indian' incapable of achieving full humanity, it simultaneously confirms the belief in the superiority of the European race and Western civilisation. "The Christian will no doubt feel for my poor people," Copway begins the widely read story of his life, "when he hears the story of one brought from that unfortunate race called the Indians [and he] will be glad to see that once powerful race can be made to enjoy the blessings of life" (*Heath* B, 1477).

Copway was also successful in two other popular genres of 19th-century Native American literature. His *Running Sketches of Men and Places, in England, France, Germany, Belgium, and Scotland* (1851) is one of the most intriguing among a number of Indian travel narratives of the period. And with his *The Traditional History and Characteristic Sketches of the Ojibway Nation* (1850), he left a fascinating ethnohistory of his tribe, which, like all other Indian nations in the northeast, was undergoing a calamitous cultural change which culminated in complete removal from its ancestral homeland in the same year Copway's text was published. Like many early Indian-rights advocates, Copway by that time had come to believe that removal was in fact the only chance for survival, and propagated the model of a separate Indian state east of the Mississippi in which an acculturated native population could live in a peaceful relationship with the USA.

Yet, despite the considerable efforts of men such as Copway, Apes, the Mahican John Wannuaucon Quincy, Elias Boudinot and others to create an effective lobby for their cause in the way the abolitionists did, the majority of people in the American nation that was being built around the constantly shrinking Indian enclaves remained indifferent to questions of tribal rights, or even to the mere survival of the indigenous population. In the face of the settlers' insatiable hunger for land and resources, plans for the establishment of independent Indian nations within the USA, such as the one Boudinot – who is also believed by some to be the author of first Native American novel in English, *Poor Sarah; or, The Indian Woman* (1833) – so eloquently advocated for the Cherokees in his famous *Address to the Whites* (1826; *Heath* B, 1445-52), were doomed to fail. Boudinot himself

acknowledged this failure with his signature under the removal treaty of New Echota in 1835 (a decision for which he was later assassinated), which sent the Cherokees on the infamous 'Trail of Tears' to their reservation in Oklahoma. With the onset of large-scale western migration after the middle of the 19th century, the same fate also overtook the tribes of the Great Plains as wave after wave of settlers flooded into Indian territory in search of gold in California, ore deposits in the Midwest, and Oregon timber. Considering the fate of his people, it seems almost like an instance of anxious overcompensation that John Rollin Ridge, son of another prominent Cherokee integrationist, who was assassinated alongside Boudinot, so openly embraced the ideology of Manifest Destiny in his writings, which are among the rare specimens of 19th-century Native American fiction and poetry. Most clearly perhaps in the poem "The Atlantic Cable" (1868; *Heath* B, 1492-5), he celebrates the inevitable "progress of the human race" through evolutionary stages from the illiterate "skin-clad" people inhabiting the woods to the new Anglo-American civilisation formed by the political and scientific revolution ushering in "the bright millennial days to be." The most successful Indian American author of this period, Ridge not only wrote poetry modelled on the Anglo-American Romantics, but also the best-selling adventure novel *The Life and Adventures of Joaquin Murieta, the Celebrated California Bandit* (1854).

After the massacre at Wounded Knee in 1890, which marked the end of open warfare in the west, Indian life entered a new phase when the tribes were largely confined to poverty-ridden reservations, and the very continuance of their culture was endangered by new and highly aggressive forms of acculturation. Under the Dawes Act, the tribes lost their legal standing, and reservation land was converted into small, individually owned allotments, a concept that ran contrary to the core principle of most indigenous civilisations: a communal life based on the principle of shared property. Also, Indian children were forcibly removed to boarding schools, where they were given Anglo-European names, forbidden to speak their languages, and prevented from practising the traditional ways of their people. The possibility of their total disappearance, together with the emergence of anthropology as an academic discipline, generated a wave of 'scientific' ethnohistories and studies on Indian cultures, as well as documentary collections of their myths, folktales and songs. A number of these, such as the *Dakota Texts* (1932), were undertaken by university-trained Native American authors like Ella C. Deloria, a Dakota who was a pupil of Franz Boas, the founder of American anthropology.

The usual practice, however, involved Indians cooperating with white anthropologists, creating a big corpus of 'oral literatures' which, especially in the early phase, betray the bias and shaping influence of the anthropologists' perspective. The same is true for the numerous Indian 'autobiographies' produced during the first decades of the 20th century as the result of collaborations between a white interviewer or editor (usually anthropologists), and relatively unacculturated Indians looking back at the 'old days'. Products of such collaborations are Paul Radin's *Crashing Thunder* (1926, told by Crashing Thunder, Winnebago), Truman Michelson's *The Autobiography of a Fox Woman* (1919), Don C. Talayesva's *Sun Chief: Autobiography of a Hopi* (1942, written in collaboration with Leo Simmons), and, most famously, John Neihardt's *Black Elk Speaks* (1937, told by the Lakota, Black Elk), an enormously popular work, especially during the counter-culture era which, like no other, has shaped the modern image of the Indian sage immersed in the spiritual world and in tune with nature. All of these texts raise difficult questions about their authenticity, as the narrated life stories often seem either partly shaped according to patterns of Western autobiographical writing and/or dominated by white models of Indianness (cf. Krupat 1985, Brumble 1988, Wong 1992).

An (auto-)anthropological perspective also informs most of the predominantly non-fictional works written by a generation of thoroughly educated Native American authors after the turn of the century. In their autobiographies, Luther Standing Bear (Sioux), Joseph Griffis, and Charles Alexander Eastman (Sioux) – the latter was probably the best-known Native American author until World War II – combine accounts of their personal history with a new kind of ethnohistory that documents traditional tribal life in the west in great detail before its expected disappearance. As much as these authors might emphasise the value of many things Indian for a future America, and might foreground the initial hardships of the transition from their (usually very idealised) youth as 'noble savages' to their life as 'civilised' adults, they still present themselves as positive examples of the evolution *From the Deep Woods to Civilization* (1916; *Heath* C, 547-54), as Eastman significantly called the second part of his autobiography. This was an evolution he, like many others at the time, thought the 'Indian race' as a whole had to undergo in order to survive. Equally ambiguous are the popularisations of Indian stories written for a white audience, particularly children, by Eastman (e.g., *Old Indian Days*, 1907) and others, like the *Old Indian Legends* (1901) of the Sioux Zitkala-Sa (Gertrude Simmons Bonnin). As attempts at preserving and making their white audience appreciate Indian culture, their works familiarised and romanticised the traditional stories they re-told, thereby simultaneously contributing to their trivialisation and 'museumisation' of tribal heritages, a problem that still mars many popular representations of Native American history today.

In the period between the two World Wars, an increasing number of Native American writers explored poetry, drama and fiction in order to engage with the difficult reality of present-day Indian existence rather than to look back at life before allotment. (Rolla) Lynn Riggs (Cherokee) is even today often considered to be one of the foremost Native American playwrights, producing highly successful pieces of folk drama such as *Roadside* (1930) and *Green Grow the Lilacs* (1931), but also critically addressing the general plight of his people and the particular problems of a mixed-blood individual in *The Cherokee Night* (1932). As well as this, Riggs was a pioneer of Native American verse, and the best texts collected in his *The Iron Dish* (1930) venture beyond the (late-) Romantic conventions that stifled most of his few fellow-Indian poets. The most daring and innovative novels written by Native Americans at the time often "dealt with mixed-bloods' quest to find their places in the Indian and white worlds and with the survivals of tribalism" (Ruoff 1994, 151). Most significant among these are *Cogwea, the Half Blood* by Mourning Dove (Christine Quintasket) of the Colville (Salishan) people, written in cooperation with Lucullus V. McWorther, the Osage John Joseph Mathew's *Sundown* (1934), and *The Surrounded* (1936), by (William) D'Arcy McNickle who was born to a French Cree mother and a Scotch-Irish father. Although little-read at the time of their first publication, these novels, McNickel's in particular, were seminal achievements, and paved the way for the so-called Native American Renaissance, which brought unprecedented success and international recognition to a new generation of Indian authors.

Of course, this cultural and literary revival did not occur in a political vacuum. Tribal life had slowly began to recover after the passing of the Indian Reorganisation Act in 1934, which – besides the legal and financial improvements it implemented – officially recognised the importance of preserving Indian cultural institutions. Then, in the wake

of the Civil Rights struggle, a Native American protest movement emerged during the late 1960s that called the nation's attention to the 'Indian question' through a series of media events such as the take-over of Alcatraz and the Bureau of Indian Affairs in Washington, or the violent events at Wounded Knee in 1973. Its organised branch was the American Indian Movement (AIM), which was created in 1968 on the model of black nationalist organisations and which agitated for a wide range of issues including "economic independence and control over native natural resources, the political autonomy of tribal reservations, the revitalization of traditional culture and spirituality, and the education of young Indian children" (Hoxie 1996, 23). Like its African American correlate, this 'red power movement' defined its task as an anticolonial struggle against the external and mental colonisation of the indigenous population that continues to this day.

Like the writings produced by the Harlem Renaissance or the Black Arts Movement, the literature of the Native American Renaissance,[11] which grew out of this social ferment, bears a certain family resemblance to other so-called postcolonial literary movements around the world. This is true despite the great differences, not least in outward circumstances. After all, the prefix 'post' in the adjective 'postcolonial' does not, politically speaking, apply to any of the 'tribal nations' which might exercise a considerable degree of self-government today, but have not achieved (if they ever sought to), and, in all likelihood, will never achieve, complete political autonomy from the USA in the way that countries like India did from Britain. Even though North American Indians arguably still live in a quasi-colonial situation, the writers of the Native American Renaissance share a concern for the revitalisation of a cultural heritage, as well as certain basic strategies of resistance, most importantly a creative 'writing-back' to the ideas and representations disseminated by the literature of dominance with anglophone postcolonial authors around the world. Or, as the Chippewa Gerald Vizenor put it in *Manifest Matters*: The driving force behind "tribal creative literature, and now [...] the creative literature of distinguished postindian authors in cities" has been the desire to transfigure the English language, "this mother tongue of paracolonialism," with its semantic memory of "colonial discoveries, racial cruelties, invented names (and) simulation of tribal cultures," into a "language of invincible imagination and liberation" (Vizenor 1994, 105-6).

If one wanted to identify a *spiritus rector* of the Native American Renaissance, it would undoubtedly be the Kiowa N. Scott Momaday, whose Pulitzer Prize-winning *House Made of Dawn* (1968) staked out a literary market for a new kind of Indian literature and served as an example for his own as well as the following generations of Native American authors (see Georgi-Findley 1986). In more ways than one, Momaday's book continues where the novels of McNickel left off. Similarly defiant of white stereotypes, he paints a grimly realistic picture of contemporary reservation life as the backdrop for the psychologically complex portrayal of a mixed-blood protagonist called Abel, a World War II veteran who suffers from what the author has called a 'dislocation of the psyche'. Living in and fighting for a white-dominated society into which he will never be fully integrated, Abel has been cut off from his cultural moorings and set adrift in search of a new identity. Unlike the earlier mixed-blood novels, however, Momaday's novel offers a more hopeful perspective for the future, since its final chapter suggests that Abel successfully enacts a new sense of self through the creative appropriation of healing rituals and mythic precedents from several tribal traditions. With *House Made of Dawn*, Momaday established important themes and literary methods not only for his own works to follow – including *The Way to Rainy Mountain* (1969, *Heath* E, 2480-9), *Names* (1977), a literary memoir of his childhood, and *The Gourd Dancer* (1976), one of his several volumes of poetry – but also for the fiction and poetry of the many other Native American writers who made their appearance during the following decades. Just as the overwhelming majority of their texts revolve around the Indian struggle for survival and identity, most of them have followed the example of Momaday in creating hybrid or interstitial forms of writing which, in one way or another, combine the generic forms of Western literature – most importantly the novel itself – with indigenous oral traditions (see Hochbruck 1991).

[11] For comprehensive studies of the Native American Renaissance, see Lincoln 1983, Owens 1992, and the essays collected by Breinig 2003.

Beyond these basic commonalities, however, individual authors have differed widely from each other, both in the way they handle their subject matter and in the specific literary techniques they use. One decisive factor determining these differences is the diverging 'identity politics' that inform their writings. In analogy to what has been said about the development of African American literature after World War II, one can, for heuristic purposes, distinguish between two basic positions. These indicate, as it were, the extreme ends of a complex spectrum of ideological viewpoints represented by individual works of contemporary Native American writers who have, of course, occasionally altered their outlook during the course of their careers. At one end would be a viewpoint that sympathises with an ideology of anticolonial tribal nationalism and/or a pan-Indian indigenism that is predicated on an often ethnically defined opposition between native cultures and the hegemonic culture of the white Anglo-Saxon coloniser. In both cases, the guiding assumption is therefore one "of fundamental differences [between white and red] which have been threatened by the loss of Indian speakers but can be creatively sustained and expressed in English" (Murray 2005, 78). At the other end, we have those authors who embrace a cross-cultural position, or what Arnold Krupat has called Indian cosmopolitanism, which rejects any identity politics based on ethnic essentialism, or totalising concepts of Indianness, and emphasises, rather, the importance of cross-cultural exchange (Ivanova 2004).[12]

Good examples of a tribally centred position can be found in the works of Simon J. Ortiz (Acoma), Linda Hogan (Chickasaw) and Joy Harjo (Creek), who have all committed themselves to restoring as much as possible the lost cultural integrity of their respective people, and, in the words of Ortiz, to "express a Native American nationalistic (some may call it tribalistic) literary voice" (*Heath* E, 2725). At the same time, the texts of these authors often call for a pan-Indian solidarity and self-empowerment based on a com-

[12] The academic (sub-)discipline of Native American Studies is equally divided along these lines. The most prominent proponents of tribal nationalism and Indian separatism are probably Elizabeth Cook-Lynn (1996) and Craig Womack (1999), whereas the best-known representatives of a cross-cultural position are Luis Owens and Arnold Krupat. Of course, Indian cosmopolitanism also regards itself as being anticolonial in the sense that it opposes all forms of colonial domination and oppression. Yet its proponents are critical of conceiving of one white hegemonic culture as the monolithic 'Other', or of advocating an antagonistic separation from it. Because "[i]mperial domination," as Krupat has argued, depends on "dichotimized, binary, oppositional, or manichean reasoning" (1992, 20), the dualistic perceptions of tribal nationalists or indigenists ultimately run the risk of establishing inverse forms of colonialism rather than combatting it effectively. From a position of cross-cultural cosmopolitanism, resistance to colonialism must instead aim at challenging the logic of 'us vs. them' and its societal effects; and the best way to do this through literature is to engage indigenous and Western cultural epistemes in a productive dialogue.

munal bond of Indianness. This bond they see defined by a holistic relation not only to the tribal homelands but also to the earth at large, something which, in their view, distinguishes indigenous tribes from the dualistic culture of the Western colonisers. Ever since his debut *Going for the Rain* (1976), Ortiz, for example, has evoked in his poetry the images of an ongoing struggle to defend this essential Indianness that goes back to the ancestors' fight – as he puts it in *From Sand Creek* (1981) – against "foreign diseases, missionaries," and continues today with shielding tribal cultures against "canned food, Dick and Jane textbooks, IBM cards, / Western philosophies and General Electric." As a primary means of survival in this struggle, Ortiz (like Hogan and Harjo) has defined the power of community-building that lies in the oral traditions of "ancient and deep story" and "song as language" (*Heath* E, 2726-30). Ortiz' lyrical 'orature' thus attempts to translate elements of his Acoma culture into the English language, thereby simultaneously reaching out to a wide audience of native people, but also to sympathetic non-native individuals in search for a more holistic consciousness.

A similar agenda also informs Linda Hogan's work, from her first volume of poetry *Calling Myself Home* (1978), to the novels *Mean Spirit* (1990), *Seeing Through the Sun* (1985), and *Power* (1998). One the one hand, she seeks to recuperate the particular historical legacy of the Chickasaw nation and to strengthen pan-Indian unity. On the other hand, she sees indigenism as a path to redemption for all of mankind, and has repeatedly invoked the global vision of a return to – as Omishto, the narrator of *Power* puts it – an aboriginal state when "[t]he whole earth loved the human people" (Hogan 1998, 229). The same message of reconciliation between different ethnic cultures through a collective embrace of an indigenist world-view echoes in the cadences of Joy Harjo's poem "Remember" – included in her collection *She Had Some Horses* (1983) – which simulate the rhythm of the Indian ceremonial drum: "Remember the earth whose skin you are: / red earth, black earth, yellow earth, white earth / brown earth, we are earth" (*Heath* E, 2955).

Far removed from such forms of indigenist utopianism, the historical novels by James Welch (Blackfoot) and Louise Erdrich (Chippewa) – two of the most prominent figures in Native American literature today – are nevertheless connected to the above-mentioned works by a shared sentiment of anticolonial tribal nationalism. Both Welch's *Fools Crow* (1986) and Erdrich's *Tracks* (1988) seek to restore an Indian perspective to the historical events which so catastrophically affected their ancestors, and to re-create and preserve in writing a cultural heritage which they present as being deeply rooted in the tribal homeland of the Pikuni (Blackfeet) and Anishinabe (Chippewa) respectively. When their novels are situated in the present, however, the two authors tend to problematise any notion of an ethnically defined cultural integrity by writing about mixed-blood characters who have to renegotiate their identities between the multiple strands of their ancestry and/or different communities. In this respect, Welch's best-known novel, *Winter in the Blood* (1971), as well as Erdrich's award-winning *Love Medicine* (1984) or *The Bingo Palace* (1994) with their polyphonies of intersecting Euramerican and Native American voices, are closer to a position of cross-culturalism. This is also true for the rising star of contemporary Native American literature, Sherman Alexie (Spokane/Coeur d'Alene), at least in his critically acclaimed lyrical debut, *The Business of Fancydancing* (1992) and his novel *Reservation Blues* (1995). However, in other works, such as *Indian Killer* (1996), Alexie has more leaned towards a separatist perspective typical of 'red nationalism'.

Ironically, the first major writer to at least partly qualify as an Indian (literary) cosmopolitan in Krupat's definition was Momaday himself, whose mixed-blood characters defy

clear-cut tribal affiliations, or any static notions of Indianness, for that matter. The man who is habitually hailed as the father of the Native American renaissance never really understood and practised Indian literature in English as a means to 'simply' regenerate the tribal traditions of the past. Rather, he understood it as a mediatory practice which, in the words of James Ruppert, "uses the epistemological frameworks of Native American and Western cultural traditions to illuminate and enrich each other" (Ruppert 1995, 3). Just as his most famous character, Abel, has to reconcile the re-discovered ancestral traditions with the present, Momaday's writings very self-consciously wed Kiowa, Navajo and Pueblo forms of oral storytelling to the conventions of Anglo-American literature, in particular the techniques of modernist novelists like Hemingway and Faulkner.

Very close to Momaday in this respect is another major figure in Native American literature, Leslie Marmon Silko (Laguna), whose celebrated novel *Ceremony* (1977) portrays a deeply syncretic Laguna Pueblo culture that has always been changing through the incorporation of new elements, and must continue to do so in order to survive. When Silko has a character say that "the ceremonies have always been changing" and that only "this growth keeps ceremonies strong," this statement can likewise be read as a poetological reflection on her own concept of Native American fiction, which she understands to be a mode of continuing traditions by renewing them in deliberate acts of transculturation (Silko 1977, 126). Such a tendency to theoretically question, and performatively cross, all seemingly fixed ethnic or cultural boundaries is even more pronounced in the poetry of Wendy Rose (Hopi), and, most of all, in the versatile work of Gerald Vizenor, who, like no other contemporary Native American author, "has explored the possibilities of Native cosmopolitanism in his fiction and criticism" (Krupat 2002, 20; for details see section 4).

4. Readings of Key Texts

Colonial Legacies: Phillis Wheatley, Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral *(1773) and Samson Occom,* A Short Narrative of My Life *(1768)*

For the reasons outlined in the introduction, the following sections will only discuss key texts from the African American and Native American tradition. I will begin by looking at two 18th-century authors, Phillis Wheatley and Samson Occom, who did not write from the centre of the colonial discourse but rather from its borders: that is to say, while they belonged among the few privileged representatives of their groups who were allowed to become authorial subjects by writing in the style of the coloniser, they were simultaneously colonised objects of degrading (self-)descriptions from the internalised perspective of their white patrons. What Occom's writings and Wheatley's poems exemplify is therefore a decidedly asymmetrical form of intercultural exchange in which the dispossessed Indian or enslaved African is – in the twofold sense of the word – authorised to speak on behalf of the colonised only by submitting to the (linguistic and cultural) terms stipulated by the coloniser. This, of course, seriously affected the primary purpose of both authors: namely, to assert the full humanity of their respective ethnic groups by demonstrating what the colonisers considered to be the ultimate proof of cultural competence: literacy; not only in the sense of the basic ability to write, but also in the sense of a capa-

bility to produce what was then defined as literature.[13] In their attempt to achieve discursive visibility for their people, and indeed to write themselves into being in this manner, both authors consequently struggle with the irresolvable paradox which Henry Louis Gates, Jr. so cogently analysed in his essay "Writing, 'Race,' and the Difference It Makes." Arising, as he puts it, "as a response to the allegation of its absence," early African American (as well as Native American literature) demonstrates the difficulty, and perhaps impossibility, of positing a full or sufficient self in an idiom "that contains the irreducible element of cultural difference," in which blackness, or redness for that matter, signifies deficiency and absence (Gates 1999, 474).

Just how acute this difficulty was for Wheatley is perhaps best suggested by the fact that the collection of poems she planned (but, due to a lack of American subscribers, never managed) to publish in Boston, had been advertised by the printers with the claim that they could not credit 'ye performances to be by a Negro'. And even though Wheatley was lucky enough to enjoy the support of benevolent owners, who had allowed her to be fully educated after buying her on a Boston slave market when she was seven years old, her legal status alone was enough to constantly reinforce the most pernicious form of racial self-awareness. Until 1773, the very year her *Poems* – the first volume of poems to be published by an African American – finally appeared in London, she remained the property of the Wheatley family, who only reluctantly agreed to her manumission. As is true for virtually every African American text before the Civil War, Wheatley was only able to publish her *Poems* with the cooperation of white patrons (in her case, the prestigious help of the Countess of Huntingdon, a friend of her mistress Susannah Wheatley), who, in characteristic manner, also prefaced the volume attesting to the worthiness of the 'negro poetess'. Considering these circumstances, it is surprising that Wheatley managed to find and express even the very tentative sense of racial protest and pride that occasionally speaks from her poems, which are otherwise very much in compliance with the hegemonic discourse and its assertions of white European superiority. It is not surprising at all, however, that Wheatley would have to employ very subtle strategies of manipulating her seemingly unqualified rhetoric of deference and praise in order to create an inconspicuous space for such claims to the humanity, dignity, and rights of blacks without shocking her white audience by open calls for their immediate liberation.

A good example of the often complex rhetorical manoeuvrings and sometimes downright contradictory vacillations of her poetry – which are in part due to strategic necessities, and in part induced by her own insecure sense of self – is the early piece "To the Right Honourable William, Earl of Dartmouth, His Majesty's Principal Secretary of State for North America, &c" (1772). Here she 'explains' to an intended audience of New England Whigs her instinctive sympathy for the mounting resistance of the colonials to the "iron chain" of lawless acts through which Britain "enslave[s] the land" by comparing it to her own experience with a similar kind of "wanton *Tyranny*": "I, young in life, by seeming cruel fate / Was snatch'd from *Afric's* fancy'd happy seat" (*Heath* A, 1243-4). In this direct way, Wheatley makes a strong case for ending slavery by paralleling the struggle for black emancipation with the cause of the white American patriots. And especially in the light of other poems by Wheatley, it seems that her evocation of Africa as the lost paradise of childhood is not just a rhetorical ploy serving to accentuate the cruelty of the slave-trade, but indeed a hesitant expression of heartfelt affection for her homeland. In "Phillis's Reply to the Answer in our Last by the Gentleman in the Navy" (1774), for instance, the poet goes so far as to declare: "[H]ow my bosom burns! / and pleasing Gambia on my soul returns, / With native grace in spring's luxurious reign, / Smiles the gay mead, and Eden blooms again" (*Heath* A, 1250-2).

[13] The contemporary reception of Wheatley's *Poems* illustrates how early African American texts were by necessity situated in larger cultural debates about the full humanity of blacks and the legitimacy of their enslavement. In order to bolster his argument about the racial inferiority of African slaves in his *Notes on the State of Virginia*, Thomas Jefferson, for instance, felt compelled to rebuff positive reactions to Wheatley's poetry (such as Voltaire's famous remark that she was the composer of "très-bons vers anglais") by asserting that the "compositions published under her name are below the dignity of criticism" (*Heath* A, 1005).

But despite the occasional recitation of such bucolic images of Africa in her poetry, Wheatley still regards African people as 'noble savages' who should no longer be brutalised, but who instead need to be converted and civilised by peaceful means. How much she had internalised an Euro- and Christocentric value-system, and how deeply this affected her identity, is revealed by the way she qualifies – by means of the adjectives "seeming" and "fancy'd" – even the condemnation of her own enslavement in the above-quoted lines from the poem dedicated to the Earl of Dartmouth. Having been raised as a pious woman, she could not but interpret the kidnapping from her 'primitive' African home as a divinely preordained blessing in disguise, since it led to her European education, which, in turn, enabled her to embrace the redeeming faith of Christ. Or, as she puts it in her best-known poem, "On Being Brought from Africa to America" (1773): "'Twas mercy brought me from my *Pagan* land, / Taught my benighted soul to understand / That there's a God, that there's a *Saviour* too" (*Heath* A, 1247). Even though Wheatley might argue in this and other poems against those who "view our sable race with scornful eye" and claim that "'[t]heir colour is a diabolic die'," she herself, as her use of the adjective "benighted" underscores, is trapped in the logic of a discourse in which blackness is the ultimate marker of difference and inferiority.

* * *

Very similar problems plague the writings of the Mohegan minister Samson Occom, who was a long-time friend of Wheatley, and to whom she wrote a widely printed public letter in 1774. In this extraordinarily frank text, the poet censures all racially motivated forms of oppression and emphasises the "strange absurdity" of the conduct of those in North America who sound the "cry for liberty," but in practice show "the reverse disposition for the exercise of oppressive power over others" (*Heath* A, 1056). A deep sense of embitterment over exactly this kind of hypocrisy also informs Occom's posthumously edited *A Short Narrative of My Life* (*Heath* A, 116-22), which he originally wrote to refute allegations of financial mismanagement, and to demonstrate to his superiors how desperate his situation really was despite the great value his missionary work among Indians had for the church (see Peyer 1994). Through its descriptions of Occom's personal experience of exploitation and discrimination, as well as of the systematic neglect of his poverty-stricken flocks, this earliest extant autobiography written by a North American Indian also gives more general insights into the marginalisation and maltreatment of even the most acculturated Native Americans at the end of the colonial period. "What can be the Reason that they used me after this manner?" Occom asks at the end of a long account of the hardships and injustices he had to suffer from the church to which he had dedicated his life after being converted at the age of sixteen. "I can't think of any thing," he

goes on to say, "but this [...] 'because I am an Indian.'" Occom's text also reveals how the internalisation of a negative attitude towards the "[h]eathenish ways" of his people – a process which went along with Christianisation – must inevitably lead acculturated natives to self-estrangement or self-hatred, when even their conversion does not allow them to leave behind their racially marked Indianness. The resulting sense of despair is encapsulated in the exclamation with which Occom concludes his text: "I Can't help that God has made me So; I did not make myself so."

Postcolonial (Re)visions: Louise Erdrich, Captivity *(1984) and Langston Hughes,* I, Too *(1925)*

One of the driving forces behind the Native American Renaissance since the 1970s was the desire to demythify misleading white concepts about Indian life, and to ennoble the 'heathenish ways' of the tribal cultures which Occom, like so many acculurated Indians after him, had been taught to look down upon. Confronted with the apparent difficulty of writing back to these denigrating images of Indians in a literary idiom which abounded with them, many authors made use of a specific (inter-)textual strategy for – to borrow the title of Jay Haro's and Gloria Bird's trail-blazing collection from 1977 – *Reinventing the Enemy's Language.* By the 1970s, this strategy of linguistic reinvention through subversively re-writing paradigmatic texts of the colonial discourse had already been established by writers of anti- or postcolonial literary movements around the world, including African American authors. A striking example of how Native American writers appropriated this strategy can be found in Louise Erdrich's literary debut, her 1984 collection of poetry entitled *Jacklight.* "Captivity" (Erdrich 1984, 26-8) not only takes its title and an identified motto from *The Narrative of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. M[ary] R[owlandson]* (1682), but the poem as a whole performs a revisionist reading of this most (in-)famous of all captivity narratives, a genre which had defined the literary stereotype of the 'bloody savage' inherited by later forms of Anglo-American 'Indian literature'. In an ironic act of reversal, Erdrich 'kidnaps' the voice of Rowlandson and counters the endless denunciations of her Wampanoag captors as beasts and hellish creatures with a very sympathetic representation of the Indians which not only re-claims their full humanity, but even makes them appear as more civilised than their Puritan opponents.

Erdrich does so, however, not by simple negations of Rowlandson's invective, but through a quite subtle way of reading in-between the lines of her captivity narrative, whose seemingly simple message is, on closer inspection, in fact complicated by a number of ideological lapses or ambiguities. Probably the most conspicuous of these lapses are those moments in the text when Rowlandson, almost by accident, stops writing about those 'blood heathens' as a collective singular, and begins to distinguish between different individuals, some of whom – in particular her Indian master – she cannot help liking. Right at the beginning of the poem, Erdrich picks up on these, as it were, 'involuntary individualisations', when she has Rowlandson anxiously say about her master:

> I had grown to recognize his face.
> I could distinguish it from the others.
> There were times I feared I understood
> his language, which was not human,
> and I knelt to pray for strength.

Building on the assumption of a growing intimacy between Rowlandson and her captors, the next two stanzas reference those passages from the captivity narrative in which the historical author details how she had to adjust to certain 'abhorrable' habits as well as the food of the Indians in order to survive. In Erdrich's re-writing, the vivid descriptions of shared food in the original text are turned into sensual metaphors suggestive of a retrospectively suppressed romantic seduction of Rowlandson by her Indian master. The meat he fed her, the lyrical I confides to the reader in highly ambiguous language, "was so tender, / the bones like the stems of flowers, / that I followed where he took me." As a result, the speaker is immediately tormented by guilt-ridden visions of divine punishment, as she feels that, in swallowing this lure, she has literally made a mockery ("After that the birds mocked") of the precious notion of cultural and ethnic supremacy upheld by the Puritan settlers.

Underneath Rowlandson's constant rhetorical assertions of Puritan ideology, Erdrich thus senses a subcutaneous fear of involuntary assimilation to the Indians which, as mentioned in the survey section, literary historians have also found in the narrative. From Erdrich's point of view, however, this fear has less to do with the settlers' strained relationship with the motherland, and more to do with Rowlandson' repressed desire to 'go native', to become part of a culture to which she unconsciously felt attracted because it showed her the possibility of a freer and more wholesome existence than that allowed by a highly restrictive Puritan society based on the principles of fear and guilt. When Rowlandson follows her Indian seducer into the woods, she registers the fact that to her surprise, he "did not notice God's wrath" which she, by way of contrast, has to dread all of the time. What follows during the rest of the poem is a psychological portrait of Rowlandson as torn between her longing for a 'wild life' and the temptation to break the built-in taboo of following her natural instincts.

The end of the poem paints a deeply troubled Rowlandson, who, after having been ransomed and taken home, is no longer at all sure whether she has really returned to a superior civilisation: "Rescued, I see no truth in things. / My husband drives a thick wedge through the earth, still it shuts / to him year after year." Alienated from the dualistic thinking of her own European-Christian culture, which 'drives wedges' between me and not-me, human and nature, man and woman, she lies in the dark re-living a scene in her mind when she watched a tribal ceremony led by her master, "until I could no longer bear / the thought of how I was." The poem's final vision of the ancestral Indian ways into which Rowlandson desires initiation, but to which she can never be granted full access, is that of a much more holistic culture living in harmonious relationship with the land from which they are driven by the white settlers:

> I stripped a branch
> and struck the earth,
> in time, begging it to open
> to admit me
> as he was
> and feed me honey from rock.

Significantly, the images Erdrich uses here (an in earlier passages of the poem) are freely adapted from mythological trickster stories that are part of many tribal cultures. Just as the lyrical I is seduced by a legendary Indian figure, Erdrich 'impregnates' Rowlandson's original text with native motifs and ideas which take on new meanings as a result of this 'cultural cross-breeding'.

The overall critical gesture at "Captivity" can thus be described as an almost complete inversion of the traditional hierarchical opposition between historically dominant white culture and the indigenous population for which Rowlandson's Wampanoag captors serve as a synecdoche. In contrast to many of Erdrich's later prose writings, this early poem relies on a somewhat totalising notion of ethnic differences in order to hammer home its anticolonial agenda. In this particular text, then, Erdrich instantiates what Krupat calls the "geocentric epistemology" (Krupat 2002, ix) typical of an indigenist ideology which defines a general opposition between 'red' and 'white' through their different relationships to the earth.

* * *

With its unspoken message of 'red is beautiful', but also through the subversive (inter-) textual strategies it employs, Erdrich's "Captivity" recalls a long line of literary works by African American authors who had rehearsed similar gestures of 'writing back' to the negative figurations of blackness in the hegemonic culture. These artistic endeavours started long before the Black Arts Movement gave rise to such conspicuous and popular forms of re-writing as the neo-slave narrative. Following the lead of the *négritude* movement, the Harlem Renaissance as a whole can be interpreted as a collective attempt to re-figurate blackness – a concept that, like 'redness', largely equates race and culture in positive terms. And in some instances, members of the movement also engaged in a critical intertextual dialogue with specific, often canonical, texts of the Anglo-American literary tradition. In his poem "I, Too" (*Heath* D, 1525), Langston Hughes, for instance, responds to "Song of Myself," Walt Whitman's famous celebration of the country's democracy and common man. Echoing Whitman's easily recognisable first line "I celebrate myself, and sing myself" in his opening "I, too, sing America. / I am the darker brother. / They send me to eat in the kitchen," Hughes reminds his addressees that the descendants of the freed slaves mentioned in passing by Whitman are still being excluded from the American dream of equal rights and liberty, are still living on the margin of its affluent society. By giving a voice to the poor and disenfranchised African Americans, whose protest has largely been silenced by the 'official culture' of post-Reconstruction America, the poem also emphasises black people's right to speak for themselves and in their own way. Although a great admirer of Whitman's free-verse experiments, Hughes protests against the claim to a representative Americanness which the lyrical I of Whitman's "Song of Myself" establishes through its symbolic acts of sympathetic identification ("And what I assume you shall assume") with different members of the populace, including the runaway slaves. In Hughes' poem the "darker brother" will no longer be spoken for, but defiantly promises white America: "Tomorrow, / I will be at the table / When company comes [...] / They'll see how beautiful I am."

Rejecting Whitman's poetical assimilation of the former slaves into a unified, white-dominated American monoculture, Hughes insists not only on the existence but on the intrinsic value of a separate and distinctive black culture in America. In his view, black people consequently needed their own representative bard who would, as he put it in his famous manifesto "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain" (1926; *Heath* D, 1537-40), overcome the detrimental urge of many previous black writers "to run away spiritually from [their] race [...], the desire to pour racial individuality into the mold of American standardisation, and to be as little Negro and as much American as possible." Instead of creating art only "according to Caucasian pattern," the ideal "racial artist" envisioned by Hughes would see it as incumbent upon himself to "express our individual dark-skinned selves," and to reveal "the beauty of his own people" that had been made invisible for so long by the mechanisms of (internalised) racism. In order to achieve such a truly black art, future authors must – as Hughes argues in the tradition of a Romantic cultural nationalism – discover lower-class black life as an object of beauty, and make productive use of their African "heritage of rhythm and warmth." They would have to infuse, as Hughes himself was attempting to do, the English literary language with black folk traditions such as the spiritual, jazz and blues, which he regards as "the inherent expressions of Negro life in America; the eternal tom-tom beating in the Negro soul." As was hinted at in the survey section, Hughes' basic ideal of a "racial art" in the service of an anticolonial struggle was not only a common concern amongst many artists of the Harlem Renaissance, but exerted a powerful influence on the entire development of African American cultural life after World War II. It was adopted and further developed by the theorists and practitioners of a Black Aesthetic, which might have ceased to exist as an organised movement after the 1970s but is very much alive today as the popular notion of a racially defined and Africentric black American 'counter-culture' which must be cherished and preserved in all its peculiarity.

Transcultural Perspectives: Charles Johnson, Middle Passage *(1990) and Gerald Vizenor,* Ethnic Derivatives: Tricksterese versus Anthropologetics *(1997)*

Among the growing group of contemporary African American writers who take a decidedly non-essentialising view of race and a non-separatist stance on cultural politics, Charles Johnson is one of the most prominent voices. In an interview with Michael Bocca, he once remarked that the "ideology of 'blackness'" advocated by "black cultural nationalism" was an understandable reaction to white racism, but had always struck him as equally naive in its intellectual presuppositions, since "all cultures we know about are synthetic, a tissue of contributions from others." Therefore, when Johnson declared in the same conversation that "I have always seen myself first and foremost as an American," this is not to be understood as a patriotic gesture signalling the submissive willingness to assimilate to the norms of a white-dominated Anglo American monoculture. It is, rather, an expression of his belief that "it is impossible to separate out black people from this nation's evolution" (Boccia 1996, 612-4), which he understands as an ongoing trans- or intercultural process across national borders, even though this might consistently have been denied by the nationalistic advocates of Anglo-American ascendancy. What Johnson defines as the real foundation of American identity is, paradoxically, its radical fluidity and mobility, which constantly transgresses definitional boundaries. For him, to be American in an ideal sense means to assume an anti-fundamentalist stance that rejects the very ideas of racial integrity or cultural authenticity that lie at the heart of nationalist mythologies of home and origin. The vision of America which Johnson upholds, then, is that of a nation which would be home to those who have learned to embrace their hybrid identities, cultural uprootedness, and metaphysical homelessness. Or as the black narrator of *Middle Passage*, Rutherford Calhoun, puts it towards the end of his quest for identity: "If this weird, upside-down caricature of a country called America [...] this cauldron of mongrels from all points of the compass – was all I could rightly call home, then aye; I was of it" (Johnson 1990, 179).

While all of Johnson's fictional writings reflect this belief in a transcultural America, perhaps, and somewhat surprisingly, none does so as strongly as his national bestseller *Middle Passage,* which, as the title suggests, takes its readers on a slave-ship making its voyage across the Atlantic. Unlike many other neo-slave narratives, with which it is often shelved, the novel is not so much concerned with a revisionary historiography or representational politics based on racially defined opposition between the culture of the white Anglo-Saxon oppressors and their African victims. Without belittling the determining influence and detrimental consequences which the binary logic of racism historically exerted and still exerts on people's lives, Johnson refuses to accept it as an absolute reality. *Middle Passage* is, in fact, best read as an attempt to reveal how much of any "identity is imagined," and, in particular, to expose the cultural constructedness of race that makes "the (black) self [...] the greatest of all fictions" (171). Accordingly, the text starts with a doubly inversive gesture: Calhoun, an aimlessly drifting former slave turned petty thief who is always on the run from any new form of bondage or commitment, hops a slave-ship with the telling name Republic that is partly owned by a Creole crime-boss from New Orleans. But travelling back the slave route to the homeland of his ancestors, and meeting with the kidnapped members of the Allmuseri – a mythical tribe said to be the oldest in Africa – which the Republic takes on board there, does not give Calhoun a new sense of direction by bringing him in touch with his true racial self. On the contrary, the voyage is designed by Johnson as an ultimately abortive search for cultural origins, authenticity or racial integrity.

What Johnson's protagonist comes to understand during the course of his personal middle passage, and what the journeying between the continents becomes emblematic of, is, for one thing, the cultural in-betweenness and fluidity of his own identity as an African American which he constantly needs to re-negotiate, especially after a slave rebellion breaks out on board. Moreover, he comes to comprehend just how much his own unacknowledged yearning to be part of the African community, and to reconnect to "Allmuseri folkways," has shaped his perception of the tribe as a racially defined, "ageless culture" (78), when in fact it is "less a biological tribe than a clan held together by certain values" (109). And the more he observes the Allmuseri, the more he realises that these values are neither identically interpreted by different members, nor are they by any means unchanging. In fact, they are constantly being redefined, and undergo a particularly dramatic transformation after the tribesmen are enslaved and are forced to interact with different non-African cultures. "Stupidly, I had seen their lives and cultures as timeless product, as a finished thing, pure essence or Parmenidean meaning I envied and wanted to embrace," Calhoun confides to the reader,

> when the truth was that they were process and Heraclitean change, like any men, not fixed but evolving [...]. [A]ll the Africans, I realized, were not wholly Allmuseri anymore. We had changed them. I suspected even he [Ngonyama, one of the Allmuseri leaders] did not recognize the quiet revisions in his voice after he learned English as it was spoken by the crew, or how the vision hidden in their speech was deflecting or redirecting his own ways of seeing. (124)

Calhoun's initial misunderstanding of the Allmuseri thus comes to symbolise what Johnson obviously sees as the false myths of origin, and the flawed concepts of "tradition as invariant repetition" (Gilroy 1993, x) which underpin the ideologies of black nationalism and Africentrism. In Johnson's view, cultures had always evolved through syncretic interaction, and his novel illustrates how drastically this process accelerated with the onset of a globalised capitalism represented by the slave trade, which spun its commercial webs from "New Orleans, across the sea, and even into the remotest villages of Africa" (150), thereby forcibly initiating multiple cross-cultural contacts.

Significantly, Johnson depicts the crew members of the Republic – which serve as representatives of US society at large – as a decidedly multicultural crowd, conversing in "Irish, Cockney, Spanish, and Hindi" (82), rather than as a homogeneous group of Anglo-Americans. And just as the identity of the Africans is forever altering, individual crew members are deeply changed by their exposure to Allmuseri culture and religion. While *Middle Passage* certainly does not downplay the human suffering and loss caused by the slave trade, it does problematise its dualistic representation as a monodirectional process. It challenges, in other words, the accepted view in which white Europeans or Americans were the agents of a violent change which imposed a monolithic culture of European modernity on the slaves, and with black Africans as its passive victims suffering a complete disruption of their stable, premodern traditions. The shape-shifting and side-switching role of his picaresque hero, who is neither African nor white Anglo-American, and who is at once a casualty of and participant in the slave-trade, epitomises Johnson's conviction that the creolised nature of America as a whole has (despite being denied by advocates of cultural integrity from all sides) forever rendered useless such essentialist conceptualisations and clear-cut distinctions. When Calhoun, at the climax of his existential crisis, attempts to conjure up some self-reliance to comfort the survivors of the mutiny, he indeed finds that there is no unified, stable self to rely on, and that "[t]he 'I' that I was" was "a mosaic of many countries, a patchwork of others and objects stretching backward to perhaps the beginning of time" (163).

In keeping with, and to underscore, this notion of the self as a transitory, intersubjective and intercultural process of being that reads and constantly re-writes itself in interaction with the surrounding cultures, the novel employs what Johnson in his theoretical study *Being and Race* termed a practice of "cross-cultural fertilization" (Johnson 1988, 47). In its attempts to make the reader understand the self as a "palimpsest, interwoven with everything" (ibid., 152), *Middle Passage* interlaces features of the slave narrative with strands from countless other traditions, including classic 19th-century Anglo-American novels – most importantly Melville's sea-faring novels – Hindu and Buddhist scriptures, and philosophical texts ranging from pre-Socratic writers to modern phenomenologists such as Husserl, Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty.

At the end of the novel, Calhoun is able to convert this crisis of self into a sense of spiritual liberation from the dominant ideologies of racial determinism and nationalism, which also allows him to see his self-conscious 'middleness' as an African American less as a curse and more as a gift. Yet the protagonist's liberation of perception is clearly meant to involve not just African Americans but any reader, in a general "opening up of epistemological perspective and of ontological meaning" (Scott 1995, 653), a strategy which attests to the novel's universalist and ultimately religious intentions. For Johnson, a practicing Buddhist, learning how to let go "of the fabricated, false sense of self [...] along with all essentialist conceptions of difference that have caused so much human suffering and mischief" (Johnson 2003, 54) is ultimately the only hope for individual redemption – not just from the effects of (internalised) racism, but from all misconceptions – as well as for founding a new social order of peace and solidarity.

* * *

Through means of satire and "comic discourse," the self-declared 'postindian' author Gerald Vizenor has also sought to "liberate the mind" from "imposed representations" (Vizenor 1988, xi). Emphasising, like Johnson, the cultural constructedness of race as well as the dynamic interdependencies between the many traditions which have historically intersected on US territory, he has always insisted that being what is labelled a Native American inevitably means being a 'mixed-blood' and leading an intercultural existence. Vizenor has therefore not only been critical of white racism against 'the Indian', but also of what Krupat, – in analogy to the *négritude* movement – called an ideology of *rougetude*, i.e. an ideology that propagates an ideal of cultural authenticity based on ethnic integrity. For him, any anticolonial cultural politics based on totalising notions of Indianness or a static understanding of tribal traditions is bound to entangle itself in tragicomical self-contradictions because 'the Indian', as a racial as well as a cultural category, is and always has been a simulacrum generated and disseminated by the literary and scientific discourse of the coloniser. Instead of assuming a posture of lament over the tragic demise of the Indian race, his writings, and in particular the trickster-writings for which he is best known, have, rather, concentrated on celebrating "the once pitied, or despised 'halfbreed' [...] and transforming the lowly 'mongrel' into a hero of comic invention" (Krupat 2002, 20) who playfully subverts stereotypical Indian (self-)images.

A good example of such a trickster-story, which challenges every kind of cultural or linguistic boundaries – including that between fiction and theory – is Vizenor's contribution to Ishmael Reed's collection *MultiAmerica* entitled "Ethnic Derivatives: Tricksterese versus Anthropologetics." Its protagonist, a mixed-blood academic with the telling name Almost Brown, who is introduced to the reader as "the native savant of tricksterese," grasps the opportunity to shake up the pieties of the 'academic orthodoxy' when he is invited to give "the ethnic studies commencement lecture" at a Californian university. In his improvised speech, which is "teas[ing] written words into an oral performance" (Vizenor 1997, 374), Brown increasingly outrages his audience by suggesting that "the dominance of ethnic nationalism at the university" is not only based on the racist premises of colonial discourse and the "invented cultures" (374-5) of Anglo-American anthropology. He also dismisses the main trends in contemporary Native American studies and literature as 'anthropologism', or 'anthropologetics', two of Vizenor's signature neologisms suggesting that tribal traditionalism as well as a pan-Indian epistemology are in fact prolongations of "the colonial dominance over native memories and stories" (375). By seeking to restore the authenticity of tribal cultures, or seeking to valorise a pan-Indian worldview, they in fact contribute to the 'museumisation' of indigenous people, and perpetuate the racial stereotypes and myths – such as the 'noble savage' – fabricated by the colonisers. And by endlessly rehearsing what Brown calls the "lonesome testimonies of mere victimry" (373), Indian intellectuals, according to Brown/Vizenor, have helped to reduce the indigenous role in history to that of the poor 'vanishing Indian', and thereby to install "converse histories of dominance" (377). This might appeal to a guilt-ridden audience of white liberals, but does nothing to assure the continuance of ancestral traditions as a way of life under ever-changing conditions. Instead of cultivating memories of "terminal tragedies," then, Vizenor wants the remembrances of these traditions to serve as "sources of survivance, natural reason, and tricksterese." And in the "trans-ethnic empire" (374) of America, the means of such a 'survivance', i.e. of securing the continuance and survival of a native presence through its ongoing creative transformations, must necessarily be a transcultural practice. In accordance with this conviction, Vizenor has experimented

widely with such practices throughout every phase of his work. His early collections of poetry, for instance, cross the Japanese haiku tradition with that of the Anishinaabeg dream-song, and in his most famous novel, *Griever: An American Monkey King in China* (1982), he weaves native trickster-stories together with elements of Chinese folklore (Blaeser 2005).

5. Conclusion

As much as Johnson and Vizenor might differ in matters of style or politics, they do seem to converge in a common distrust of any of the binary models which have dominated American history for so long. Consequently, their writing is directed against every kind of ideology seeking to organise racial as well as cultural relations along imaginary dividing lines such as white vs. black, and white vs. red, or African and Indian traditionalism vs. European modernity. It also forces readers to question overly simplistic oppositions, such as those between centre and margin, oppressor and victim, or suppression and emancipation. In their works, Johnson and Vizenor instead envision the USA as a multicentred arena of dynamic interchange, but also one of brutal contention between many ethnicities and cultures. While these parties usually perceive(d) one another as largely homogeneous and radically different, both authors draw our attention to their hybridised nature, as well as to their internal contradictions and internal divisions into different interest groups of cross-cutting allegiances. And if such generalisations are possible at all, this arena also seems to be the space in which an increasing number of American authors locate themselves artistically. Like Johnson and Vizenor, they practise an "art of palpable discontinuity, yoking together wildly incongruous elements, mixing voices and genres, pursuing the inconsistent, the divergent and indeterminate." In doing so, they respond to the ways in which the USA are ever more rapidly being transformed by "the central dynamic of Western, and in some sense global life today, which is marked by the powerful shaping force of shifting, multicultural populations" which erode traditional models of national (mono-)cultures and established notions of ethnic integrity or common heritage (Gray 2004, 563-4). With the accelerating tendency towards non-European ethnic diversification, the nature of these literary responses will certainly grow even more radical, more multifarious, and more multilingual. But it remains to be seen whether the hegemony of anglophone writings is eventually going to diminish as America's non-English literatures, especially Spanish-speaking literature, thrive and gain more prominence. The fact is that today already one in five children growing up in the USA learns a language other than English at home, and that these numbers are rapidly increasing. It has been calculated that within the next 50 years, members of ethnic groups from Asia, Africa and the Hispanic world will finally outnumber white Euro-Americans. As the USA are thus inexorably, and in spite of all the protest and doomsday rhetoric from the political right, becoming what Ishmael Reed called a 'universal nation': i.e. a people diversified to the degree of almost being a small-scale representation of the global population, it will be exciting to observe the future development of its literature(s). Maybe it will, after all, become what some of its 19th-century visionaries hoped it would be: not 'just' a variety of English literature, but a true world literature.

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