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An Intentionalist Approach to the Question of the White Outsider's Authorial Rights in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* and Lloyd Jones' *Mister Pip*

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Abstract

This thesis explores how *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006) by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and *Mister Pip* (2006) by Lloyd Jones engage with the issue of the white male outsider's activity of writing black people's stories. It shows that Adichie counters the discourse that entitles the Western subject, Richard, to tell African stories by transferring his interpretive privilege to the African object, Ugwu. Jones engages in canonical counter-discourse, rejecting the white outsider, Mr Watts', use of his colonialist writing to perpetuate harmful practices and ideas and advancing an approach to postcolonial white authorship that centres on responsible writing and the cultural potential of Pacific fiction. Taking an intentionalist view, this thesis ascribes a hypothetical intention to each author which is believed to communicate the core meaning of the literary work. It attributes to Adichie the intention to argue that only black insiders can authentically speak about their own experiences. It claims that Jones contrarily posits that white outsiders can speak validly about black insiders. Adichie ultimately argues for every human's right to speak validity about themselves and others but is quite restrictive about who those "others" are. Jones advocates for the intercultural value of the postcolonial white author's perspective.

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Introduction

This thesis will examine the theme of white male authorship in the novels *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006) by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and *Mister Pip* (2006) by Lloyd Jones. The novels are framed around the white outsider's activity of writing a book in the postcolonial world. In *Mister Pip*, the white outsiders, Mr Watts and Jones himself, rewrite Charles Dickens' novel *Great Expectations* (1860-1) in the context of the Bougainville Conflict (1988-1998). Jones' larger postcolonial rewriting of Dicken's novel serves as a response to Mr Watts colonialist and postcolonial rewritings of the same work. His response uncovers and criticises, from multiple angles, the demerits of Mr Watts' authorship, on the one hand, and its merits, on the other. In the process, he not only demonstrates but also suggests *how* and *why* the white author should tell black people's stories. This argument appears to form part of an artistic vision about the future of Pacific literature. In *Half of a Yellow Sun,* the reader is guided into conjecturing that only an insider can rightfully author *The Book,* the African story. The reader theorises Richard, the white outsider, as the likeliest author. This theory strengthens as the story progresses. However, at the novel's close, another man, Ugwu, is presented as the actual author of *The Book*. In this switch of authorial rights from Richard to Ugwu, Adichie advances an essentialist argument about *what* story should be told by *whom.* The novels' treatment of the white author's activity of writing the story of black people can be understood within the context of the authenticity debate.

One of the key disputes of the authenticity debate is whether the white author should tell the stories of black people. Very broadly, the dispute is about the white author's ability or desire not to preserve white privileges from which he benefits by assuming control over black people's voices and identities. Jones and Adichie weigh into the debate differently. While Jones holds up the value of the white male author's perspective on black people's experiences, Adichie insists that only black men and women can authentically speak about their experiences.

The choice of concepts and theoretical framework has been dictated by the salient concerns and formal elements of the novels. With the novels subversively examining dominant Western images, tropes, practices, and discourses, they involve a critique of the traditional objectives and assumptions of white authorship. This critique forms the

rationale for the final statement about authorial rights. Hence, this thesis will adopt a postcolonial lens to understand the novels' engagements with specifically stereotyping, universality, and counter-discourse. Each novel's concern with the theme of white male authorship appears intentionalist, since both Adichie and Jones employ self-reflexivity, referring to their own writing, vis-à-vis the central white author character in the formulation of a final statement about authorial rights. The textual analyses will, therefore, be primarily guided by the theory of hypothetical intentionalism as outlined by Jerrold Levinson. In addition to enabling a charitable approach to each novel's treatment of a controversial literary subject, Levinson's theory allows for the framing of each author's statement about rights as intentional and as constituting the central literary meaning.

This thesis, then, will concentrate on postcolonial literature by indigenous and non-indigenous authors with the white outsider author as the central subject. It is, in essence, a study about two artists' positions on the subject of the artist's rights within postcolonial literature and art. The driving research question is: how do Adichie and Jones employ the book motif to make a statement about the rights of the white male outsider author in postcolonial Nigeria and Papua New Guinea?

The thesis is divided into a number of sections. It opens with an explication of relevant postcolonial concepts before moving on to consider the position of the white author in the colonial project generally as well as specifically in the contexts of colonial Nigeria and Papua New Guinea. This is followed by an overview of the rise of the black author, with particular attention paid to the postcolonial motives of his text. At this point, the political and historical underpinnings of the contemporary authenticity debate are established. The thesis, therefore, goes on to present the white outsider and black insider as they were considered in the authenticity debate in the late twentieth- and early twenty-first centuries. This part covers a wide range of critical research with the hope of conveying the complexity and some of the central concerns in the authorial rights dispute. The thesis then presents Levinson's theory, after which it conducts the textual analyses. The novels are treated separately, with each analysis divided into subsections that, in a cumulative fashion, develop towards a hypothesis of authorial intent. The analyses are then joined in a comparative discussion.

Before the thesis proper beings, some of the terms employed in it require clarification. The terms “European”, “Western”, “white”, and “outsider” are used somewhat interchangeably in the primary and secondary literature. This is because the writers and critics interrogate colonial practices and discourses in which these terms synonymously refer to the members of the dominant group. It is, however, important to mention that these terms are far too general or vague and are not, furthermore, always interchangeable. Indeed, their meanings are contextually determined. Bearing this in mind, this thesis will follow the practice of the literature and use these words interchangeably.

The terms “black” and “coloured” are also too broad, though some of the literature tends to use them interchangeably as blanket terms for people with dark-coloured skin who have been exploited or enslaved by Europeans. This thesis will comply with this usage. Nonetheless, it should be noted that the significations of “black” and “coloured” are contextually contingent. Moreover, the thesis employs the terms “native”, “black”, and “coloured” with due consideration for their pejorative connotations.

Postcolonial Concepts

There is an internal tension in writings of otherness that arises from the insistence on the other's simultaneous sameness and difference to the self. In *The Location of Culture* (1994), Homi Bhabha attempts to understand this tension through a theoretical analogue between Freud's model of the fetish and the activity of stereotyping. He presents this analogue as follows:

> The myth of historical origination – racial purity, cultural priority – produced in relation to the colonial stereotype functions to 'normalise' the multiple beliefs and split subjects that constitute colonial discourse as a consequence of its process of disavowal. The scene of fetishism functions similarly as, at once, a reactivation of the material of original fantasy – the anxiety of castration and sexual difference – as well as a normalisation of that difference and disturbance in terms of the fetish object as the substitute for the mother's penis. (106)

In Freud, the scene of fetishism plays out the first encounter of the male child (the narcissistic, originary self) with the female body (the other). The boy is disturbed by the female body's lack of the male genital organ; he registers it as a *lack* because his original fantasy – or prior narcissistic assumption – is that all other bodies mirror his, that he is the norm. However, the female body threatens his narcissism because it introduces the possibility of castration. The anxiety of castration initiates a mental process of disavowal, or repression, of sexual difference which aims at defending the boy's original fantasy. Yet because disavowal merely represses the perception of difference, rather than eliminating it, the perception of difference persists. In other words, disavowal generates two contradictory beliefs – difference does not exist; difference exists. The boy tries to fix, or "normalise", his denial through the creation of an imaginary object, a *fetish,* which substitutes the absent organ (Freud 152-5). Consequently, the female body becomes similar to his: 'Yes, in his mind the woman *has* got a penis' (154). Since the perception of difference never goes away, however, fixation cements the fetishist's 'divided attitude' in the fetish object itself (156): Freud writes, '[B]oth the disavowal and the affirmation of the castration have found their way into the construction of the fetish itself.' (156) Therefore, the fetish becomes a defensive object that enables a compromise between conflicting beliefs, between the simultaneous affirmation of sameness and recognition of difference (154). Bhabha uses this schema to understand the narcissistic, originary self's

first disturbing encounter with racial/cultural difference. In this mythical moment, the self is the white individual whose self-concept is informed by the fantasy of historical origination, that is, of racial purity and cultural priority. This fantasy is threatened by the racial/cultural difference of the other. The self disavows the difference before fixing/"normalising" his denial by producing a stereotype, an image that mentally and ideologically defends the original fantasy by operating as a substitute or stand-in for the real other or an aspect of them (106). However, the process of fixation builds a divided attitude into the stereotype; hence, 'in Freud's terms: "All men have penises"; in ours, "All men have the same skin/race/culture" … again, for Freud "Some do not have penises"; for us "Some do not have the same skin/race/culture."' (106-07). The stereotype, in other words, encodes an imbrication of sameness and difference which creates a tension, what Bhabha terms *ambivalence*, in the colonial discourse (95).

He gives two justifications for analogising stereotyping and fetishism. Firstly, fetishism casts the fetish/stereotype as the manifestation of an obsession with the problem of difference. Redescribed as a form of disavowal, the activity of stereotyping becomes a function of the compulsion to deny difference, a denial which is then defended through the creation of a fetish object – a stereotype – which masks the difference and restores the original fantasy (106). Secondly, the fetish represents a simultaneous masking and recognition of lack/difference. The result is an oscillation between the affirmation of an ideal ego that is whole and mirrored in others who look the same as the self and the recognition that some people are different (106-7). The fetish, then, creates a continual back and forth between two seemingly opposing positions which is virtually compulsive and which indicates the demand for iteration, for the re-enactment of the scene of fetishism in which difference is perceived, disavowed, and masked, over and over. If transferred to the colonial discourse, fetishistic processes illuminate why stereotypes are repeated (106-7). The need to repeat implies that the stereotype only momentarily reconciles the self's contradictory beliefs and, hence, only temporarily dispels the threat of difference. It follows that sustained relief from colonial anxiety can only come from continual stereotyping, from the continual production of the same images and stories (110). Stereotyping can, simply, be understood as an activity whose effectivity relies on iteration – 'the same old stories … *must* be told (compulsively) again and afresh' (111). The interlocking of sameness and difference creates a conflict in the self, whose identity

becomes ‘predicated as much on mastery and pleasure as it is on anxiety and defence’ (107). The stereotype, therefore, betrays the uncertainty of the self, whose inability to resolve the problem of difference leaves him always divided between ‘pleasure/unpleasure, mastery/defence, knowledge/disavowal, absence/presence’ (107). This conflict is of crucial importance to an understanding of the colonial discourse, as it shows that the self's longing for a pure “race” and superior culture is always threatened by its own internal division (107).

Apart from the stereotype, another important feature of colonial discourse is the concept of universality. In his essay ‘Heroic Ethnocentrism’, Charles Larson argues that our/the West's expectation that ‘all peoples … react in the same way that we do’ (64) proceeds from the assumption of the universality of Western culture. There is a belief, in other words, that the Western culture and people function as the norm for what counts as features of a universal or common human experience (64). Larson investigates Western cultural givens as depicted in African fiction and concludes that not all behaviours are universally experienced by humans. By the same token, some behaviours are not as universally desirable as we might otherwise expect. Attitudes and behaviours may vary across cultures, which is normal (63-5). His key point is that the idea of universality becomes spurious when the postcolonial engages with the Western text and culture. He holds that the belief that non-Western cultures are deviant is symptomatic of a Eurocentric tendency to disparage, marginalise, or dismiss cultural differences. He warns against Western ethnocentrism and encourages a relativism of perspective that allows for the appreciation of cultural differences (62-3).

Importantly, the assumption of universality was propagated in the colonial periphery. Bill Ashcroft, Helen Tiffin, and Gareth Griffiths claim that, in the colonial world, traits, behaviours, and experiences deemed “universal” and “normative” were those of the dominant group. An important medium for circulating such notions in the colonies was English literature (‘Part II’ 55-6). Therefore, the dissemination of the assumption of the Western culture and human as universal was an essential building block of colonial power and rhetoric.

The postcolonial engagement with the colonial discourse is seminal for the process of literary decolonisation. In ‘Post-colonial Literatures and Counter-discourse’, Helen Tiffin locates this process within the counter-discursive features of postcolonial texts.

Tiffin claims that there have been demands, but also attempts, within postcolonial literatures to reach for a precolonial cultural, social, or linguistic purity (95). However, such demands and efforts are misguided, she argues, and only reveal that the past is irrecoverable. This has to do with postcolonial cultures having evolved from a dialectic between European values and cultural modes and the desire to invent or reinvent local identity. The subsequent cultural hybridity makes it impossible for postcolonial cultures to construct or reconstruct themselves outside of colonial history. This is why, she maintains, the location of cultural and literary decolonisation must be identified in the culture's or text's ability to engage with colonial practices and discursive strategies. Truly postcolonial literatures, she suggests, seek to map, read, and unravel dominant European discourses and their basic assumptions with the intention to subvert the latter through counter-discursive strategies (95-8). In this spirit, Tiffin argues that postcoloniality should be situated solely in the text's use of counter-discursive strategies. It is not enough to consider such strategies in isolation. The location of postcolonial writing is on the particular political zone of conflict between cultures, histories, societies, coloniser and colonised, etc. Consequently, it is in this zone that certain meanings are produced and consumed. To understand how certain textual strategies function counter-discursively, it is, consequently, paramount to situate the counter-discourse in the proper context (96-7).

The Authenticity Debate: The Right to Tell Stories

In West Africa, the white writer assumed interpretive privilege over the conception of Africa to validate the material practices of British imperialism. To justify the cruelty of slavery, British writers created theoretic defences which drew authority from existing racial ideas that insisted on the differences between the European and the African. The exponential growth of these defences during the eighteenth century is discussed by Chinua Achebe in his essay 'Africa's Tarnished Image.' Achebe draws on a study that notes a change in eighteenth-century British writing from 'almost indifferent and matter-of-fact reports' of Africans (210) to descriptions that reduced the African to a stereotype that is 'dark … ominous … alien.' (215) These writings unanimously asserted the cultural and moral inferiority and subhumanity of Africans and the obligation to "save", to teach them European ways or "civilise" them, through slavery and domination. These writings formed a body of literature that was defensive in nature as it was shaped in response to

criticism that threatened the survival of the slave trade and, later, colonialism. To save the financial stakes of slavers and colonials, the writers' cast European imperialism as not only defensible but, indeed, as desirable (210). This literature, Achebe claims, bequeathed a repository of stereotypes of Africa to the literary domain, founding a new tradition and way of conceiving Africa. The reproduction of these stereotypes saw a sharp rise during the nineteenth century and early twentieth century as the 'sensational "African" novels' gained in popularity (210).

The defences were based on well-established European ideas of otherness with roots in what Mineke Schipper calls in *Imagining Insiders* (1999) the myth of *homo caudatus,* the tail-man who represented the first "other" or "savage" counterpart of the "civilised" European. Schipper states that the *caudatus* evolved through various European writings into an emblem of the other as an inferior species (15). Classical texts located the *caudatus* to the Mediterranean and North Africa. However, from the early modern period to the late eighteenth century, travellers and explorers began to transpose the *caudatus* to remote, tropical sites and connected it to the local peoples. Deeply familiar with the civilised/savage rhetoric, the reading public back home easily bought into the writers' descriptions of otherness. Peoples from remote cultures were subsequently increasingly thought of as deviating from the 'natural' order (14-20). In the nineteenth century, the *caudatus* myth, minus the tail, was carried over into academia. The myth spawned a host of "scientific" theories[1] about there being profound and unmitigable differences between the "civilised" white European and the black "savage" (18-9).

Not only were racist writings used to justify overseas domination and exploitation, but they also influenced the methods of colonial governance. In *Imagining the Other* (2007), Regis Tove Stella claims that racist writings underwrote the German colonial power's belief that Papua New Guineans could be "saved" through forced labour in European enterprises (7). Germans' conception of the natives came from a host of texts – travel writings, historiography, imaginative literature, ethnographic descriptions, "scientific" texts – mostly composed in the second half of the nineteenth and the first half

[1] See G. W. F. Hegel's *Philosophy of History* (1837), Arthur de Gobineau's *Essay on the Inequality of the Human Races* (1853-55), Charles Darwin's 'Chapter 7: On the Races of Man' in *The Descent of Man* (1871).

of the twentieth centuries (5, 207). Many works operated along a binary system, where the European writer portrayed the natives as the complete antithesis of the white man (12). Common tropes included Papua New Guineans as inherently lazy, intellectually inferior, childish, and evil, as pagan barbarians, cannibals in need of Christian salvation, and savages in a natural state (3-4). The German power drew on such ideas to legitimise its excessively violent colonial practices. The racist ideology was, moreover, enshrined in colonial laws and regulations that safeguarded 'white prestige' (7-8). Since colonialist writers were slanted and completely uninterested in local viewpoints, they initiated a process of deleting indigenous identity and supplanting it with a literary conception that dovetailed with colonial interests (4-5). Because indigenes for various reasons lacked access to colonialist texts, and because the Western reader only encountered the other through texts, colonialist writers successfully injected readers unacquainted with the facts with racist and prejudiced opinions of Papua New Guineans (12, 14).

The indigenous writer began to intervene in the dominant discourse and seize the privilege and power of discourse from the European author at various times throughout the twentieth century depending on context. In *A History of Nigeria,* Toyin Falola and Matthew Heaton state that the European-educated middle-class Nigerian elite harnessed their political and racial awareness in the early part of the twentieth century to 'spread their message of African pride, ingenuity, and intelligence, actively opposing the racist ideology put forward by the colonial regime.' (131) This ideological subversion, which fostered a positive counterimage of Africans, was done chiefly in written form and sowed the seeds of nationalist sentiments (131). In Papua New Guinea, the indigenous population was long denied higher education and political participation. Hence, the other, also the *alternative voice*, was silent until the late 1960s (Stella 208), at the height of the period when the alternative voice was challenging the colonial narrative. In *The Cambridge Introduction to Postcolonial Literatures* (2007), C.L. Innes claims that the idea of rewriting the colonial story gained global traction in the wake of the visible racism against black and brown migrants in post-WWII Britain as well as the black power and civil rights movements between the 1950s and 1980s. These events galvanised cultural, political, and psychological resistance against racist discrimination globally. Within the cultural realm, black students, teachers, and prominent authors, such as Achebe and Edward Brathwaite, were motivated into placing a premium on the notion of writing their

own stories and speaking for themselves (4-5); this to restore self-respect and dignity (4), in addition to creating literature that treats the other as a subject with a valuable historical and cultural heritage (Schipper 10). It has since become the special task of many novelists to recuperate the image of their world and to defend the validity of its cultures by challenging colonial narratives and representing themselves (Innes 37).

By the end of the twentieth century, the bulk of colonialist stereotypes had virtually disappeared (Achebe 'Africa's' 210, Stella 208). Nonetheless, ideas of white normativity and superiority persisted and manifested as systemic racism, everyday racism, and white privilege. Whiteness continued to carry its colonial power long after the dominant phase of colonialism, as it was still not regarded as a "race" as such. Indeed, "race" was still only applied to non-whites (Hernán and Gordon 11). Hence, despite the virtual disappearance of colonialist images, racism continued to consciously or unconsciously influence how non-whites were thought of and portrayed, not only in literature but also in other domains, such as cinema, journalism, and humanitarianism (Achebe 'Africa's' 210, 219-20). In light of colonial history and the white writer's place in it, a key concern of literary debates in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries has been whether the white author should retain the right to tell the stories of non-whites.

Kathryn Lasky addresses this concern passionately in her essay 'To Stingo with Love', writing,

> We are told with greater frequency that certain stories may be told only by certain people… Everything eventually must be perfectly aligned in terms of gender, sexual preference, race, creed, or ethnic origin. And then, only then, would we get the perfect book for our multicultural audience. (88)

Lasky is here critical of the notion that a story ought to be consistent with the author's background or else be deemed inauthentic as it cannot accurately capture the experiences of the community. This is an absurd, if dangerous, dictate, she maintains, that severely brackets the creative process and so inhibits the author's freedom that it is practically censorship. Besides this, the claim that there is only one voice and one version of a story – the 'authentic' ones – she says, denies art its innate possibilities (89-91). Moreover, Lasky believes it to be an attack on the artist herself to claim that she is impeded by her background to tell stories that do not exactly replicate her own background (90). The general thrust of her criticism is that art transcends the contingencies of "race" and other

factors, such as sexuality and gender; therefore, serious criticism should assess literature on strictly aesthetic standards – on how the story is crafted (87-9, 91). However, she glosses over the historical context that gives the debate the distinctly political flavour behind calls for what some say is actually responsibility, not censorship. This point is taken up by Joel Taxel.

In 'Multicultural Literature and the Politics of Reaction', Taxel claims that calls for authorial freedom grounded in aesthetics betray a dangerous presumptuousness where the author assumes that she should be able to write any story without subjecting it to critical evaluation. This kind of authorial arrogance, he says, points towards a broader disagreement about literature's relation to society (150-3). Ought we, he asks, to decontextualise art? Or is literature a cultural product that should be properly contextualised to be understood? (153-4, 156) Given the historical function of culture to legitimise racial injustice and oppression, there is every need, he maintains, to contextualise literature in its proper social, historical, and political situation. So, while writers should be granted the licence to choose their stories, their stories may have political origins and implications that require a careful and respectful articulation of characters, plots, and themes about minorities. Looking at things this way, Taxel continues, allows for the understanding of this debate as being about demands for social and artistic responsibility, not censorship, guidelines, or political correctness (156-7).

Indeed, in 'Who Can Tell my Story?' Jacqueline Woodson underscores that this debate does not seek to restrict the freedom of white authors. In fact, it 'isn't about white people' per se (45). In line with Taxel, she claims that it is about white authors' complicity in discriminatory systems. However, whereas Taxel points to the historical operations of colonialist writing, Woodson focuses on the contemporary function of white writing. She contends that if white authors continue to fill the literary market with black peoples' stories, then this maintains the exclusion and silencing of marginalised peoples and, by extension, preserves the power structures upon which Western society is founded (45). It is for this reason, she says, that this debate is 'about people of colour', and particularly '[about] the chance to tell our own stories' (45). In Woodson's view, then, the debate is about black people wanting the opportunity to represent themselves. By opting not to tell black stories, white authors, she implies, can provide that opportunity.

In ‘Who Can Write as Other’, Margery Fee engages with the question of authenticity as it has been raised in New Zealand by C.K. Stead, who is highly sceptical of the criteria of the Pegasus Award for Maori Literature. In ‘Keri Hulme’s “The Bone People”’, Stead wonders how the prize committee evaluated the works entered for Maori authenticity, concluding that the author’s ethnicity formed the main criterion. The prize, therefore, problematically assumes a division of New Zealand writers along Pākehā (European) and Maori lines (102-3). Despite his criticism, Stead himself, Fee argues, assumes that there is such a thing as ‘Maori’ authenticity, only shifting it from the biological to the linguistic and cultural. Fee holds that critics like Stead who cling to the notion of authenticity operate within the framework of colonial discourse since they continue to designate the culture of postcolonial populations ‘other’, assuming that there are essential differences between ‘us’ and ‘them’ (242-4). More significantly, however, ‘[i]t is not possible’, she writes, ‘simply to assume that a work written by an “Other” (however defined) … will have freed itself from the dominant ideology.’ (244) On the one hand, Fee here recognises the possibility of the other internalising dominant ideas and, on the other, that insiders do not necessarily have a homogenous conception of their cultural experiences. Because of this, the project of distinguishing between inauthentic-outsider and authentic-insider perspectives becomes futile (244-5). It is better, she argues, to redefine ‘authenticity’ as denoting works that promote ‘indigenous access to power without negating indigenous difference’ (245). Indeed, the notion of authenticity, as Gareth Griffith writes in ‘The Myth of Authenticity’, negates the wide range of representations through which indigenous cultures might otherwise be successfully represented by prescribing one subject position for the indigene, the ‘authentic’ one (237-8). In thus controlling the way in which indigenous stories are told, the idea of authenticity engages in a practice parallel to colonial discourse, where the voices of indigenes are homogenised and denied their inherent complexity and plurality. This runs counter to the postcolonial project which seeks to celebrate the diversity of indigenous cultures. It follows from all this, he claims, that the notion of authenticity recreates the colonial oppression on the very subjects it claims to represent and protect (240-1).

Hypothetical Intentionalism

Hypothetical intentionalism (HI) is a view of literary interpretation argued for by Jerrold Levinson in 'Defending Hypothetical Intentionalism.' According to Levinson, an appropriately informed reader hypothesises what an actual author is most plausibly and sympathetically understood as communicating via a text in the given historical and authorial context (139, 141, 146-7). Levinson argues that the interpretative work should follow a pragmatic model which redefines *work meaning* as *utterance meaning* and the *text* as an *utterance*. By placing the text at the centre of what he envisions as the author and the reader's dialogue, he demonstrates that the author-reader-text triad is pivotal to a meaningful discussion of a text's central meaning. The context of the text's/ utterance's issuance is first and foremost 'public' (139), which means that the text is interpreted in relation to what is publicly known of the author and her works. Consequently, the text is unintelligible in relation to private communication, such as is had by the author in letters, journals, and other private sources. Importantly, any relevant public information is merely used to support interpretations of meaning. Hence, the public criterion implies the assumption that the text alone is a successful embodiment of intent and functions as an adequate vehicle of meaning (139-40). What the reader seeks to arrive at is the *best hypothesis* of authorial intent. To achieve this, the text must be contextually situated, which apart from the public context entails situating the text historically (139, 141).

Once the properly prepared reader places the text in its accurate context, he needs to be sympathetic, an attitude that should be understood along the lines of the principle of charity (Levinson 141, 144). This principle, with origins in rhetoric, dictates, Normand Baillargeon writes in *A Short Course in Intellectual Self-Defence*, '[That] we must present the ideas we are contesting in the most favourable light.' (78) Baillargeon's illustration of this principle by reference to what he calls the 'straw man argument' suggests that 'the most favourable' means the most rational. Therefore, a charitable interpretation is one that is governed by the requirement to maximise the reason or logic in the interlocutor's argument. Baillargeon adds that the quality of interpretation depends on the degree of adherence to the principle of charity (78).

The plausibility of the charitable interpretation, Levinson proposes, is assessed on two grounds:

> My version of HI indeed allows that the best hypothesis of authorial intent given a contextually situated literary text is one that is best on both *epistemic* grounds, that is, most likely to be *true* given the evidence, and *aesthetic* grounds, that is, one that makes the work artistically *better,* so long as such a hypothesis is still epistemically optimal. (141, original emphasis)

He proposes that the literary elements of the text should be evaluated separately from the epistemic ones, from the textual and extra-textual evidence that creates meaning, in the formulation of the best hypothesis of intent. However, the epistemic considerations should be prioritised since, he argues, the most plausible interpretation of meaning is not necessarily the one that makes the work most valuable aesthetically (142). Although he talks about a ranking of hypotheses, where there is such a thing as the *best* hypothesis, he holds that, ultimately, many equally valid hypotheses of intent can be attributed to an artwork. Therefore, the full meaning of a properly contextualised text, he says, is determined by all the interpretations that it can be shown to support. He identifies this recognition of the richness of a work of art's meaning as the virtue of HI (150). This thesis will, therefore, not compare its hypotheses of intent with other readings of hypothetical intention, nor will it produce a series of interpretive options that are then ranked from *most plausible* to *least plausible*. It will, simply, present an argument for the most reasonable hypothesis of intent attributable to the author with all the relevant evidence taken in what is deemed the proper historical and authorial context and evaluated on epistemic and aesthetic grounds.

Finally, and for emphasis, HI seeks to establish a *hypothesis* of intent, as opposed to *actual* intent, that is formulated with a view to arriving at an intention that can be reasonably ascribed to an *actual* author (139, 140-1). The choice of ascribing a *hypothetical*, rather than *actual*, intent to an author suggests a wariness of the author's statements of actual intention, which have, apropos, been shown to be highly unreliable (Wimsatt and Beardsley 98). Besides, the belief that there is a monolithic interpretation, the interpretation meant by the actual author, limits the text's signifying power (Barthes 128-9). By adopting a more balanced approach to authorial intentionalism, one that considers the author, reader, and text, HI acknowledges the author's fundamental incapacity to knowingly inscribe all identifiable meanings. By the same token, it recognises the text's relative plurality and preserves the reader's interpretive freedom.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*

The White Author Figure

A central motif in *Half of a Yellow Sun* is **The Book: The World Was Silent When We Died**[2] (hereafter *The Book*), a text that tells the story of Biafra and that is scattered across the novel in excerpts. *The Book* presents an enigma about the identity of its author. Written in the present tense to indicate ongoingness, and with the author's identity anonymised and masculinised, *The Book* is a work-in-progress text by an unnamed man. In 'He Writes About the World that Remained Silent', Emmanuel Ngwira treats *The Book* as a metafictional strategy that communicates Adichie's intention to formulate a statement about writing (46-7). *The Book*, Ngwira claims, stages the process of writing, thereby turning the reader into a witness of the writing of history. The aim, he suggests, is to provoke the reader into thinking about the identity of the author and his relation to the text (50-2). What is certain about the author's identity and relation to the text from the outset is that the author tells the story of Biafra as a Biafran, as is signalled in the titular 'We'. The novel pushes the reader to posit two male central characters as the likeliest authors of *The Book*, Richard and Ugwu. However, the overwhelming evidence for Richard's authorship causes the reader to theorise him as the likelier author, a reading corroborated by many critics (Donnelly 257, Ganapathy 99, Lecznar 126, Ngwira 47, Novak 40).

Richard is an English writer whose ambition to become an African presents him as capable of writing an African story. He comes to Nigeria in the early 1960s to investigate Igbo-Ukwu art for a book he plans to write about Nigeria. In the next decade, however, he tries his hand at a range of topics, producing a morass of writings: 'He went to his study and spread his manuscript pages out on the floor and looked at them: a few pages of a small-town novel, one chapter of the archaeologist novel, a few pages of rapturous descriptions of the bronzes.' (Adichie *Half* 112) His inability to hold to a course in his writing reflects a deeper identity confusion, his search for a story in Africa being linked to his quest to identify with a new group of people. Orphaned at nine, he moved from an English village to the metropolis to live with his aunt Elizabeth, who was 'quite grand', and his 'terribly sophisticated' cousins (61). A social outcast in the new environment, he

[2] This is how the title mostly appears in the novel.

experienced feelings of loneliness, identity insecurity, and social dislocation which have dogged him ever since, even in the expatriate community in Nigeria. His consequent apparent lack of familial, social, and cultural restraints, however, suggests that he is in a position where he might be able to relinquish a fixed self, which entails the possibility of immersing himself in a new group and capturing their experiences without cultural biases. Indeed, as Abdul JanMohamed claims in 'The Economy of Manichean Allegory', an authentic understanding of otherness 'is possible only if the self can somehow negate or at least severely bracket the values, assumptions, and ideology of his culture.' (65) This assumption is strengthened when he begins to cross the cultural and racial boundaries in Nigeria through his endeavours to become Igbo. Learning the language and customs of the Igbo, he gradually changes his behaviour and even appearance, in his own eyes transforming into an Igbo man: '[H]e was browner and happier' (Adichie *Half* 137), a 'brother … from a different land' (151), 'a fellow' (319). When the Eastern region secedes from Nigeria on 30 May 1967 to form the Republic of Biafra, Richard sees his dream of belonging as an African in Africa as possible at last:

> This was a new start, a new country, *their* country. It was not only because secession was just, considering all that the Igbo had endured, but because of the possibility Biafra held for him. He would be Biafran in a way he could never have been Nigerian – he was here at the beginning; he had shared in the birth. He would belong. (168, original emphasis)

Richard sees Biafra as the start of his journey to belongingness. He anticipates his belongingness in his use of the pronoun 'their', which foresees his inclusion in the Biafran community. Importantly, he links his belongingness to a shared history – 'he was here at the beginning; he had shared in the birth.' Notably, Emeka Ojukwu, the head of state of Biafra, states in the Ahiara Declaration[3], that

> From the moment we assumed the illustrious name of the ancient kingdom of Biafra, we were re-discovering the original independence of a great African people. … We knew that we had challenged the many forces and interests which had conspired to keep Africa and the Black Race in subjection forever. (15)

[3] This document is an important source for Nigerian history. It was composed by Biafra's National Guidance Committee, chaired by Achebe, and delivered by Ojukwu in the city of Ahiara on 1 June 1969.

Contrary to Richard's belief, then, Biafra as an irridentist state is not newborn; rather, it is reborn. Ojukwu here presents a narrative to the Biafrans about *re*discovering their precolonial agency, which implies remembering a story about themselves that they have forgotten or neglected. The act of remembrance is revolutionary as it challenges the powers that have long oppressed 'the Black Race'. On some level, therefore, Ojukwu speaks to the epistemic violence that the West has perpetrated on indigenous stories and voices. This violence is an effect of what Adichie terms the *single story*. Defining this concept in her 2009 TED speech, 'The Danger of a Single Story', Adichie says, that the single story replaces the stories of a people with one story that then determines the people's identity. Ojukwu's speech suggests that Biafra embodies this history of silencing indigenous stories, and as an Englishman Richard not only cannot identify with this past but as a writer, in fact, represents the silencing voice of colonialism. Richard's reasoning about his relation to Biafra, therefore, seems fallacious, if not illusory. Nonetheless, the characterisation of Richard as a Biafran suggests that he might write for Biafrans without prejudice, giving voice to their experiences rather than silencing them.

When this portrayal is weighed against the placing of *The Book*, it becomes possible to hypothesise Richard as the most probable author. There are eight excerpts in total, with six appearing at the end of chapters focalised through Richard and only one appearing in a chapter told from Ugwu's perspective. The final fragment appears on the closing page of the novel, which is narrated from Olanna's point of view, another central character. That most excerpts appear in the storyline of Richard, a white male author with aspirations to become Biafran and write a story about Africa, visually suggests and stresses that Richard is *The Book's* author. When one excerpt suddenly appears in one of Ugwu's chapters, however, the reader is momentarily compelled to reconsider the author's identity. Nonetheless, since Ugwu is not an author at that point, and since there are no signs that he will become one, it is still most reasonable, all the textual evidence considered, to assign the authorship of *The Book* to Richard.

The hypothesis of Richard's authorship is further strengthened when he strikes on the idea to write a new book, which he significantly titles '"The World Was Silent When We Died".' (Adichie *Half* 374, originally not italicised) The events leading up to this idea are

telling. Having worked for a while for the Propaganda Directorate[4] as a representative for Biafrans, Richard is assigned the task of guiding two American journalists around Biafra and answering their questions about the Biafran cause. The episode is characterised by indirect or direct assertions of Richard's outsiderism. At one point, the party stops outside a refugee camp, and Richard notices 'two interpreters waiting. Their presence annoyed him. It was true that idioms and nuances and dialects often eluded him in Igbo, but the directorate was always too prompt in sending interpreters.' (370) The interpreters' job is to bridge the linguistic gap between Biafra and the West, with American (and British) journalists representing the West in the novel. The interpreters' presence forcibly identifies Richard with the Western journalists. Their presence undermines his attempts throughout the episode to represent Biafrans as a Biafran. Nonetheless, he persists to identify as an insider until one of the journalists is provoked:

> 'You keep saying *we*,' the redhead said.
>
> 'Yes, I keep saying *we*.' (372)

The journalist questions Richard's self-identification as an insider, betraying his conception of Richard as an outsider. The defensiveness in Richard's response lingers with him until he finally sublimates it into the title of his new book. Thus, towards the end of his meeting with the journalists, 'the title of the book came to Richard: "The World Was Silent When We Died".' (374) He is here shown to formulate the title of *The Book,* which, in light of recent events, casts *The Book* as a defence for his right to represent Biafrans as a Biafran. Indeed, the pronoun 'We' insists on his self-proclaimed status as a Biafran, an insider, vis-à-vis 'The World', the West or the outside. What further consolidates the theory of Richard as the author of *The Book* is that many of the observations he makes during the tour he gives the journalists are reproduced in the subsequent, chapter-concluding snippet from *The Book* (375). Ngwira notes that this snippet is associated with Richard on a deeper level, too, as it alludes to his literary admiration of another character, a poet named Okeoma (51). Overall, the episode suggests that Richard draws the authority to write *The Book* from his belief in his "Biafranness". The novel then corroborates Richard's belief by doubly tying the chapter-concluding

[4] A department of the Biafran government coordinating and supervising the dissemination of information during the war.

book snippet to him. All this implies the novel's belief that Richard can tell the story of Biafra because he is a Biafran himself.

While Richard thinks he is a representative of Biafrans as a Biafran, others think he represents them as a Westerner. In the phone conversation where Colonel Madu hires Richard to work for the Propaganda Directorate, Madu motivates his job offer on the interpretive privilege of white people:

> 'You would not have asked me if I were not white.'
>
> 'Of course I asked because you are white. They will take what you write more seriously because you are white. Look, the truth is that this is not your war. This is not your cause. Your government will evacuate you in a minute if you ask them to. … If you really want to contribute, this is the way you can. The world has to know the truth of what is happening, because they cannot simply *remain silent while we die*.' (Adichie *Half* 305, emphasis added)

Madu draws an equivalence between being white and speaking authoritatively which speaks to the assumption of the Western subject as a detached observer and, hence, as speaking objectively. In 'Beyond the Subject-Object Binary', David Nielson locates the source of this assumption to Western social science (449-50). The subject position indicates a hierarchy of knowledge, he says, where the subject places itself above the object (449) through claims to objectivity that gives it 'a superior access to reality' (451). This superior access rationalises the assumption that the Western subject produces knowledge that is universally true. The object, however, is believed to be too subjective to produce truths that hold any value beyond the immediate group (449). Madu, therefore, positions Richard as the speaking subject who produces authoritative knowledge and who is, hence, listened to and is distinct from the silenced black object, here associated with the nation of Biafra and its people. Richard appropriates the words 'remain silent while we die' for the title of *The Book* from Madu. When he does so, he aligns himself not only with Biafra but also with the silenced black object.

Nonetheless, Richard is, in spite of himself, a Western subject. He gains entry into Igbo society through his first topic, Igbo-Ukwu art. Once inside Igbo society, he extends his research to the people, also turning them into objects of study. He takes the role of the seemingly detached observer, the "impartial" outsider, listening, interrogating, and noting things about the people and culture, increasingly treating Africa as a site of exploration.

An instance of this is when he attends one of the revolutionary professor Odenigbo's nationalist and anticolonial evening meetings as an active listener:

> Most of [Richard's] material for his latest effort came from the evenings spent with Odenigbo and Olanna and their friends. They were casually accepting of him, did not pay him any particular attention, and perhaps because of that, he felt comfortable sitting on the sofa in the living room and listening. … [H]e watched … and thought to himself … Richard watched… (Adichie *Half* 75)

Richard's detachment from the observed is cued in sensory details that frame him as a listener and watcher. The observed do not 'pay him any particular attention', further emphasising his distance from them and, thus, appearing to ensure his objectivity. His observations spark interpretations – 'thought to himself' – which he then transforms into coherent texts – 'material'. Through his observations and interpretations, he distinguishes and distances himself from the others, the observed (the object), and positions himself as the knowing observer (the subject). Crucial to the apprehension of the epistemological imperialism of Western social science, Nielson claims, is the assumption that the methods of observation, research, and quantification that separate subject and object guarantee the subject's objectivity (449). So, while Richard's literary explorations in Nigeria initially seem to facilitate his entry into and identification with the Igbo people and culture, his literary methodology counteracts his integration, turning him, instead, into a representative of the Western subject.

Because the subject/object division is activated in a Nigerian text with distinct colonial overtones, it is possible to see an intertextual reference through Richard to the District Commissioner (DC) from Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958). In Achebe's novel, the narrator reports on the DC's thoughts as he leaves the tree from which Okonkwo's body hangs:

> As he walked back to the court he thought about that book. Every day brought him some new material. The story of this man who had killed a messenger and hanged himself would make interesting reading. One could almost write a whole chapter on him. Perhaps not a whole chapter but a reasonable paragraph, at any rate. There was so much else to include, and one must be firm in cutting out details. He had already chosen the title of the book, after much thought: *The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger.* (117)

The passage shows the DC assuming the privilege of the Western subject to observe and interpret others. He cuts out the African actor, silencing him – Okonkwo is worth only 'a reasonable paragraph', there is 'so much else to include'. Not only is Okonkwo's story thus erased, but his identity is, moreover, distorted as he is categorised as a 'primitive'. In his years in Africa, the DC has 'toiled to bring civilisation' (117). In this context, the word 'primitive' invokes the civilised/savage binary and discloses his inability to, despite his many years in Africa, perceive the complexity of indigenous societies and peoples. This is highly ironic considering the assumption of his objectivity that is encoded into his subject position. By placing the passage at the end of the story of precolonial Umuofia, Achebe illustrates that the knowledge the Western subject produces is subjective, as opposed to objective, since it is slanted with cultural biases. Yet the DC's word is still more valid than Okonkwo's, and his representation of the Igbos as primitives in need of European pacification will become authoritative accounts that will control his readers' conception of Igbos, specifically, and of black Africans, generally. In a larger way, the passage demonstrates that the author is a powerful arbiter of perceptions of "reality". It suggests the importance of *who* is writing the story about *whom* and *why*. *Half of a Yellow Sun* apparently makes this allusive connection between Richard and the DC to implicate the former in this literary tradition.

Stereotyping

The association between the subject/object binary and racist ideology is further illustrated in Richard's observations of Madu:

> Richard smelt the guest's cologne from the hallway, a cloying, brawny scent. The man wearing it was striking in a way that Richard thought was primordial: a wide, mahogany-coloured face, wide lips, a wide nose. When he stood to shake hands, Richard nearly stepped back. The man was huge. … here was a man who was at least three inches taller than he was, and with a width to his shoulders and a firm bulk to his body that made him seem taller, *hulking*. (Adichie *Half* 78, original emphasis)

Richard here stereotypes Madu in a characteristically ambivalent way as possessing both an idealised masculinity and denigrated otherness. Significantly, his activity of stereotyping exemplifies how the construction of the racial other starts with the subject's

observation. His focus on the geography of Madu's body foregrounds the act of seeing: Richard moves between body parts ('face', 'lips', 'nose', 'shoulders'), observing the skin colour ('mahogany'), and dimensions ('wide', 'taller', 'width'). These observations are punctuated by comments that are ideologically charged for the way they bring attention to the black other's physique and physiognomy ('hulking', 'wide lips', 'wide nose') as well as for the way they elicit racist associations, with 'primordial' recalling the notion of the "savage" and with Madu's masculinity suggesting danger. Richard's gaze and commentary establish Madu as an object to be seen and himself as the knowledgeable subject, the Western authority, doing the seeing and interpreting. These activities hearken back to the construction by the Western subject of a hierarchy of intelligence based on "race" that legitimised slavery and colonisation. This hierarchy, Nielson states, was validated by the subject's claims to objectivity and was, thus, passed off as "factual" or "scientific" (449-50).

The psychical and ideological processes of Richard's activities are illuminated by Bhabha's take on 'the problematic of seeing/being seen' (109). Bhabha seeks to illustrate this problematic by applying Jacques Lacan's concepts of the scopic drive and the mirror stage [5] to an analysis of two scenes from Frantz Fanon's *Black Skins, White Masks* (1986). As 'primal scenes' (108), they invoke 'primal fantasy', that is, the individual's desire for a pure origin (107), in this case for historical origination (108). This desire is threatened in Fanon's primal scenes, where the encounter between the white self and the black other reactivates the scene of fetishism (107). In Lacan's model, the mirror stage is when the ego is formed in the child through his acts of gazing upon and identifying with his counterpart image. Bhabha shifts this situation to the white-black encounter, arguing that the white self gazes on his black counterpart and through subsequent acts of disavowal and fixation turns the other into an object that is not only seen by the white gaze but also reconstructed by it (108-9). The black other identifies with the object – or stereotype – that he has become and experiences self-alienation and a loss of identity (108). The returned gaze of the object, which affirms his identification with his otherness and the priority and purity of the white culture and "race", is the aim of the white gaze and, hence, gives the white self scopic satisfaction (109). In the process, the self similarly turns

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[5] See Jacques Lacan's *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* (1973) *and* 'The Mirror Stage as Formative of the *I* Function as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience' in *Écrits* (2006).

towards himself and identifies with 'an ideal ego that is white and whole' and consequently also reaffirms his cultural priority and racial purity (109). In this way, Bhabha shows that the white/black relation is constituted through a symbolic act of mutual identification, again bringing out the intricate interrelation between sameness and difference in the colonial discourse. He additionally demonstrates that the acts of observation and objectification, as understood within the colonial discourse, are crucial to the formation of the white self-image, the erasure of the black identity and voice, and the establishment of an order of human "races". By involving Richard in these processes, the novel strengthens his connection to the DC figure and evinces doubt about his ability as a Western subject to observe and interpret Biafrans without contributing to the repression of their identities and voices.

In the interest of the theory of Richard as *The Book's* author, however, the novel works hard to redeem its portrayal of Richard's racism. This redemptive work is mostly clear in how the novel depicts him as critical of Western stereotypes. In 'Who Speaks? Who Listens?' Amy Novak claims that the novel portrays Western media as still filtering the image of Africa through Conradian images, representing it as 'an indistinguishable, violent, disease-ridden, uncivilised, and unknowable presence in the Western imagination. In this Western narrative, Africa is … a stereotype.' (40) Since Western media reads the war events through a set of stereotypes, it illustrates, Novak states, how the Western subject's understanding of and response to events are moulded by cultural narratives (39). Considering this, the coverage of the war by Richard, a Western subject, becomes interesting. In 'Sidestepping the Political "Graveyard of Creativity"', Maya Ganapathy notes that Richard responds to Western media's distortions by presenting a non-essentialist and factual image of the war (97). His criticism is important, she holds, since the reader's ability to theorise Richard as the author of *The Book* 'hangs on his ability to represent and think of Africa in non-essentialist terms' (96). When Richard's criticism of imperialist policies and exploitation is echoed in excerpts of *The Book*, the novel presents him 'as responsible for *The Book's* critique of a British perspective' (96). That his criticism emerges towards the end of his story means, Ganapathy continues, that the theory of Richard's authorship only becomes stronger as the story unfolds (97). However, even while the novel strives to reinforce the theory of Richard's authorship, it strives to undermine it, too. It works on two planes, one where it presents him as an

unbiased Biafran author and another where it negates this idea, forwarding instead the idea of him as a biased Western author.

An analogy appears between Western representations of Africans and Richard's representations of them. The heavily stereotypical war coverage by the Western press prompts Richard to proclaim that it carries an 'an echo of unreality' (Adichie *Half* 166). He soon picks up a similar 'echo of unreality' in his private writing about the war (168). His writing 'sound[s] just like the articles in the foreign press, as if these killings had not happened and, even if they had, as if they had not quite happened that way.' (168) His writing inadvertently distorts events – 'as if they had not quite happened that way' – because it conforms to the same templates of Africa used by the 'foreign', or Western, press. Despite his criticism of imperialist attitudes, Richard is himself unable to transcend his cultural biases and relate African experiences with verisimilitude. JanMohamed provides some insight that might explain Richard's apparent hypocrisy. JanMohamed argues that the Manicheism of the colonial environment creates a profound inability in the self to reflect and identify beyond 'prevailing racial and cultural preconceptions', even though one 'may … be highly critical of imperialist exploitation' (63). It is, in fact, Novak adds, 'the Manichean organisation of the colonial world … that structures the Western subject's sense of the real.' (39) Richard, like the Western media, is locked behind his inability to think outside the colonial symbolic order that structures the Western imagination of Africa: his cultural preconceptions determine what he sees, hears, and understands of Africa. Novak concludes that,

> Despite his effort to shed his European identity, Richard functions as a marker for how colonial epistemology constructs and shapes Africa as an object for consumption. His presence illustrates the continuing legacy and belief of superiority in the Western subject's relationship with African people. (40)

Hence, Richard assuming the epistemological power of the Western subject points up the novel's concern with the continued domination of a colonial signifying system that preserves the interpretive privilege of the subject over the image of Africa and relegates the African to the position of silenced object. The figure of Richard ultimately gestures to a long tradition of Western epistemic imperialism.

Adichie's focus on authorship is related to her concern with written literature as a powerful shaper of the perception of "reality". In the 'Danger of a single story', she

addresses the West's history of exercising epistemological control over the African story. This practice, she claims, was initiated by European explorers who produced a single story of Africa, which, in turn, yielded a set of stereotypes that came to limit the ability of the Western reader to think and imagine Africa beyond that story. Her speech implicitly subscribes to what Edward Said in his work *Orientalism* (1979) terms 'textual attitudes', the notion that texts structure the reader's understanding of and attitude towards other people and "reality" (92-3). Adichie, therefore, presumes a connection between the author, text, and reader, where the Western reader is conceived as a passive recipient of the author's text. If the situation is read through Bhabha's problematic of seeing/being seen, the text becomes the mirror through which the Westerner encounters the black other. The act of reading the single story initiates the symbolic act of identification which reaffirms the white/black identity relation. Stories, then, can influence not only the reader's perception of an external reality, of how Africans are perceived, but also an internal reality, an identity. Read this way, Adichie recognises the importance of authorial responsibility in depictions of others' "reality" as these can influence the self's relationship with that other. Although the single story has its origins in Western literature, it is, she states, perpetuated through Western media's compulsive recycling of stereotypes ('Danger'). This compulsion can be understood through Bhabha's analogue to Freudian fetishism as a result of the idea that the affirmation of wholeness/sameness is never stable since the perception of lack/difference persists. The consequent tension continually reactivates the need to defend the original fantasy by masking the perception of difference (106-7). '[T]he same old stories of the Negro's animality' (111) are, therefore, produced to derive a steady relief from the anxiety of difference. This cycle is difficult to break, Bhabha argues, so long as "race" remains a 'sign of *negative difference*' (108, original emphasis). The cycle will, in other words, persist if the colonial symbolic order endures.

Richard ultimately realises his inability to write *The Book*. Towards the end of his story, he tells Ugwu that he has renounced his authoritative and authorial privilege:

> 'Are you still writing your book, sah?'
>
> 'No.'
>
> '"The World Was Silent When We Died". It is a good title.'
>
> 'Yes, it is. It came from something Colonel Madu said once.' Richard paused. 'The war isn't my story to tell, really.'

Ugwu nodded. He had never thought that it was. (Adichie *Half* 425)

The moment before disclosing his decision not to write *The Book*, Richard alludes to Madu's speech. The proximity of this allusion suggests that Madu's words had some bearing on his decision. It has presumably been borne in on Richard that he cannot speak for Biafrans as a Biafran because he is a Western subject, as Madu once claimed, and not the object, as Richard then seemed to think. The novel thus ultimately rejects Richard's ability to attain sufficient critical distance from his own culture to comment truthfully on Biafra and its people. It appears to discredit the notion of, to rehearse an earlier quote from JanMohamed, 'negat[ing] or at least severely bracket[ing] the values, assumptions, and ideology of [one's] culture.' (65) According to JanMohamed, such negation or bracketing is unachievable since it inevitably involves 'negating one's very being' (65). This supposes that one can only ever appreciate others through self-understanding, through the values and codes that structure the self. Since the values and codes informing Richard's self are colonial, he cannot transcend his culture and "race" and identify with Biafrans. The novel hence rejects the Western subject's claims to complete objectivity.

Looking closer at Richard's phrasing – 'isn't my story' –, one notices that he is speaking about rights, which begs the question of who can rightfully write *The Book*. The answer to this is disclosed eight pages later when the final fragment from *The Book* reveals that Ugwu was the author all along. Richard was never the author, then. The novel seems to have encouraged the reader to hypothesise Richard as the author only to make a point about authorial rights, about *who* should tell the African story. Novak frames the switch in authorship as a disruption of the subject/object binary. Central to her argument is her conception of *The Book* as the traumatic history of colonialism and its aftermath (34-5, 40). Richard is removed from the subject position, she argues, because the Western subject is prevented by his preconceived notions about Africa from hearing and understanding the lingering trauma of colonialism. By removing the Western subject, the novel acknowledges that the problem of the West's inability to understand colonial trauma is not that the other cannot speak but rather that the West cannot hear the other's traumatic speech because of its biases (40-1). By placing the trauma survivor in the figure of the silenced black other in the subject position, the novel disrupts the Manichean order of the neocolonial world (39-42). This way, it suggests that the problem of hearing originates in the persistence of the subject/object binary, especially in the assumption of

the subject's objectivity. The binary must, she concludes, be dismantled (45). Novak here gestures to what Nielson describes as the basic premise of the subject/object binary, namely, that the Western subject cannot be biased because he is entirely separated from his subjectivity. It is the other who is subjective and, therefore, produces biased knowledge. Nielson argues that the problem with denying its own subjectivity is that the subject will not be self-critical and notice the flaws in its own position. This also means that the subject is blind to the potential validity of other forms of knowledge (449). Novak's conclusion indicates that to acknowledge colonial trauma, the West must admit that its position is subjective. Only then can it accept that there are other truths that are equally valid, that there are other subject positions beyond the Western. Her overarching point appears to be that Richard is denied authorship to make way for and recognise Ugwu's subject position. However, the point of Ugwu's authorship, she argues, is to alter the West-Africa relationship of address so that the other can be heard by and gain acknowledgement from the West for its trauma (45). It seems more likely, however, that placing Ugwu in the subject position has more to do with the novel's desire to make a claim about speaking from the subject position as being a human right.

Universality

The title of *The Book, The World Was Silent When We Died*, by invoking the contemporary political fight for recognition advertises the fact that the "post"-colonial African remained silenced because he was still considered to be the other. *The World Was Silent* importantly signals that *The World* is not silenced. There is the suggestion here of *The World* as an agent who can use its voice but, perhaps, chooses not to. The *We* is dependent on the speech of *The World* since this determines or somehow influences its ability to survive. The question of voice is here related to power, therefore, with *The World* holding the position of the speaking authority. The title in this way registers Biafra's struggle for recognition, where the world remained silent, refusing to recognise Biafran claims to sovereignty. In the sixth excerpt from *The Book*, Ugwu 'argues that Britain inspired this silence' (Adichie *Half* 258). He ties the lack of recognition to Britain's neocolonial interests in Nigeria. These interests made the other white powers, primarily France and the United States, unwilling to recognise Biafra. In 'The Bildungsroman and Biafran Sovereignty', Michael Donnelly notes that many African

nations did recognise Biafra. Nevertheless, since none of them leveraged the geopolitical power of the West, their recognition was insignificant (249). The West's silence on the Biafra question, Donnelly argues, was related to the black nation's and individual's continued status as an other in the postcolonial world. This because the Biafran cause was framed as a battle for human rights, so that any recognition of Biafra became tantamount to an acknowledgement of Biafrans' human rights (246-7, 250). Therefore, the West's silence was read by Biafran officials as a failure to recognise the equal humanity of black people, making 'the fight for Biafran sovereignty … nothing less than "the plight of the black struggling to be man."' (Ojukwu qtd. in Donnelly 250) The African's nation's inability to be heard and have its claims recognised, then, was a result of the continued silencing of the African for the purpose of maintaining the racial and political hierarchy. The fact that the black "race" continued to be subjugated throws doubt on the idea of *post*colonialism; indeed, the Biafran struggle brought to the surface the persistence of the colonial order on the political terrain. Adichie reinscribes this fight for the humanity of the black other on to her novel, recasting it as a fight for authorial rights, for the right to speak and write *The Book*. By playing with two likely authors of *The Book*, the novel encourages the reader to consider how the author's position is shaped by this historical and political context, and particularly how the author, who includes himself in the *We*, would also have to be part of the struggle to assert his humanity.

Ugwu assuming the subject position means that he claims the right of speech for the African and, in so doing, challenges the West's monopoly of humanity. To understand this claim, a detour to Adichie's essay 'African "Authenticity" and the Biafran Experience', a companion piece to the novel and an adaptation as well as an elaboration of her speech, becomes crucial. One point that Adichie makes in her essay is that literature is a key method for promoting a notion of universal humanity (46). For literature to express a universal human experience, however, the concept of universality must be bound to a definition of humanity that includes the black human, too (46). In this vein, Adichie remembers,

> After my first novel, *Purple Hibiscus*, was published, a professor at Johns Hopkins informed me that it was not authentically African. My characters were educated and middle class. They drove cars. They were not starving. … It made me wonder why I had never heard anybody speak of 'authentically American'

> characters. Is F. Scott Fitzgerald's Jay Gatsby, with his love of money and position, any more or less authentic than John Steinbeck's altogether dissimilar characters? Both Fitzgerald and Steinbeck are American writers, and their stories are American. I do not accept the idea of monolithic authenticity. To insist that there is one thing that is authentically African is to diminish the African experience. (48)

At the heart of the professor's comment is the assumption of Africans as unchanging because they are frozen in time as though they exist outside history. In a very important sense, this single story originates in the colonialist writer's endeavour to dehumanise Africans: 'If … African natives can be collapsed into African animals,' JanMohamed writes, 'and mystified still further as some magical essence of the continent, then clearly there can be no meeting ground, no identity, between the social, historical creatures of Europe and the metaphysical alterity of the Calibans and Ariels of Africa.' (68) By removing Africans from history and the "real" world, Africans were presented as deviant from the "normal" or the "real" humans, the Europeans, who possessed 'a legitimate history, who live "in the world".' (Ashcroft et. al. 'Part II' 55). The European was thus constructed into what Larson terms the 'standard of measurement' – the norm – for what counts as a feature or characteristic of humanity (64). Hence, 'European' came to equal 'universal' (Ashcroft et. al. 'Part II' 5555). The idea here was that to become "normal" or human, one must become European, Westernised, or "civilised". Hence, the "normal" humans were also those who formed the dominant group (Ashcroft et. al. 'Part II' 55). Only the dominant group, Stella claims, are '"naturally" diverse' (28) or, borrowing Adichie's term, have many stories, as opposed to a single story. Adichie claims that this colonial discourse can only be contested by insisting on the equal universality of the African experience and, thereby, assert the African's equal humanity. This can be done, she argues, through an illustration of the heterogeneity of African cultures, which is only possible, she suggests, if writers depart from the single story ('African' 46-8). So, while the single story 'makes our recognition of our equal humanity difficult' ('Danger'), the diversity of stories facilitates that recognition.

Adichie engages in the project of humanising the African in *Half of a Yellow Sun*. Having shown that the Western subject, Richard, is incapable of telling anything but the single story, it becomes necessary for the African to tell his own story; hence Adichie's

call for ‘diverse African stories told by Africans’ (‘African’ 47). By having Ugwu assume the position of the speaking subject, Adichie, on the one hand, insists on the validity of what he says about himself. If the speaking subject is also the human subject whose experiences serve as a yardstick for what is “normal” or “universally” true, then Ugwu’s story might carry a universal truth, might speak to an experience that is common to most humans. This also means that Adichie asserts his right to speak on grounds of his equal humanity with the Westerner. Simply put, Ugwu as subject speaks authoritatively about his own experiences and reclaims this right on the basis of his right to occupy that position as a human. Ugwu then goes on to reclaim the humanity of his people through the polyvocal structure of *The Book* which makes it, Ngwira notes, ‘a plethora of voices becoming, in Bakhtinian terms, truly “heteroglossic.”’ (49). *The Book* includes a variety of individual, African voices, with each voice telling a personal story and claiming the speaking position of the human subject. The polyvocal structure, furthermore, challenges the single story of African culture and people as unchanging and homogenous by demonstrating that ‘the African experience’ (Adichie ‘African’ 48) is naturally diverse and dynamic, too. *The Book*, then, plays on the symbolism of the secession which, recalling Ojukwu’s words, on some level, revolves around the rediscovery of old stories that the West’s new story of Africa, the single story, has repressed (15). *The Book* becomes revolutionary, just as the Biafran secession, because it contests, on multiple levels, the West’s epistemological control of “truth” or “reality”. The aim of *The Book* subsequently appears to be to revive, to rediscover, indigenous stories in order to recreate the African identity. In sum, by placing Ugwu in the subject position, the novel asserts the African’s human right to tell his own story. The implication here is that every human is entitled to tell his story because the right to speak and have one’s experience validated is a human right. Moreover, that the aim of *The Book* as regards both its authorship and content is to reclaim the African’s humanity from the colonial discourse implies that its objective is communal healing and regeneration from colonial violence through storytelling. The *We* in *The Book* title suggests that for the healing to be truly communal, the author must be part of the community, must also have been defined by the single story as a silenced other.

Intention

Through the motif of *The Book*, *Half of a Yellow Sun* seeks to test African and Western readers' assumptions about *who* should tell *what* stories. The novel encourages the reader to theorise Richard as the writer of the African story symbolised by *The Book*; this to reacquaint the reader with the assumption that the subject position is the Western position. The novel demonstrates how the continued relevance of this assumption is related to the endurance of the colonial symbolic order, which systematically allocates whites and blacks to opposing discursive positions to sustain the racial, cultural, and political hierarchy. This way, the novel not only provides a rationale for why certain representations – why certain stereotypes – persist but also illustrates that the right to speak is still associated with colonial ideas of who counts as a human. When Ugwu is revealed to be the author of *The Book*, the reader is forced to re-evaluate the discourse of authorship presented through the portrayal of Richard. Ugwu's authorship endeavours to illustrate that storytelling is a human right, and that every person is entitled to speak authoritatively about his own experiences. His authorship of *The Book* does not seek to reaffirm the racial, cultural, and political hierarchy, but rather promises through its polyvocal structure a new story, one that runs counter to the single story. Through these two male authorships, therefore, the novel engages in a discourse that subverts and rejects the Manichean order of the colonial discourse, the continued significance of which places Africa and the African as voiceless others to be studied, interpreted, and constructed by the "knowing" Western subject. Adichie's strategy here can, in accordance with Tiffin, be read as counter-discursive, as it involves 'a mapping of the dominant discourse, a reading and exposing of its underlying assumptions, and the dis/mantling of these assumptions' (98) within a specific political context (96-7). Adichie's intention with her counter-discourse appears to be to articulate the claim that it is the African's human right to tell his own story. However, if drawn out, this claim suggests, as will be elaborated, that only Africans should tell African stories.

As seen, *The Book* embodies the dilemma of voice in its title and also in its content, for, as a story about Africa, it nods back to a Western tradition of writing about Africa as an exercise of power. Richard is denied the authorship of *The Book* because by positioning himself as the knowing subject and the Biafrans as the objects, he comes to represent the colonial voice who is privileged to speak, identifying himself, therefore,

with the titular *The World*, instead of the *We*. As subject, he might, consequently, continue the narrative tradition that represses the black voice and conform *The Book* to the single story. The novel subsequently endorses Ugwu's rise to authorship, so that he goes from being the silenced object to the speaking subject. That he is thus also identified as the rightful speaker for the *We* – the Biafrans – indicates the novel's belief that Ugwu, unlike Richard, is actually Biafran. By this logic, the novel proposes that Ugwu can write *The Book* and speak for Africans because he has been defined by the colonial discourse as the silenced black other. In the same vein, Richard cannot write for Biafrans because he is not and, indeed, cannot become an African because as an Englishman he does not share the colonial identity of silenced other. Importantly, it is the Manicheism of the neocolonial environment that insists on an essentialist division of identities, because here, as in the colonial world, 'nurture is ephemeral – one's culture is inherited, like the colour of skin, through the genes.' (JanMohamed 79) It appears, therefore, that the novel's stance on *who* should tell *what* story is fundamentally anchored in a contention about the reinscription of the symbolic order of colonialism in the postcolonial world, a contention which, moreover, advertises the novel's scepticism of the "post" in postcolonialism. Perhaps in a truly *post*colonial world, it would be possible for Richard to cross boundaries and write outside his culture and "race". The implication here is also that the colonial order necessitates Africans to act, to claim their voice and equal humanity, because it is this same order that continues to silence them.

As the overabundance of masculine pronouns in this analysis signals, Adichie's treatment of authorship is strikingly androcentric, with one male author given the space to claim the subject position from another male author. It conveys the stance that specifically male Africans should tell African stories. On the one hand, it reiterates the idea that the subject position belongs to men; on the other, it endorses a tradition in which men tell the stories of women. The reason is that the subject/object binary is also inscribed into the patriarchal discourse, where the male self functions as the "knowing" subject and the female as the passive, silenced other who is observed, interpreted, and constructed in much the same way that the black other is gazed upon and constructed by the white male self. In this way, Adichie's androcentrism ironically reasserts the very binary – subject/object – that she contests, an argument supported by Novak (48). Arguing that Adichie reproduces female voicelessness in other ways too, Novak points to the removal

of Kainene as a significant example of Adichie continuing the silencing and marginalising of the female voice. Kainene disappears when she goes to trade across enemy lines. A very vocal female character in the novel, her disappearance leaves a tangible void in the final part of the novel. While the war thus silences Kainene, it makes way for Ugwu's voice (46-7). This point is picked up on by Matthew Lecznar in '(Re)fashioning Biafra: Identity, Authorship, and the Politics of Dress.' In response to Novak's claim, he asserts that Ugwu's authorship becomes 'a form of gendered power.' (124) The novel's male focus, Lecznar shows, runs very deeply, with the text being densely interwoven with preceding male-authored narratives of the war which 'silence and cut off female voices and textual threads.' (126) *The Book* is likewise based on and mediated by male-orientated texts and is, besides being written by a man, even dedicated to one (126). Lecznar concludes,

> Ugwu's book seems to show that women remain marginalised from the closed circle of male writers who have the power to construct knowledge and narratives about Nigeria. This view is supported by Ogunyemi, who argues that "[Nigerian] literature is phallic, dominated as it is by male writers and male critics who deal almost exclusively with male characters and male concerns" (60).' (126)

Lecznar's overarching point is that Adichie's male-centredness undermines her attempt to rework and update 'her literary heritage' through depictions of ahistorical, gender-empowering fashion which, intentionally, seek 'to reclaim female voices' (121-4). Adichie's main argument for who should tell what story, therefore, is apparently essentialist on the levels of gender and "race"/ ethnicity.

The novel is, therefore, weighed down by a double paradox: while Adichie, as a black/African woman, can write Richard, a white/European man's, story, he as a white/European cannot write her story because she is black/African. These argumentative inconsistencies trouble the meaning of the novel, since, at face value at least, Adichie is here doubly invalidating her argument for who can tell what story. However, the principle of charity enjoins the reader to reconcile these inconsistencies. Addressing the paradox of "race"/ ethnicity first, it seems impossible to resolve this paradox in any other way but to surmise that Adichie tells Richard's story simply so that she can formulate her counter-discourse about the African's authorial rights. By including Richard in her novel, she can chart and criticise the ideas he represents more efficiently than if she would have excluded

him. Addressing the second paradox, that of gender, telling Richard's story is also apparently significant from a feminist perspective. In her book-length essay *We Should All Be Feminists* (2014), Adichie describes herself as a conscious feminist (10, 21). Apart from treating patriarchy as a universal phenomenon (21-3), she is conscious of the operations of 'the male gaze' (40), which, as earlier noted, is integral to the subject/object dualism in the colonial discourse, where it is instead the "white gaze". She believes that the patriarchal system engages in othering and silencing practices (33), which she in her novel projects as inherent to the colonial system as well. On some level, then, she is aware of the parallels between the black other and the female other. Together, the novel and the book-length essay frame Adichie as a so-called *doubly subjugated* postcolonial woman. This term comes from the concept 'double colonisation'[6] which is commonly used in postcolonial and feminist theories to describe the postcolonial woman's double oppression by colonial and patriarchal systems. With Adichie's doubly colonised position in mind, it becomes possible to see an inversion in *Half of a Yellow Sun* between Adichie and Richard, where the former becomes the subject writing the larger book, and the latter the object of that larger book. She observes, interprets, and reproduces knowledge about Richard, the Western subject, from her cultural position to present a new narrative about authorial rights. Her repression of the white male voice, where she ends up removing his right to speak, seems necessary to make way for the black female and the black male voices. Therefore, it also appears to be her intention to include the female voice in her argument about who should tell African stories. She only seems to subscribe to gender essentialism until her own authorship is considered. Ultimately, then, Adichie tells Richard's story so that she can reclaim his authorial privilege for African men and women.

This analysis of authorial intent has not prioritised epistemic considerations over aesthetic ones. The relevant aesthetic qualities of the novel, its formal elements, are inseparable from considerations of the ideas that shape the meaning of the text. Indeed, the characterisation of the white author figure, the stereotypical imagery, the literary allusion, the central motif, and the themes of authorship and universality, to name a few,

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[6] This term was coined by Kirsten Holst-Peterson and Anna Rutherford in *A Double Colonisation: Colonial and Post-Colonial Women's Writing* (1986).

have been shown to enter into textual and contextual considerations of work meaning from the outset. This reading of intent, consequently, supports Stephen Davies' criticism of Levinson's theory. Davies argues that it is impossible to prioritise epistemic over aesthetic evaluations since these are not 'distinct and separable' (Levinson 141). It seems, therefore, necessary that Levinson complements his theory with a model for how aesthetic and epistemic elements are to be distinguished. In all, then, the best ascription of intent to Adichie is that only African men and women should tell African stories.

Lloyd Jones' *Mister Pip*

Stereotyping

The events of *Mister Pip* unfold against the backdrop of the racially tense atmosphere of the Bougainville secessionist war of 1988-1998. By turns invaded by Germany, Japan, and Australia, Bougainvilleans had suffered nearly a century of foreign occupation characterised by bloodshed (Laracy 108-9), territorial neglect (Griffin 292), and foreign appropriation of indigenous resources (Norridge 60) when they collectively decided to drive out the latest foreign authority. The years of domination inspired a sense of community, of being bound together by their black skin. Their skin colour has, in fact, historically distinguished them from other Pacific peoples (Griffin and Regan xxv-vi, xxxii). Importantly, their black identity formed the basis for the ethnonational sentiments that led to calls for secession from the most recent foreign government of Papua New Guinea (PNG) in 1988 (Griffin 292). At the time, a mine that had been in operation for sixteen years had pushed the already poor race relations between the black islanders and the white and the so-called *redskin* outsiders to a head (Griffin 292, Vernon 267). The war that ensued between the rebels of the Bougainvillean Revolutionary Army and the PNG redskins is the largest, most persistent, and bitterest war ever waged in Melanesia (Griffin and Regan xxvi). While the other white outsiders have fled the war-torn island, Mr Watts, for whatever reason, has decided to stay in one of the rebel sympathetic villages becoming 'the last white man' on the island (Jones *Mister* 4, 73).

The hitherto ostracised and mysterious Mr Watts plays on the conflict to cast himself as the good outsider and build a relationship with the village children. The island is monitored by circling helicopters and patrolling gunboats that enforce the blockade imposed by PNG in 1990 (Jones *Mister* 31, 35). It gives the redskins an omnipresence

that instils the villagers with fear. The threat of fear is substantiated by the redskins' exerting authority either through acts of violence or the promise of violence whenever they pay surprise visits to the village. The villagers do not fear the rebels, however, since some adults support the rebels and 'nearly all the young men in the village [have] joined them' (70). Nonetheless, they do fear that the redskins might find them guilty by association. Caught in this dilemma, they are constantly agitated: the author-narrator, Matilda, states, 'We waited, and we waited for the redskin soldiers, or the rebels, whoever got here first.' (10) Regardless of who comes, something undesirable, she here implies, might happen. However, Mr Watts remains untouched by the fear of the redskins (31-2). Repeatedly spared from their violence, he is presently protected by his white skin: 'The redskins wouldn't do anything to cause white displeasure. Port Moresby [the PNG capital] was dependent on Australian aid which came in many forms' (105). Indeed, some of the means whereby PNG maintains its advantage in the war, such as the helicopters, are provided by a white country (105). In a sense, therefore, the redskins' distinct treatment of him identifies him with the immediate enemy, PNG. It puts him in a dangerous predicament in the village as a potential target for the rebels' hostility. His situation appears to compel his metamorphosis into the saviour, the good outsider. Hence, the situation allows for the following explanation: a white man has decided to remain on hostile, non-white territory and turns himself into the good outsider who "saves" the natives from redskin oppression. Leaving aside the latter part of this statement, the "saving", which will be returned to, these narrative components are consistent with those of the well-established white saviour fables, as explained by Vera Hernán and Andrew Gordon in *Screen Saviours: Hollywood Fictions of Whiteness* (2003) (33-5). As shall be seen, the conflict, therefore, creates the circumstances for Mr Watts to develop a close relationship with the village children and to become perceived as a kind outsider.

That Mr Watts plays the saviour role specifically relates to a desire to defend his status as a white person while being perceived as useful to the villagers rather than threatening. He admits that he is constantly reminded that he is white: 'We [whites] feel white around black people.' (Jones *Mister* 156) His statement recalls the notion that 'Whites don't have a colour until a person of colour enters the room.' (Hernán and Gordon 11) Mr Watts here invokes the arsenal of assumptions attached to the idea that whites are universal – neutral and normal – until they interact with coloured people. This is when the norm of whiteness

is threatened and must be restored. That “blackness” threatens Mr Watts’ “whiteness” must be understood in terms of how black skin functions within the colonial discourse. The skin, Bhabha states, is an organ on which colour is manifested. Hence, skin becomes an embodiment, sign, or evidence of natural racial difference (114). Skin emphasises the role of recognition in the process of discrimination, since, being ‘at once visible and natural’, it not only invites the perception of difference but also spontaneously prompts acts of disavowal and fixation (113-5). In Mr Watts’ case, this means that his every interaction with non-whites reactivates the scene of fetishism, so that he is constantly faced with the possibility of loss and threat to his ego. In Freud’s schema, the encounter with difference encodes the prospect of actual castration. Since the body is understood to be bound to the ego, physical loss harms the child’s developing ego. In Bhabha’s model, the ego is not bodily; rather, it is associated with a part of subjectivity – whiteness – that has been culturally valorised and charged with narcissism. In *Mister Pip*, the villagers’ black skin threatens Mr Watts’ whiteness, so that he is compelled to defend it through disavowal, fixation, and masking. Through these acts, the subject turns towards itself, identifying with the white ego and reinforcing its self-image which crucially involves the returned ‘look’, the other’s recognition of the white ego (Bhabha 109). These processes are encoded on to the narrative construction of the white saviour: the saviour, Hernán and Gordon demonstrate, symbolically functions to defend the white ego. The saviour narrative reaffirms white superiority by defining the saviour figure in contradistinction with the non-white, indigenous oppressors. He becomes the good outsider, the non-oppressor, whose innate, superior qualities are needed by the natives to survive or somehow cope with indigenous oppression. Understood as a defence of the white self-concept, the saviour figure first and foremost serves himself, though his saving is portrayed as self-sacrifice, as a form of service (34, 50-1). The novel enables Mr Watts to defend his whiteness by assuming the saviour identity, and this transformation is aided by the setting; for the conflict places the black natives in an environment that paralyses them with fear, so that, Matilda writes, ‘we [the villagers] need[] a saviour’ (Jones *Mister* 210). Only Mr Watts, the white man with the saviour qualities, can ‘fill[] that role’ (210).

The white saviour trope originates in Rudyard Kipling’s poem ‘The White Man’s Burden.’ In ‘Kipling’s “The White Man’s Burden” and Its Afterlives’, Patrick Brantlinger writes that ‘[Kipling] clearly believed that the white race was charged with the

responsibility of civilising – or trying to civilise – all of the dark, supposedly backward races of the world.' (179) This notion is recycled in contemporary Western narratives about the white saviour (or messiah), where the lonely white figure, typically a man, somehow rescues the natives from oppression (Hernán and Gordon 33). In *Mister Pip*, the saviour trope is foreshadowed on the very first page:

> Pop Eye [Mr Watts] wore the same white linen suit every day. His trousers snagged on his bony knees in the sloppy heat. Some days he wore a clown's nose. His nose was already big. He didn't need that red light bulb. But for reasons we couldn't think of he wore the red nose on certain days that may have meant something to him. We never saw him smile. And on those days he wore the red clown's nose you found yourself looking away because you never saw such sadness.
>
> He pulled a piece of rope attached to a trolley on which Mrs Pop [Grace] stood. She looked like an ice queen. Nearly every woman on the island had crinkled hair, but Grace had straightened hers. (Jones *Mister* 1)

Since Mr Watts only wears the clown's nose when he tows Grace (208), this passage describes Matilda's observations of a seemingly strange and recurrent behaviour. Significantly, Grace is a black native who has been "reformed", or anglicised, through her interactions with Mr Watts and the "white" world (124-5), a transformation signalled above by her 'straightened' hair. Described as 'an ice queen', she is given negative traits, the word 'ice' in particular attributing to her qualities of unfriendliness and a lack of compassion. These qualities enlist sympathy for Mr Watts who is tasked with pulling her. His load being a person, he is indirectly likened to a draft animal pulling a vehicle carrying a passenger. The implication of service here is bolstered by Matilda's description of Grace as a 'queen', which serves as an allusive reference to the biblical story of 'The Queen of Sheba' (208). This allusion metaphorically ties Mr Watts to the queen's storied servants. He tows Grace through the village so frequently that it seems to be his duty, almost as if his purpose there is to serve her, particularly since he does no other work (9). Moreover, the clown's nose and his sadness invoke the sad clown trope and suggest that he suffers from anxiety or some form of complex which he vainly seeks to relieve by assuming the clown identity and towing Grace. These descriptions allude to many lines from Kipling's poem, salient among which are 'Go bind your sons to exile / To serve your captives' need;

/ To wait in heavy harness / On fluttered folk and wild' (3-6). Here, Kipling exhorts white men to serve non-whites. White men will be harnessed like draft animals and humbly serve a capricious and savage people who are, he later adds, childish and evil (8). Since Kipling's poem intertwines the white man's burden with the need to continue white superiority (Brantlinger 172-4), this burden is, importantly, carried out to defend the anxiety of the perception of difference by reasserting the original fantasy. In this sense, Mr Watts' pulling of the black, "reformed" native foreshadows him taking up the white man's burden on the island. The white saviour trope emerges more fully when Mr Watts becomes the teacher.

Because of the war, all the teachers have fled the island. The children quickly become lazy (Jones *Mister* 10) as if returning to their "natural" state. The idea of children as lazy or listless is itself not loaded. However, considering the text's colonial overtones and the widespread usage of the 'lazy native' trope in colonialist texts about Papua New Guineans (Stella 207), this depiction becomes racially charged. Apart from being lazy, the children are, together with the adults, completely powerless without the help of 'the outside world' (Jones *Mister* 35), in the novel conflated with the 'white world' (6-7, 85). They resign themselves to 'waiting', leaving their fates in the hands of the conflict between the redskins and the rebels (10). Here, then, is a second stereotype, also widely used in colonialist writings about Papua New Guineans, namely, the helpless native (Stella 21). To save the helpless and lazy black children from their oppressive reality, Mr Watts decides to read to them from *Great Expectations* and give them 'another country to flee to' (Jones *Mister* 80). In 'Bringing Newness to the World', Monica Latham argues that Mr Watts uses the book to teach the children to mentally transport from the island to Dickens' Victorian England and briefly forget their reality (26-8). Matilda, however, does not receive it as a lesson so much as an act of rescue; from her viewpoint, Mr Watts' activities 'save [the children's] sanity' (Jones *Mister* 80). While the *actual* effects of his saving work remain to be explored, suffice it here to say that his work allows him to transform in the children's eyes from the strange white outcast into 'a kind man' (41). This re-evaluation of Mr Watts, Zoë Norridge contends in 'From Wellington to Bougainville', becomes possible only within the classroom (61), where he teaches the children cross-cultural empathy through Dickens' text (58). Through this new skill, the children, Norridge claims, can conceive Mr Watts 'as an intriguing human being' (61).

Such empathetic identification is not possible, Norridge claims, outside the classroom, where Mr Watts is compelled by the racially and politically charged environment to 'adopt[] the culturally determined position of "colonial superior".' (62) Mr Watts, indeed, becomes more human the more the children interact with him, but it is also true that the more human he becomes the more he comes to personify the white saviour, going from being the strange outcast to a teacher, a respected authority figure, in adherence with the trajectory of the saviour figure (Hernán and Gordon 33-4). So long as they interact as saviour and natives, there is no real cross-cultural understanding between Mr Watts and the children.

However, the bond between saviour and native is best exemplified in his and Matilda's relationship. Unlike many, Matilda's respect towards Mr Watts grows into blind loyalty:

> Mr Watts had called a school holiday … This meant that we were back to idle days to fill.
>
> So when I saw Mr Watts start up the hill one morning, I set after him. … I followed Mr Watts in the same unthinking way that a dog gets up and follows its master or a tame parrot flies to the shoulder of its owner. (Jones *Mister* 150)

Matilda here likens herself to tame animals and Mr Watts to her master and owner. She uses language that dehumanises her and casts Mr Watts as her domesticator. One can intuit a "race" hierarchy as the operative logic of her description, where he is placed above her. European evolutionary thought proposed, Stella writes, that humans evolved 'from savagery to barbarism to civilisation' (139). This produced an anthropology that underwrote the notion of the animality and, hence, the inferiority of black people. The purpose of thus dehumanising the black other was to redefine colonisation as a process of taming the native so as to evolve them, to "civilise" them (139). This midwifed the idea that indigenes needed 'a white man' to make them 'human' (139), or, in keeping with the white saviour trope, a white man to "save" the native by "civilising" them. Apart from testifying to Mr Watts' successful "saving", Matilda's taming invokes the stereotype of, in Bhabha's words, 'the loyal servant' or follower (113). She even comes to worship Mr Watts, as is indicated in the shrine she makes for Pip (Jones *Mister* 39). Since Mr Watts represents Pip[7], and since Matilda's memoir is dedicated to 'Mister Pip', who is Mr Watts (139), Matilda's loyalty has a distinctly devotional cast. Notably, this

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[7] See 'White Author Figure' and 'Intention'.

characterisation of the native as a devoted follower of the good white outsider complies with the saviour narrative (Hernán and Gordon 34).

At this point, a certain logic emerges. In line with other cultural narratives about the white saviour, where '[o]ther racial and ethnic groups exist … to bolster the grandiose white self-image' (Hernán and Gordon 34), *Mister Pip* presents a situation where Mr Watts' whiteness is constantly reinforced through the varied positions of especially Matilda – she is the lazy native, the helpless native, the loyal follower. Since the stereotype never eliminates the perception of difference, Bhabha claims, the threat of difference is always there (106-7). To derive sustained relief from the attendant anxiety, the self is caught in a cycle of disavowing, fixing, and masking the difference. This, as earlier stated, involves a repetition of stereotyping (110-1). The novel is attuned to these processes, as it demonstrates that Mr Watts whose constant awareness of racial difference forces him to disavow and fix his denial by playing the saviour. The duration of his act – the duration of his relief – depends on Matilda's adoption of a series of stereotypical roles that affirm Mr Watts' self-image, humanising and exalting him, whilst insisting on her inferiority. The reduction of Matilda into stereotypes, in turn, testifies to her growing devotion to him.

Universality

Matilda's growing devotion is an essential feature of the saviour narrative as it makes her susceptible to Mr Watts' influence. At the close of the introductory meeting at school, Mr Watts pauses like

> he'd just had a new thought, and he must have, because next he asked us to get up from our desks and to form a circle. He told us to hold hands or link arms, whatever we saw fit.
>
> Some of us who had heard a minister speak and knew about church closed their eyes and dropped their chins onto their chests. But there was no prayer. There was no sermon. Instead, Mr Watts thanked us all for turning up. (Jones *Mister* 16)

Though they do not exactly perform a ritual, the scene plays with the idea of worship through how the children almost instinctively associate Mr Watts's speech and behaviour with a minister's. This association inspires the expectation to imminently engage in an act of worship through either a prayer or sermon. While the scene illustrates that their

expectations are disappointed, it also, and more importantly, prefigures the value these meetings will come to have for Matilda. For when Mr Watts in their next class reads to them from *Great Expectations*, the experience becomes so spiritual that Matilda compares him to a church minister. It is the English language and the world the book comes to emblematise that stir this reaction in Matilda, who writes,

> I had never been read to in English before. … When Mr Watts read to us we fell quiet. It was a new sound in the world. … He kept reading and we kept listening. It was some time before he stopped, but when he looked up we sat stunned by the silence. The flow of words had ended. Slowly we stirred back into our bodies and lives.
>
> Mr Watts closed the book and held the paperback up in one hand, like a church minister. … [and said] 'That was chapter one of *Great Expectations*, which, incidentally, is the greatest novel by the greatest English writer of the nineteenth century, Charles Dickens.' (18)

Through his gesture of raising the book with one hand, Mr Watts is compared to a clergyman. By the same token, the book is here tacitly likened to a Bible. Add to these suggestions the fact that Mr Watts lives in 'the old mission house' (9), and Mr Watts as saviour speaks to a very particular part of colonial history. Historically, the figure of the missionary played a seminal role in the "civilisation" of Bougainvilleans. Their internalisation of Western culture and values was fraught with violence as it was enforced through the brutal German pacification campaign. At its root, the campaign sought to subdue indigenous resistance to the civilising mission mainly in order to defend the economic imperatives of colonialism (Laracy 110-1, 117). The German power called the end of the campaign only when the last tribes agreed to give up their traditional ways and submit to the new order (123). With the destruction of the old order, the various tribes became ardent followers of the French, German, American, and English missionaries. These were apparently benign figures, who acted as bulwarks against colonial violence and built schools and chapels where they educated the natives on the new way of life (119). 'By the 1930s,' Hugh Laracy writes, '… the people were singing of the wonders and wealth of the white man's world' (123). Dickens especially was part and parcel of what George Lamming calls 'the whole tabernacle of dead [authors]' historically used to colonise the minds of natives (14). Lamming uses the word 'tabernacle' to indicate the

sacred status these works held for the Caribbean subject in his foundational postcolonial essay 'The Occasion for Speaking.' In this context, Latham's description of *Great Expectations* as a 'colonial story' (31) that is 'Eurocentric' (39) is particularly apt. Apart from the cultural and linguistic violence it entails, the aim of such mental colonisation is not to entirely "reform" the native, according to Bhabha, who argues that the native is merely anglicised, only 'partial[ly] reform[ed]', in order to uphold his supposed racial/cultural inferiority to the European. The result is a mimic man, a parody of Englishness (121-5). By invoking this history, the above passage predicts Mr Watts' use of a canonical text to "civilise" or Westernise the black native, Matilda.

Explicitly, however, Mr Watts has an idea to provide the children with an escape from their harrowing reality by introducing them to Dickens' world. However, his intentions notwithstanding, he manages to so impress Matilda with Dickens' world that she is colonised by the text. Applying speech-act theory to *Mister Pip*, Nil Korkut-Nayki offers insight into how texts and authorship can possess the power to alter Matilda's mind in the first place. In 'How to Do Things with Words and Texts', Korkut-Nayki weighs in with the idea of literature and writing as performative, as things that 'do' and that, therefore, can affect the reader's relationship with the real world (43-4). Vital to understanding her point is the idea of Mr Watts' reading of Dickens' novel as a rewriting. Years after she departs from the island, Matilda gets hold of a copy of *Great Expectations* and discovers that Mr Watts had reworked Dickens' novel (51-2). Consequently, he has, from the very first moment of reading, assumed the authorial role, actively rewriting Dickens' text. Because Jones ascribes performative power to rewritings of *Great Expectations*, Korkut-Nayki claims, Mr Watts' rewriting has the capacity to influence Matilda (43-4, 52). Specifically, his rewriting acts on Matilda in such a way that it lastingly and negatively reshapes her thinking and even influences her actions (47-8). Therefore, the principal outcome of Mr Watts' rewriting, or "saving", is the transformation of Matilda's behaviour and thinking.

Her new mindset attests to her colonisation. Lamming states that the mental colonisation of the native shows itself as an underestimation of the native culture and an overestimation of the English culture and language, such that it sustains cultural and racial hierarchies (12-3). In other words, the native begins to view the English world as establishing the norm, and this is a function of the use of canonical literature in the

native's early education (13-4). What Lamming describes is, according to Tiffin, a widespread imperial practice, where 'the imposed European education systems' deployed canonical, or '"great" literature', to implant the assumption of universality in the natives (97). In this way, European codes of understanding and the 'vilification of alterity' were circulated and normalised in the colonial periphery (97). Mr Watts engages in this imperial practice with his main teaching material being Dickens' novel. After having taught from Dickens' novel for a time, he inspires Matilda's worship of the English world. Latham writes that, '[I]n the context of the war, uncertainty and fear of extinction, almost everybody is concerned with the revival, retrieval, transmitting and preservation of ancestral stories.' (29) Yet Matilda is not interested in her ancestral stories, as she indicates by valuing her shrine for Pip above the ancestral history shared by her mother, Dolores (Jones *Mister* 65-6). Through the shrine, she treats Pip's world as superior, as holding a sacred status, compared to her indigenous world which has ceased, in fact, to hold any value (65). Mr Watts 'approv[es]' of her shrine (59) but apparently misses the significance of it as an expression of cultural worship. Consequently, he seemingly does not register that his decision to read his rewriting of *Great Expectations* four more times before deciding they should all reconstruct the story from memory deepens '[t]he book's magic hold on [Matilda]' (80). This last activity is virtually catechismal, with Mr Watts asking specific questions about his rewriting of the book and demanding that the children recite dialogues and scenes as if he had been inculcating them all along. Matilda likens her nightly preoccupation with the task of remembering and reciting to Dolores' attempts 'to summon passages from … her Bible.' (119) Here, Mr Watts' work is, once more, symbolically likened to that of the missionaries[8].

Norridge believes that the strand of universality forms the backbone of *Mister Pip's* message about literature as a gateway to increased knowledge (71). This message operates on two levels: that between Mr Watts and Matilda, on the one hand, and that between Jones and the reader, on the other. *Great Expectations*, Norridge claims, is universal enough to allow Matilda to empathetically identify with Pip and, through that act, achieve some sort of understanding about herself and Pip's world (69-70). Jones adopts Dickens'

[8] The symbolism gains force from a reading of Mr Watts as a stand-in father for Matilda. This reading is supported by the metaphoric association of Mr Watts with Joe Gargery (Pip's adoptive father) and Matilda's father who is described as figuratively 'white' (Jones 192). Mr Watts functions, on several levels, as a religious figure for Matilda, a 'white father'.

balance between being universal and culturally specific to produce a text that makes room for similar acts of empathic identification and knowledge acquisition (70-1). He uses universal principles, Norridge holds, to open up a world 'far from the parameters of conventional Western lives' to a global audience (71). On this basis, she construes *Mister Pip* as appealing to a primarily Western audience, overlooking the novel's critical treatment of the notion of universality. Korkut-Nayki, contrarily, picks up on this critical component, arguing that the performativity of *Great Expectations* subverts the idea of universality which is inscribed into canonical texts through liberal humanist discourses (54). For a text to '"perform" properly, … [to] be received in the "expected" way' (54), she claims, there must be consensus about its function in the particular context. A text does not, she says, operate in the same way 'regardless of time and place, social and cultural differences, or specific circumstances.' (55) Context, Korkut-Nayki stresses, figures seminally into how the text is received. Hence, in *Mister Pip*, the negative, or unexpected, performances of texts and rewritings are imputable to the fact that a canonical text operates outside of the Western context. All this brings to the fore, she believes, the novel's scepticism of the universality of canonical literature (54). It is possible to view the novel's critical engagement with universality as also occurring through Mr Watts and Matilda's relationship. This point will crystalise as the thesis proceeds.

The final outcome of Matilda's colonisation is her assimilation into the Western world. In a 2007 interview with Craig Rintoul, Jones states that, 'Right at the centre of the book … there is a contest between Mr Watts and Matilda's mother, Dolores, for the mind and soul of Matilda. It is not that explicit; it is more implicit'. It is the prospect of losing Matilda to the "white" world that distresses Dolores and turns her against Mr Watts. Through anecdotes, fables, underhanded comments, and actions, such as hiding *Great Expectations*, Dolores treats the book as an evil that culturally transforms Matilda and Mr Watts as the evil, white mastermind. Despite Dolores' attempts to win Matilda over, she loses her to Mr Watts who has become a point of ideological and psychical identification for Matilda. Novak describes any enforced acknowledgement of 'white subjectivity', the forced identification with 'the white man' and espousal of his attitude (37), as a form of neocolonial trauma. This process typically occurs through education and other forms of cultural reinforcement, and the consequence is a 'wounding' which 'results in a loss of voice and no sense of identity – or rather, an identity modelled after the coloniser, which

is no identity at all.' (37) In this spirit, Mr Watts' colonisation of Matilda can be redescribed as a form of neocolonial violence, of repression of her indigenous voice and identity. It speaks to a larger neocolonial violence, where black islanders who have been in contact with whites end up assimilating the latter's values and behaviours because these are deemed superior and normative. Matilda reminisces, '[I]f I had been older at that time then I would have noticed, as my mum did, that whenever our men returned from the white world they came back changed in some way.' (Jones *Mister* 85) In Matilda's own family, '[her father's] transformation into a white man [is] near complete' (192). She ultimately follows in the footsteps of her father, and, more importantly perhaps, in those of Pip, whose story, by extension, becomes her own: 'Pip was my story' (219). Jones appears to use Matilda's colonisation by *Great Expectations* to put her on a parallel journey to Pip: just as Pip leaves his home and changes in such a way that he severs his ties to home, Matilda finally leaves the island, disassociating herself from it to become "white".

The White Author Figure

Mister Pip is Matilda's memoir. Nonetheless, she is not exactly the main central character. She devotes the bulk of her memoir to an exploration of the elusive Mr Watts. Before he becomes the saviour, he is a mysterious white man. No one knows what he does nor where he spends his time (Jones *Mister* 9). As earlier stated, he lives in 'the old mission house' (9), also called 'the minister's old house' (3). Apart from being 'buried out of view by the vegetation' (84), this house is located at a great distance from the 'thirty or so houses' of the black islanders (9). The distance from and the screening of his place of residence, therefore, create visual obstacles for the villagers that make it difficult to perceive Mr Watts, as does his almost spectral presence: 'He was invisible most of the time.' (9) His overall invisibility gives him an air of mystery, so that the islanders resort to received "knowledge" of white people to achieve some sense of certainty about him: for instance, no one has heard him speak, but, with 'white [being] the colour of all the important things' (4), it is generally believed that 'the language would have to be big, even enormous' (9). His almost literal invisibility becomes figurative of his elusiveness, of the struggle to pin him down. In this regard, Matilda states,

> If you wanted to be critical you might have said [Mr Watts] looked like the important self-regarding white men that my grandfather had become part of a human pyramid for; he looked like a man about to make a speech, who was simply waiting to be invited to step forward.
>
> There were other smaller changes too. It was a while since we had last seen him wear a tie. His left hand fidgeted with where it was tied around his throat. He had found a shirt that buttoned up. He wore shoes. He was dressed like someone going to catch a plane. (85)

In PNG, being white is historically associated with 'the right to speak' (Norridge 62). Hence, it may be said that Matilda's perceptions are the result of her internalisation of racist ideology – Mr Watts' whiteness signifies certain things in her eyes, such as authority. However, it is also fair to claim that her description, on some level, recognises the performativity of racial identity as it casts Mr Watts as a performer who relies on externals and the socio-political role he projects to portray a certain persona. This point is supported by Korkut-Nayki, who negotiates the complexity of Mr Watts' performances through Judith Butler's ideas on performativity. His performances, Korkut-Nayki states, 'draws attention to the theatrical nature of identity, which involves playing a variety of roles as required by circumstances.' (51) In instances like the above, where Mr Watts presents himself as white, *Mister Pip* raises the notion of racial identity as a performance, rather than a given essence, that transpires within a specific cultural and social context which compels the subject to repeatedly engage in performances that reaffirm cultural and social norms (50). Hence, in the passage, Mr Watts is compelled to adopt, to repeat Norridge's appellation, 'the culturally determined position of "colonial superior"' (62) by the very norms that he is corroborating through his performance. Not only does his performance subtly subvert the prevailing norms and constitute an indication of the novel's scepticism of essentialist notions, but it also demonstrates that "race" is something enacted by whites as well. '[Richard Dyer writes,] "As long as race is something only applied to non-white peoples, as long as white people are not racially seen and named, they/we function as a human norm." … The power of whiteness rests in its apparent universality and invisibility' (Hernán and Gordon 11). This is one observation among many that indicates Jones' intention to question, not reassert, normative ideas.

Similar theatrics characterise Mr Watts' role as a teacher. A while into his teaching, Matilda remarks on a few changes:

> Outside the class we were seeing more of Mr Watts. … He saved his white linen suit for school and that's how we saw him most of the time, as a 'gentleman'. To see him on the beach in his baggy old shorts with a plastic bucket was to wonder what had happened to Mr Watts of the classroom. You saw how terribly thin he had become or really was, which was akin to making a discovery – I couldn't be sure of which. He looked like a skinny white vine. To see him so stooped was to realise the special effort he made to dress and stand tall in class. On the beach, though, he was like the rest of us. Head down, alert to whatever had washed up. He wore an old white shirt which, usually, he had left unbuttoned, but as he drew nearer I saw it had lost all its buttons. (Jones *Mister* 59)

It appears she here uses the word 'gentleman' to denote social standing since she ties it to Mr Watts' clothing. It is bracketed with inverted commas possibly to signal her departure from Dickens' use of the word as denoting an internal, as opposed to external, quality. Significantly, what Matilda's account spotlights is that Mr Watts is not all that he seems. He dresses the part and is very good at concealing himself behind roles – he is the saviour, Pip, Joe Gargery, etc. Close up, however, he is a frail and worn old man who gives off a troubled air and is, perhaps, not so unlike the villagers as he sometimes gives himself out to be. His performances point towards the difficulty of establishing who he is outside his roles. What is certain, however, is that the identities he does assume are dictated by the dominant context.

Among his many performances, one act remains quite steady throughout the story, namely, that of the white male author. It is through the authorial role that he does his "saving". Put otherwise, the author is the saviour. Through his interactions with *Great Expectations*, he not only plays with the idea of being an author but actually becomes one. He starts by introducing Dickens, wittingly or not misleading the children into construing Dickens as a living person, 'another white man … [who] had been hiding himself.' (Jones *Mister* 16) The next day, when the children see 'just Mr Watts' where they expect to see 'Mr Dickens' (17), the text begins to blur the boundaries between Mr Watts and the white author figure. This process continues during Mr Watts' first reading of *Great Expectations*: 'There had been no warning from Mr Watts. He just began to read.

… So when I heard Mr Watts speak I thought he was talking to himself. That he was Pip.' (18) In this second instance, he becomes the fictional author of *Great Expectations*. The authorial identity is reinforced by Matilda's discovery years later that he is rewriting, rather than merely reading, Dickens' novel. Therefore, Mr Watts' performativity frames the saviour as the author of a canonical or colonialist text. By illustrating that the author is negatively influencing the native through his text, the novel implies that the author is responsible for how his text impacts his reader.

This notion of authorial accountability is reinforced when the redskins pay the village a fateful visit. Some children find it hard to tell Mr Watts apart from either Dickens or Pip. This has serious consequences when the redskins scour the village for potential rebels. After discovering Matilda's shrine for Pip, the redskin officer accuses the villagers of 'concealing a man known by the name of Pip' and offers them 'one last chance to hand this man over.' (Jones *Mister* 89) To appease the redskins, one of Mr Watts' pupils states, 'Pip belongs to Mr Dickens, sir' (84) and then gladly ushers the soldiers 'to … this Mr Dickens.' (84) He takes them straight to Mr Watts, who is then brought round to where the villagers have been rounded up. The officer says to Mr Watts, matter-of-factly, 'You are Mister Dickens.' (85) He affirms, 'Yes, I am that man.' (86) The text here enables him to adopt Dickens' identity so that he can assume responsibility for the consequences of his rewriting. Indeed, responsible for introducing the children to Pip, this situation is a direct result of his rewriting of Dickens' novel, specifically of how it has inspired Matilda to erect a shrine for Pip. By taking Dickens' identity and, thereby, relating himself to Pip, he attempts to redirect the redskins' attention to himself. The implication is that a text can have certain real-world consequences, for which the author should take responsibility. Having assumed responsibility, Mr Watts tries to prove Pip's fictionality by having Matilda fetch *Great Expectations* from the schoolhouse, but the book has gone missing. The redskins are, consequently, convinced that Pip is real and burn the villagers' possessions as punishment before promising to return for Pip. The redskins exempt Mr Watts, even though his rewriting has generated these social and political consequences. What presently protects him from the consequences of his writing is his status with the redskins as a white authority (105). The event carries home the point that authorship does not transpire in isolation; there is a certain historical and cultural context that must be carefully considered as it might provoke certain implications.

Mr Watts tries to, once more, fix the problem he has created, and this time by assuming the identity of Pip. On this occasion, the rebels visit the village. Because he is white, the rebels behave violently towards him. In a bid to placate them, he decides to perform the good outsider, the saviour-author, announcing, 'My name is Pip.' (Jones *Mister* 139) The rebel in charge confirms, saying, 'Mister Pip' (139). Almost immediately, the rebels are subdued; 'something ha[s] changed' (140): 'Mr Watts ha[s] asserted his natural authority.' (141) That he assumes Pip's identity specifically could be read as an attempt to portray himself and Pip as harmless outsiders, rather than as a rebel, as Pip is suspected to be, or a redskin sympathiser, as he otherwise appears to be because of his power status with the redskins. Apart from this, his performance seeks to mitigate the effects of his earlier rewriting. As Mister Pip, Mr Watts rewrites Dickens' work again. Although he claims to be telling his life story, he ends up telling a story that unites the Western world with the islanders'. Latham holds that he here becomes 'a perfect postcolonial storyteller' because he creates 'a microcosm of postcolonial literature' (36). He is 'writing back' to Dickens' work, she claims, rewriting it and transposing it into a new cultural environment where it becomes hybridised, a mixture of native and Western elements. The result, she says, is a new postcolonial story (39). One can also see him as 'writing back' to his first rewriting of Dickens' novel. His postcolonial story draws on fragments from his own life story, Dickens' characters' stories, and the islanders' stories. By mingling the Western voices of Dickens' characters and his own with the islanders' voices, he brings Western and non-Western worlds into conversation, removing the cultural and racial hierarchy and suggesting the value of the postcolonial white author as a facilitator of cross-cultural dialogue.

However, this time, Mr Watts fails to use his performance to survive. Korkut-Nayki believes that the absence of an agreement as to the function of a canonical text with non-Westerners cause them – the redskins and the rebels – to fail to recognise Pip as a fictional creation. This misunderstanding eventuates in tragedy (53-4). However, it is more likely that the fault lies with Mr Watts himself. In a nod to Scheherazade from *One Thousand and One Nights*, Mr Watts asks the rebels to give him a series of days to tell his story: 'My story will take … [s]even nights in total.' (Jones *Mister* 141) However, his plan backfires when the rebels unexpectedly leave the village on the sixth day. No sooner is this discovered than a captive rebel is returned by the redskins to identify the putative Pip.

The subsequent execution of Mr Watts also causes the violations and executions of innocent islanders. The novel's correlation between Mr Watts' first rewriting and his death indicates that these tragic outcomes could have been avoided if he had never become the saviour-author. More specifically, by showing that his use of his authorship to colonise Matilda is socially and politically dangerous, the novel points to Mr Watts as an irresponsible writer. It might ultimately be inferred that he is killed as punishment for his irresponsible authorship.

Intention

The saviour trope allows the novel to describe Mr Watts as perpetuating the colonialist practice where canonical texts were deployed to spread and reaffirm "universal" ideas and, thus, maintain the cultural and racial hierarchy. He plays on the conflict and dominant norms to configure himself into the good white outsider, the saviour. He achieves his "saving" by rewriting a canonical text. His rewriting of a colonial text as a colonial agent causes him to preserve Western superiority and repress the indigenous identity and voice, as testified by Matilda whose colonisation indicates her belief in her otherness and inferiority and is, thereby, made submissive to the Westerner and his world. While the cultural consequence of Mr Watts' rewriting is signified in his primary reader, Matilda's, worship of the Western world, the political and social consequences are represented by the redskins' destruction of the villagers' houses, belongings, and bodies. He endeavours to take responsibility for and rectify these outcomes by, first, assuming the identity of Dickens and, later, of Pip. That he tries to take accountability advances the notion that the author bears responsibility for what he writes. Significantly, the repercussions of his rewriting are born of his desire to defend his whiteness: he would not have influenced Matilda to create the shrine if he had not conformed to and reasserted the prevailing norms in order to benefit from the privileges of his status as a white authority and, thus, derive some protection in a hostile environment. One might, therefore, argue that the novel in a larger way points to Mr Watts' desire to preserve the status quo in order to benefit from it as the fundamental problem. That he is removed from the plot as a form of punishment for his calamitous authorship indicates the novel's rejection of his first rewriting. This removal also implies, on the one hand, the need for the white outsider not to reassert dominant ideas through his writing and, on the other, the need for him to be

critically attuned to his historical and cultural position to comprehend the function of his text in the operative context and the potential implications the text might have.

This critique of the white outsider's activity of writing inevitably draws attention to the presence of another white outsider author, namely, Jones himself. According to Norridge, *Mister Pip* so foregrounds the white outsider in the figure of Mr Watts that it throws light on Jones' own position as a white writer in the same context. She wonders if Jones, like Mr Watts, is pulled into the racial and cultural vortex and, hence, engages in imperialist practices (62). She rejects this idea and, in agreement with this thesis, claims that if there are imperialist tendencies in Jones' writing these are intentional (62). Indeed, despite being an outsider like Mr Watts, Jones cannot be conflated with him (62). While it does not seem to be Jones' intention to identify himself with Mr Watts, it does appear to be his aim to signal his interaction with him. It is by looking closer at the nature of this interaction that one can form a hypothesis of intent.

Mister Pip is, Jones says, 'all about story' (Jones, Interview Penguin). The main story at play, *Great Expectations*, is being rewritten on two levels. These rewritings exist in a complex intertextual relation that, when untangled, reveals that Jones replicates in his own work Mr Watts' project of rewriting Dickens' work. Mr Watts rewrites Dickens' novel twice, once as a colonialist text and once as a postcolonial one. These rewritings transpire within Jones' own postcolonial rewriting of the same story. The idea that both Jones and Mr Watts are rewriting the same story suggests that Jones has structured the novel around the white outsider's activity of writing in PNG to make a statement about it.

Jones writes a postcolonial version of Dickens' novel which is, in fact, a two-fold response to Mr Watts' rewritings. As the title *Mister Pip* together with the epigraph, which reads 'Characters migrate' (qtd. from Umberto Eco), indicates, the novel revolves around the character of Pip who, reincarnated in Mr Watts, has migrated to Bougainville. Since Mr Watts is Mister Pip, Jones' text can be understood as what Tiffin terms 'canonical counter-discourse' (97). In canonical counter-discourse, the postcolonial author reuses one or more characters of a canonical text to examine and subvert the 'originary and continuing' role of European canonical texts in (post)colonial societies (97). By casting Mister Pip as the saviour-author, Jones can comment on the 'originary', or historical, and 'continuing' function of Western literature in a former colony, showing

that such literature was and is strategically used to preserve the cultural and racial hierarchy. He shifts the focus to the connection between the text and the author, to how the text is used to spread the author's ideas of his cultural and racial superiority. The text becomes an embodiment of the author's ideas and performs on the native, acting on her to alter her worldview – "civilising" her – in such a way that it reaffirms the author's "white" worldview. The author's ideas are, in turn, a product of his internalisation of dominant norms: Mr Watts conforms through his identity performances to prevailing norms because he wants, like 'the colonialist', 'to maintain his privileges by preserving the status quo' (JanMohamed 70). This way, the white author's sense of self, his ideas of culture and "race", is shown to be dependent on a complex chain of mutual performances that makes manifest the structure and operations of racist ideology. *Mister Pip* consequently seeks to elicit recognition of the causal links between the white outsider's writing and the context in which that writing is composed and performs. Jones thus manages not only to problematise the activities of the white author, Mr Watts, in the postcolonial world, but he also demonstrates critical awareness of working from a privileged position as a white author. Therefore, Jones validates his claim for responsible authorship in his own rewriting, where his counter-discourse signals his consciousness of working with a canonical/colonialist text and within an ideologically charged environment. Whereas his canonical counter-discourse criticises and rejects Mr Watts' first rewriting, it signals his approval of Mr Watts' second postcolonial rewriting.

Through Mr Watts' second rewriting, Jones appears to advocate for an alternative role for white authorship as a means for creating cross-cultural communication and understanding. Jones' larger rewriting of Dickens' novel is a macrocosm of Mr Watts' postcolonial rewriting. His duplication of Mr Watts' postcolonial story suggests that he supports this approach to authorship, where the purpose is a dismantling of old cultural and racial hierarchies through the promotion of a literary dialogue between Western and non-Western worlds. To achieve this dialogue, however, Jones points to the necessity of writing from the inside. Just as Mr Watts tells the villagers' story from his perspective, Jones writes *Mister Pip* from Matilda's point of view. He creates space for Matilda's voice and brings it into conversation with Pip's voice: 'I felt like I had been spoken to by this boy Pip' (Jones *Mister Pip* 20); 'I had come to know this Pip as if he were real' (50). By exploring Matilda's interactions with Pip's world, Jones cannot only examine the

cultural relations between the Western and non-Western worlds but can also attempt to understand the postcolonial black subject's experiences, specifically how the black subject's interaction with Western culture might influence her self-perception and worldview.

Given that the focus of Jones' novel has been on the practices and objectives of the colonialist versus the postcolonial white outsider's writing, it seems reasonable, all textual and extra-textual evidence considered, to argue that he intends to articulate *how* and *why* the white author should tell the stories of black people. He appears to make the argument for responsible writing in relation to Mr Watts' colonialist rewriting in order to promote a new approach to postcolonial white authorship. The role of the white outsider in the postcolonial world appears to be to create cultural bridges, which importantly includes writing from the inside and using literature exploratively to understand cultural relations and experiences, as opposed to as a means towards establishing hierarchies and vilifying cultural and racial difference. In other words, he grounds his argument for the postcolonial role of the white outsider author in the history of his colonial predecessor. In sum, he seems to suggest that the white author needs to be conscious of the context in which he writes and the potential implications of his writing and proposes that the purpose of white authorship of black stories should be to bridge cultural differences and contribute to cross-cultural understanding.

To form a hypothesis of intent, the interpretation of literary meaning should, according to Levinson, and as earlier stated, proceed from a distinction between epistemic and aesthetic considerations (141-2). However, character, setting, themes, motif, symbolism – indeed, any element of the craft that makes the text a valuable work of art – are, again, shown to be indistinguishable from the text's endeavour to produce meaning in the given context. This reiterates the thesis' agreement with Davies' statement that aesthetic and epistemic elements are not 'distinct and separable' (Levinson 141). Moreover, in his application of his theory, Levinson rather than make a distinction between aesthetic and epistemic considerations conflates them (149-50). Hence, as Davis argues with Robert Stecker in 'The Hypothetical Intentionalist's Dilemma', Levinson's practice is inconsistent with his stipulation (307). Accordingly, this analysis has considered how various formal elements have been handled both through the techniques of juxtaposition, intertextuality, and self-reflexivity and the concepts of the white saviour, performativity,

fetish stereotyping, and universality within the relevant historical and authorial context. Ultimately, the best attribution of intent to Jones is that the outsider not only can but, indeed, should write the stories of insiders since he is crucial in facilitating cross-cultural dialogue and contributing to the postcolonial project of razing down myths of racial purity and cultural priority; however, this project appears only possible if the writer pays due care and attention to his place in the operative context. Since *Mister Pip* appeals to a global audience largely unacquainted with PNG (Norridge 64), an important caveat to make is that Jones' text can, despite its postcolonial objective, potentially reacquaint a new audience with the racist assumptions inscribed into the imagery presented in the text, particularly the exaltation of the white self through the white saviour-author character and the denigration of the black other through the stereotypical portrayal of Matilda.

Comparison

Both *Mister Pip* and *Half of a Yellow Sun* engage with a point of contention in the authenticity debate, namely, whether the white author should tell the stories of non-whites. Both novels approach this question through the book motif which develops the theme of white authorship. In *Mister Pip,* the book motif operates on two levels simultaneously with *Great Expectations* being rewritten by both Jones and Mr Watts, the white outsiders. Jones uses Mr Watts' rewritings of Dickens' novel to comment on the historical and cultural function of the white author and text in the postcolonial world. In his first rewriting, Mr Watts writes a colonial text for his black reader, Matilda, preserving Western supremacy and exerting neocolonial violence on the indigene's sense of self and voice. This triggers a series of social and political consequences which he attempts to handle. His eventual death emphasises the need for the white author to be aware of his historical and political position in the current context in order to foresee the potential negative implications of his writing. This rewriting transpires within Jones's own rewriting of Dickens' novel through the story of *Mister Pip*. Therefore, the novel draws attention to itself as a text written by Jones, a white outsider in a power position who might likewise reassert dominant ideas. However, Jones counters Mr Watts' rewriting through a discourse that criticises and subverts the dominant norms, practices, and ideas, the ideological purpose of which Jones exposes to be the extension of Western supremacy in order to defend and sustain the status of the white individual. His counter-discourse

demonstrates his sensitivity to the charged context in which he is writing as a white outsider and communicates his rejection of the status quo and his interest in the future of the white author as a mediator who reconciles cultural differences and experiences through postcolonial literature. In this way, Jones appears to frame the authenticity debate as partly being about the need for the postcolonial white author to write responsibly about the insider's world, which means showing critical awareness of his position in the context in which he is writing. One objection that may be raised to Jones' contention is that the author is obliged to write responsibly only because of his cultural and racial background. In this sense, he implies that not only is the author's ethnic/racial and cultural identity important for his relationship with the text he is writing, but identity also plays a major role in the creative process as it influences how the artwork should be made. Literary meaning is, by implication, informed by the author's ethnic/racial and cultural affiliations. The person of the author is, therefore, presented as inseparable from his work.

Contrary to Jones, Adichie discredits the outsider's ability to change the status quo and reach an authentic understanding of the insider's world. Though Richard tries to socialise into Igbo culture and internalise its values, he ultimately fails, his writing and literary methodology establishing him as a Western subject and, thus, unable to transcend his subjectivity and produce writing that reflects the experience of the African insider. In this way, Adichie destabilises the notion of the European writer as an authority in matters of judgement and commentary of Africa, showing that his lack of objectivity causes him to produce Eurocentric writing that, on the one hand, reaffirms the cultural ideas and values that structure his self and that, on the other, reiterates the representations of otherness that historically created and reinforced the West/Africa power relation. Put otherwise, the Western subject cannot be a detached observer because representation is submerged in, to rehearse Said, 'the language[,] … culture, institutions, and political ambience of the representer.' (272) The Western subject's claims to complete objectivity and production of universal truths are, in this way, invalidated. The character of Richard can, consequently, be seen as a commentary on the power of socialisation over the author. However, Achebe thinks it is a mistake to blame the artist's 'time … for his racial attitude' ('Africa's' 217). Such victimisation, he claims, distracts not only from the need to demand artistic responsibility but also from unbiased artworks, the existence of which amply demonstrates that it is not the prevailing values and attitudes that determine the

ideological texture of an artwork; rather it is 'the presence or absence of respect [in the artist] for the human person.' (219) Rejecting such arguments, Adichie forwards the idea that the continued relevance of the colonial symbolic order makes it difficult for the white author to perceive the black other's humanity, to think of the other outside the single story.

Since Richard can only rewrite the single story, the colonial story of Africa, his licence to write *The Book* is transferred to the African object, Ugwu. She disrupts the binary order that privileges Richard by bringing Ugwu, the traditionally silenced other, into the subject position and asserting that there are valid subject positions beyond the Western. This move appears prompted by a desire to remove the hierarchisation of knowledge production so as to make a point about the worth of observations and understandings of the world made from non-Western subject positions. The right to assume the subject position and tell one's story is, moreover, presented as a human privilege, as opposed to a Western or white privilege. While it is a human right to tell stories, the individual human, Adichie also suggests, is entitled to tell only certain stories. This is implied in the title of *The Book*, where the 'We' signals that the Biafrans' story is the author, Ugwu's, story, too. This begs the question of what it is exactly that authorises him to claim the Biafran story as his own.

Adichie's 2013 interview with Harriet Gilbert offers insight into her belief concerning what licences a specific person to tell African stories. Adichie affirms her

> [V]ery firm, ardent belief that people should be allowed to tell their own stories, that the stories that get passed around as the definitive stories of a place and a people should be written by people who are *of that place* and obviously this is not the case with a lot of African stories. (emphasis added)

That the author ought to be '*of* that place' expresses a relationship between the author and the place which is characterised by belonging: the author belongs to the place and not to the people per se. Her choice of the word 'place' is quite broad and encompasses anything from a nation to a village to a household – indeed, any delimited space that is somehow associated with a particular group of people. *Half of a Yellow Sun* proposes that the stories about the place associate the author with that place and, hence, determine his belonging to it. The novel concerns itself with three specific geographical sites, Biafra, Nigeria, and Africa. As Richard's interactions with the distortions of the Western press illustrate, the

West has a single story about Biafra which is also its single story about Nigeria and Africa. This story, Adichie claims, defines Africa as a beautiful place populated by beautiful animals and voiceless, passive, helpless, and uncivilised others ('Danger'). The story about the place – about Biafra, Nigeria, Africa – is here shown to create the people's identity. In the final pages of the novel, Richard has lived in Biafra for nearly a decade. Despite his long stay in this place, he is disqualified from telling the Biafran story because as a Western subject his identity is not shaped by the single story that identifies Biafrans as silenced others. Ugwu, on the other hand, does share this identity, hence his rise, as it were, from the object to subject position. The implication here is that only Biafrans can tell the stories of Biafra, only Nigerians the stories of Nigeria, only Africans the stories of Africa, etc. because the stories about the place by shaping the identity of the people living there tie them to it.

If a people's identity is defined by the stories about their home, then Ugwu's authorship implies that he should tell the Biafran story so that he can redefine himself and his community. The idea of stories as formative is articulated by Fanon, who says that

> I should like nothing more nor less than the establishment of children's magazines especially for Negroes, the creation of songs for Negro children, and, ultimately, the publication of history texts especially for them, at least through the grammar-school grades. For, until there is evidence to the contrary, I believe that if there is a traumatism it occurs during those years. (148)

Fanon advocates for the need for black people to tell their own stories against the backdrop of an earlier point about stories as seminal to the child's identity formation. Unless Africans read their own stories, he holds, they will 'subjectively adopt[] a white man's attitude', that is, identify with Western stereotypes of themselves (147). This identification is traumatic as it involves the loss of their identity with them turning away from themselves and towards the white ego, in a way reminiscent of Bhabha's mirror stage argument. On a deeper level, therefore, *Half of a Yellow Sun* recognises that if stories, whether told orally, medially, or textually, inform the African's self-perception then *who* tells them becomes very important. That Ugwu and not Richard writes *The Book* stresses the notion that the story needs to be told by someone who shares the values, self-image or identity, and cultural assumptions of the community. This way, storytelling becomes healing, affirmative, and empowering, instead of traumatising. That Adichie

seems to locate the value of stories to how they contribute to the individual's self-formation casts the authenticity debate as being about the need for black self-representation.

In the interview with Gilbert, Adichie associates self-worth with African authorship:

> [I]t is the power of literature – how stories can inform how you see yourself, what you think of yourself. And if I hadn't been fortunate enough to read Chinua Achebe when I did, I don't know how messed up I would be in my head now really about … the worth of one's own story, and so, in some ways, that's why it's so important to me now. I go back to Nigeria now and I'm asking people what are your kids reading?'

She wants children to read Nigerian, African, or black authors because it is vital, she believes, for their ability to value their African identity. In the novel, *The Book* embodies the need to restore or reinvent the Biafran/African/black identity by creating new – or rather bringing out the diverse – stories that contradict the single story of Africa and by spreading values and ideas that challenge entrenched views about who Africans and black people are. In a sense, the novel appears to iterate the authorial duty charged by Achebe in his essay 'The Novelist as Teacher' (1975). Here, Achebe states that the author should 'help [his] society regain belief in itself and put away the complexes of the years of denigration and self-abasement.' (44) He holds up the therapeutic value of stories to the formerly colonised society and construes the author as a teacher whose task it is to re-educate his community so as to heal colonial scars and bring in societal and personal regeneration. His stress on the African author communicates the idea that colonial oppression creates a distinct experience that cannot be empathised with from without, and so neither can it be repaired from outside.

While there is no problem with this line of reasoning, a problem does emerge when one looks closer at the criterion of group membership. There appears to be an implicit essentialism in Adichie's argument because it is articulated against the single story about Africa, which ties a certain "race", dark-skinned people, to the continent of Africa. If Ugwu can speak about Africa because he is identified with the people in the single story about Africa, then it is because he belongs to them by virtue of his "race" or ethnicity. In a very important sense, therefore, Adichie seems to assume that the author must look like the people he speaks about. Her argument that only Africans should tell African stories

consequently enshrines an Us/Them, authentic/inauthentic, rhetoric in postcolonial literary discourses. It seems virtually impossible for an outsider to earn the right to write African stories. It should be repeated, however, that the novel puts this essentialist strand down to the continuing influence of colonial structures. Moreover, that Adichie's argument rests on the dismantling of the subject/object binary suggests that the African claiming the subject position so as to speak, take charge of his own stories, and define himself constitutes the first step towards breaking those old colonial structures and the binary thinking inherent in them.

It is precisely because of the personal and collective value of telling their own stories that many black proponents of self-representation argue for the necessity of white writers to make clear their intentions with telling black people's stories. Writers and critics Jacqueline Woodson, Rudine Sims Bishop, Violet Harris, and Thelma Seto assume this stance based on the claim that black insiders and white outsiders typically have different motives with their texts:

> [A]uthors of colour often write within their own cultures with the intention of enhancing the self-concept of children of colour, challenging existing stereotypes and dominant culture assumptions, and passing on the central values and stories of their own cultures to their children. Authors writing outside their own cultures often intend to build awareness of cultural differences and improve intercultural relationships. These differing intentions result in different stories for different audiences (Short and Fox 17).

Because of these differences in motives, they believe that white authors should 'make their intentions and ideologies explicit' (17). This openness influences the assessment of their texts for authenticity, for representational accuracy. It also, they hold, encourages the author to elucidate what sort of story he is attempting to present and to critically scrutinise whether it is worth writing as an insider from the outside (17). Jones appears to take this approach, making his intention and ideology explicit to argue for the value of the outsider's perspective. He rejects colonialist authorial practices to reframe the outsider author as an important cultural mediator.

Jones makes Mr Watts' postcolonial story a miniature of his own rewriting of Dickens' novel. This correlation advertises Jones' intention to base his argument for *why* the outsider author should write black stories in the cultural potentials of postcolonial

literature. His postcolonial story, just as Mr Watts', is a response to the latter's colonialist rewriting and articulates as an objective for white postcolonial authorship the creation of cultural bridges rather than the reinforcement of cultural hierarchies. He is, therefore, arguing for what JanMohamed claims is the aim of Anglophone postcolonial fiction (85). However, JanMohamed believes that this work belongs to 'Third World artists' (85), since he, like Adichie, is sceptical of Western writers' ability to achieve harmonious cultural relations between the West and the rest. He makes this claim against what he sees as the enduring failure of Western writers to utilise the potential of Anglophone fiction in the (post)colonial world to create a bridge between worlds. Instead, they have only managed to alienate the other and his world and reassert Eurocentric assumptions (64-5).

Nonetheless, Jones argues to the contrary, and what makes his argument noteworthy is that it is made in relation to Papua New Guinean literature. This branch of Anglophone postcolonial literature is, Norridge says, dominated by indigenous writers. *Mister Pip*, she states, is unique for being the only Papua New Guinean text in which a white writer adopts a local perspective (Matilda's), identifying himself as an insider in a racially tense postcolonial setting, namely, the Bougainville Conflict (63-4). This perspectival gesture is also rare within the broader context of postcolonial literature (72, note 10). Most contemporary white writing about Melanesia, generally, and PNG, specifically, could, Norridge says, be categorised as travel writing. In most of these writings, the writer assumes the stance of the impartial observer from the outside world (63). Jones has, then, chosen a doubly charged environment to work within. In an interview with novelist Geraldine Bedell, Jones reveals that he initially saw *Mister Pip* as a creative, postcolonial investigation of 'the future of the Pacific'. He here implies a desire to expand his literary activities beyond the New Zealand context, within which he mostly writes (Robinson), to creatively explore the wider Pacific. His literary exploration of Bougainville specifically is probably a nod back to his attempt to enter Bougainville as a journalist in 1991 – the year in which *Mister Pip* opens – to cover the conflict. However, he was then prevented by the media embargo imposed by the Papua New Guinean government (Jones, Interview Bedell). In *Mister Pip*, he finally enters the conflict-ridden island but explores it imaginatively instead of journalistically. Ultimately, it might be conjectured that Jones' argument for *why* the outsider should tell others' stories could be part of a vision for the future of Pacific postcolonial literature as a site for cross-cultural literary exploration. His

aim appears fundamentally to be to develop the intercultural relations in the Pacific region.

Another point of intersection between Adichie and Jones regards their treatment of the subject/object binary. In *Mister Pip*, Mr Watts' relationship with Matilda is directly comparable to Jones's relationship with her. Through his authorship, Mr Watts manages to colonise Matilda, compelling her to internalise white subjectivity and gradually adopt a behaviour and an attitude that the novel associates with the "white" world. Fanon writes,

> The black schoolboy in the Antilles, who in his lessons is forever talking about 'our ancestors, the Gauls,' identifies himself with the explorer, the bringer of civilisation, the white man who carries truth to savages – an all-white truth. There is identification – that is, the young Negro subjectively adopts a white man's attitude. He invests the hero, who is white, with all his own aggression … [O]ne can observe in the young Antillean the formation and crystallisation of an attitude and a way of thinking and seeing that are essentially white. (147-8)

Like the black schoolboy, Matilda, a black schoolgirl's, interaction with the colonialist text by Mr Watts, the saviour-author, 'the bringer of civilisation', provokes her identity transformation – she becomes "white" – which results in a loss of her indigenous voice and identity. She consequently becomes the silenced female native. While one might argue that Matilda's memoir is a cross-cultural exploration of Mister Pip, Mr Watts', world, this idea is annulled by her colonisation which proposes that she already identifies with his world. Nevertheless, Jones reproduces the single story, to use Adichie's term, of the voiceless black woman so as to critique it, to point to it as a consequence of irresponsible authorship. Yet, in a way, he weakens his argument by replicating the very practice he criticises. Indeed, an irony marks Jones' relationship with Matilda: he seemingly values her voice, making room for it by enabling her to voice her experiences, yet he is simultaneously suppressing it in the sense that he is speaking for her and portraying her as a silenced other, not to mention as a stereotyped other. The subject/object relationship, therefore, is recreated in their relationship, too: Jones speaks for the doubly subjugated Matilda who remains the silent, black female other. Her colonisation is, then, demonstrated both through her relationship with Mr Watts and through her relationship with Jones. On some level, therefore, *Mister Pip* serves as an example of the single story that Adichie challenges by reclaiming the subject position for

the black female. Additionally, readers unfamiliar with the Papua New Guinean context may receive Jones' twice silencing of Matilda uncritically into their repertoire of assumptions about the white man and black (female) power relation. Therefore, Jones risks reasserting the single story and validating Adichie's stance, even while his intention appears to be to develop a meta-commentary on postcolonial white authorship that actually challenges the discourse that insists on continuing Western authorial practices that harm the other's identity and voice.

Adichie tackles the same issue of black voicelessness, albeit differently. Despite her dismantling and criticism of the subject/object binary within the racist discourse, her androcentrism implies, at face value, that she reclaims the right of speech for only the black male as part of an argument for the black African man's right to tell his own story and the story of his community. She subsequently appears to make a gender essentialist claim: the black man reclaims the right to speak from the white man, thereby reaffirming the idea that men should hold the subject position. This claim implies a silencing of the female voice which is borne out by Adichie's narrative repression of female voices. However, she is redeemed on this point by her public disapproval of universal structures of female oppression and gender inequality. It then becomes possible to see her novel as reversing the white male subject/black female object binary. In the larger book, she reduces Richard to the object of her observation and interpretation, subjecting him, in a sense, to her "black female gaze", but instead of using her own discourse to construct him, she is using his own, as it were, against him. Her purpose seems to be to formulate a liberatory discourse for black men and women that insists on their equal right as humans to speak authoritatively from the subject position about themselves and other Africans. Crucially, this reconciles the double paradox of the novel, where a black African woman can tell the story of a white European man but not vice versa. Indeed, she appears to claim the right to speak about Richard only to overturn his discourse about her and others like her and to emancipate herself and these others from it. Despite her liberatory motives, Adichie, while advancing a notion of authorship as a human right, makes quite a restrictive claim about what story the individual human is entitled to tell. The problem with making such specific claims is that some people are inevitably overlooked.

Even as Adichie reclaims the subject position for the oppressed black man and doubly oppressed black woman, she has not included black nonbinary individuals. Her failure to

address this issue has most likely to do with the colonial matrix of the ideology from which her argument develops. The colonial Manicheism still obtains in this environment, and it is the binary logic of that system she tackles. As she seems to be operating within a binary frame, nonbinary identity constellations cannot be considered, which, of course, raises the question of whether Africans who identify as neither man nor woman can tell the stories of African men and women. The point here is that the problem with making binary outsider/insider claims is that one must define the outsiders and insiders in order to establish who is considered a reliable and authentic speaker for the insiders. It must be iterated, however, that Adichie does not entirely reaffirm the subject/object binary; she disrupts it and critiques the assumptions embedded in it. In fact, her overarching argument arises from her scepticism of the idea that only some individuals – white people – should tell certain stories – black stories – which, considering her final, very firm claim that only Africans should tell African stories is somewhat ironic. Hence, even as she disrupts the binary system, Adichie reasserts it in other ways: there is still a distinction being made between outsider and insiders, Europeans and Africans, white and black, etc., where each is the rightful owners of their own stories. Adichie finally appears to contend that what story the author chooses to tell must be consistent with his or her place and gender identity.

Conclusion

Through the book motif, Adichie and Jones articulate opposing views of the white author's right to tell black people's story. While Adichie's intention seems to be to challenge the discourse that privileges the white author's knowledge production, her essentialist understanding of authorship in some ways enshrines the binary mentality that undergirds that discourse. She rejects the white outsider's perspective on the black insiders' experiences since the former is prevented by his biases from saying anything reliable about the latter. Nonetheless, the rejection of an alternative perspective might limit the individual's or group's ability to challenge its own biases and truths, to recognise the limits and flaws of its own subjectivity. She is, in other words, asserting the superiority of the individual's/group's understanding of African experiences to the outsider's, creating a hierarchy between insider/outsider knowledge, whilst immunising the individual/group from criticism from without – which is not so unlike the Western

subject's claim to an incontestably 'superior access to reality' (Nielson 451). This line of argument, therefore, potentially excludes the possibility of establishing a dialogue between peoples and cultures. This argument is advanced to bring the silenced other into speech and, consequently, to affirm that every human has something valid to say about themselves. This, in turn, entails a recognition of the validity of non-Western subject positions and others' stories. Put differently, she maintains the validity of understandings and writings about the world that are not Eurocentric. Whereas Adichie rejects the white outsider's perspective, Jones embraces it. He is not suggesting that the white outsider can or should transcend his culture and "race" but rather that the outsider should bring his culture into conversation with non-Western cultures. He, therefore, seems to acknowledge the subjectivity of the white writer but proposes that for the writer's cultural perspective to be used meaningfully, he must be critically self-aware. Put differently, the outsider should be attuned to his historical and cultural position in the operative context. This is presented as a necessary precondition for the responsible authorship of black stories. His contention, therefore, encodes the belief that if the male white author is self-critical then he can also comment meaningfully on the experiences of not only racial others but also other "others". Nevertheless, the fact that he grounds his argument in the reproduction of stereotypical representations might undermine his intention. So, while Adichie reaffirms the insider-outsider dynamic in the black African context, Jones tries to renegotiate it through his stress on the possibilities of white authorship in the postcolonial Pacific region.

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